

# Winterbourne Woman

BY SCARLETT LEWIS

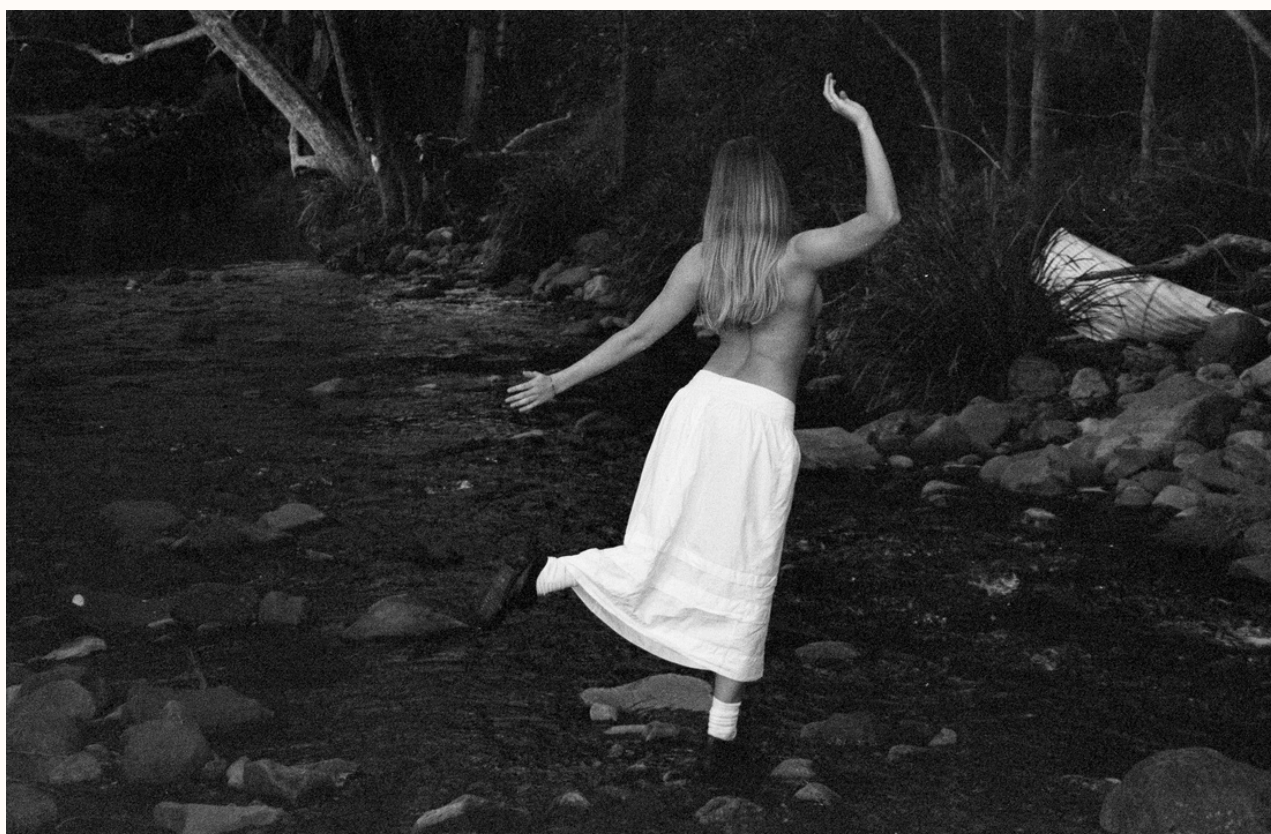
28 MAY, 2025

"Theory, the seeing of patterns,  
showing the forest as well as the trees,  
theory can be a dew that rises from the earth  
and collects in the rain cloud  
and returns to earth over and over."

*FROM ADRIENNE RICH (1984), NOTES TOWARD A POLITICS OF LOCATION.*







*IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST SCARLETT LEWIS, WINTERBOURNE WOMAN, MINNAMURRA (2025)*

## BODY AND SITE - CONCEPT

In a place where the rain-swelled streams tell stories of plenty and song, this series traces the breath of water as it meanders through the rainforest, the escarpment, and finally to the sea. Minnamurra, "plenty of fish", is a testament to the ancient practices of women who paddled nuwi canoes, fished with chant and care, and lived by the rhythm of water and earth. Here, in the fleeting flow of a winterbourne stream, we find the echoes of this knowledge and strength, held, and carried by women, past and present.



