

FRAMEWORK

#8 | *the social change issue*







EDITORIAL

Welcome to the last edition of Framework for 2014.

In this issue our contributors tackle the theme 'Social Change'. Like many people living in Australia in 2014, I have a sense of dread when I think about the future. Between our current government, inhumane asylum seeker policies, and the imminent threat of climate change it's easy to feel disillusioned. This issue of Framework looks at artists tackling the big issues, locally and on a global scale.

This is a bumper issue of Framework, with contributors from across the UNSW Art & Design community. Emily O'Connor is the artist profiled this time around. O'Connor is a dynamic artist who has just commenced postgraduate study here.

I was thrilled when Simon Hunt agreed to be interviewed for this issue. Not only is he an important voice around campus and in the Sydney art scene, Pauline Pantsdown's social media presence is my favourite thing on the internet.

Diana Smith has kindly allowed us to publish her 'Letter from a young woman artist,' which speaks volumes about the way sexism continues to pervade the art industry. Helen War gives us an insight into her life as an artist and activist in her piece 'How I Learned to be the Ball'. I have written about Temporary Democracies 2013 in anticipation of the 2014 festival.

We have two eloquent reviews of local work dealing with themes of Indigenous sovereignty. Reko Rennie's *No Sleep Till Dreamtime* is reviewed by Olivia Welch and the curated exhibition *We visited in canoes...* is reviewed by Tahjee Moar and Olivia Welch in a piece called 'Australian Future Histories'. This review is a follow-up to Claudia Nicholson's artist profile in our 'Place and Space' issue from earlier in the year.

As this is my last issue of Framework, I'd like to say an enormous thankyou to Arc for this opportunity. Special thanks to Penelope Benton. Thank you for reading, thanks for contributing, thanks for rocking up to our launches. It has been a blast. Can't wait to read some more Framework in 2015!

- Maria White

**THE
SOCIAL
CHANGE
ISSUE**

ARTIST PROFILE

Emily O'Connor



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*by Tahjee Moar +
Olivia Welch*



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by Maria White

FRAMEWORK

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4

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Front cover image

'Dinghy Drag', 2013
Emily O'Connor

Photo: Natalie Randall
Image courtesy of the artist.

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Emily O'Connor

Emily O'Connor is an artist working in video and live art. Her practice advocates a rethinking of the body, of desire and our relation to space as informed by corporeal feminist and queer theory.

O'Connor is interested in the malleability of bodies as informed by her continued fascination with the mimetic behaviors of insects and the natural world. She has been a volunteer with the Australian National Insect Collection in Canberra for five years and in 2012 O'Connor completed an internship with the insect collection at the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. In February and March of 2013 she completed a residency with the National Film & Sound Archive in Canberra where she began research into the archive being devoured, literally, by the natural world (specifically mold, bacteria and insects).

In 2013, O'Connor completed her Honours year in Theatre and Performance Studies at UNSW, winning the Philip Parsons Prize for her research. This research utilises the theory of Roger Caillois, read through Australian Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz, who uses the mimetic behavior of the *Phyllia* Moth as a metaphor to investigate the ways in which body and environment are corporeally informed by one another. The practical component of O'Connor's honours research was a video performance titled *Dinghy Drag*. This work captures O'Connor dragging a six-foot dinghy across the desolate and dried up Weereewa (or Lake George.) *Dinghy Drag* expresses the mutually determinative relationship between bodies and their environments.

O'Connor has since revisited this footage and is in the process of utilising video compression artifacts, intentionally degrading and deforming the recorded imagery of this performance to question the role of the document as an object that reflects individuals' desires. The intentional digital degradation of the footage further blends her body with the landscape, allowing virtual and natural materials to influence one another.

O'Connor has recently commenced her Masters research, which is still heavily informed by the mimetic qualities of the flesh. She turns to the potential of cinematic and filmic space as a place to re-imagine bodies. Specifically, O'Connor is interested in representations of the feminine and female expression both historically and in a contemporary context. Her research begins with an investigation of 19th Century female hysteria and its complex relationship with the photographic frame. This research has been informed by her work with collective Hissy Fit, of which O'Connor is a core and founding member together with Jade Muratore and Nat Randall. Hissy Fit's work investigates the notion of the deviant woman, a transgressive character symbolic of an unapologetic breed of feminism. Hissy Fit's most recent project *Heat* is a multi-channel video installation that investigates filmic representations of female competition and aggression. It will be shown as part of the Activist Curating Exhibition at SCA this October.



01 Hissy Fit, Episode, Photo: Robert Knapman, image courtesy of the artists, 2014

02 Hissy Fit, Episode, Photo: Lucy Parakhina, image courtesy of the artists, 2014





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Q&A WITH

SIMON HUNT

by Isabella Trimboli



IN THE LATE 1990S, PAULINE HANSON AND HER ONE NATION PARTY REPRESENTED A DANGEROUS SCHOOL OF THOUGHT THAT EXISTED WITHIN THE FAR RIGHT. HOMOPHOBIC, RACIST AND BIGOTTED OPINIONS WERE BEING AIRED IN PARLIAMENT - AND FOR A MOMENT, IT SEEMED LIKE SOME AUSTRALIANS WERE BUYING INTO PAULINE'S DANGEROUS ZEALOTRY.

ANGRY AND WANTING CHANGE, SIMON HUNT CREATED PAULINE PANTSDOWN - AN AMALGAMATION OF DRAG, SATIRE AND SOUND THAT PROVIDED THE PERFECT COUNTER-ATTACK TO HANSON'S HARMFUL IDEOLOGY. IT WAS ENTERTAINING YET INFORMATIVE, A COMEDIC PROVOCATION THAT SPARKED DIVERSE DISCOURSE.

AFTER HANSON LOST HER PARLIAMENTARY SEAT IN 1998, PANTSDOWN RETREATED. BUT AFTER A LONG HIATUS, HUNT RESURRECTED THE CHARACTER FOR THE DIGITAL AGE VIA FACEBOOK. PAULINE PANTSDOWN'S FACEBOOK PAGE IS BURSTING WITH ONLINE ACTIVISM AND COMIC RELIEF - AND HAS BEEN BEHIND MANY SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS INCLUDING THE TERMINATION OF HOMOPHOBIC OPERA SINGER TAMAR IVERI'S CONTRACT WITH OPERA AUSTRALIA, AND DISRUPTING THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES' MELBOURNE CONFERENCE IN AUGUST.

I SAT DOWN WITH SIMON TO DISCUSS HOW HE'S MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE PHOTOSHOPPED POLITICIAN AT A TIME.

IT: HOW DID PAULINE PANTSDOWN START?

