

THE MORDANT FAMILY GIFT



Newcastle Art Gallery Collection

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Prof. Cav. Simon Mordant AO and Catriona Mordant AM are known for their unparalleled philanthropy and support for the arts, both in Australia and internationally. I first met Simon in 2013, and we would later serve together on the New South Wales Government's inaugural Visual Arts Advisory Board for two terms (2019–2022). Through this work, I came to know him as a thoughtful, generous man with a deep belief in the transformative power of art. I am fortunate now to count him as both a mentor and a friend.

In early 2025, Simon and Catriona sent me a copy of their recently published *Mordant Collection Highlights*, followed shortly by an email asking whether the Gallery might be interested in anything for our collection. I suspect they imagined I might select a few works by Australian artists to find a new home here – but, true to form, Newcastle aimed higher, returning a considerably expanded wish list, spanning local, national, and global artists.

After many conversations, and rigorous justification for each painting, sculpture and photograph, I was delighted to accept a remarkable gift: twenty-five works of art by fifteen artists, joining an earlier single donation made in 2013. To date, this is the largest single donation from the Mordants to a public institution.

In the following pages, and in the accompanying exhibition, you will encounter each work of art in the Mordant Family Gift presented alongside statements from the artists, offering insight into the ideas and practices that shape their work.

This extraordinary gift strengthens a long legacy of giving at Newcastle Art Gallery. Of the more than 7,000 objects that form our nationally and internationally significant collection, the vast majority have come to us through the generosity of donors like the Mordants. I remain deeply grateful to the foresight of all who have contributed over the Gallery's sixty-nine-year history, ensuring that art continues to enrich the lives of the people of Newcastle for generations to come.

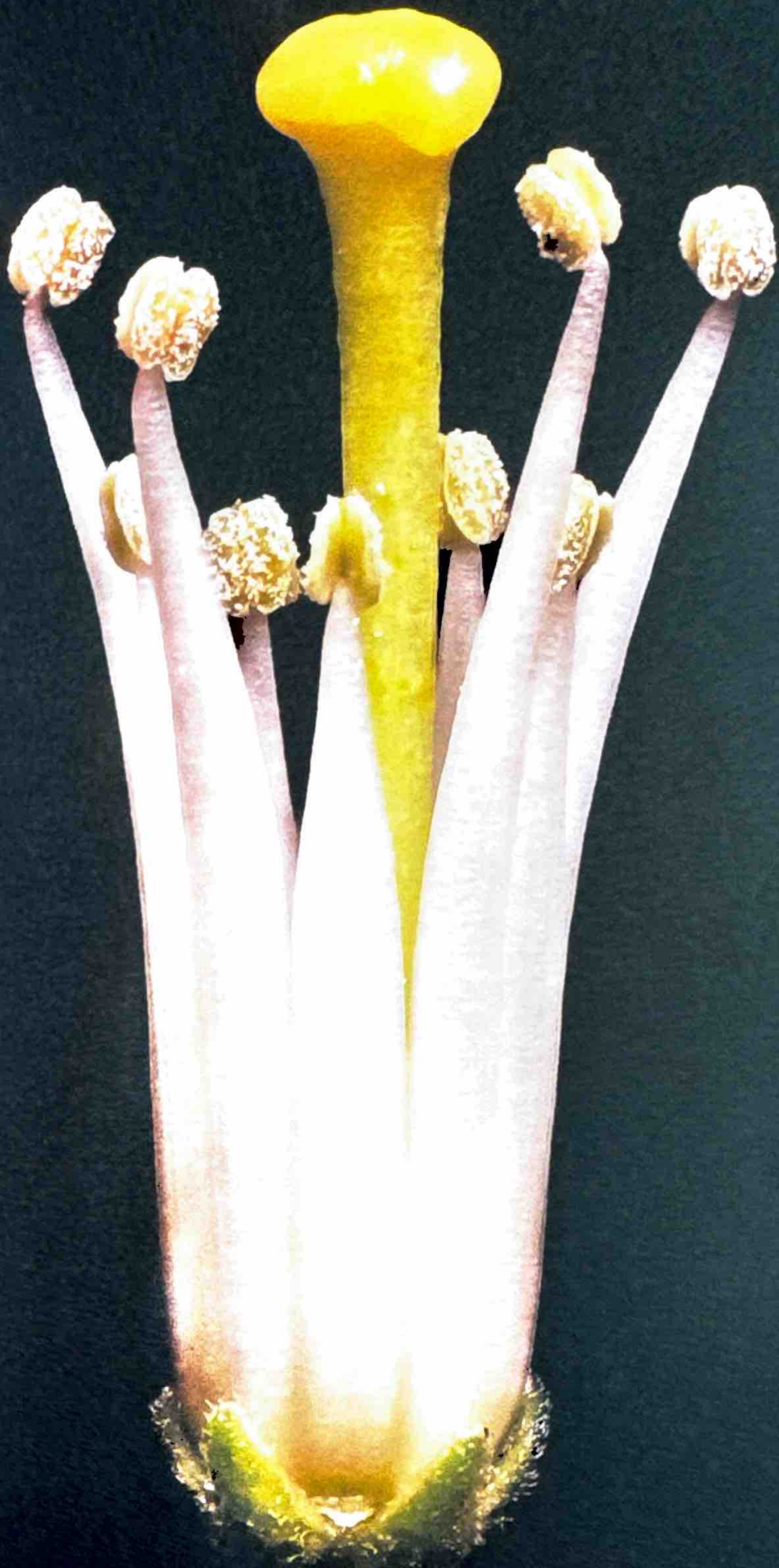
I share this publication and exhibition with profound gratitude to Simon and Catriona, and to all the artists whose works of art feature throughout.