MAMARANG BY WILLIAM NICHOLAS (FIRST NATIONS KIAMA). PROPERTY OF KIAMA LIBRARY.

My four-part photographic series Winterbourne Woman explores the convergence of ecofeminism and conceptual landscape photography, focusing on the relationship between the female body and the natural world. This series investigates how the historical domination of women and the exploitation of nature are deeply interconnected, aligning with ecofeminist theory which argues that these forms of oppression arise from shared patriarchal structures (Merchant, 1980; Rock & Art, 2023). The images, featuring a female figure immersed in water and forest, aim to depict the body not as separate from nature, but as a fragile, resilient presence within it; entirely fluid, interwoven, and part of a larger ecological and historical narrative.

This concept holds personal resonance for me as it draws on my home, the coastal and rainforest landscapes of Dharawal Country, and the Minnamurra River. This land, traditionally cared for by the Dharawal-speaking people and rich in Indigenous ecological knowledge, shapes the way I see the environment, not as a backdrop, but as a living archive of culture, feminine Indigenous strength and story. By working in this space, I acknowledge the enduring significance of these lands and the vital role of Indigenous women in caring for and sustaining them.

Acknowledging these layered histories challenges me to consider my role in the site, and to celebrate the ecofeminist principles of collaborative, non-hierarchical relationships between women and the land (Rock & Art, 2023; Earth.org, 2023). The images taken here are both an act of witness and of care.

A central focus of my project has been bridging the gap between theory and practice within the conceptual photography tradition. Conceptual photography prioritises the idea or concept over the purely visual aspects of an image (Gordin, 2021; Wall, 2012). This approach allows me to use the landscape as more than just the context or frame, but it becomes a metaphor for the entanglement of body, place, and memory.

My research into ecofeminism, particularly through works by Merchant (1980) and Mellor (1997), reinforced the idea that the female body and the natural world have been simultaneously romanticised and exploited. Drawing on this theoretical foundation, my photographic practice seeks to reveal how women's agency can emerge within these contested spaces. Scholars like Adams (2004) draw attention to how landscape photography can either reinforce or challenge colonial narratives of control, so my series intentionally resists dominating the landscape or subject, allowing instead for fluid relationships between figure and place.





FRANCESCA WOODMAN, UNTITLED, BOULDER, COLORADO, 1976.

## WOODMAN, FORD, KURLAND

This series draws on influences from Francesca Woodman, Justine Kurland and Sue Ford informed my use of monochrome and film to capture the narratives of womanhood and agency within landscape that resonate with ecofeminist thought (Peguero Fontcuberta, 2019). These artists' blurred and experimental portraits suggest impermanence and self-erasure (Solomon-Godeau, 1986); Justine Kurland, who stages adolescent girls as mythic, untamed figures within wild landscapes (Kurland, 2002); and Sue Ford, who used monochrome photography to highlight the authorship and subjectivity of women (Ennis, H 2022). These influences guided my decision to shoot on Ilford HP5 Plus 400 black and white film using the Minolta X-700, embracing the materiality and unpredictability of film with the control of SLR to create images that feel like lived memories and encounters rather than posed documentation.

In this way, the technical choices of exposure, lighting, and format become acts of care and listening rather than control, echoing ecofeminism's call for reciprocity and balance (Szanto, 2021). This convergence of theory and practice transforms the images from mere documentation into sites of shared vulnerability and quiet resistance. Technically, the decision to work in monochrome was pivotal. Shooting on Ilford HP5 Plus 400 with the Minolta X-700 embraced the tactile, imperfect quality of film, enhancing the intimate, memory-like feel of the images. The absence of colour in the final photographs strips the landscape of pastoral romanticism and draws focus to the play of light, texture, and gesture. I was heavily influenced by Rinko Kawauchi's use of light as a second subject that conveys the transient, dreamlike quality of natural environments (Kawauchi, 2011).

