THE PARTNERSHIPPING PROJECT 2016–2020

PLACE MATTERS

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Does where we choose to live still matter? How much impact does place make on how we create and live our lives? And how have our relationships with place changed in the globalised on-line world?

And while we're on this subject of place, does living in regional Australia change the way artists work? And at what points—if any—can concerns about Country experienced by First Nations Australian artists be shared by non-Indigenous Australians?

All of these questions and more formed the core around which the 26 month unfolding of *The Partnershipping Project* evolved. Bringing together 20 artists from diverse cultural origins, the directors and staff from four regional galleries, touring-team members, writers and educators, the original framework swelled to include artistic collaborators and communities as it moved forward on its touring cycle.

This publication brings together images and ideas that emerged from the travelling exhibition project between November 2018 and December 2020 to project ongoing discussions about our changing sense of place in a globalised world.

Ironically, over the course of that period, the central premise of our relatively humble project was jettisoned into global critical urgency as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic unrolled. Almost overnight, issues that included the necessity to refocus considerations of the relationship between global and local understandings about belonging, inter-connectedness and agency emerged as crucial to survival.

Closer to home, this anthology of words and images offers insight into the creatively diverse abundance of visual culture in four Australian regions. The richly nuanced capacities of their artists and communities materialise through stories and images where the importance of nurturing and sustaining land, waters, histories and communities are shared by First Nations and non-indigenous Australians alike.

www.thepartnershippingproject.net.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To eagle-eye Stephanie Britton for her copyedit of the manuscript.

And to my remarkable, resilient and inspiring daughter Visaya, who remains core to my world, no matter whether global or local.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the project, as Director of Salamanca Arts Centre, Rosemary Miller invited me to come up with an innovative touring initiative that might challenge the standard touring model. In this, the exhibition selected and assembled by a curator remains unchanged throughout the touring process. That model has its advantages, especially in terms of streamlining the work demands for Gallery Directors, the Touring Partnership Organisations and the curators. But the fixed and final nature of that format fails to critically engage with the very nature of the touring process itself. Instead, *The Partnershipping Project* model ironically replicated globalised manufacturing processes, where the product—the exhibition—is altered and adjusted according to each of the four regional destinations. And the changing travelling exhibition was 'contained' within the very structure that makes globalised trade financially and practically viable—the shipping container. The other material constant across all four iterations of the exhibition was the fleet of eight small boats. These vessels, 'harvested' from across Tasmania, offered a wealth of interpretive possibility, and echoed the maritime nature of the world's very first attempt at global alliances in 1356: the Hanseatic League, a 'commercial and defensive confederation of European merchant guilds and market towns' founded to dominate maritime trade in the Baltic until 1862.

But *The Partnershipping Project*'s small fleet of motley vessels also harked to other histories: the immigrant nature of Australia's non-indigenous invasion/settlement; the tools and craft of colonialism and this era's fear of arrival of refugees via boats. But beyond the overtly political references, these boats offered the potential for fantasy—as little dreamboats capable of cradling options and possibilities for more sustainable futures.

Key issues emerged clearly from the project's first exhibition in Burnie: the need for critically engaged cultural responses to the plight of the environment and the necessity of paying heed to First Nations knowledge; the value for trans-cultural approaches to new understandings of the world we share; recognition of the contribution immigrant cultures make to Australia's history; and the pivotal role of art-making and associated cultural practices to provide tools of understanding, recognition and reinterpretation of our relationship to each other and to the world we live in. And at each destination, these themes were echoed, re-translated and nuanced by the personal experiences and communities of the artists involved.

Pat Hoffie

Pat Hoffie

OVERVIEW

“The collaboration inherent in a partnership is more than a mere exchange—it is the creation of something new, of value, together”.[1]

Who were the partners in this *Partnershipping Project*? They include the artists, the regional gallery directors and their staff, the touring agency (Contemporary Art Tasmania) representatives, the curators, the designers, the marketers, the funders (the Australia Council and Visions Australia), the schools and organisations associated with the local audiences, the communities and families the artists worked with and, importantly, you, the reader of this catalogue.

As the project grew, more and more partnerships were established; the ‘specified goal’ we all shared was to think a little more carefully about these places we live in, and the communities we are part of, and to consider the extent to which those of us who are lucky enough to live in regional areas might share values and experiences.

The Partnershipping Project also asked us to think about how very special each of these communities and places might be. As *The Partnershipping Project* progressed and changed the artwork and the artists and the audiences changed, and all of these changes and the responses to them are gathered together in this compendium of images and ideas and conversations that lay at the heart of the project.

Each iteration of *The Partnershipping Project* shared a little fleet of eight hand-made boats as constants throughout its journey. Themes associated with boats and shipping exchanges have provided foundations for the work: the very origin of the term ‘partnershipping’ comes from the fifteenth century, when shipping companies associated with a group of countries sharing the northern coastline of Europe decided to form a partnership called the Hanseatic League. By ‘partnershipping’, they shared economic gains while strengthening ties between the countries involved. The long-lasting success of the agreement was based on their willingness to join forces in a spirit of reciprocal trust.

The little boats that carried the artworks in *The Partnershipping Project* were salvaged from across Tasmania. As an island-below-an-island, Tasmania is known for its wooden boat building. Craftsmen who make these boats have contributed a great deal to Tasmania’s sense of its culture. The boat-builders are cultural producers, just as artists are cultural producers. The flotilla of little salvaged boats were carriers for the artwork of artists from across four regional destinations in four states. Each artist brought aspects of their own story, and their own community, to the work they produced. In a sense, each of these eight little boats that carried cargo from somewhere else carried a ‘message in a bottle’—they were launched on to the next destination to tell other artists and audiences a little bit about what it feels like to live and work where they come from.

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[1] Kanter, 1994, in World Health Organisation (WHO), 2009, *Building a Working Definition of Partnership African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS) (http://www.who.int/patientsafety/implementation/apps/resources/defining_partnerships-apps.pdf)*

TOURING MODEL

“The final project was conceived of as much more than a chain of exhibitions—it entailed a process of ongoing assessments, amendments and adjustments arrived at through processes that included interaction, intervention, collaboration and consultation”.

As has been mentioned, the ‘display furniture’ for the artists’ installations was created through re-purposing eight little hand-made wooden tenders from Tasmania. This little fleet carried changing ‘cargo’ in the form of artwork to/for each of its venues.

At each venue, the work of more artists was added to ‘the fleet’.

The work of eight Tasmanian artists filled the boats for the first iteration of the project at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (BRAG). But when the exhibition moved forward, only two boats filled with the work of Tasmanian artists continued to the next destination in Townsville. Here the work of six Townsville artists filled the six empty boats, so that the exhibition at Umbrella Studios included six boats bearing artworks from locally based artists, and two boats carried work from Tasmanian artists.

When the exhibition travelled on from Townsville to Lismore, two boats filled with works from Townsville artists joined those two filled boats with Tasmanian works to arrive in Lismore.

Four artists from Lismore exhibited at the Lismore Regional Gallery along with the work of artists from Townsville and Tasmania, but only two boats carrying work from Lismore moved on (with two boats with Townsville work and two boats filled with Tasmanian work) to Mt. Gambier. At Riddoch Art Gallery two artists had two boats to fill, to be exhibited with the work from Tasmania, Townsville and Lismore. So when the exhibition left Riddoch Art Gallery to return ‘home’ to BRAG, the fleet of eight was comprised of four lots of two boats representing each of the four regions.

All the way along the journey, documentation of each exhibition was recorded, so that the final exhibition in BRAG featured a video documentary of the project’s various iterations at all destinations. Alongside this, a comprehensive online catalogue and website documented individual artist’s developments and contributions. The final project was conceived of as much more than a chain of exhibitions—it entailed a process of ongoing assessments, amendments and adjustments arrived at through processes that included interaction, intervention, collaboration and consultation.

ARTISTS

Ritchie Ares Doña

Born in Cebu in the Philippines, Ritchie draws from traditional basket-weaving and fabric-wrapping to transform discarded industrial materials, often working with large community teams. He writes, “Material discarded from factories around the North West of Tasmania are shipped from other shorelines but are discarded in this land. I aim to collect these materials, make them into art by using traditional techniques, construct them into an artwork, and then ship them back offshore again”. The careful, elegant attention to detail Ritchie brings to his work serves to sanctify the discarded, bringing community together in processes of shared conversation and care.

www.theadvocate.com.au/story/3981666/artist-chips-away-at-new-major-project/

Selena de Carvalho

Selena de Carvalho an inter-disciplinary artist based in Longley, Tasmania. She describes her artwork as “respond(ing) to human interaction with the environment, often relating to the perceived consumption of wilderness and lived experiences of wildness, focusing on the core paradox of how we yearn for the untamed, while consciously or unconsciously seeking to control it”. Selena’s success with interactive, immersive practice aims to be “experiential in the best possible sense, drawing viewers into its poetic sense of mystery and magic”. For *The Partnershipping Project* Selena addressed disturbance in Tasmania’s environment in ways that are up-close and personal.

www.selenadecarvalho.com/

Karla Dickens

A proud Wiradjuri woman, Karla’s powerful imagery is gaining increasing and much-deserved acclaim. She draws from her personal experience and her responses to some of the critical and crucial issues of our time, to produce works that are compelling and challenging. For *The Partnershipping Project* Karla has designed a small brave boat, one capable of sailing endless galaxies. With its hull painted by local artist Leigh Arnold, the work addressed the attempted world take-over of the British Empire. This work extended Karla’s concerns evident in earlier work such as *Unwelcome*—where she floats direct issues concerning the colonisation of Australia’s Aboriginal peoples. Karla is represented by Andrew Baker Galleries (www.andrew-baker.com).

www.karladickens.com.au
Karla Dickens is represented by Andrew Baker Gallery: www.andrew-baker.com

Rob Douma

As an emerging artist whose everyday drawing practice extends from preparing work for a tertiary course in fine art to preparing images for his day-job as a well-known Townsville-based tattoo artist, Rob draws from his interaction with the local tattoo community to examine how Townsville’s role as an army garrison has influenced its tattoo culture. After leaving his home town in Burnie, Tasmania, Rob was involved in a range of military experiences in a range of international destinations. These experiences form the basis for his growing conviction that art provides a unique means of expression, a language capable of traversing cultural and social boundaries. For *The Partnershipping Project*, Rob selected images, icons and symbols many use to define their sense of self and re-presented them in a new context to expose new relationships and meaning.