SH: It came out of a whole series of voice cut-up work that I'd done. I was doing satirical political work through voice cut-up and Pauline [Hanson] was just another project pretty well within that. She represented something very different at that time than she does now - now she's sort of a B-grade celebrity, but then she had 25% of the Queensland vote, she was saying what I perceived to be racist things. And so to me it was just another opportunity to turn a message around and do it within a fringe, queer performance set as I'd been doing for some years. But this is the one that burst through into mainstream culture.

IT: IN THE PAST YOU'VE SATIRISED PAULINE HANSON AND JOHN HOWARD, DO YOU HAVE ANY FUTURE PLANS TO MOCK ANY MODERN POLITICIANS? I CAN THINK OF A FEW THAT DESERVE THE TREATMENT!

SH: No, not really. You see the Pauline campaign - that was sixteen years ago and to me that was a time where certain ideas were encapsulated in her [Hanson] and her popularity. We're also talking about a pre-internet society, so it was a campaign run through mainstream media that really targeted a person where their ideas were very contained and were the types of ideas that I tend to fight in my political work - like women's issues, gay and lesbian issues, issues of race, issues of bigotry of various types - those are no longer encapsulated in a certain person. They are modes of thinking that are spread throughout all sides of politics in Australian government. It's not so easy to target things anymore.

She was a package of ideas put together. I think that was part of the whole thing. I saw her as very much being a construction herself. She sort of put forth this traditional, American, Republican idea of "I was born

in a log cabin and I'm a working class person and do this and I'm an average Australian" and all that. But the more you picked it apart the more you could see how constructed the whole thing was. So a part of what I was doing, I think, was to satirise that actual construction of her. So you know, you could put a man or anyone in these clothes and this voice and get them to say anything.

IT: YOU BROUGHT PAULINE PANTSDOWN BACK VIA FACEBOOK DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN LAST YEAR. WHY THE REBIRTH?

SH: It was a quite specific thing at the time. I've always been quite fascinated with politics and the way it works, and there was a certain reading by a political analyst just before the election that said she had a good chance of getting into the senate in Australia in that she'd engaged the best preference dealer, this guy, Glenn Druery, who was also engaged in setting up all these minor party deals and stuff like that. So I generally felt like she was going to get back into power and start saying and doing all of these things again. So I initially started a campaign to break that down and through direct political analysis, exposing the way she could get into power. But the big thing was she started using Facebook, she'd never been on Facebook before and then suddenly there she was. It was too easy - I was copying her cover pictures and profile pictures and replacing things. So it just automatically became 'I can have this other battle and do it in a different way'. And by the time we got to

the election it turned out her preference dealer was double dealing her along with everybody else so she didn't get in. But by then, I had picked up a very large following during the election campaign and suddenly Tony Abbott was in power and I had this outlet.

IT: YOU'VE USED YOUR FACEBOOK PAGE AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF ACTIVISM, MOST RECENTLY CAUSING HAVOC FOR THE WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES CONFERENCE IN MELBOURNE THROUGH ENCOURAGING YOUR FOLLOWERS TO WRITE BAD REVIEWS OF VENUES THAT WERE TO HOLD THE EVENT, CAUSING TWO VENUE CHANGES. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO CRITICS THAT SLAM ONLINE ACTIVISM AS 'SLACKTIVISM' AND NOT EFFECTIVE IN THE REAL WORLD?

SH: That's a commonly said thing and I think mostly it's true. But to me, whenever I've taken a campaign on Facebook I'm actually trying to get people to do things outside of the Facebook world. It's like you can have somebody put a picture up of a dead child in Palestine, and it can get a million likes and it does nothing. With these campaigns I'm actually going for concrete outcomes that work beyond social media. So in the case of World Congress of Families it was that directly through my campaigning we enabled at least two venues closures that resulted in the conference ending up in a venue that was so right wing that the politicians had to pull out, which was the literal aim of the campaign.



IT: YOUR PANTSDOWN FACEBOOK PAGE IS RIFE WITH MEMES, FUNNY PHOTOSHOP JOBS AND FARCICAL WIKIPEDIA EDITS - I THINK THAT'S WHAT MAKES YOUR PAGE SO EFFECTIVE - ITS HUMOUR. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SH: It's like when you open up Facebook and you see ranting and ranting so you just keep scrolling quickly because it can get over the top. So for me it's this idea that you can use comedy to illuminate but also as a stress relief at the same time... and I don't see those things as being contradictory at all! It's actually a way, I know myself, it's actually a way I can diffuse my own anger about certain things and certain inequalities.

What I noticed when I had my fifteen minutes of fame with the initial Pauline thing was that for a two-year period everyone I met, when they found out who I was, there'd be a discussion about Pauline Hanson and what they thought she meant. There were really stark differences in responses between Caucasian people, to whom it's just funny, and then from those in the targeted groups. Aboriginal and Asian friends would say to me "she made me so angry, thank you because when I laugh at your work it feels like I'm getting back at her".



Simon Hunt can be found teaching Media Arts at UNSW Art & Design, and his digital alter ego on the Pauline Pantsdown Facebook page:

**facebook.com/
paulinepantsdown666**

⁰⁴ Simon Hunt, A still from the video set of "I Don't Like It" image courtesy of the artist. 1999.

⁰⁵ Simon Hunt, Christopher Pyne Dartboard. This was distributed in regulation dartboard size files, with printing and mounting instructions, image courtesy of the artist, 2014.

⁰⁶ Simon Hunt, Image was produced in the week that Australia assumed the rotating leadership of the United Nations Security Council, 2013.



Letter From A Young Woman Artist (after Janine Burke)

Dear Janine,

I recently read your 'Letter to a Young Woman Artist'. Even though you first wrote it to a painter named Cathy as she started her career in the 80s, it was strikingly relevant to me, a performance artist who started working more than 20 years later, in the first part of the 21st century. With some alarm, I read your comment:

Remember, at first it can be easy for an artist in Australia. (Yes, even a woman artist!) There are grants, awards, Biennales and Perspectives, galleries eager for the young artist to show. You can even think you've made it by thirty, you've been bought by a national collection, given an overseas residency...and got a part time job in an art school. And, just as swiftly, it can change. Look ahead. How many good painters are there of sixty or seventy? And how many women?¹

I've had my work purchased by the Museum of Contemporary Art, undertaken overseas residencies in Korea and China, had my work shown at major institutions, and I've got a part time job as a researcher at the College of Fine Arts. But, having just turned 31, I find myself pondering your advice to Cathy and wondering if, as you say, things are about to change.

