

## GALLERY

## YING ANG

by JOSH LUSTIG

Last year, over the course of a single fruiting season, Ying Ang wandered the inner-city streets of Melbourne photographing mushrooms. She describes them to me as “small signs of life in a landscape preparing for rest”. Amidst the concrete busyness of the city, as the leaves turned from green to red to brown, Ang was drawn to these fleeting, fragile forms. “I photographed them as if they were portraits: couples, small families, solitary figures.”

She also began to read and learn more about the life cycles of fungi, how the real work – the real lives – of these living things happens out of sight, deep underground across sprawling networks of mycelium that play a vital role in entire ecosystems. The more Ang learnt, the stronger the parallels seemed between the lives of these “fruiting bodies” – as she has titled her book – and the lives of human beings, specifically women. “I began to see parallels between the fetishisation of the fruiting body – the visible, reproductive peak – and the ways society regards the female body. Both are celebrated for their fertility, yet their deeper, sustaining labours remain largely invisible.”

Ang’s work has always been autobiographical. Her first book, *Gold Coast*, was a coming-of-age story about the search for belonging. Her second, *The Quickening*, she describes to me as a work about “matrescence – the reordering of identity that comes with motherhood”. Now, as she enters perimenopause, she has made *Fruiting Bodies*.

Coupled with the mushroom portraits are texts written by Ang. A mix of poetry and prose that digs deeper into the similarities she sees in these short-lived flowerings and our own lives: “She had spent years being told she was disappearing. Her body, once a landscape of purpose, was now described in terms of loss – of eggs, of hormones, of desire. As if she were a house abandoned by its occupants, left to gather dust. A careful folding of herself into the space of others. This is the quiet, unspectacular revolution. She stands in the kitchen, barefoot on cold tiles, peeling an orange, considering the weight of her own survival. This, too, is a kind of freedom.” **FT**

“*Fruiting Bodies*” is published by Perimeter Books, [perimeterbooks.com](http://perimeterbooks.com)