www.facebook.com/PinnaclesTCC/posts/1142087755804854

Penny Evans

Kamileroi/Gomeroi artist Penny Evans works with a range of media including ceramics, printmaking and collage. She uses work as a means of exploring her own identity and connections to Country. From this central axis, the work has gradually come to focus on ecological issues that include the threat to the river systems of north-western New South Wales. She is a cultural gleaner, who spends time on Country to search for remaining pockets of cultural knowledge that can be sutured together to give us glimpses of what could be. The works she produces as a result, throw light on some of the most critical problems in our country today. For *The Partnershipping Project*, Penny reconsidered a selection of those issues and re-presented them in a small boat that performed the role of a fragile ark.

www.pennyevansart.com

Lisa Garland

A highly acclaimed photographer, Lisa is from a long line of fisher-folk from Tasmania’s northern coastlines; her keen, candid eye and her familiarity with her subject matter grants her work poetic intimacy through the small details of ordinary lives. For *The Partnershipping Project* Lisa focused on a crucial turning point for Tasmanian aquaculture. “Now we see the arrival of fish farming from Southern Fish farms and the relocation of seals, wild fishing is on the decline on the North West coast. My family now fish for Southern Calamari (squid), that’s sent to the fish markets in Sydney. This is what remains: it is sustainable and it enables my family to continue life on the ocean (for now)”. Lisa’s imagery is a paean to the fragile, powerful and haunting land, sea-scapes and denizens of Tasmania’s North West coast.

www.despard-gallery.com.au/artistprofiles/lisa-garland/

Dave mangenner Gough

Dave mangenner Gough is a proud trawlwoolway man who descends from bungana (chief) manalargenna’s oldest daughter, woretemoeteyemer of north-east Tasmania. Dave has spent many years passionately sharing his cultural knowledge with educators and students across the state. He is the cultural advisor for University of Tasmania, Co-Chair of the QVMAG Aboriginal Advisory Council, board member of the Aboriginal Advisory Council of TMAG, Co-Ordinator of Tiagarra Tasmanian Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Devonport and Chair of Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation, Devonport. Dave has been heavily involved in protection of Aboriginal heritage sites across the state; he currently has works in permanent display at Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston and was a commissioned artist in *10 Days on the Island* 2017. His work received a Highly Commended in the *Bay of Fires Art Prize* 2018.

www.utas.edu.au/community/naidoc/community-bio-david-gough

Jamin

Jamin is a ‘local legend’ who works across a range of media including sound-mixing, graffiti and style-mixing, working with MONA’s festivals, running youth workshops and exhibiting as an artist in traditional gallery spaces. His installation for *The Partnershipping Project* offered a reflection on perception and understanding. He drew from the notion of *umwelt* (reality as experienced by a specific organism) to suggest that there are many layers to a single experience, and that our own ideas, values and knowledge differ from person to person and community to community.

www.jamin.com.au/about/

ARTISTS

Joan Kelly

Since 2004, Joan Kelly has held the remarkable position of President for the World Federation of Miniaturists from her hometown of Burnie. Joan's miniature paintings and etchings trace the tiny details of her local surroundings. For *The Partnershipping Project*, Joan extended these jewel-like miniatures into installation. She documented, in black and white etched drawings, the northern Tasmania coastline that welcomed her and her family to Tasmania in December, 1968. Joan writes that the practice of "partnershipping" with locals provided the basis for building a strong sense of community in northern Tasmania.

http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/csr/programs-and-services/tasmanian_honour_roll_of_women/inductees/2008/kelly,_joan_phyllis

Greg Lehman

Greg Lehman is a nationally recognised Aboriginal (Trewulway) writer, researcher and curator, whose PhD examined the representation of Tasmanian Aborigines in 18th-19th century colonial art. He has written,"…watercraft weren't introduced to Tasmania by Europeans, but were preceded by a distinctive maritime technology developed by my Aboriginal ancestors involving canoe/catamarans made from reeds and paperbark". His work for *The Partnershipping Project* offered an opportunity to reconsider traditional accounts of Tasmanian history through references to historical imagery and material evidence that are an indication of the strong continuing traditions of Aboriginal cultural production.

www.robertasykesfoundation.com/greg-lehman.html

Greg Leong

Greg Leong often uses cross-cultural symbolism to investigate the complexities of his identity as a Chinese Australian working in forms that traverse installation, sculpture and performance. His installation *The Tasmanian Migration of Oriental Carp* used a 'pest' species in Australian waterways to refer to Australia's rejection of people from non-Anglo-Saxon countries. Greg writes, "My boat in *Partnershipping* is the boat that symbolically brings new peoples here. My installation can be read simply as a ghost ship, referencing the many paper effigies of worldly goods the Chinese living burn during ghost festivals and so keep their relatives in the nether world in comfort and well-heeled. To the Chinese the carp (or koi) is a symbol of love, courage and wealth. However my carp skeletons, wrapped in joss paper (gold and silver for the dead) tell a sadder story of migration and the search for asylum, and perhaps the references are to pitiless governments, drownings at sea and off shore incarceration".

www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2013/01/02/3663236.htm

Anne Lord

Anne Lord's life experiences in north west Queensland growing up on a sheep and cattle property and returning to help during teaching holidays have contributed to her unique approach to interpreting the environment. As an established and highly respected artist who has worked in a range of media for over three decades, Anne reflects on the land's deep past. Tracing back to the pre-human existence of organisms emerging from primal matter of the prehistoric inland sea, she invites viewing audiences to re-think the necessity of collaborative custodianship of this ancient land as the planet moves towards a precarious ecological future.

www.visualartist.info/annelord

Gail Mabo

Daughter of Eddie Mabo, Gail is aware of the ongoing vigilance and energy that is necessary to raise consciousness about Indigenous Land Rights. A high-profile public figure and a highly commended artist, Gail welcomed participation in the project as a means to extend her practice into installation. Gail collaborated with other artists and members of community, responding to the project's core question 'Does Place Matter?'—a question that has been pivotal to her family's focus for several generations.

www.eyelinepublishing.com/eyeline-82/review/gail-mabo-mabo-kara-art

Aris Prabawa

Prior to moving Australia seventeen years ago Aris was well known as a key member of *Taring Padi*, a cultural activist group of artists who have fought to foster community voice against oppression in Indonesia. He is also acclaimed as the leader of *Black Boots*, the longest running punk band in Indonesia. He now lives in Lismore where he continues to make art and music, and travels regularly between Lismore and Jogjakarta. In 2019 he returned on the invitation of the Director of the Yogya National Museum, Yogyakarta to celebrate a solo exhibition of his work, and has maintained a career of exhibiting as an artist in Australia and Indonesia. His band *Black Boots* has enjoyed successful Australian tours, and he continues to write and perform with them.

https://arisprabawa.wordpress.com/

Brian Robinson

Brian Robinson is an internationally acclaimed artist who harnesses his deep knowledge of his Torres Strait Island heritage to approaches and materials that are cutting edge and aesthetically powerful. Robinson draws from his childhood memories where traditional cosmologies of the Torres Strait merged with his fascination with comic-book super-heroes. Robinson uses the apparent conundrums of these clashing world-views to invent new ecosystems—imagery that offers new possibilities for seeking out connections with place, with cosmology and with each other. In response to the 'water travel' aspect of *The Partnershipping Project*, Robinson produced a "cartographic system as a means of producing and preserving knowledge of the traditional tenure and place of his people".

www.artistprofile.com.au/brian-robinson/

Obery Sambo

Obery Sambo is a performance and visual artist who draws from his roots in Murray Island, Eastern Torres Strait. His inventive masks (Krar) capture the spirit and energy of animals, spirits and people of the region. For *The Partnershipping Project* Obery brings art, performance, ritual and dance together in his unique contemporary reinterpretation of the powerful masks that are so central to his heritage.

www.australianartnetwork.com.au/category/indigenous-artists/obery-sambo/

ARTISTS

Damien Shen

Damien Shen draws from his Ngarrindjeri and Chinese heritage making powerful images that reflect the complexities of race and identity in Australia. He's "interested in the Coorong region, work that relates to the stories my family has about their early memories of growing up on the Raukkan mission in the early 50s". An accomplished story-teller, he collaborated with Robert Hague in this project to investigate the role of scientific sampling, scanning and body part collection in racial stereotyping.

www.artistprofile.com.au/damien-shen-2/

Hiromi Tango

Japanese/Australian Hiromi Tango's installation/performance projects are well known for their playful interactive qualities; qualities that often involve both adults and children in immersive worlds where they are able to experiment with a range of ways of working with each other that might not otherwise be possible. However, the playful aspect of these works belie the artist's serious commitment to making changes in the ways we relate to each other, to ourselves and to the environments we share. For *The Partnershipping Project*, Hiromi chose to experiment with those edges where the more private and public aspects of living as an artist rub against each other.

www.hiromitango.com

Vanghoua Anthony Vue

Vanghoua Anthony Vue is already gaining international attention for his work exploring the peripatetic journeys undertaken by members of his Hmong community across the globe. Vue explores Hmong writing systems, together with Hmong textiles that have so often been misinterpreted as simple patterns, and reinterprets these as monumental graphics for ersatz graffiti markings. For this project Vue worked with his parents in Cairns to develop new work exploring Hmong journeys across various bodies of water and land, and the 'shipping' and translation of home from South East Asia to far north Queensland.

www.vanghoua-anthonyvue.com

Sera Waters

Sera is currently working from Adelaide after having spent her childhood in Mt. Gambier. Since being awarded a Ruth Tuck Scholarship in 2006 to study hand embroidery at the Royal School of Needlework (UK), Waters' art practice has been characterised by a darkly stitched meticulousness. Her embroideries and hand-crafted sculptures examine settler colonial home-making patterns and practices, and intertwine these gaps in history with references to her own genealogical ghostscapes. In 2017 she was the recipient of the inaugural ACE Open South Australian artist commission, where she staged her solo exhibition *Domestic Arts*. Her works are held by the Cruthers collection of Women's art, Ararat Gallery TAMA, the Art Gallery of South Australia and private collections nationwide. Waters is a studio member of The Incinerator, Thebarton, lecturer at Adelaide Central School of Art, and is represented by Hugo Michell Gallery.

www.serawaters.com.au

ARTISTS' STORIES & ARTWORKS

Interviews transcribed by Pat Hoffie

RITCHIE ARES DOÑA

I was born in the province of Cebu in the Philippines. I was two years old when my mother left. My father had already left after I was two months old—I know very little about him other than the fact that he had curly hair. This is a fairly unusual characteristic among Filipinos—one that is often associated with the Negritos—the original indigenous inhabitants. It's a characteristic I've inherited. I was taken care of by my grandfather and my step-grandmother in their family home in Negros. I was raised believing that they were my parents.