It would seem that I'm not the only one contemplating this. Artist Elvis Richardson has spent the last five years compiling statistics on gender equality in the Australian art world for her influential blog and archive project CoUNTess (<http://countesses.blogspot.com.au>). She's found that, whilst there are substantially more female artists graduating from art school (65 % compared with 35%), things change after graduation. In both commercial and public galleries men outnumber women as exhibitors by a ratio of 59% compared with 35% (with 6% collaborations).²

Richardson also found that major institutions in Australia tend to favour collecting the work of male artists. Between 2000 and 2010, the National Gallery of Victoria collected the works of 269 men, but only 59 women. The National Gallery of Australia collected 222 men, but a mere 43 women.³ The recent acquisition of the private Kaldor Collection by the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) caused surprisingly little debate considering that, out of the 202 works donated, 194 were by men (and 6 were collaborations). The AGNSW's subsequent New Contemporary Galleries opening show (21 May 2011 – 2 May 2012), mixing the Kaldor with their existing collection, exhibited 11 women alongside 127 men and 3 collaborations.⁴ Given women make up 53% of the population, it seems odd that such a major exhibition in a state gallery would reduce their cultural contribution to around 14%. If we make up 65% of graduates, what happens to reduce that figure so substantially by the time we're established enough to appear in major collections?

I wonder how different it might be if women of your generation, or even Cathy's, were at the helm of more of the major institutions. Instead, men run the vast majority of the state and national galleries. In her recent article for *The Age*, Fiona Gruber interviewed leading women arts managers, with established director and Order of Australia recipient Maudie Palmer commenting, "nothing much has changed since Betty Churcher ran the National Gallery of

¹ Janine Burke, 'Letter to a Young Woman Artist', *Field of Vision, A Decade of Change: Women's Art in the Seventies*, Viking, Victoria, 1990, p.107.

² 'Educating and Exhibiting Artists', *CoUNTess*, Web. 2 December 2012. 10 January 2012.

³ 'News', *CoUNTess*, Web. March 22 2010. 10 January 2012

⁴ 'When Private Collections go Public', *CoUNTess*, Web. 16 June 2011. 10 January 2012.

Art (from 1990-97)".⁵ Since Churcher broke through the glass ceiling 23 years ago, the only other woman to be appointed at this level is Louise Doyle, who became the director of the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra in 2010. The same situation is reflected in the university system. In a recent interview in *Art & Australia*, artist Kathy Temin noted the predominance of women art students but ponders why "there are not more female artists in higher-level positions at art schools."⁶

For those women who do work in the arts, there's also a pretty significant disparity in pay. Australia Council's statistics from 2007/2008 (the most recent available) reveal that women earn half of what men earn for their creative practice.⁷ This is significantly lower than the national pay gap, which has been sitting at 17.5% for over a decade according to ABS average weekly ordinary full-time earnings.⁸ Despite the fact that there are more women graduating from art school, and working at the lower and middle levels of institutions within the visual arts, they don't seem to be getting the same opportunities or pay rates as their male counterparts.

With statistics like this it's not surprising that there has been a renewed interest in the history and traditions of feminist art practice. Certainly, in the past decade we have seen a series of major exhibitions focused on 'women's art' and the legacy of feminism. These include 'WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution' (MoCA, Los Angeles), 'Global Feminisms' (Brooklyn Museum, New York) 'elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collections of the National Art Museum' (Centre Pompidou, Paris) and in Australia our very own 'Contemporary Australia: Women' (GOMA, Brisbane).

Feminism is also back on the agenda for women of my generation and many of my peers have been initiating creative projects, publications and exhibitions dedicated to the topic. A few recent examples include 'The View from Here: 19 Perspectives on Feminism' (West Space, Melbourne), an exhibition and publication curated by artists Victoria Bennett and Clare Rae and 'Food For Thought' (2012 Next Wave Festival, Melbourne), a series of dinner parties that brought together a range of women curated by LEVEL – a female run and focused artist run initiative established by Brisbane artists Alice Laing, Courtney Coombs and Rachael Haynes in 2010. This year we have the emergence of JANIS, a project initiated by my friend and colleague Kelly Doley, which, as the manifesto proclaims, "is dedicated to enabling female voices to be heard a little louder and to take up more space in the art world, and subsequently, in the annals of art history."⁹

I suspect you may have written something similar to the JANIS mantra in 1974 to accompany 'A Room of One's Own' – the all female exhibition you curated at the Ewing and George Paton Galleries in Melbourne. It's hard to believe that it's been almost four decades since you, as a young university student "irritated by a course that did not mention women", put together one of the first feminist exhibitions in Australia.¹⁰ Forty years on, the JANIS manifesto recalls the sentiments expressed by women of your generation and the argument first posed by Linda Nochlin in her 1971 landmark essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' In 1971 Nochlin advocated the need for a "feminist critique of the discipline

⁵ Fiona Gruber, 'Recasting the Old Masters', *The Age*, Web. 2 December 2012. 10 January 2012.

⁶ Kathy Temin in Julie Ewington, 'Think big and be loud: Three Generations of Female Artists', *Art & Australia*, vol.49, no.3, 2012, p.450.

⁷ Australia Council for the Arts, *Artists Careers Summary*, Sydney, 2010, p.11.

⁸ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gender Pay Gap Fact Sheet*, Canberra, August, 2012.

⁹ Kelly Doley, *Janis*, Sydney, 2013.

¹⁰ Janine Burke, 'A Home for the Revolution: the Ewing and George Paton Galleries and the First Phase of the Women's Art Movement, 1975-1980' in *When you Think About Art: The Ewing & George Paton Galleries, 1971-2008*, ed. by Helen Vivian, Macmillan Publishing, Victoria, 2008 p.180.

of art history”¹¹ and the entire education system. In a revised paper published in 2001, she argued that there is still much more work to be done and “we will need all our wit and courage to make sure that women's voices are heard, their work seen and written about.”¹²

As a woman artist, who is nearing the end of the ‘young’ part of my career, I try looking ahead – as you suggested to Cathy – but in doing so I can’t help looking back and wondering why it is that we have been saying the same thing for over 40 years. There is no doubt that an important task for the future is to connect the rich events of the past with the present and to encourage intergenerational dialogue and exchange – we need more exhibitions, discussions and critiques of our recent art history that highlight the role women have played. But I wonder, what will it take before the advice you gave Cathy over two decades ago will no longer be relevant to young women artists?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Diana', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Diana Smith

¹¹ Linda Nochlin, ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists’ in Baker, Elizabeth C. and Thomas B. Hess, *Art and Sexual Politics: Why have There Been No Great Women Artists?* New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1973, p.2.