Lauretta Morton OAM

DIRECTOR, NEWCASTLE ART GALLERY

MARIA FERNANDA CARDOSO

*Beauty is a form of
communication and
has a purpose*



My work begins with observation. Observation is different from just seeing; it is stopping, looking, taking time, paying attention to detail, admiring, asking questions, guessing, and wondering. I've always been fascinated by the beauty of morphology, and by how forms in life come from the forces of physics and mathematics, as well from the evolutionary forces of reproduction and adaptation.

Beauty is a form of communication and has a purpose. Form, colour, symmetry, pattern, scent, movement – all of these are ways that species signal, seduce and survive. Life mastered these forms of communication tens of millions of years before humans existed. Humans were not the first to have an aesthetic sense. Life itself is the ultimate artist.

The *Naked flora* series grew out of my research for the *Museum of Copulatory Organs*, 2012, where I was looking at the extraordinary variety of reproductive organs in animals. I wanted to demystify genitalia. We often forget that flowers are sex organs too.

I collected flowers around my neighbourhood, undressed them by removing the petals, and photographed them in my studio, using focus stacking software so every detail was sharp and in focus. The number of each flower's 'private parts' (pistils and stamens) are a family of sorts: one 'wife' with nine 'husbands', five 'wives' with many 'husbands', one 'wife' with two 'husbands', and so on.

And that is exactly how Linnaeus¹ described them. His system used the language of marriages – public marriages, clandestine marriages – husbands and wives in the same bed or in different beds. That language blew me away. His system endured because it was cheeky and easy to remember, and every botanical illustration shows what I call the 'private parts of plants'.