I returned to Cebu after my grandfather died—I was nine at the time. I can still remember this event vividly: the person whom I had always believed to be my mother led me to a house I'd never entered before. She took me to a woman I could never remember having seen before and simply said, "This is your mother". I felt complete confusion—my step-grandmother had brought me up well, she'd always treated me as her own son and I felt complete attachment to her. The confusion was exacerbated by the fact that my mother now had two small children of her own from an Australian man she'd married. I felt as though I was less important than them; the two months I stayed with my 'new' family in Cebu were shot through with feelings of confusion and jealousy. She wanted to restore the affection between us but it had been so sudden and unplanned.

After my real mother left to return to Australia I continued to live with my step-grandmother for a little while, but my mother did not want me to live with her, so I was removed from her care to be looked after by her brother and his wife who had never been able to have children of their own. This was doubly difficult, especially as a result of the fact that I was never given a chance of saying goodbye to my step-grandmother. I lived for a year with my aunt and uncle, and during this time, unbeknownst to me, they prepared the paperwork to get me to Australia. I was sent off to Australia in December 1997 at the age of thirteen. I travelled on the plane alone and I couldn't speak English. The prospect of travelling huge distances to live with a woman I had only known for a few weeks, who was married to a man I'd never met, and in a country I'd never heard of with a language I didn't understand, was enormous.

My mother was living in Gatton, Queensland. The following two years were akin to an emotional roller-coaster ride that included domestic violence. I was inevitably the odd one out in the family—I was less white and I was struggling to learn the language. I didn't like school, but it was a sanctuary away from the trials of home. At first I had to translate what I was learning back into Filipino until gradually it got to a point where I was thinking in English and translating in English, and later, by the time I left home, the fact that there was no one else to speak to in Cebuano meant that I had lost my skills in my native tongue.

After considering the domestic situation I was in, the school counselor recommended that I leave home, so at fifteen I was sent to Withcott, a little town near Toowoomba. The Social Worker placed me with a family to be my legal guardians. I stayed there until the end of grade twelve, surrounded in my home life by the other children in the family and also by others like me who had experienced difficulties in their own homes. At the first school I attended I had been bullied because of my colour, my accent and my imperfect attempts at speaking English, but when I went to live in Withcott I went to the Christian Outreach College at Toowoomba, where the bullying alleviated. It was here that I flourished at art—my teacher Mr. Robert Gunter became my ersatz 'father'; through his encouragement I was successful in applying to the University of Southern Queensland to complete a Degree in Visual Arts after I graduated from high school. He helped throughout my university studies, and I've continued to keep in touch with him. After my graduation I enrolled in Honours. My studies were proceeding reasonably well, but there was one particular event that turned my practice around completely. One of my lecturers—Charles Robb—had had a profound influence on my practice. I loved sculpture, and spent a great deal of time in the ceramics and textiles studios.

In 2004 I'd invented a way of folding books that completely transformed them. I wanted to imitate the books by using clay slabs with paper clay but had been faltering with approaches and methods and it was taking me ages. In the critique before the assessment Charles gave me a particularly stern critique, after which I went back to the folding book work and threw myself completely into the project. The work produced a work that was chosen as the only representation for the USQ for Fresh Cut—the prestigious annual exhibition of emerging artists at the IMA (Institute of Modern Art). As a result, a representative from the State Library of Queensland commissioned chandeliers made from the folded books. And immediately after this, a representative from the Brisbane Airport bought my other works when they were exhibited at Crafts Queensland's Artisan exhibition space. I often reflect that if I hadn't listened to Charles I might not be where I am today. The downside of this success was that the demand for my studio work had taken my focus away from fully focusing on the written aspect of my thesis, and as a result I was unsuccessful in completing my Honours.

In 2007 I went back to the Philippines for the first time since I'd left. I wanted to find out more about my family on my father's side, so I asked members of my mother's family to show me where my father's side of the family came from. They took me to a region inhabited with mountain people, and although there was an occasion where someone called out to me using my father's name, they claimed to have never seen my father since I was born either.

In 2011 when I reconciled with my mother I tried again to find out from her about my father's side of the family. She explained to me that there had been differences of opinion between my mother's father and my biological father, and that was why they had refused to have anything to do with my father. My speculation is, looking back, that the problems between my mother and I have probably had a lot to do with the fact that, especially due to my curly hair and appearance, I look so much like him. When I'd moved to Toowoomba to study I'd lived on my own with Youth Allowance, and worked 40 hours a week at Domino's Pizza to pay the bills. When I graduated I moved to Tasmania to study at the Tasmanian Preaching School. All my life I've been religious—like most Filipinos, I was raised to understand that worship should be included as an integral part of daily life. Although I was brought up Catholic, when I'd parted company with my mother in Australia I'd renounced my Catholicism. The family I moved in with in Withcott were also religious, and they were keen for me to attend their particular church with their family. But it was during this time I began to question the contradictions in religious ideas and beliefs. And when I'd shared accommodation with a

“I love the laid-back lifestyle in Burnie—you have time to think here—to incubate your ideas and thoughts and creative processes. From early childhood I grew up in small places—I don’t like the chaos of cities—they rob you of your own thinking”.

friend who worshipped at the Assembly of God in Toowoomba, the contradictions and the questions they raised for me seemed increasingly complex and compelling.

At the same time every Sunday night a local community radio there would play Filipino songs—I'd listen to it in part to test my capacity to understand Tagalog language. The program after that was run by the church of Christ, and I'd continue to listen. Eventually I called the man who ran the radio program, and gradually became more involved.

I made the decision to study the Bible more seriously, and as a result applied to undertake a two-year Diploma course at the Tasmanian School of Preaching, in Devonport. By the time I'd completed it I loved Tasmania so much I decided to stay. What I learned there has provided an integral part of my role as an artist: I use mainly rubbish for materials, and undertake mentoring roles with youth and also work in the Juvenile Detention Centre, using my art as a metaphor to see and show value in what can otherwise be thought of as worthless. Because of what I went through, I want the young people I work with to have the same opportunities I was given by special individuals. I can use art as a way of getting those I work with to see their own value.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

I love the laid-back lifestyle in Burnie—you have time to think here—to incubate your ideas and thoughts and creative processes. From early childhood I grew up in small places—I don't like the chaos of cities—they rob you of your own thinking.

What might make it difficult?

The difficulties include access to resources like materials; for example, the band-saws I use to cut the books require parts that are only available in Sydney. If you don't travel there yourself to pick up certain tools, you have to buy online—this can also be costly.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

The challenges lie in distance and expenses—but this makes me be more resourceful and inventive—I have to change and compromise my ideas. This constantly happens in my projects … I often need to cut costs but often, as a consequence, the outcomes are better than the plans I'd intended in the beginning.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

Because I see my role as a 'community artist', I don't really work through the galleries as much, so I can't say for sure… but as an 'art worker' I have to be in touch with the broader communities because an essential purpose of my work is to engage these communities. The galleries come in with the final presentation of the work, but then most of my works are not even presented in galleries—a lot of the time they're in public places that the community has contributed to building—like libraries and council halls.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

No—never. I guess the best answer for this is to just say that, as an artist, you just go with the flow. One of the reasons I moved to Burnie was because I was invited here to participate in the Makers Workshop that was started by the Council for artists from a broad range of disciplines to work in specially designed 'pod' where people could chat with them—it was a good way of engaging with the public while selling your work. But since UTAS has taken over the initiative, the dynamic has changed, and last year I left.

How does it feel now?

I've never really had a sense of being fixed in one place. All my life I've been moving. The place I'm living now is where I've stayed longest in my life—I'm coming up to my fifth year here. Even in my childhood we were constantly moving. As a result, I don't have a particular sentiment attached to a particular place.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

The answer while I was living in Toowoomba would have been different to how I would answer this question now—back then I was doing more work for Brisbane than for local exhibitions in Toowoomba. From my point of view now, I very much depend on workshops in a range of places from the library to juvenile detention institutions to all kinds of broader community initiatives. The last project I was engaged in at Lorne in Victoria was regionally focused. Perhaps art has now gone well beyond the conveniences of galleries.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

I have a good situation with where I live at the moment, so I can't complain at all. Fuel and food is generally more expensive—the competition is not there. And the fact that you have to travel a bit more adds to the expenses.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

In some ways—yes. You can lose track of what's happening. When I was recently in Lorne I could see that the descriptions of art they were engaging with and the language they were using—had changed. The issues change all the time, and unless you leave every so often to get involved, you can get out of touch with this. But this can also be a good thing, as it can give time for your creative impulses to develop.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

Absolutely crucial—because regions connect each other through their communications across a range of media—and cultural exchange is important—even though no region is completely isolated.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

Especially in Tasmania—place is very important to people …right now, while I can say that I can build my own sense of contentment wherever I go, I love the people here—I have a strong connection with the people through my art. I am not on social media, but I'm aware that it can break people-to-people connection in a way that disconnects them from place. I can say from my own experiences that when I work most closely with communities in developing my art projects—that's when I build the strongest sense of—and connection to—place.

What is the role of your work?

My primary purpose is to have the interaction with other human beings both physically and socially—my art encourages shared conversations. The processes are simple enough that everyone can do them, and the materials I use have an ethical significance with psychological interpretations—to see value in something that's worthless.