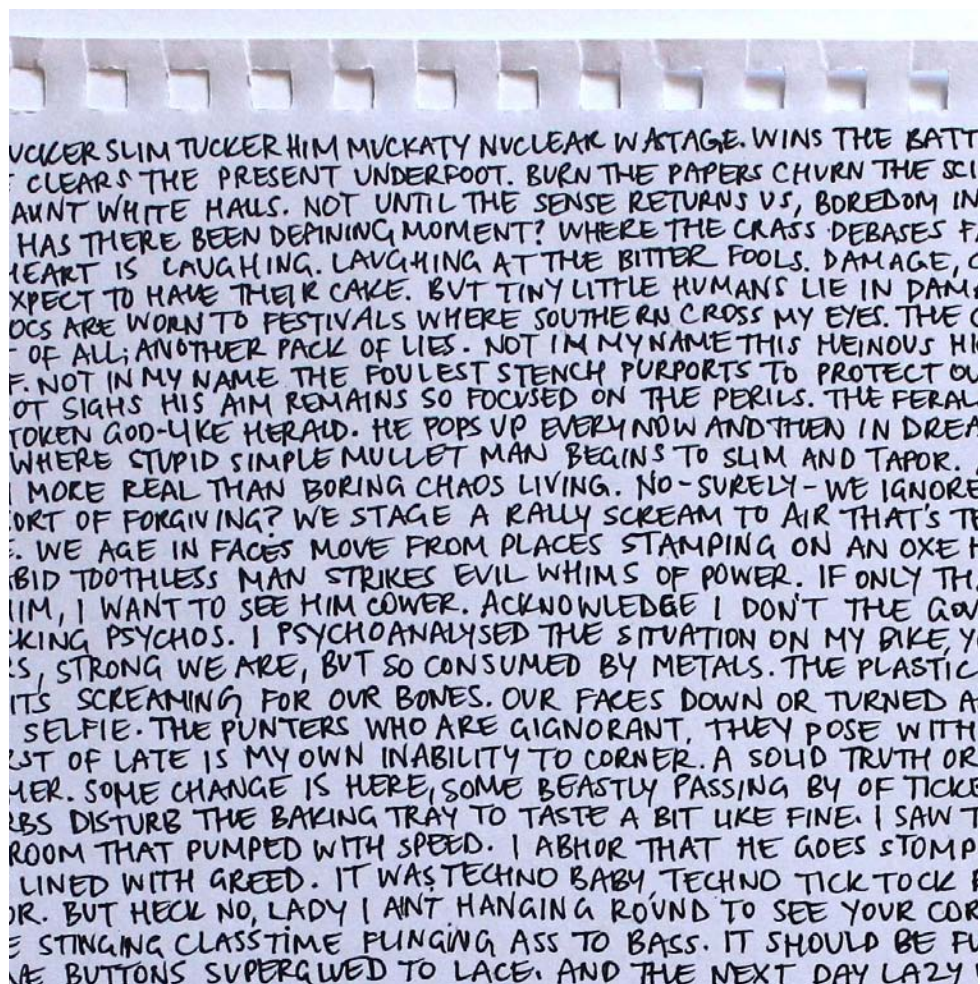
¹² Nochlin, “‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’ Thirty Years After’ in *Women Artists at the Millennium*, ed. by Carol Armstrong and Catherine de Zeeher, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p.24.

Letter from a young woman artist was originally written for the publication accompanying the inaugural JANIS exhibition in 2013, curated by Kelly Doley at Alaska Projects, Sydney. It was subsequently published in Artlink (Sexing the Agenda, Volume 33, no3, 2013)

Diana Smith is a PhD candidate at UNSW Art & Design.

HOW I LEARNED TO BE THE BALL

by *Helen War*



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I'M HELEN WAR. FOR SEVEN OUT OF THE PAST TEN MONTHS I'VE LIVED AT THE LEARD BLOCKADE, AN ACTIVIST CAMP OF PEACEFUL PROTEST, IN ORDER TO STOP A FOREST FROM BEING BULLDOZED FOR A NEW COALMINE. I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOVEREIGNTY WAS NEVER CEDED THERE NOR HERE, AND OFFER MY ENDURING RESPECT FOR THE GOMEROI PEOPLE, WHOSE LAND IS BEING STOLEN AND DESTROYED OUT IN THE NORTHWEST, AND THE GADIGAL PEOPLE OF THE EORA NATION UPON WHICH COFA SITS.

This is my fifth year at COFA and my final semester. Coming back to the concrete and centralized learning paradigm, I squirm at the apathy, the quiet, the corrugations. And I have to stop myself, have to keep my discontent in check. I sense a growing and disproportionate mass of people seeking to further careers instead of engaging with issues and passions that have burned so fervently in art schools throughout the ages. Here we are, the hotbed of society; the place for rage and reaction! And yet, "protest" is almost a dirty word among many.

Even in Environmental Studies, I was disappointed with the perceived lack of enthusiasm for action. In hindsight, I don't think there's any proponent in the modern university who can nourish those seeking to act upon the outrage of what is happening to the planet with the immediacy needed. Please Sign This Form. You May Not Cross This Line. Students Not Permitted. So instead I bought a tent, packed up my shit, split from my boyfriend and stormed out of Sydney to go live in a forest with Frontline Action on Coal activists.

The stunts of the Leard Blockade are almost innumerable and some have been spectacular, in order to spotlight environmental destruction through a beautifully pertinent image. One morning in February, two activists shut down Idemitsu Resources' huge coal loader by suspending themselves with harnesses and rope for 10 hours. The cincher: they were wearing bat costumes to highlight biodiversity loss, and the

media dubbed them "Batgirls". By the end of the day, the cost to the company had been extensive, the media exposure fierce and social media had gone nuts sharing the image of the Batgirls. My faith in the arts was renewed that day. After weeks of eating coal dust on the edge of an open pit coal mine and listening to the endless rumbling of coal trucks, crushers and blasts, the possibility of art as redemptive was monumental. Whether or not this action was considered "art" is of little consequence to its power in addressing and critiquing the issue; creativity had caught the imagination.

Perhaps we should despair at the need to decorate a sordid issue so that people don't turn away from destruction. On the other hand, it's a credit to creativity that one of the most powerful places for an artist is the contested space of social, political and environmental conflicts. Yes, art can be a tactic. In the early 90's activist Charles Zuber suggested Greenpeace protesters "could be thought of as performance artists, producing challenging theatre pieces enacted with the involvement of mass media. Guerilla tactic is an artform. Culture standing on the side of nature."

And we can do it with gadgets. The most highly-screened piece of footage from the campaign is several minutes of trees being bulldozed, which also happens to have been the most terrifying minutes of my life. Is it art? Maybe. Is the act of bearing witness

bereft of artistry? Certainly, the practicality of the “job”, to get “good” footage, was paramount. Wedge thyself against a tree. Consider your ISO. Hold your breath for 6 seconds. Money shot. Trees crash around you. The noise. The screeching of it. Giant treetops whip over at sickening break-neck speed. A mine car pulls up in the clearing. You’ve been seen. You’re flat on the ground. And it doesn’t matter who you are, what you’ve done; that you’re a real funny bitch sometimes or a total ninja with a hula hoop. You better get out, honey, or your ass is arrested; the footage on that memory card is lost, and you can forget trying to convince police you were doing it for the good of the planet because baby You’re Breaking The Law.