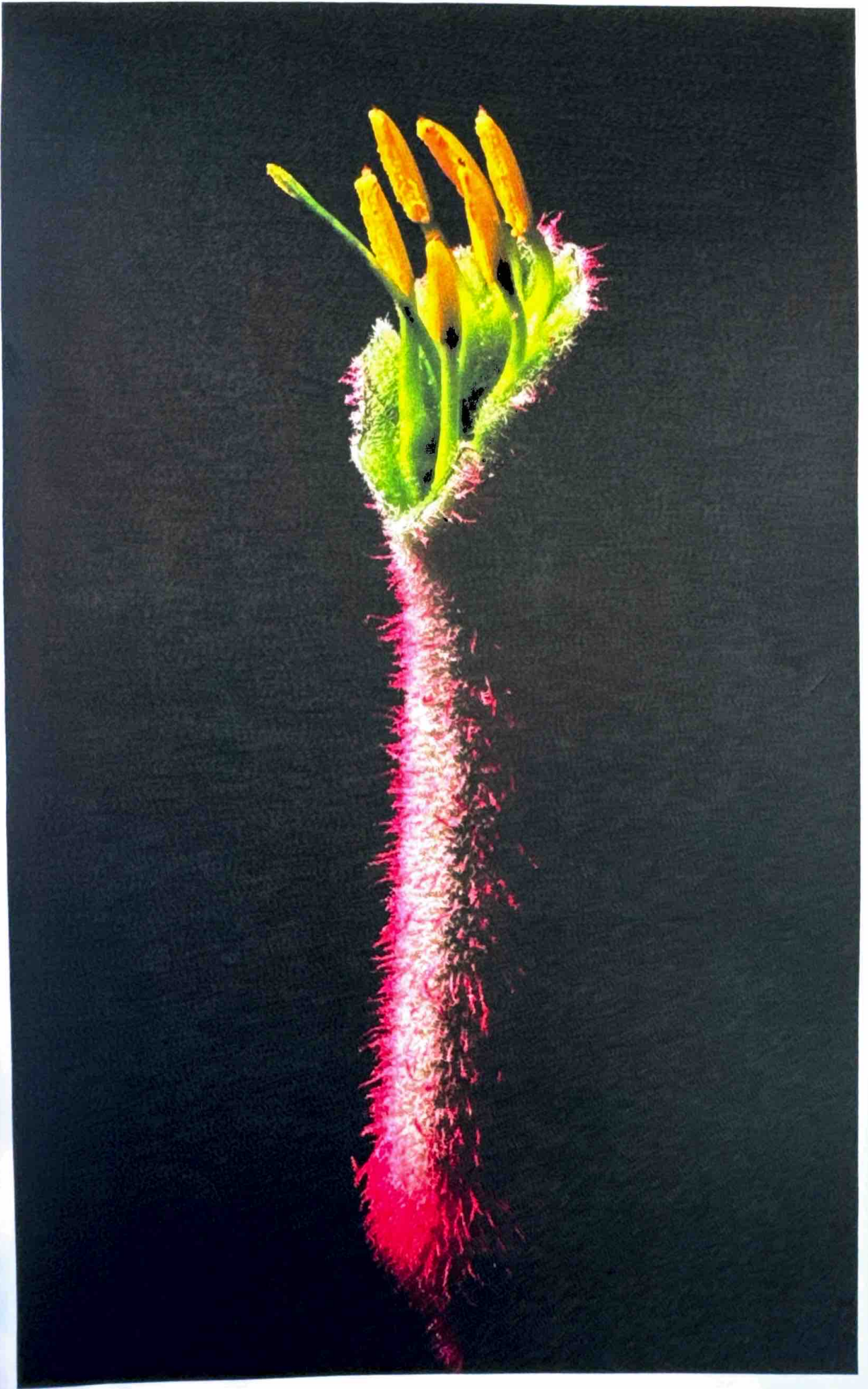
In this work I restrain myself from artistic freedom. I don't modify anything; I remove petals, clean up the background, and present the forms clearly, like taxonomy does. My role is modest: to make these lifeforms visible so that people can admire, observe, feel wonder and awe in the face of the extraordinary creative force and intelligence of life.²

Maria Fernanda Cardoso

Previous page *Naked flora #2: One wife, nine husbands*, 2013

Opposite *Naked flower #5: One wife, six husbands*, 2013

Overleaf: *Naked flora #4: One wife, eight immature husbands*, 2013



Colombian-born artist Maria Fernanda Cardoso creates installation, sculpture, video, photography, and performance. She draws on scientific methods of research and image-making, and transforms unconventional materials from nature, often with cutting-edge technology. In doing so, Cardoso explores the inextricable relationship between the natural world, culture, and scientific observation.

Select solo exhibitions include: *Spiders of Paradise*, presented at venues including Cairns Art Gallery, Gimuy/Cairns, Queensland, Tweed Regional Art Gallery, Murwillumbah, New South Wales, Geraldton Art Gallery, Geraldton, Victoria, Orange Regional Art Gallery, Orange, New South Wales, and Canberra Museum and Gallery, Kamberri/Canberra, 2024–26; *Maria Fernanda Cardoso: MCA Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2023; *Maria Fernanda Cardoso: Death Becomes Her*, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, United States of America, 2006;

Zoomorphia, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney, 2003; and *Cardoso Flea Circus* presented at venues including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, and Sydney Opera House, Sydney, 1994–2003.

Cardoso has featured in major group exhibitions including: Bienal de Arte y Ciudad de Bogotá – BOG25, Cinemateca de Bogotá, Bogotá, Colombia, 2025; *Divided Worlds*, 2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, The Jam Factory, Tarndanya/Adelaide, 2018; *All Our Relations*, 18th Biennale of Sydney, Cockatoo Island, Sydney, 2012; and 50th Venice Biennale, Pavilion of the Italo-Latin American Institute, Venice, Italy, 2003, where she represented Colombia.

Notable public commissions include: *Ripples and droplets*, Sydney, 2022; *While I live I will grow*, Green Square, Sydney, 2018; *Sandstone pollen*, International Convention Centre, Sydney, 2016; and *Cemetery: Vertical garden*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States of America, 1999.



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