Photos: Rick Eaves

Ritche Ares Doña

Cultural Transmission

2018

Overhead transparency films, wire comb, polycarbonate plastic, glue, and LED batten
Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

My childhood and the repetitive process of making, are the important elements in my work. They determine my thinking, design, process and outcome of the things I make. I have now lived in Australia for twenty-one years and every time I produce artworks I reflect on my childhood and cultural heritage. Every process of making *Cultural Transmission* had elements of my childhood; when glueing the stands for the work it reminded me of planting rice, cutting and folding individual artwork reminded me of making a hut from bamboo and coconut leaves, and the works remind me of the incredible iconic landmark in the Philippines called Chocolate Hills. Chocolate Hills are 2,000 naturally formed hills on the Island of Bohol. My cultural heritage and childhood experiences are the fabric of what I do and how I do it.

Cultural Transmission is a transportation and integration of my childhood, culture, values and traditions to my place in Tasmania. The boat in which the work quietly sits serves as a metaphor of shipping my cultural ideas and experiences to Tasmania. Though my ideas and processes are from the Philippines, I use the material sourced from the area in which I live. I made thousands of heart-like-shapes called Puso from plastic milk bottles. Puso is a traditional technique made from woven coconut leaves, which are filled with rice. For this project, I folded 9,170 overhead transparency films, which are similar to the folding of coconut leaves used in huts.

I have moved around in Queensland and Tasmania both in cities and regional areas. Wherever I go I always take something with me to take to the next place. I started folding discarded books when I was in Queensland and when I arrived in Tasmania I folded brochures, flyers and transparency films. Folding transparency films started when I was living in Devonport. I was asked to make a chandelier for a concert. The work hung at Makers' Workshop Burnie as a complete chandelier. Moving does not only change the place but changes my ideas and materials on the foundation of my cultural heritage and experiences.

SELENA DE CARVALHO

I can remember in summers, when my brother and I ran down to the creek, the slap, slap, slap of the water dragons as they launched themselves into the river. They'd hear us well before we could see them, and frightened by the noisy prospect of our arrival, they'd vacate their sun-basking positions in the branches that overhung the water. My brother is two and a half years older than me—I've always been his naughty little sister. We grew up in Coramba, a small town inland from Coffs Harbor in northern New South Wales.

Dad was an architect and Mum was a Women's Health psychologist. Both of them were first generation Australians—and although each of them held down jobs, they were in some ways 'drop outs'. They'd come from Newcastle, but the peers they shared and the places we'd go were different to what I could see around me as more mainstream family experiences. Mum and Dad were way less conservative than the rest of their families. When we first moved into that home right next to the Orara river, it was a standard weatherboard dwelling. But my parents put it on stilts and for a couple of years some friends from Indonesia lived downstairs. I can remember half the house being covered by a passionfruit vine—the warmth, the river, the lifestyle—that childhood was idyllic.

But when I was 11 we all moved back to Newcastle. It was during the 1980s—the country was undergoing an economic crash and my Mum's sister had been diagnosed with cancer, so Mum went back home to nurse her and Dad got a job at the Newcastle University.

Nevertheless, much of my childhood continued to be spent outdoors. The move had meant there was extra family support—both my grandmother and aunty lived there, and they lived opposite the beach. We'd been going up there every holidays so I think of my childhood as spent near two kinds of water—the creek and the beach. I can remember thinking that there was another kind of terrain that I hadn't 'mastered'—the ski-fields, so I spent one whole summer training hard on my cousin's roller blades in an effort to prepare for my next imagined venture as a ski-er.

It was also a difficult transition for us and for the town itself—the local steel mill had closed and the town seemed to be full of fierce, angry people. As I became a teenager I had the increased sensation that I was definitely an outsider to the local beach culture. I ended up wondering why I'd never learned to surf. It seemed to me as though I'd arrived from an altogether different 'tribe'—I had purple hair down past my bottom and I didn't fit in with the beach idea of beauty. For me, surf culture was a traumatic space, one where identities and status were fought over, but the beach itself was a refuge. So riding my bicycle further afield, I would seek out the less popular beaches and quiet.

I was a crafty teenager at a time when being interested in craft and making things was considered really dorky. I worked in all kinds of media including crochet, embroidery, silk painting and felting. I did lots of sewing that I'd sell at markets to make money. I especially loved sewing classes at school but I had a conflict with the teacher when I handed in a nightie dress that she accused me of, saying it was not my work. She absolutely refused to believe me and in the end Dad had to go into bat for me and tell her that he'd watched me stay up all night to make it. I can remember fancying some of the 70s style paisley material that were used as curtains at my high school. I pilfered a length, stitched together a suit, and did a series of photographs of me posing in front of the school curtains that remained. In year 11 you could take electives at TAFE as school subjects. Dad bought me an SLR camera, and I'd spend a lot of time taking black and white and time lapse photos.

I found my art classes really stifling—I just wanted to make stuff but there was a strong emphasis on art history, and as a result I wasn't so interested in the classes. I admit I was really naughty. One of my other skills was a proficiency at forging notes. I'd sneak off school and tell fibs about where I was going. I went to all-weekend rave parties when my parents thought I was visiting friends in Sydney. I did a lot of truanting but somehow managed to pass my subjects.

When I was 15, I was involved in a social scene with kids who were a lot older than myself. One weekend I caught a bus to East Gippsland with my friend where there was a festival around the logging area. This was my first experience of seeing the destruction of an old growth forest; this kicked off the direction that occupied my interest for the next few years, where I continued to make journeys travelling to the forests of East Gippsland and Northern New South Wales in summer, and out into the desert in winter as part of groups that were protesting environmental degradation.

In the desert we worked with Indigenous groups like the Arabunna elders from Lake Eyre, whose country the Roxby Downs Uranium Mine affects. In 2000 they were opening the Beverly Uranium Mine in the Flinders Ranges. The method that Beverly uranium mine used to retrieve and process the yellow cake had already been banned in several other countries. The opening of Beverley was a particularly violent protest—the mine flew out the Star Force (riot police) from Adelaide and protesters and custodians were tear gassed and beaten and then herded together and welded into a shipping container. An eight-year-old Indigenous girl was tear-gassed during those events. Some of these victims continued a court case that took some ten years to settle—the first case of a protest incident where civilians took the state to court over the way they were treated—and ultimately received monetary compensation for their abuse. By this time I was 19; I'd finished school 2 years earlier. When I wasn't involved in protesting I was living out of a back pack. I'd gone up to Darwin to assist a friend who was working on a permaculture project for a community garden there, then I hitched down the west coast to Coral Bay, then kept going south to Perth and walked part of the Bibbulum track. Then I came back to the east coast and went down to Tasmania for the first time. I'd heard it was an amazing forested place and I really wanted to know more of Australia before I headed overseas.

I drove down with my brother and a friend in a panel van that broke down in Ulverstone on the first day. Someone helped us out, we got the car on the road again, and we headed on down south to Hobart. My friend from Darwin had old friends living at Mole Street in Hobart who were having a party the next day. It turned out to be perfect timing—at that party we met a lot of people who were to become close friends. I got everyone in the house at Mole Street to help make a 'zine' and went to the local council to use their photocopier for free so I could print and distribute them. Soon after that the Huon Valley Environment Office opened in Huonville. At the time it was a really hostile place. There was a lot of tension between industry and environmental activists, the HVEC had had its office windows smashed several times. It's changed a great deal since that time.

I fell in love with a man I'd met at that first party and within six month I'd fallen pregnant. We moved into a little shack in the bush near the Franklin. The rent was forty dollars a week. There was no power, and every angle in the building had a lean—it looked like a fragile deck of cards, one among a number of little half-falling down shacks scattered through the bush. The shack stood at the top of a windy track, and there was a donkey and a goat that lived on the property. It had a hot water system that came off the fireplace—a simple, rustic and beautiful little place—and that's where I free-birthed my daughter.

We lived there for two years, but I'd never learned how to drive and it was quite isolating. After that time we moved to Melbourne where I lived in a squat warehouse and it was there that I learned how to drive and learned how to become a parent and grew up, with my daughter, in Footscray living amongst a big crew of friends in the Maribyrnong. Last week I revisited some trees we planted there—they're now massive gums.

After that period in Melbourne we moved back to Tasmania again where I started a squat in Hobart, in an old two-story rambling house. The owner's sister allowed us to 'caretake' the place for the time we stayed there. The home was full of the things she'd collected. My daughter was 3 at the time and I had separated from her father. I decided to apply for art school, and managed to scrape together a portfolio that I'd assembled from a collection of my zines and photos and lots of scrappy bits and pieces that I'd managed to salvage from my belongings that had been dragged around from place to place. I went to the university and was accepted. The rates of the house we'd been living in had never been paid, so the state took over the property and sold it. After that I got a little place in Ferntree—an eccentric kind of granny flat where the bathtub was in the lounge room. But it was perfect for us—my daughter could hang out in the bath while I was making dinner and later on I'd work on my art for my courses.

I loved university—it was a time during which I really learned to maximize my time expenditure—I was very productive, producing a lot of printmaking, drawing, e-media productions, but I didn't do any of my theory subjects until my last year. Part way through my candidature I'd fallen in love, had

“The way a place is storied in the memories of those that live there, histories and news that have nothing to do with a newspaper, that’s what I love about living outside the city. I pine for the stories of the Indigenous people who lived here long before I arrived”.

another child and come back to university for the second time when I was 28. This time one of my lecturers drew my attention to the fact that, according to my grades, I was doing well. Up to this point I'd never checked my grades—I was simply trying to get through all my work and all my responsibilities, but when I could see the fact that I was achieving, I shifted my attitude.

By the time I got round to doing my theory subjects during the last year of my undergraduate candidature, I really enjoyed the thinking and reading I'd put off for so long. I'd drive the kids around in the car until they nodded off to sleep and then I'd sit and read for ages. In between I'd moved to a place in Longley—a little village with a river that forms the heart of the place. My house is quaint, quirky, colorful and warm… and there's a good berry patch out the back.

