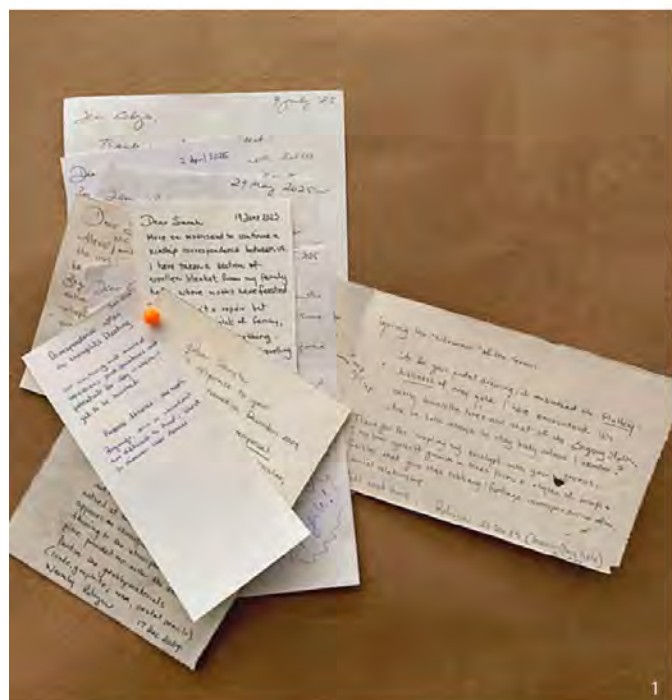




1 Sarah Christie and Robyn Phelan, accumulated correspondence letters, 2024–2025; photo: Sarah Christie

2 **Robyn Phelan**, terracotta clay with bilateral and bipedal compressions, with Bogong Moth drawing and species decline text behind, 2025; photo: Robyn Phelan

ELSEWHERE A CORRESPONDENCE

by Sarah Christie and Robyn Phelan

It's Good Friday, 2025. One of us is walking in Melbourne, the other is walking in London, at the same clock time, on the same calendar day. Our prompt is simply, 'take some clay for a walk' – after Paul Klee's framing of drawing as taking a line for a walk. Clay in hand, we walk together across distance, time zones, seasons. Afterwards we exchange a record by post: a tiny book of images, a photograph of ceramic objects.

After discovering common approaches to clay, Sarah Christie (London) and Robyn Phelan (Melbourne) started corresponding in 2024. A speculative email, followed by post and video calls at odd hours, led to a year-long journey towards meeting and making face to face in Australia. Our presentation at *Wedge*, the 2025 Australian Ceramics Triennale, was a punctuation point in an ongoing correspondence. In the following text, we share insights from inviting each other into our respective practices.



L: Sarah Christie, clay correspondence alongside the Delatite River
 R: Robyn Phelan, clay correspondence alongside the Moonee Moonee
 2025; photos: courtesy artists

Sarah Christie (SC): True to the spirit of using simple means, we began by using the limitations of international letter post as a creative opportunity. Exchanging by mail established a material convention from the start, allowed us to improvise with only what and where is close at hand, and allowed us to tread lightly – to leave no lasting trace. We kept to this principle all the way through, and brought our postal correspondence together in Melbourne. In your studio we used your existing clay and left it unfired so that it could go back into your practice afterwards.

Robyn Phelan (RP): I have only just recycled that adventurous body of clay work! I find it interesting how we naturally continued to work separately yet still in correspondence, even when sitting together in the studio. Using the mail is true correspondence, demanding patience, and anticipation. Waiting weeks for a creative response from you was tremendously exciting. With each envelope opening, I became more adventurous and spontaneous.



- 1 **Robyn Phelan**, clay in Paperbark, Moonee Moonee, Melbourne, h.50cm, w.25cm
2 **Sarah Christie**, clay and eucalyptus bark on Mountain Gum, Delatite River, Victoria, h.50cm, w.30cm

