ARTIST: LUCY T. SMITH
ARTWORK: Grass Tree Xanthorrhoea johnsonii

Take a closer look at the flowering stages of the grass tree. Xanthorrhoea johnsonii, from the time of the first appearance of the flower spike, through to the completion of the spike.

- A spiral pattern of tiny triangles appears all around the spike.
- White flowers emerge, appearing at the base of the flowering spike, progressing upwards. Each flower produces numerous seeds, enjoyed by many nectar feeders.
- The triangular sections enlarge as the flower buds begin to emerge.
- The final stage of empty, spiky nut cases is also the most familiar.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Smith has stated, “a dominant feature of the Melaleuca woodlands are the beautiful, iconic grass trees. Instead of just painting one, I invented another informative page to illustrate the different stages of the grass tree’s flowering spike. I found the shape and patterns of the inflorescence fascinating, and hopefully communicated this to the viewer – perhaps they will stop and look closer next time they walk past a grass tree.”

QUESTION/DISCUSS

Through the construction of their narrative elements, some illustrations can tell us more about a particular organism. In this work, has the artist been successful in giving us more information about the life cycle of the grass tree? If you were going to design a poster on grass trees, describe what you would do differently than the artist.

Lucy T. SMITH
b.1968 Australia

Grass Tree Xanthorrhoea johnsonii 1994
Watercolour on illustration board with printed overlay
43 x 21 cm

Purchased for the James Cook University
Art Collection in 1994

Photograph: Michael Marzik