I completed my undergraduate studies in 2011 and immediately began applying for grants and residencies. I was successful in being awarded an Australia Council Artstart grant, a Jump mentorship and a residency in 2012 in Beijing. I spent six weeks in China after which I went to Japan to see Echigo–Tsumari. I just wanted to get out of the institution and make art, and so that's what I did until 2015 when I re-enrolled to commence my Honours. By the time I re-entered university, I'd undergone experiences that had built up my skills and confidence. I'd always viewed myself as an artist, but had become more aware of the complexities of the 'art world'. I'd moved away from printmaking and towards medias like film and technology that were more immediately transportable. Even so, I was still continuing my preoccupation with a conceptual space focused on the environment and on the communities that gather together in a space of shared custodianship.

The Honours year was a really successful one—my research project involved a lot of getting back into Country—connecting to a sense of place in Tasmania. The final work 'Ecological Haunts ii' received the Harold Schenberg PICA Hatched Award ($35,000) for one student from across Australia … this was a fantastic confidence and financial boost for me. When I'd flown over to Perth I didn't know I was going to win the award. On the day I'd installed the work I took the train to Fremantle and had had a talk to myself about devoting the day to performing an ongoing series of 'good deeds'. I'd been so preoccupied with my self-imposed regime that I'd forgotten to eat and so when I got to the event I realised how hungry and thirsty I was. I immediately bought an ice-cream (bad dinner choice) and drank a beer. I threw back the beer and was beginning to feel a bit nervous when they called out my name. I was astonished! But I had to go up there onstage a bit tipsy and holding the half-finished Choc Wedge.

But neither seemed to diminish the immediate glow of being a 'winner'—suddenly I was a desirable person to know, and everybody bought me champagne. The next day I had to get up at 4. 30 am to get on the plane to Sydney to meet with Dad to celebrate my uncle's 70th birthday, carrying the burden of the worst hangover of my life. When I arrived my whole family was there—and there I was, arriving as a shell-shocked success-story, transformed from the black sheep of the family as an overnight success.

Since then I've gone on to begin my PhD at UTAS. Further study suits me—I guess because I'm working in a project-based capacity in the visual arts; while it's awesome and I'm well-supported, the focus offered by the PhD to delve further into my own research and to maintain one strong current is positive for me. Also, it offers me a scholarship that gives me the financial freedom to be a bit more choosy in terms of what projects I take on. And I'm aware that, in my role as a mother, I have to present a positive role-model; I've given up social media in my efforts to be that role model and if my children try any of the stunts I did I'd be onto them in a second. That having been said (in jest) the communication we have is very different—the three of us are working things out together as we go. They've been on a number of art adventures with me—we all went to Europe and camped for 2 weeks in Iceland last year, and there are a lot more adventures to come…

I think this place chose me, more than I chose it. Tasmania, that is. I came for a visit in late 2002 and stayed. In the beginning, I tried leaving, and living in other places, but each time I found my way back here. The more that I've travelled, the more I appreciate and acknowledge how truly unique and delicious this place is. When I leave I miss the smell of the air and the way the sunsets linger in autumn, I miss the quiet and sometimes, I even miss the lilt of cover bands on a Sunday afternoon, as they waft up the hill. The perspective that distance enables.

I live in a little village 20 kilometres south of Hobart. I call it a village because one day the Council pop-riveted the word 'village' on the sign that had previously just read 'Longley'. I know all my neighbours. This can be both a blessing and a curse. But mostly it's a blessing. The way a place is storied in the memories of those that live there, histories and news that have nothing to do with a newspaper, that's what I love about living outside the city. I pine for the stories of the Indigenous people who lived here long before I arrived. There's diversity in this small valley, and abundance too. There are still roadside stalls that operate on an honesty system, and a river that I can swim in and drink out of… but it's changing. Even in the time that I have lived here. The waterhole which used to be 'secret' has boomed in summertime, perhaps since someone shared it on Facebook or perhaps since Tasmania has become a 'desirable' location to live, (out grown its inbred, penal colony image). Tasmania is a refugium… I think my fear is that perhaps too many people all seeking some sense of connection and quiet will over-populate this fragile place. But there are interesting folks moving here too. Diversity and change, it's an exciting time to be here. There's a healthy art scene, it's small, and everyone knows everyone, but there's something fantastic about that too. It's kind of horizontal; you can access and connect with people at all different levels of their practice. It's a place where people get behind and support new work, but also critically engage.

I love the internet! I love that I can live where I live and still be connected to the broader flow of ideas and people remotely. But I can also see a dark side to it too, a black hole of information and potential time-wasting. I guess, like anything, being mindful of how I engage with the internet as place, keeps me connected to a broader movement, while also staying grounded, being with the everyday. Remembering to get out bush and let it all drop away.

Photos: Rick Eaves

Selena de Carvalho

100 Year Flood

2018

Mixed media: car exhaust ink, charcoal from Weld Valley, tree mast from North West Bay River, post flood | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018), Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019), Lismore Regional Gallery (2020), Riddoch Art Gallery (2020), and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

My material attention is focused on communicating an engagement with place. I visited and worked with environmental sites of disturbance, collecting charcoal from a burnt rainforest coup in the Weld Valley and filling the boat with this carbon cargo. The mast was found in the North West Bay River, relocated after the flash flood of May 2018. I had a sleeve made for my car exhaust, which I used to collect particulate matter to create the ink, which adorns the exterior of the boat. Attempting to translate acts of moving through the environment as a contemporary human, this ink became the vehicle for a poetic, pathetic rumination on the haunted environment in which we reside. The plastic sails add a tone of consumerism to the work, a quick fix, or a cheap immortal crown.

100 year flood
electric stream
waterfalls out of power sockets
new islands emerge as cars float down
unfamiliar streets
instead of ripping my clothes off and running
into the storm
I check my sleeping children

carboniferous perfume drifts over the back
fence
we toast marshmallows around a burning tyre
sharing stories of the big flood and the big fire

face like a screen saver
the mountain is not ours to brand
exhausted breath

I make ink out of car fumes and take on too
many projects
driving doughnuts around my garden
a ghetto of ideas, weeds and non-indigenous
species

home

KARLA DICKENS

with Leigh Arnold

I was born in Darlinghurst, Sydney, growing up in a range of suburbs around the inner city—Beaconsfield, Waterloo, Mascot and we moved to the eastern suburbs when I was about ten. My brother Grant is five years older than me. Dad was a wharfie and a truck driver and Mum was a factory worker. I was always close with my Grandparents who lived in Mascot. My Grandmother Myrtle was brought to Mascot when she was young—she lived in a humpy village where Mascot Airport now sits. There was a large community of displaced people who'd been moved off their original lands and who'd come to the city for work and a range of reasons. Myrtle met my grandfather, a German immigrant and agreed to marry him if he bought her a house. He did, and they were married. Still in their teens, they remained together in that same house he bought her in Mascot until they both died. My father moved out of that same house just last year as a result of Mascot's re-gentrification and the motel explosion around the airport. My father was my grandparents' only child. My Grandfather worked in an iron foundry in Mascot 'til he was seventy-six. He and my grandmother lived a simple life, no phone or car and little contact with others as they maintained their insularity as a result of the trauma they'd suffered. My grandfather was a very tall man—about six feet four, and my grandmother was tiny. They would walk together daily holding hands to the local shops, work in their garden and read the race guide together.

I'd spend time with my grandparents every school holidays and often during weekends. I'd help in the garden and would help with cooking, and was always being told I was loved. They've had a huge influence on who I am—my grandfather would find stuff on the street and make things. Like him, I enjoy the tip—it's a great resource for my art and it's also my tie with him and my grandmother—the things I select even now are often things that were made and used from their time—they remind me of them—my nostalgia draws from those two people—Myrtle and Tommy.

I knew I was Aboriginal while I was growing up but nothing much was said. My grandmother was very cautious about identifying as Aboriginal—she warned me to stay out of the sun, to avoid going to the beach, and to tell people I was Italian. But there were plenty of other things going on at home and the issue of being Aboriginal was not the most pressing issue—it was simply more important to make sure there was food on the table and that we were all safe.

During my primary school years I went to Gardeners Road Public School and loved it. I was class captain and house captain and school captain. I was hardworking and diligent until my teenage years. My favourite subjects—in order—were Geography, Maths and Art. I loved the geography teacher—he gave me a sense of the world outside of my own. I liked maths because I was good at it. I was always making things at home; my parents loved the way I'd keep myself entertained for hours, cutting, pasting, reconstructing and building—all of which I found more enjoyable than the art classes at school. Things haven't changed much in that sense as I still love the same basic process of making and the solitude I find during those processes of creating.

Once I started moving towards my teen years, things changed in a big way. I became uncomfortable in my own space and moved towards a pattern of self-destruction that included drug abuse. At the end of that period—at the age of twenty-four—I ended up in a rehabilitation centre. When I exited from that facility, I enrolled in the National Art School. I had a family and dear friends who watched over and took care of me. They were involved in the arts and it was them who recognised the passion and talent I had. Either that or they might have taken the trouble to enrol me simply because I was driving them mad. At that point my obsession for self-destruction was transformed into an obsession with making art. One of my teachers, Roy Jackson, was a practicing artist who was also a Buddhist. He had an amazing way of talking his students through the process of making art—he would recognise the kind of emotional headspace they needed to keep going forward—to take risks and to push themselves. I did well at the Art School; I lived close by at Taylor Square in a share house above a shop across from Kinselas. Taylor Square was alive then—there were always people on the streets, there were lots of artists and it was affordable. There were plenty of cheap food spots and Artist Run Initiatives in which to show your work. I exhibited in group shows in an ARI called the Tap Gallery.

But by the time I'd finished my degree in 1993/4 I couldn't afford to live in the city and make art, so I moved to the Hunter Valley. I wanted to be in the bush—there were a lot of artists living in the area and I got a mortgage and a small house for forty dollars a week… Margaret Preston's brother had worked in a printing studio on the same mountain. There was no power, but there was an old cooker that I used morning, noon and night. I had a forty-four gallon tank outside that I'd light a fire under for showers and washing. There weren't many walls on the dwelling—it was rustic, but it enabled me to live a lifestyle in the bush that connected me with nature and with myself. That little dwelling was my way to move out of the city for the first time, and it enabled me to make art. I had a car some of the time, and when I didn't, I'd hitch into Cessnock and back for provisions and art materials. I was on a disability support pension that enabled me to keep this lifestyle going for seven years. I didn't have exhibitions during this time—I just lived and made art. I threw most of it away, but I did have some shows towards the end of the period with Elaine and Gordon Syron who had a gallery in Taylor Square called Blackfellas Dreaming.

