

# CRISIS FRAMEWORK

Collection 28.



### **Reflection during crisis.**

One month later, when I look back on my volunteering experience at Sydney Biennale, isn't the act of reflection something we could practice at home? I believe that the COVID-19 lockdown is not a period of isolation, but rather it offers us special moments of reflection and introspection. Although reflection is a solitary action, it brings us a collective understanding of the challenges we have all endured both in the past and the present as human beings and it offers us new perspectives for the future





The work is about listening.

Listening to the land, listening to the water,  
listening to the blood and bones of our ancestors, listening to what our bodies remember.

Listening to where the songs were last sung.

Listening to where rivers used to be.

Listen. To the silence.

Listen to find the wound, where it hurts, why it hurts, how it hurts.

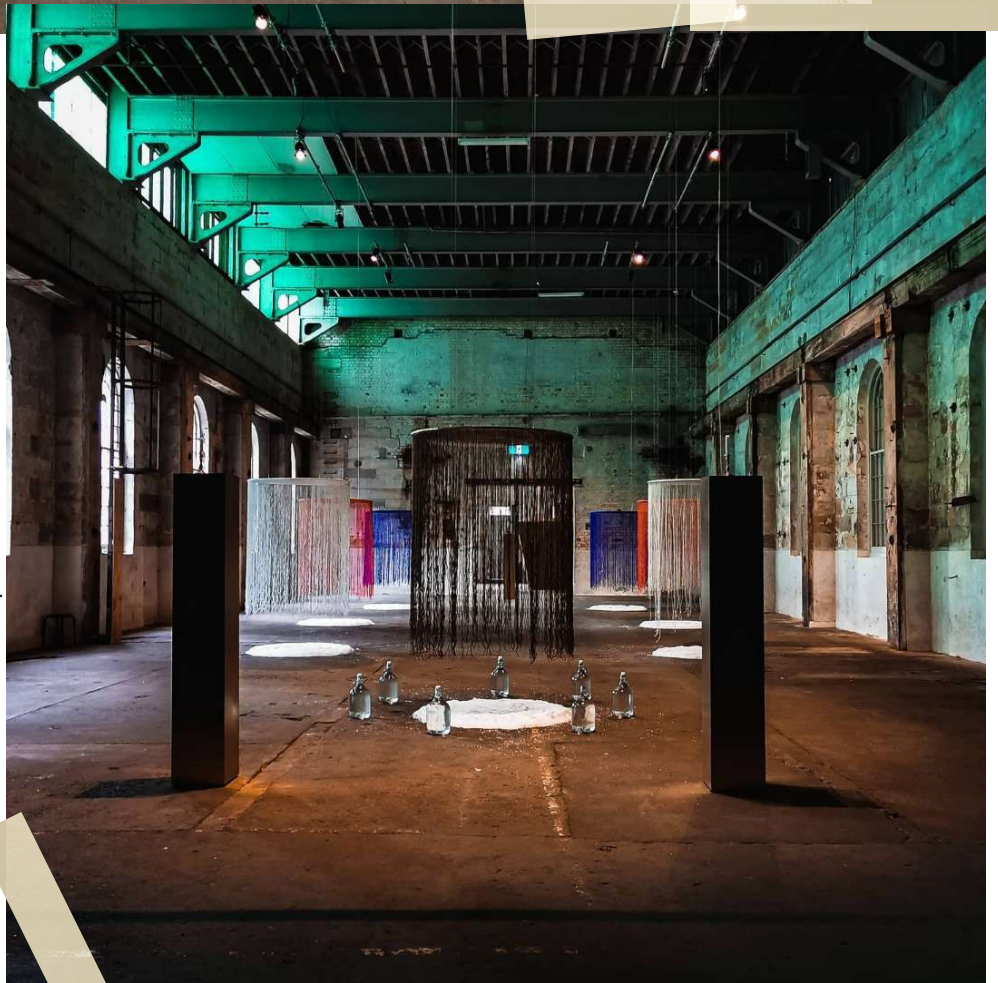
Listen for the medicine.

Hearing the voice of a black, female artist is rare, having the opportunity to reflect upon our ancestral histories of slavery and colonization is also a special experience in contemporary society. During the Sydney Biennale (Cockatoo island), the South African interdisciplinary artist Lhola Amira, weaved the narrative of Southern Africa's colonial histories into her artistic practice to explore African Nguni spiritualism in her installation **Philisa: Ditaola ( To Heal: Divining Bones)**. The artist called herself an ancestral presence and her work encourages the audience to reflect upon individuals' existence in relation to collective historical and future narratives.

During my invigilation of her installation **Philisa: Ditaola**, I was invited to enter a sacred and ceremonial space with the sound of South African hymn. It was a cold and rainy day, not many visitors were coming, so I had enough time to fully immerse in the installation, alone. As I stepped through the beaded curtain with my bare feet, I could feel the rawness of the sea salt. Around the bed of salt, there were several bottles of seawater. Lhola said that humans had a special relationship with the ocean, it is a place where we cleanse ourselves and a place so many black lives were lost during slavery and colonialization. Therefore, the collection of the seawater is a way to invite the next generation to remember their ancestors and heal these wounds of the past. Although I personally have not experienced slavery, this installation makes me feel more empathetic for those who have suffered in the past. As I stayed longer, I could hear the sound of the rain and the voices of South African hymn blended together. This reminds me that regardless of our cultural background, we as humans all have the need for healing, connection and belonging.







During these moments of healing and reflection, I begin to think about the psychological traumas during slavery, would they disappear once the crisis is over? Relating back to the present situation, each individual in the community has experience some level of fear and anxieties, would we need the future generations to help us to heal these psychological traumas and loss when COVID-19 crisis is over?

For me, the success of this artwork is that it encourages the audiences' participation from different age groups, children are also invited to take part in the work. What I found interesting is that each visitor has their own way of interacting with the installation. There was a little boy putting his hands into the salt and then wandering around innocently. A young man came to take a photo inside the installation, then he slowly sat down to meditate. Two young ladies took off their shoes and held hands, enjoying the moments of silence. An old woman used her bare foot to draw spirals in the salt, then she took out a notebook to document her experience. Although I can't read their minds, I believe that each audience member has formed a special connection with the installation through this immersive sensory experience. Whether they are reflecting on their personal life experience or healing the collective ancestral memories of slavery and colonization, the visitors all became very humble after their experience. I was quite touched when many visitors said thank you to me for being a volunteer. Especially during this challenging period, I believe that art has the power to connect people with a shared experience.

Ultimately, Lhola Amira's installation reminds us that each individual takes part in the historical narrative of enduring the crisis. In the past, we all share this collective ancestral memories of trauma and suffering; in the future, we all face the same level of uncertainties; in the present, we are all on this journey together to find the connection with the others and with the self through healing and reflection.

Joyce Gao





UNSW Student Life

ART & DESIGN

By Joyce Gao

# FRAMEWORK