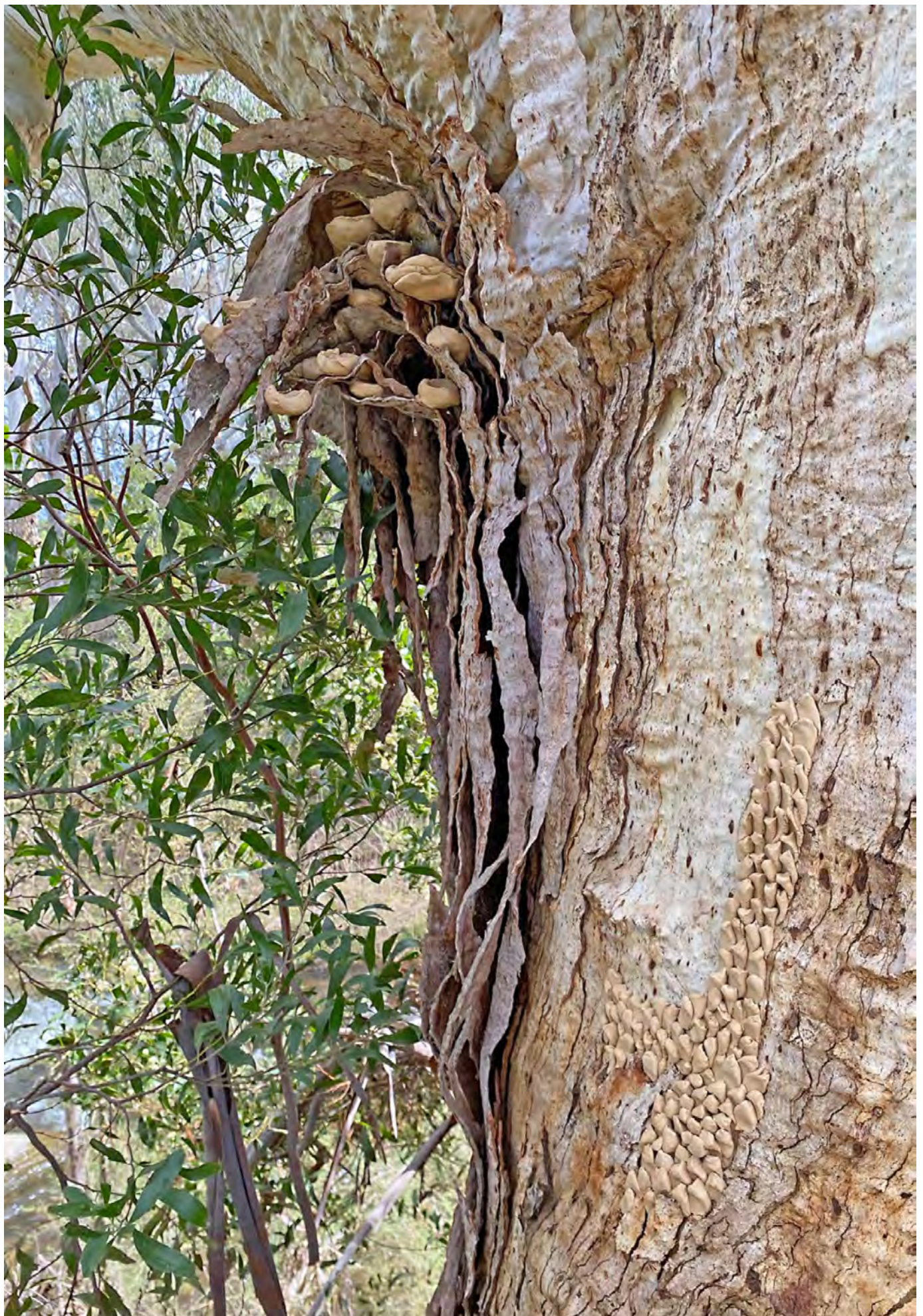
Opposite page: **Robyn Phelan**, clay with Mountain Gum tree, Delatite River, Victoria; photos: Sarah Christie, 2025

SC: Walking together gave us a relational and generative structure. I started to see rivers as lines of correspondence, which began at the Thames, exploring with you live over WhatsApp the post-industrial stretch of river at Woolwich where boats departed and arrived from Australia in unequal exchange. It was enriching to share those walks; and then to finally meet and love your rivers.

RP: It was a thrill to realise that we could WhatsApp meet at the same time and same hemisphere when I was beside the Spree on my trip to Berlin, and you were along the Thames. The perfect synchronicity of that morning crystalised the idea of walking a river together as catalyst for creative thinking and making. I had responded to many rivers in the past, but walking with you, along with the flow of the river, contributes newly to the flows of associations, body movement, and material.

SC: The process of call and response is fundamental to our activity. We answer each other's prompts without overthinking, and welcome the vulnerability of exchanging work in progress – clay or otherwise. On our walks, we were each called by what we encountered in our immediate environments – to look, and actively listen, touch, smell, and sense – and we then shared our material responses to these embodied experiences. This laid a deep foundation for our clay-in-hand walks together along your rivers in urban Melbourne and the rural Victorian High Country. I don't think we could have responded so directly and instinctively through clay to the trees there, without first going through this longer process together.

RP: Experiencing the Moonee Moonee and the Delatite (Australian rivers) through your eyes gave my critical lens more clarity and deeper relational meaning. Our correspondence, call and response,





Above: Sarah Christie and Robyn Phelan, studio wall correspondence, 2024–2025, mixed media h.70cm, w.420cm; photo: Leni Ciuro Photography

Below: **Sarah Christie**, *River Works*, 2025, handbuilt terracotta and black clay, tallest h.45cm; photo: artist





river strolling, and WhatsApp screen chatting all share side-by-side proximity that I call associative play. Like children, we make, observe, share, and test ideas and materials, meeting each other without judgment but full of curiosity and risk-taking.

SC: We have walked again together since presenting at the Triennale. I walked my local river, the Wandle in south London, and you returned to the Delatite in Victoria.

RP: Ah, to wander the Wandle with you one day! You'll recall I had to WhatsApp chat with you as soon as I got back to the Delatite to check in and re-attune to the river with you beside me. I was also blackware-firing a clay piece made during our studio session around that time. I have a new way of bilateral clay compression that mimics the action of walking. Our correspondence continues forward from place to place, action to action, call and response.

SC: Yes, and we are each nourished conceptually, intellectually, and personally, with freedom to respond individually via parallel associative practices. 'Elsewhere' continues for me through writing, film and sound recordings, as well as in clay. I love that our collaboration is always active, despite the distance, because one of us is always awake.

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**Loose guidelines, tips, rules,
 for a correspondence practice.
 (Whatever works, just do it.)**

Don't let distance prevent you from working with someone who shares your approach to making.
 Take the time to build up trust: start small, listen, and follow through.
 Material objects hold deep resonance – use the post.

You could start by sharing five words – write or draw them on something tactile. Respond quickly, take risks, use a range of materials.

Postage tips: Australian international standard letters up to 250gm in weight, 5mm thick, and 130mm x 240mm are around \$3–\$5 to post. Scale, weight, and thickness are a wonderful creative parameter. Also collate, share, and archive your images and documents online.