The exhibition with Elaine and Gordon drew supportive responses and the show sold out. People enjoyed it. The show was called *The Garden of Wings*. It was pretty naughty—full of vaginas with butterfly wings. It was about letting go of shame and being comfortable with my sexuality. There were two rooms of heavily collaged canvases. The sell-out left me feeling validated and inspired.

Apart from art I have had much needed work to do on myself—my mental health and recovery were the most important considerations for me, so I didn't really take my art seriously commercially until I had my daughter in 2005. She has just become a teenager.

Through the nineties I just made art for myself. I had a housing commission residence in Chippendale for a bit, but I wasn't interested in living in the city anymore and so in 2003 I moved to the Northern Rivers. I had close friends living in the area and it seems to be a safe and open part of the country to be a gay parent, artist and Aboriginal environmentalist. With beautiful bush and beaches nearby, it seemed to be a great fit. Elaine and Gordon Syron opened

“If you have been bush or out of the city for a decent amount of time and head into town—city slickers are attracted to your energy—it has a freshness and rawness that isn’t found in built up areas. Just as they are attracted to people’s energy I believe they feel the energy in the art. I know with my art more and more holds the essence of the bush and rural Australia—whether that be in story, materials or both”.

up a gallery called Blackfellas Dreaming Art *Gallery and Museum* in Bangalow where we showcased the work of Aboriginal artists—mainly contemporary urban-based Indigenous art. Elaine is a documentary photographer who'd been documenting urban Aboriginal life since the 1980s.

There was a house attached to the gallery that I initially lived in, before buying a small house in Bangalow. It was here that my daughter was born. I took a few years off making art to devote to child rearing and to setting up the home. When my daughter was a toddler I was offered a show at Lismore Regional Gallery by then-Director Steven Alderton. I had been prepared to let go of making art at that time, as it didn't seem financially practical, but when the offer for a solo show was offered to me, I decided to have one more crack before becoming an adult and getting a real job. That solo exhibition at the Lismore Regional Gallery in 2007, was called *Loving Memory.* It was about the grief of losing a child and a close friend. I worked in sculpture and fabric and collages—the fabric element of my collages were particularly successful. The response was positive and uplifting and the opportunities that came out of it again validated my role as an artist and reinforced the positive possibilities for me to make art and feed my daughter. From a financial point of view, I'd sold a few pieces, but the opportunities that came out of it, on a local as well as an interstate level, were the most important outcomes. Teaching, running workshops and inclusion in a number of group shows managed to keep me afloat, and demanded that I just keep on making art on a more-or-less daily basis.

I moved from Bangalow in 2007 to Goonellabah, an outer suburb that's close to the bush. I bought an old house with plenty of space to make art. I planted fruit trees and developed garden beds to feed both myself and daughter. Ever since I got off the streets and out of a cycle of drug abuse I've lived a frugal life where growing my own food has been helpful in a number of ways. My daughter Ginger who is now thirteen is very health-conscious and careful about what she eats, so the simple lifestyle we've taken up in order to survive has paid off in a number of positive ways.

I love the space to make work—I've got a roof—a safe space—and the foundation to be able to work away at buying a home gives me the sense of security I need. My work is therapy and often challenging and difficult, so the site of the home is very important to me. My daughter has been the major catalyst to continue with my work and to stay in one place. She is the source of my drive and inspiration. Throughout my daughter's primary school years, I continued to make art and to support both of us. I've always been inspired by and aspired to the kind of life lived by my grandparents—one that's honest and simple.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced?

Growing up in Sydney I made a decision once out of art school that I was serious about following my passion in creating and making. At this time, I also realised that leaving the big smoke would be essential to live and work as an artist. Focusing on art seemed more important than the stress of funding city living. Regional NSW is affordable, beautiful and spacious.

What might make it difficult?

I'm at a great stage in my practice where regional living only helps my work, there is a heathy interest in my work and I receive exciting opportunities which involve short trips away. I'm inspired in my studio working and as long as the internet stays connected and I can find my phone I'm a happy camper.

Where do the other challenges lie?

I don't get to see as much art as I would like to.

But are these challenges worthwhile?

Social media softens the blow—as a single mother with a strong working practice I probably wouldn't get to see as many exhibitions as I imagine I would anyway.

And what kind of benefits are there?

I have a great space to work in, that is more than affordable—I'm inspired by the easiness of everyday life, the beauty of the country I live on and fresh air.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

Yes I do, yet in saying that I also believe that the lack of art community is important to the artist in the area. Nothing like the inspiration of real life and concerns to inspire.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

Yes I did but I definitely did not expect it to work as well as it does for me.

How does it feel now?

It feels like a perfect fit, I'm inspired by the materials I have at my doorstep—(sourcing them in a city is near impossible) I make art, do housework, do a decent job parenting, rock a beautiful and yummy garden; all I need is here in the town of Goonellabah that next-to-nobody has ever heard of.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

If you have been bush or out of the city for a decent amount of time and head into town—city slickers are attracted to your energy—it has a freshness and rawness that isn't found in built up areas. Just as they are attracted to people's energy I believe they feel the energy in the art. I know with my art more and more holds the essence of the bush and rural Australia—whether that be in story, materials or both.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

Shit yeah.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' and come back in again?

When I think of getting out—I feel the need to leave Australia more than the area I live in. Australia's racist politics does wear me down—Staying away from social media also helps.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

I'm not really sure how important they are for other people; for myself I simply enjoy visiting other regions, meeting the people and explore the history and culture.

Do you think that where you work is still important?…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

When I first started making art I didn't have a computer, didn't have a smart phone, I had no idea how to send digital images. Now that times have changed it has made life as an artist living outside of major city very do-able.

Photos: Brett Adlington (top) and Vanghoua Anthony Vue (bottom-left and bottom-right)

Karla Dickens

with Leigh Arnold

Colonial Bottom Feeders

2018–19

Mixed media | Installation at Lismore Regional Gallery (2019)

Artist Statement

The work *Colonial Bottom Feeders* visually explores and plays with the term 'lost at sea' reconstructing found objects to reclaim an overturned vessel. The rusty oil cans form a Union Jack, talking of the British Empire's history and its ability to overturn countries and peoples, leaving them lost at sea.

A space-like cabin sits on top of the hull which has been painted by contributor Leigh Arnold an Indigenous artist and astronomer. The stars and planets may serve to navigate a lost soul at sea or in space.

This work speaks of ships at sea (or vulnerable humans) finding themselves out of sight of land and therefore in dangerous, uncertain positions.

Not all sinking ships are doomed, if you are blessed with knowledge of the old ways, finding refuge with ancient skills of star mapping you may just enjoy the space and adventure of the space between.

ROB DOUMA

My Mum and Dad emigrated from Holland in the late sixties. Mum was on her way to visit her older sister for a holiday and Dad was on his way to New Zealand for work when they met on the boat to Australia and hit it off. Mum suggested that Dad visit her in Tasmania after he finished his job in three months' time. When they met up again they continued the romance, married two years later, and started the adoption process.

I came along in 1973, and the adoption process for my sister took a further four years. The family settled in the Northwest coast of Tasmania where they purchased an old small timber cottage that had once been used as the local coach station and post-office. The neighbor's father and grandfather had actually built it. Dad is always very resourceful—he taught himself the skills of carpentry from books at the local library and began the repairs to fully and carefully restore the old building. When he wasn't working on practical concerns he would sit filling his sketchbook with images of the surrounding landscape.

Hobart and Penguin has quite a few immigrants from Holland. I was keen to learn the language but my parents were hesitant at the time, thinking that it might have impacted on my English studies. My first major trip out of Australia when I was 13 was when the family visited Holland. My Dad and Mum had travelled extensively throughout Europe, and their stories of other places had already captured my imagination. Growing up in a small town in Tasmania as a first generation Australian with Dutch parents made me feel "less Australian"; someone who was always slightly on the outskirts of Australian culture. Growing up attending small rural schools came with a range of little drawbacks—team sports don't really happen when there are only four in the class. But you find other ways of getting around things—I was still interested in sports, but tended to be drawn to more solo sports like karate and boxing.

Both Mum and Dad were very creative. Dad made beautifully crafted wooden toys—often out of scrap wood—that he sold at markets. He made intricate doll's houses that were replicas of Dutch colonial homes. Mum made a lot of folk art and would help Dad painting and varnishing the wooden toys. She also did a lot of stitch-work, knitting and needlework. I can remember sitting with Mum completing cross-stitch art together, listening to classical music. My love of materiality grew from that childhood. I loved working with wood, but I preferred to make wooden guns instead of dolls' houses.

At school, I had a natural tendency towards art, and was encouraged by the school and my parents. I had a mate Richard who kept me on my toes throughout primary and secondary school; we were both keen on art and pushed each other to be better artists through a supportive competitiveness. English, Geography and History were my strengths, but art was always my main focus. When I'd completed grade twelve in the late eighties, I didn't have a strong ambition to go to university—I'd always thought it was only for upper class rich kids rather than those from the working class. I considered going to Art College and sat in on a couple of classes, but it didn't feel quite right. I felt there was much more to see and do in the world before I was ready to start making comments on things. I was sixteen and extremely keen to explore the world.

Throughout my childhood I'd also always been interested in the army; I applied and was accepted in 1991. I can look back now to the time I was a child and how I was influenced by soft propaganda in family programs like The Sullivans, that focused largely on World War 2. Mum and Dad would never let me have firearms on the property when I was growing up, but I was keen on making those wooden guns. It's ironic how things turn out—I'd always wanted my Dutch passport but my parents relinquished their Dutch passports because they were fearful I would be drafted into the Dutch military. But in the end, I enrolled in the Australian military anyway. Ironic.

My interest in travelling was fanned by the overseas training in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the USA including Hawaii. I also completed two operational tours to East Timor. After initial training in New South Wales, I was posted to Townsville in 1995 as an infantry soldier where I stayed for four years, then went to Melbourne for a year. When I was recognised as having a proficiency in languages, the army sent me to the Australian Defence School of Languages where I achieved a Diploma in Thai. Upon graduation, I became a Thai linguist and worked as an interpreter to the Royal Thai Army on both training and operational missions.