There is some sort of poetry in the orchestration of it – the intention, the act, the recording, and dissemination. Is art more allowable where activism is not? In this instance, giving no credit on footage is safer for all involved. Those who take shots often do so on pain of arrest or some other great duress. The experience travels with them as a shadowed ally; one not to be talked about, and not to be claimed. Seems paranoid, but activist circles are closely monitored by security, police, and ASIO. In June this year it emerged that a number of corporate spies were posing as protesters to infiltrate the Leard camp. We called these people friends, but turns out they worked for a security company hired by the coalmines we were protesting against. #loljokesbutnotreally. They are currently under police investigation for breaching security licenses. It’s been a busy year.

And yes, while we’re all busy, more people need to bridge the communities that should already be working together but aren’t because of growing segregations between elitist institutions and those in grassroots groups – few of whom are of a privileged background. It’s uncomfortable to talk about it. Just as it’s uncomfortable to consider the nature with which we acknowledge sovereignty lest it become another rote sentence. To embody and internalise this ethic

is to have integrity as social agents and artists in modern Australia. “Out in the forest, I’ve witnessed true altruism and humility in the name of universal good; individuals who have forged the historical Leard Forest Alliance slog away quietly, without expectation of thanks.” Yet, the tide of urban leasures that living a comfortable privileged existence lends to many, myself included, means a maddening quiet on social and political engagement. Am I frustrated? You bet. Am I exhausted? I’ve never been so burnt out. And yet, here I am, writing this piece because when shit gets this bad, honey, we’ve gotta talk about it. As artists we need to participate; in the words of Captain Planet, “the power is yours!”

Out in the forest, one is not availed of their artistry. I didn’t pick up a paintbrush until the day I left, unable to indulge in that way. But I was learning the art of defiance, of what it is to be alive; to be an activist, to navigate through bush, and to make change through environmentalism. Reflective art would come later. In the 9 months I was there, from the day I learnt how to write a press release to the day I left, I wrote nearly 60 of them; 250 people were arrested, 150 hectares of forest bulldozed, including 11 sacred sites of the Gomeroi people, and I’d somewhat mastered the art of the 3-second media “grab”. Stats, stats. They sicken, and yet they’re still enthralling to me, sometimes horrifying, curled in a ball crying myself to sleep. #lolnotjoking

This 8-month creative backlog has induced copious drawing, poetry and silliness. I leave you with a couple of these. There’s too much to say and too much to do in this pressing time of climate change, so I’ll leave you with my new mantra.

To my brain: I salute you. To my body: I thank you. And to creativity: I am yours.



02. Helen War, Batgirl image from protest action, image courtesy of the artist, 2014.

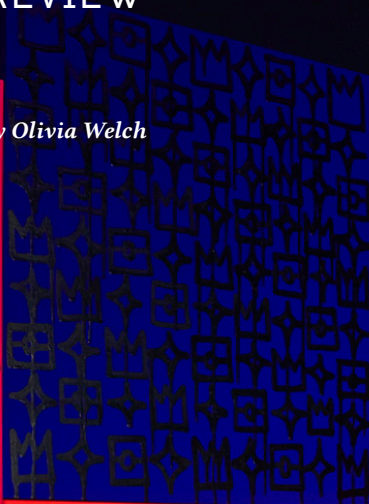
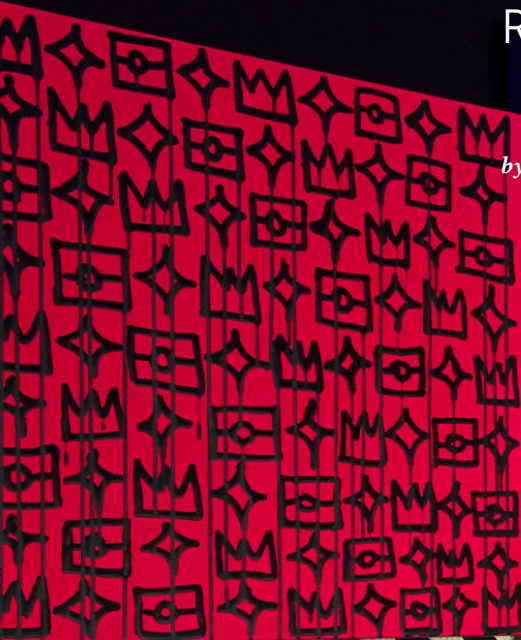
03. Helen War, screenshot of logging, image courtesy of the artist, 2014.

REKO RENNIE

NO SLEEP TILL DREAMTIME

REVIEW

by Olivia Welch



The British Crown has been the representative legal and political sovereign in Australia since settlement, and remains alongside a parliament whose laws are founded upon those laid down during colonialist times. The validity of the British Crown's claim to Australia is one fraught with contention and notions of racial superiority. The belief that Australia was both *terra nullius*, a land without tenure, and *territorium nullius*, a land without a sovereign, (i) and was therefore able to be "conquered", is an issue that has been the topic of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarly interests for the last few decades, notably by the well-respected and prolific critical historian Henry Reynolds. He holds the view that Aboriginal people had a sovereign relationship with Australia prior to settlement, never gave up this sovereignty to the British Crown, have maintained a "residual sovereignty" (ii) and that this should be acknowledged and incorporated into Australia's judicial system.

Illuminated within a darkened space in the Art Gallery of New South Wales' Yiribana Gallery, Kamilaroi artist Reko Rennie's *No Sleep Till Dreamtime*, presented by blackartprojects, is a contemporary echo of Reynold's views on the presence and perseverance of Indigenous sovereignty in Australia. Spanning ten metres, this installation of forty-four panels encapsulates a multitude of themes, symbols and techniques that reoccur throughout Rennie's practice. A graphic crown, an Aboriginal flag and a curve-edged diamond are repeated, three motifs that Rennie continually nominates to represent a trinity of Aboriginal regalia. Appropriating paraphernalia associated with sovereign status – crowns, flags and jewelled ornaments – he applies his own contemporary Indigenous voice.

Coruscating on multiple panels of *No Sleep Till Dreamtime* are vividly patterned concentric diamonds, a marking of the Kamilaroi people. Bringing a contemporary aesthetic to this traditional design, Rennie uses glittery blues and a lustrous gold to

radiate between an alternated use of black. The ancestral meaning behind the diamond in Rennie's regalia trinity becomes evident, further amplified by the imagery of a king of diamonds playing-card and the Aboriginal flag with a crown at its centre, a motif titled 'King and Country' in his recent exhibition at Karen Woodbury Gallery in Melbourne. In these panels Rennie's political views on the rightful reigning peoples of Australia becomes persistently salient.

