Barbara Campbell  
The Grimwade effect

Pre-performance exhibition 22 October to 7 November  
Performance 2pm Saturday 8 November  
Post-performance exhibition 11 November to 14 December

My first point of contact with the Grimwade Collection was the watercolour of the Felton, Grimwade & Co. leech aquarium—a humble weatherboard shack given dignity by the surrounding parterre gardens and, further, by the pictorial status of ‘factory portrait’. Leeches are co-performers in The Grimwade effect performance. They go to work on me and I convert their work into a body monitoring system. In order to perform, the leeches are given a ‘stage’: the historical context provided by the watercolour hanging nearby; the especially commissioned ‘jewellery’ I use to handle them; the hand-crafted glass aquarium that holds them; and the research undertaken to procure, handle and dispose of them. These conditions create a context for their performance quite different from that which they perform either in their natural environment or in medical applications.

The leech aquarium watercolour was my entrée into the history of the Felton & Grimwade companies and the life of Russell Grimwade. The material that pervades the Grimwade story is wood, or, more precisely, the eucalypt. The company has extracted and marketed eucalyptus oil since 1882, but Russell Grimwade’s interest in the gum-tree was far more extensive: photographing and writing about them, championing their bio-chemical benefits, and making crutches with them in his home workshop.

It seemed a natural progression to extend Russell Grimwade’s relationship with trees into the metaphoric language of the body. The wooden bench is a surrogate body in the two exhibitions and a body shadow in the performance. The bench legs are modelled on crutches that are themselves leg substitutes. The bench top is like a torso: a piece of red gum, milled so that its heart and skin are revealed. Like me, it is dressed. During the performance it will absorb some of my blood. And the sounds of my heart will be conducted through it before being carried away towards the glass heart and into the atmosphere.

Barbara Campbell, October 2003