Upon discharge from the army in 2004 I was interested in getting into the tattooing industry. I had by this stage acquired several large tattoos and had been commissioned to design tattoos for other soldiers. I had heard it was a tightly controlled industry where entry was difficult. When I was first asked to show my portfolio of works, all the images were fine art style drawings—so was asked to produce more typical tattoo-style drawings. I was offered a job straight away. Unfortunately, the first two studios I worked at didn't pan out; both collapsed and I was forced to seek alternate employment. As I already owned a house in Townsville and had a large network from my military career, I moved back to Townsville and have used it as a base ever since.

A bodyguard and medical course was completed in Cape Town, South Africa in 2005 and for the next two years I worked locally as a security guard, hoping to secure employment overseas in the lucrative security contractor industry on the circuit in Iraq, Afghanistan or Africa. In 2007, I commenced work on a Mines Rescue team and had made plans to commence tattooing again, this time in Cairns. However out of the blue I was offered employment as a Security Consultant in Afghanistan in Kabul, the country's capital city.

I worked as an independent security consultant in Afghanistan from 2008 to 2011. The last three years were on a US Defence contract. It was a place I was surprisingly sad to leave, but it came down to lifestyle choices—the work I was engaged in started paying less and the conditions were getting worse, and more dangerous. I did a lot of photography in Afghanistan but I knew I needed a way of life that allowed me more time to make art. The opportunity to work in the offshore oil and gas industry would mean better financial returns and more time at home. After spending three months in Scotland getting the necessary qualifications to work on oil rigs, I was hired in Houston, Texas as a ROV (Remote Operated Vehicle). Pilot /Technician where I would control and 'fly' the vehicle, conducting tasks such as subsea construction, salvage or repair operations. I worked in the industry from 2011 to 2015 on a month on/month off roster system. Although trained in Scotland and hired in Texas, I was happy to work anywhere in the world and consequently worked around South East Asia for about a year, including a month in China, then spent the last couple of years working

“Living here and trying to make a living, as well as trying to make art, forces you to be more aware of your environment... You have to ask yourself about the extent you’re prepared to conform—or otherwise—in order to make ends meet. Or do you stick to your ethics and beliefs at all costs? You have to be realistic in assessing how it might be possible to make a financially viable future in the arts”.

around Australia, mostly off the Great Western Shelf, west of Dampier in Western Australia, and making side trips to the Bass Strait and the East Timor Sea.

By 2012, I had identified my real need to 'catch-up' on my art, and in time-off from the oil rigs I began painting and drawing in earnest, participating in local shows and competitions where my work received awards. Even when I was at work, I would bring materials to draw with whilst I was off duty. In 2015 I was approached to participate in a major national touring exhibition, titled *A Permanent Mark*, that focused on the impact of tattooing on contemporary art. At the opening, I met the Lead Vocational Teacher from the local TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) campus, Donna Foley. When I mentioned that I was interested in developing my arts practice, Donna encouraged me to enroll into a Diploma program where I focused on drawing and printmaking. After the Diploma, I completed the Advanced Diploma and rolled it into a degree program when the University of Canberra began a Bachelor of Visual Arts program at the TAFE campus. I am currently about to commence the final semester of that degree, focusing more on 3D works.

In January 2016, I had successfully applied for a Life drawing Marathon course at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. On return I bumped into a local tattoo studio owner who had previously bought some of my art and he offered me a start into tattooing again, which I took up. Since then I have been tattooing virtually non-stop for the past two years. I see tattooing as different to my art practice. In the trade, there's a kind of running joke where I always reiterate that my tattooing is separate to my 'real art'. I view it in a similar way to how graphic design can be different from 'fine art'; the client on the whole generally dictates the design of the tattoo. My role is to bring that client's vision to life as best I can. At times, there is scope for my own design or style, but it's generally always tied to following a specific brief. Fine art might be produced on commission as well, but it comes much closer to expressing my own viewpoint. I see the physical and material aspects of tattooing as being more akin to a craft.

What makes where you live and work different? (To a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Townsville has the largest military community in Australia and it's in a small regional city. Lavarack Barracks grows continuously, as does the Air Force base and Naval facilities. I think approximately thirty thousand people in Townsville are directly related to the military in some way. The mood and energy of the town has changed; prior to 1999 the military in general were not really liked by the locals, who openly referred to army personnel as 'AJ's'—an acronym for Army Jerks. A lot of the level of contempt and jealousy stemmed from the fact that the army men had a disposable income, and were interested in spending it going out and having fun.

The other large sector in Townsville was comprised of the university students, who were generally much less cashed up. Townsville had a big drinking culture back then—I guess it still does—and the locals weren't very enamoured of the typical Alpha male army types with a disposable income. However, all that changed in 1999 when the Australian Army was sent to help East Timor regain their independence from Indonesia. From then on they were viewed in a much more positive light. There were signs posted all over the town—and particularly in the car yards—reading "Welcome back Heroes". Part of that supportive, positive change was driven by the fact that local businesses were keen to collect part of the forty to fifty thousand tax-free dollars that each guy would come back with.

What might make it difficult?

Opportunities for artists are minimal—there are two main galleries—Perc Tucker and Umbrella—and getting exhibition space can be at times lengthy and challenging. Also, I feel the community doesn't embrace art as much as other small communities might: the new football stadium will be embraced more by locals than artistic ventures.

This is in spite of a recent report that art and cultural activities bring three to five times the revenue to Townsville that sport does. The live music performances, the sculpture competitions, the exhibitions and a range of other cultural events bring in big audiences. But even so, Council opts to support a Super stadium and a V8 track over a new cultural premise in spite of the fact that it is arts and culture that bring real opportunities and advancements to local businesses.

It's also a very conservative town—anything off-center can seem quite challenging out here. Obviously any critical responses I might make in my work about the commercialisation of war may not be popular with some of my clients.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

Living here and trying to make a living, as well as trying to make art, forces you to be more aware of your environment—there's no safety blanket here. You have to ask yourself about the extent you're prepared to conform—or otherwise—in order to make ends meet. Or do you stick to your ethics and beliefs at all costs? You have to be realistic in assessing how it might be possible to make a financially viable future in the arts. And in turn, you have to ask yourself whether you'll be able to maintain a practice here or whether you'll only really be able to make the kind of statements you want to make somewhere else, sometime else. But answering those kinds of questions can drive a stronger rationale for your work.

It's forced me to look hard at opportunities beyond the bubble of Townsville. In 2016 I enrolled in a drawing workshop in New York and will attend a printmaking workshop in Mildura later this year. Or from time to time I'll fly down to Melbourne or Brisbane to visit an exhibition. The fact that this place makes you aware that you have to get out to look around has a strong benefit.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

The Perc Tucker Regional Gallery has fostered a great deal of community engagement and involvement. Umbrella too, but most of my tattooing clients seem to only know about the Regional Gallery, and it's been working very hard over the years to bring people in. To a large degree you could argue that on the whole its cultural outreach could be described as preaching to the converted. Every two years we have the Strand Ephemera, a sculpture exhibition and competition held on the Strand, which really pulls the community. In recent years council has commissioned large street art murals and public art works that increase the profile of the CBD. I'm not entirely sure about how they've been received, but the response and support definitely seem to have been growing, even though very slowly.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

No, although I did imagine I'd be an artist. Growing up on a rural farm, I always felt the pull to the cities, but I hate living in suburbs. When I first went to Bangkok, I loved living there—I can envisage myself living in a bigger city rather than a regional city.

How does it feel now?

Convenient—I live in a converted warehouse in an industrial estate but it's very central. The university is a few minutes down the road, and work is a few minutes in the other direction. Right now, it suits me fine. If I could replicate all this and move to Bangkok it might actually be heaven… but…

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

I'm not too sure … there are a few fairly major artists who live up here, many of whom are associated with the teaching institutions, but Townsville itself is not really a place that I think people across Australia are aware of for its culture. If people think of north Queensland culture in Australia, Cairns promotes itself more as an artistic community—they have a stronger 'arts footprint'—especially through their involvement with Indigenous artists.

National competitions like the Percival Portrait Prize, that offers a first prize of fifty thousand dollars, raise the profile of the city, as does the Strand Ephemera. These events also offer great opportunities to network with other interstate artists.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

Yes—rent is cheaper; I couldn't achieve this proximity to the CBD in Brisbane for what I pay here—plus I don't have to spend much time driving around town. Also, the limitations in terms of entertainment mean you're not spending so much money; in big cities you spend money going out on taxis, food and drinks to endless exhibition openings. Here there may be only one or two gallery events a month. But up here you pay for it in other ways through art supplies, where you're always adding on extra for freight.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Absolutely—you can educate yourself well through the internet, but it's not like actually spending time in those places. A broad comment about Australia is that it can be quite insular—many people grow up living in their own little regional bubble—it can tend to be quite territorial, and as a consequence you can easily become quite close-minded. I recommend travel to everyone; it's enlightening to see how people do things differently. You have to get out and explore the world to get the best out of it. I tattoo a lot of people who've never left Townsville, when I speak with them I try to be encouraging rather than condescending, hoping that they will travel and experience for themselves.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

They can be very important—I guess that ties into the concept of being open-minded—the way others do things can present new ways of resolving issues that can help preventing that insular mind-set. It's also important to share understanding about living in regional contexts. For example, we have a large issue with crime here at the moment, and it would be interesting to see what other regional towns are doing to combat similar problems.

Do you think that where you work is still important? …or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

I think it can be—but it depends largely on personal agendas. For me the opportunity of spending time in Townsville—especially with the

military context—has been very important to my development. But with social media and the ability to experience the world via the Internet you can see repetitive patterns all over the world. Sometimes we're not as unique as we think we are—it could be a bit of both.

What is the role of your work?