Employing graffiti, the image of an aerosol can and neon colours, homage to the post-punk New York street art scene of the early 1980's is evident. The Jean-Michel Basquiat inspired crown beams as the largest symbol within the installation and the title of this work makes reference to the Beastie Boys single 'No sleep till Brooklyn'. Though delving into an issue with historical justifications, Rennie's delivery has an undeniably urban aesthetic. Concurrent with the first month of this installation at the AGNSW, Rennie had an exhibition of the same name at Chalk Horse in Sydney, featuring triptychs of iconography combining the traditional and the contemporary, executed with Rennie's signature street art style.

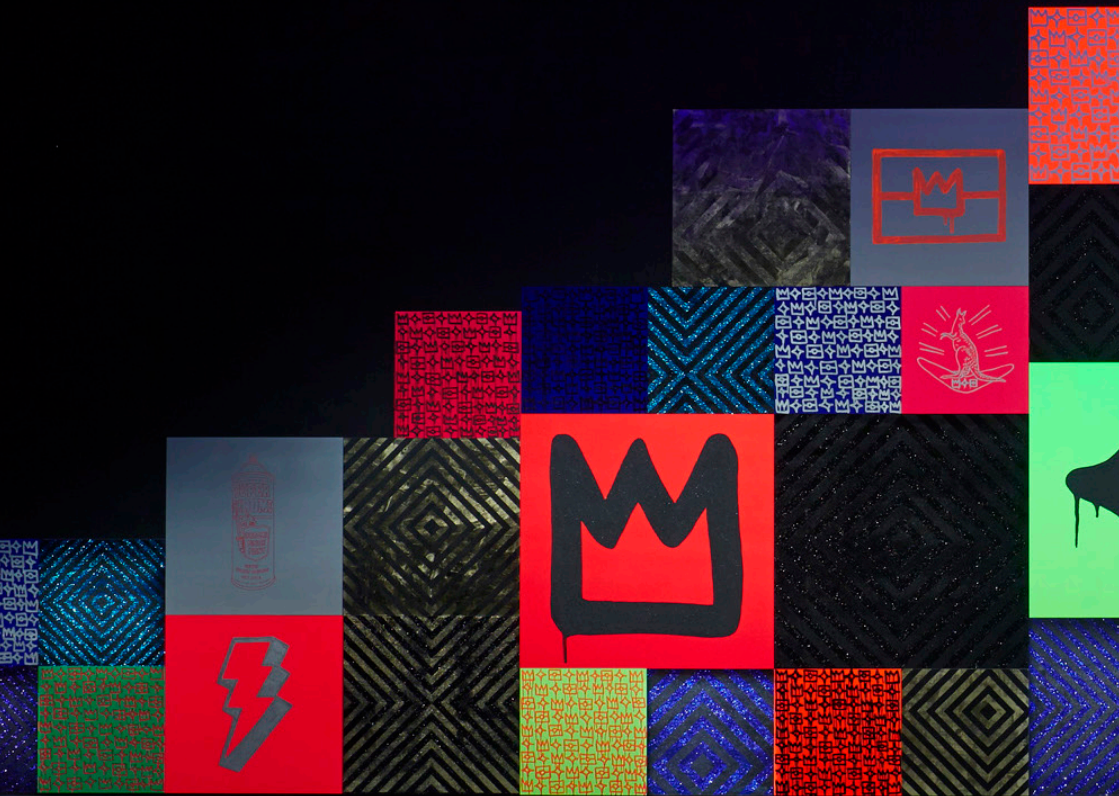
No Sleep Till Dreamtime conflates the past and present to express a sense of time immemorial. Where the law asserts a pre- and post-settlement timeline of jurisdiction, Rennie insists upon endurance being honoured. Appropriating the language and symbolism of British sovereignty, Rennie employs contemporary platforms to reevaluate the sovereign status of Australia, an issue often relegated to the follies or facts of history.

No Sleep Till Dreamtime is on display in the AGNSW's Yiribana Gallery until 30 November 2014.

Olivia Welch [oliviamwelch.com]

(i) Henry Reynolds, "Reviving Indigenous Sovereignty?" *Macquarie Law Journal* 6 (2006): 5, Hein Online, 22 Mar. 2013.

(ii) As quoted in Reynolds' *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Reflections on Race, State and Nation*: "If Aboriginal law and authority were slowly eroded away has some residual sovereignty survived among people still on their own land maintaining customary law?"- Henry Reynolds, *Aboriginal Sovereignty: Reflections on Race, State and Nation* (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1996) xv.







WE VISITED IN CANOES, WE SWAM IN FRESHWATER RIVERS AND WE CONQUERED FROM OUR SHIPS

REVIEW

by Tahjee Moar & Olivia Welch

AUSTRALIAN FUTURE HISTORIES

With a curatorial theme that presented incredibly ambitious and philosophically complex ideas, *We visited in canoes, we swam in freshwater rivers and we conquered from our ships* positioned itself in the firing line for debate. The exhibition set out to present hypothetical histories for the Australian continent if another nation instead of the English had claimed it. A grand promise, this question was not directly addressed by any of the artists, who instead incorporated Australia's anglicized conceptualisation of culture and identity as a point of departure, while ignoring questions regarding Australia's original occupants. What this exhibition did raise eloquently and amusingly, however, were extremely important questions regarding Australia's national identity, culture, contemporary social attitudes to race and racial preconceptions – all quintessential tropes of postcolonialism that are often raised in Australian society from a critical standpoint, rather than discussed and engaged with through an artistic lens that considers alternate possibilities. It is in this realm that Ben Soedradjit, Jason Phu and Claudia Landi Nicholson imagined what Australia could be like if it became the colony of another country, projecting a series of scenarios for the future wherein "Aussie" customs and lifestyles are no longer solely dominant.

With a sparse hang that split the offbeat space of Redfern's 107 Projects into three separate sections, the exhibition encouraged contemplation, as each artist's work was given its own distinct domain. Soedradjit's work hugged the right wall, Phu's installation was pushed back within the space and Nicholson's sculptures and textiles occupied the left side of the gallery, which was painted in a dark bluish hue, breaking up the industrial "white-cube" edge that characterises the space.