Alas, overexposed highlights and deep shadows transformed my images into testaments on presence and absence (I like the Italian word *chiaroscuro* for this), tracing the quiet exchange of the female body and the landscape. The subject is captured moving with the water, not posed but instinctively present, her gestures dissolving into the ripples and reflections of the river, her skin and dress merging with the textures of water, reeds, and rocks.



FRANCESCA WOODMAN, UNTITLED, MACDOWELL COLONY, PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1980.

This collaborative, intuitive process was as much about listening to the landscape and her as it was about making images, resisting imposed control, and embracing the gentle tension between subject and site. Shooting with film also forced a slower, more intuitive process that reflected the collaborative, non-impositional ethos at the heart of ecofeminist thought (King, 1987; Mellor, 1997).

Rather than seeing the subject as a static object, I invited her to move organically within the landscape as she wished, wading through water, exploring the site, standing still in moments of quiet reflection, and ultimately dissolving into the environment. This approach resists the patriarchal gaze and aligns with the feminist photographic lineage that positions women's bodies as active, fluid, and sacred presences in landscape (NGV, 2022; Contemporary Art Review LA, 2024). The images were not composed to perfection but emerged from moments of intuitive connection and candid movement, what I see as a small rebellion against imposed control, both in photography and in how women are viewed within the natural world.

What evolved, was a visual essay that seeks to collapse the boundaries between body and land, presence and memory, vulnerability, and strength. It is an exploration of how the female form and landscape can be seen as co-creators of life and meaning, challenging traditional power structures and revealing the quiet, layered resilience of both. In doing so, my work contributes to the ongoing dialogue within conceptual landscape photography that sees the landscape not merely as a setting, but as a site of cultural, gendered, and ecological entanglement.



SUE FORD, "CARMEL AND TRISH", 1962; PRINTED 1988.  
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE.

Landscapes are always cultural landscapes,  
and our photographs are always mediations of power—  
whether we choose to acknowledge it or not."

*FROM WILLIAM M. ADAMS (2004) FROM AGAINST EXTINCTION: THE STORY OF CONSERVATION.*

## REFERENCE LIST

Adams, W.M. 2004, 'Against extinction: the story of conservation', Earthscan, London.

Earth.org 2023, 'Ecofeminism explores the relationship between women and nature', viewed 27 May 2025, <https://earth.org/ecofeminism/>.

Gordin, M. 2021, 'Conceptual photography and the landscape', *World Literature Today*, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 76-78.

Kawauchi, R. 2011, *Illuminance*, Aperture, New York.

King, Y. 1987, 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology', in Diamond, I & Orenstein, G. (eds), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.

Kurland, J. 2002, *Girl Pictures 1997-2002*, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

Mellor, M. 1997, *Feminism & Ecology*, NYU Press, New York.

Merchant, C. 1980, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, HarperOne, New York.

Ennis, H 2022, 'Sue Ford's History', NGV, viewed 27 May 2025, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/sue-fords-history-2/>.

Peguero Fontcuberta, M.E. 2019, 'Woman artist or feminist artist? Approaching Francesca Woodman's work', Universitat Pompeu Fabra, viewed 27 May 2025, [https://www.academia.edu/43466124/Woman\\_artist\\_or\\_feminist\\_artist\\_Approaching\\_the\\_female\\_gaze\\_in\\_Francesca\\_Woodman](https://www.academia.edu/43466124/Woman_artist_or_feminist_artist_Approaching_the_female_gaze_in_Francesca_Woodman)

Mahmood, Z 2023, 'Ecofeminism: Rising voice in art and activism', viewed 27 May 2025, <https://www.rockandart.org/ecofeminism-rising-voice-in-art-and-activism/>.

Solomon-Godeau, A., 2017. *Photography after photography: Gender, genre, history*, edited by S. Parsons. Durham: Duke University Press, vol. 41, pp. 103-113.

Szanto, A. 2021, 'The magic of black and white images: History, art, and science', *FRAMES Magazine*, viewed 27 May 2025, <https://readframes.com/the-magic-of-black-and-white-images-history-art-and-science-by-attila-szanto/>.

Wall, J. 2012, 'Photography and Liquid Intelligence', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 451-459.