A technical highlight of the show was Nicholson's textile works. Attached directly to the wall, the artist's works included two calico squares filled with characters painted in achote and intricately embellished with fabric and embroidery. Asking the question, "What would Australia be like if it were re-conquered by Colombia?" Nicholson's detailed pieces, depicting scenes of festivity, humorously incorporate symbols of Australian culture, such as VB bottles and Australian beach culture via the use of patterned bikinis (some sporting the Australian flag). The work includes references to Colombia with the inclusion of pink dolphins, Christian crosses and the presence of sacred ritual. The figures that dominate these works are brown-skinned with black hair and large gold

earrings. Purposely innocent and jarring, Nicholson's representation of a Colombian Australia speaks of cultural plurality. It presents themes of geographical dislocation and the appropriation of cultural emblems across different cultural and social contexts as a result of diaspora and movement across space. Extending these ideas are Nicholson's ceramic works that, in the context of this show, read as a commentary on the definition of cultural identity through signs, symbols and objects. There is an overtone of irony and humour, as Nicholson selects clichéd symbols from Australian and Colombian culture, commenting on how cultures are often defined by what is perceived to be quintessentially unique to them, no matter how stereotyped or mythologised they may be.

Soedradjit's three-part work 'small talk' is concerned with what Australians might look like if Australia was re-conquered by an Asian nation, with specific reference to an Indonesian-Australian identity via his appropriation of traditional Indonesian designs. This text-based work spells out various derogatory terms for those with Asian and Caucasian heritage. Beginning with "banana", moving to "half-caste" and ending with "wasian", Soedradjit employs racial colloquialisms to suggest degrees of "Asianness" or, infact, "whiteness". These ideas are reminiscent of historical classifications of Aboriginal people, who were identified by pseudo-scientific terms to measure degrees of "blackness" following the colonisation of Australia. The artist's appropriation and reclamation of racial slogans lends the work a critical edge that comments on themes of identity, race, and the complexities of having multiple cultural identities.

Whilst his work may be initially met with confusion, Phu indicates that he has created a site of memory through his revealing title 'The Second World Milk-Powder War fought under the Five Great Stars of the East (the steaks were high but we creamed them anyway and

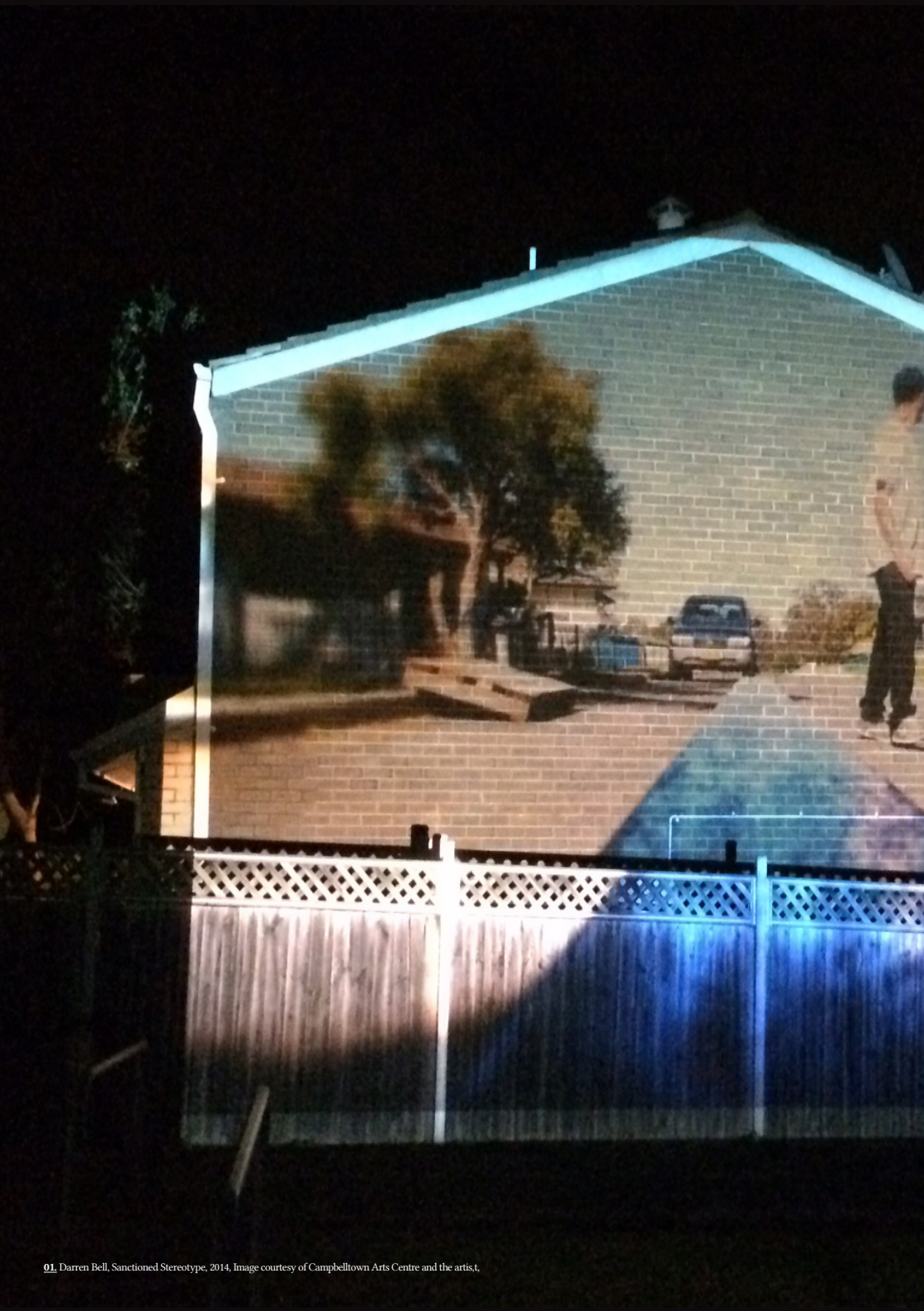
milked them dry)'. Though slightly exhausting, the title paints the picture of an epic battle that as a result sees milk powder become a highly prized commodity. With untranslated words in a Chinese script scrawled onto an adjacent wall and the reference to the 'East' in the title, Phu's installation refers to an imaginary battle between China—who appear as the conquerors—and the cattle-rearing people of Australia. This Australian link is made salient through the inclusion of a central fountain featuring a kitsch kookaburra as its centrepiece. The title makes reference to the "Five Great Stars of the East" materialised via the installation's layout that sees five milk carton stacks existing as pedestals for ceramic containers of milk powder, which surround the flowing fountain of diluted milk. The arrangement conjures the formation of the five stars that make up the Southern Cross, a symbol that has become synonymous with white superiority and nationalism in Australia. This work reassigns the meaning and cultural location of the Southern Cross, jocosely appropriating its form without reference to its meaning.

Whilst an overarching anglicised cultural identity is apparent throughout the exhibition, collectively the works read as presenting a series of open-ended questions and perspectives on cultural plurality and identity in contemporary Australian society. Though alternative visions of Australian colonial grand narratives are not directly offered, hypothetical ideas regarding the integration of cultural narratives into current Australian ones are indeed brought to the fore. With the Abbott government's policies towards asylum seekers, which are reminiscent of the xenophobia and racism that informed and generated the White Australia policy and John Howard's response to the Tampa incident, this exhibition offers a timely response to the perpetuation of an Anglo-centric national agenda.



02 Claudia Landi Nicholson, 'Virgins of the sun', Image courtesy of the artist and 107 Projects. Photo: Jack Condon, 2014

03 Jason Phu, 'The Second World Milk-Powder War fought under the Five Great Stars of the East (the steaks were high but we creamed them anyway and milked them dry)' Image courtesy of the artist and 107 Projects. Photo: Jack Condon, 2014



TEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES

by Maria White





02. Bindi Cole, Image courtesy of Campbelltown Arts Centre and the artist, 2014

03. Robert Guth, 'Mobile Cooking Hearth', Image courtesy of Campbelltown Arts Centre and the artist, Photo: Heidrun Lohr, 2013

I REMEMBER MAKING THE JOURNEY OUT TO AIRDS FOR TEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES LAST YEAR. I HAD NEVER BEEN THERE BEFORE. FIFTY SIX KILOMETERS SOUTH-WEST OF SYDNEY'S CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, AIRDS DOESN'T SEEM LIKE THE KIND OF PLACE YOU WOULD DRIVE THROUGH IN ORDER TO ARRIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE. THERE IS NO TRAIN STATION. LAST AUGUST WHEN I ATTENDED THE FIRST INCARNATION OF TEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES, SOMEONE OFF-HANDEDLY TOLD ME THAT AIRDS IS 98% PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE OTHER 2% IS THE IGA. LOOKING AROUND, I COULDN'T TELL IF THIS WAS FACT OR HYPERBOLE.

Temporary Democracies is a site-specific contemporary art festival. According to curator Paul Gazzola Temporary Democracies "is informed by, and operates within, the frame of the Airds Bradbury Renewal Project that will see the comprehensive redevelopment of public housing in the area over the next 15 – 20 years." This 'renewal' project involves moving residents of Airds, many of whom have been living in the area for decades, to new locations around Sydney. The 2013 project involved a variety of artists (at various stages of their careers) creating site-specific work for houses that were newly vacated - or even newly demolished.

The two highlights of this festival were Brian Fuata's *Privilege (house)* and Tanja Schultz's *Dreamers who seek pleasure*. For six days, Fuata occupied a platform of concrete, standing in for a housing foundation, laid on a space where a house had been recently demolished. Over this time Fuata (according to his artist statement) 'sonically reconstructed' a house with written and improvised text developed from his research into the local community. The audience sat up on a seating bank (as if in a theatre) looking down at him. It was a melancholy but exciting experience watching Fuata perform in this sparse, lonely space to a small audience. *Privilege (house)* addressed the experience of Airds and its inhabitants and gave me time to reflect on the process of eviction and demolition taking place within this neighbourhood.

Schultz's project *Dreamers who seek treasure* was an eerie celebration of the people and culture of Airds. Schultz made brightly coloured wallpaper using photographs of objects that had been donated, lent and created by local residents. I remember pink sugary buns, pet parrots and other colorful things making up a repetitive (almost op art inspired) pattern. Schultz covered the walls of an empty house with this detailed design. According to her artist statement the work was "optimistic" and "based on an ancient folk tale that describes a dreamer who seeks treasure in a faraway land but finds it at home, the project explores the things we cherish and that define our familiar spaces." However, like Fuata's work, this offering made me feel a sense of sorrow about the future of the site and the plight of people removed from their homes. This is a strange feeling to experience in a place you've never visited before, at what is essentially a contemporary art festival meets street fair. To give you a sense of the vibe, there was bunting aplenty and a sausage sizzle. Admittedly, the sausage sizzle was an artwork by Robert Guth, in which he constructed a mobile barbeque with the local blokes from the Airds/Bradbury Men's Shed.

This year I will return to Airds on the 11th of October for round two. Taking a cursory glance at the 2014 program, some of the works that involve community engagement make me nervous. For instance, I wonder what Bennett Miller (you might know him as the creator of *Dachshund UN*) can offer the people of Airds with



his project *Myers Briggs Mixer*, a participatory work based on the questionable personality test popular with internet users and HR departments. What to make of David Cross' *Skyball* where the artist has developed a new sport and wants participants to play it while wearing inflatable costumes? Both works sound interesting, but not necessarily site responsive. I think Fuata and Schultz's works rang true in 2013 because they addressed the site in a tangible way, that empathised with the struggle of people that live(d) in Airds. Ultimately, Fuata and Schultz presented work that was self aware but not patronising. Both works seemed to address the intervention of the festival itself. Put simply, the artists (like me: a tourist) are not from Airds, or anywhere like Airds. This must be addressed.

I'm aware that this brings up a number of questions about contemporary art and social change relevant to debates around Community Cultural Development (CCD) a term developed in the 1980s to describe activities undertaken by artists in collaboration with non-artists to represent a community's identity, while (and here's the controversial part) building local capacity for change. This discourse is too large for me to try to unpack here, and I acknowledge that Community Cultural Development is no longer a popular term. (For context, the CCD board of the

Australia Council was dismantled and CCD peak bodies around the country have been defunded.) I only bring it up to provide a framework for the way that this local intervention could be viewed, within a context where somewhat vulnerable or disenfranchised people are the participants. How would I feel if a festival was taking place as my community (and home) was being dismantled around me? In work that engages communities such as these, I don't think that art should be a transformative experience for everybody involved, I simply believe that empathy is a useful starting point. I am heartened by the look of Kate Mitchell's 2014 work, *Psychic Shop*, which acknowledges the uncertain future of people still living in Airds. The work does not seem to want to create a transformative experience for the community, the gesture is small and organic. As Rebecca Conroy writes:

"During Mitchell's time in Airds she met an ex-con who shared his story with her including his new home, a tent in the surrounding bushland of Airds (incredulous, it seemed); when it was time to leave, he pressed two stones into her hands and requested that she hold onto them for seven years. Even if the Psychic Shop turns out to be just a facade, Mitchell is certain she will hold onto those stones." - (temporarydemocracies.com)

02. Tanja Schultz, 'Dreamers who seek pleasure', Image courtesy of Campbelltown Arts Centre and the artist, Photo: Heidrun Lohr, 2013

03. Brian Fuata, 'Privilege (house)', Image courtesy of Campbelltown Arts Centre and the artist, Photo: Heidrun Lohr, 2013



FRAMEWORK