Ultimately I am drawn to make the kind of art that makes people think—art that works as an agent of change. I'd love to make art that makes positive change; art that challenges people—not in a confrontational way, but to appreciate different opinions. If I make art that does that, I'm pretty happy. I'm not interested in making, for example, anti-army statements per-se, but more to comment on the profiteering behind it. In my tattooing practice I like the conversational aspect of the process; I like the way communication can form bridges or give insights. When I tattoo I often have science or history programs on in the background, and people concentrate on them when they're being tattooed. Sometimes it's surprising and somewhat confirming how exposure to more information can help people change their opinions, in a positive way.

Photos: Rob Douma (left), Angela Little (top-right) and Rachel Cunningham (bottom-right)

Rob Douma

Grounded

2019

Timber, carbon transfer paper, tattoo stencil paper, and cord | Installation at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019)

Artist Statement

Tattooing has been a constant in my travels; in fact, I received much body art here in Townsville when I first arrived in the mid-nineties. After having collected more on my overseas journeys, I returned and opened my own studio, *Death Proof Tattoo*. Advancements in technology and the rise of outsourcing manufacture overseas to countries such as China, have moved the tattoo industry towards using disposable items. Few practitioners make their own needles anymore; most people use pre-made mass-produced setups. Considering the popularity and rapid expansion of the tattooing industry globally, this has resulted in a massive increase of single-use plastics, not to mention other consumables that are also hazardous to the environment.

Concerned with the amount of waste generated by tattooists for several years now, I kept the detritus from tattooing procedures to re-purpose them in artworks. In this artwork I used materials from the tattoo stencil process: carbon transfer sheets are used to put the tattoo design onto a thin paper stencil that is then applied to the skin, leaving a carbon outline that can be traced with the tattoo needles. The hull of the boat is clad with the original carbon sheets. The sail is formed using pre-used stencils. There is a direct relationship between the two materials in the same way that there is a physical relationship between people and place. The hull provides the structure, or grounding, for the mast and sail, in the same way place provides for the existence of people.

The skeletal structure of the boat covered by decorative motifs is a strong metaphor for the tattooed body, a vessel that carries the soul across the sea of life from place to place. The boat is constructed from plywood and although it is reasonably rigid, the materials are quite fragile, and this also speaks to the ephemeral nature of existence. The sail is deliberately constructed from two coloured papers—brown and white—symbolic of alternate and different relationships to land and its other occupants.

PENNY EVANS

I grew up in Lane Cove in Sydney in what you could describe as a pretty dysfunctional family. I am the middle kid: my sister is two years older than me and my brother is four years younger than me. Mum abandoned us when I was eight.

Dad brought us up while working in the Commonwealth Bank and when he retired after forty years they gave him a gold-plated watch. Although Mum disappeared from the immediate family circle, by the time I was in my early teens she'd moved nearby into a little rental property in North Sydney, and my sister and I lived with her there on and off. During the early 1980s my sister and I spent a lot of time hanging around Darlinghurst, partying and clubbing, going to parties and hanging out, so it was convenient to drop in on her because we were in the area anyway.

During school holidays, Dad used to drive us kids down to south-west New South Wales to stay with his elderly mother. We called her Nana in Narrandera. It's in Wiradjuri Country and the mighty Murrumbidgee River runs by it. We'd spend the summer holidays in Nanna's old house with no modern facilities. It hadn't changed since the depression era. She had an old wood stove and all their old furniture from when Dad was a boy, original furniture from the 1930s. They were the poorest white people in town and I still remember her fear of "the blacks" although I had no idea what she actually meant by it. Ironically, I was later to discover that that side of my family were also of Gomeroi descent. I can remember us all sitting on the floor in front of the wood stove when we were kids taking it in turns shaving the bunions from her feet. It was the early 1970s and Narrandera had two pools—a modern chlorinated pool that they built next to the river pool. We used to swim in both pools when we were there, but I noticed that the local Aboriginal kids stuck to the river pool.

In those days, people would shut up about being Aboriginal if you could pass for white. My Mum's Dad—my Pop—used to take us on his boat up the Hawkesbury from Brooklyn to Dangar Island when we were little. I feel a strong connection and longing for that river from those times. His boat was called *Bengerang*. It took me twenty years to understand certain connections: we found out that the name of the property that Pop's family settled on near Moree was called *Bengerang*. He didn't talk about his Gomeroi identity—he was just trying to get by—to survive—and all these years later I realised that he'd left all these little clues that pointed to his ownership of and pride in his Kamilaroi heritage. My Dad was also born in Kamilaroi Country, at Narrabri. Because Mum had walked out when we were kids, I lost contact with her side.

I wasn't aware of my Aboriginal heritage until I was in my late teens—when we were hanging out with people drinking they'd be talking about their roots—where they came from—and how it mattered to them. That talk was confronting for me… it made me aware that there was a lot about who I was that I didn't understand. In 1985, I went to East Sydney Technical College (which is now called the National Art School) and later Sydney College of the Arts, where I majored in ceramics. This was where, through my arts practice, I really started to connect with my cultural heritage.

The evidence of connection came around the Bicentennial in 1988, when my Mum's cousin Stan threw a whole lot of paperwork into our laps. He was, and still is, a mad genealogist. We were Aboriginal, Kamilaroi, through my Mum's side. After that I began reading everything I could get my hands on to find out as much as I could about the real history of New South Wales. I looked at the Aboriginal language maps which showed tribal names and boundaries. I began to understand our family story in the context of our true history through the journey of my convict great-grandfather who, when freed, headed out west to near Mungundi where he married my Gomeroi great-great-grandmother and established Bengerang station.

At art school during the late eighties, there was a lot of drug abuse. I was right in the middle of it all, but no matter how wasted I got I always kept working—it was my way of processing ideas, images, fears. Australia was in a state of turmoil at the time—topsy-turvy with the emotions the bicentennial 'celebrations' had exhumed, but I kept on drawing at home.

I could probably describe myself as fairly psychotic during this period from self-medicating to cope with the waves of realisations about the brutality of the frontier massacres as the horror of what had happened to our people became crystal clear in my mind.

The insights kept moving closer to the personal when I realised that my great-great-grandmother Caroline Carr had survived one of the many massacres. It was as if the inherited trauma of generations of suffering had taken lodging in my own body.

Gudrun Klix who was the head of the Ceramics Department at Sydney College of the Arts helped me through this period by encouraging me to realise that I really *was* an artist. Even so, I was just getting through by the skin of my teeth mainly as a result of the amount of time I was absent from classes. She could also recognise the reality of Australia at the time and could see the connections between the history, the events and my own behaviour—the fact that two centuries of official denial of the Aboriginal occupation of the land prior to 1770 had forced me into a position as an outsider.

Miraculously, I finally did graduate from art college even though I was suspended for taking too much time off during my final year and had to show just cause to get back into the institution again. No matter whether I was attending the institution or not, I'd kept working on my art. I'd moved around, living in squats and with a range of different groups of people, but I kept on making things in whatever circumstances I moved into. I'd pick up whatever I could and use it. At times I'd collect odd bits and pieces of wood and started carving, a meditative process I greatly enjoy, and a way of working that has continued into the kind of decorative ceramic work I do today.

After College I moved to a studio-workshop/store in Enmore Road with a friend. I worked there for eight years. We were prolific, and the work ethic we developed refined the way I still approach my art practice today. That period was like an apprenticeship on production and design for me. All the design work on the ceramics was carved. Before it all fell apart, Alana Rose and Gavin Flick, two Kamilaroi people from Moree came into the shop and asked whether they could commission a line of ceramics. They ran GAVALA, the first Aboriginal cultural centre at Darling Harbour, an extremely successful enterprise for which we produced the Kamilaroi Ceramics Collection for the Sydney Olympics.

“My connection to identity evident in my designs connects with history, place, the present and the future. I am a maker—I think through my making. The work I produce is the tangible evidence of this process of connection”.

Around the same time (1999) I met a Kamilaroi man who took me on my first trip to Country. He taught me cultural protocols and took me to Gil Gil Creek where my great-great-grandmother Caroline Carr was born in 1846. When we were there we lit a fire and I was encouraged to 'speak out loud' to her. I loved being on Country. Later in town I had people recognising me and asking if I was stolen generation. I had a complete breakdown a while after that time and ended up spending twelve months in *The Buttery*—a residential drug and alcohol rehab and therapeutic community near Byron Bay. When I got out I headed to Lismore to attend the Gnibi Indigenous College that's part of Southern Cross University. Before I'd gone to rehab I'd read *Trauma Trails* by Professor Judy Atkinson, who ran Gnibi. The way her book explained trans and intergenerational trauma helped me to understand my own experience and the way I felt.

I started a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies at the University of the Southern Cross, but left after two years when I became pregnant with my first son, Solomon, in 2005. My second son, Stan, was born in 2006. I was very pleased to have given birth to those two boys having had two miscarriages prior to conceiving Solomon. After about five years my relationship with the boys' father dissolved. At that time I was offered a job teaching ceramics to Aboriginal students at Lismore TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education). This was a very productive and connecting time for me. The boys were settled into good sleeping routines and this was when my art practice began to re-flourish. I was feeling more connected to my own culture and I was blossoming—producing work through stitched imagery on paper, collage on cardboard, and lots of experimental approaches that I constructed into books, many of which are now in our State Library's rare books collections. One is titled *Proof* and another *Mapping Genealogy*, a variable edition of five books.

During the three years I taught at TAFE I'd managed to buy an old gas kiln from Ballina as the urge to return to ceramics had resurfaced. I also had a big old wooden house in Lismore with plenty of rooms that could be used for studio spaces.

My sister had moved to Moree in 2004 and when I visited her I was able to reconnect to people and Country whilst also making many connections with local Gomeroi people who were living in and around the Northern Rivers. At the time, Arts Northern Rivers established various programs with funding, which facilitated connections through a series of workshops and programs.

During that time, I met Burri Jerome—an Aboriginal artist who made a profound impact on my understanding and knowledge of culture, identity and the importance of connecting with and caring for Country. When we met, I'd been taking my kids to Hat Head for holidays. Unbeknownst to me this was where Burri had grown up and knew all the Dreaming stories for that Country through his Mum. Burri was a deep-thinking philosopher and a phenomenal story teller who described how, as a child, his mob walked the New South Wales coast from Brisbane to Wollongong, staying in various camps and avoiding the mission system. I began producing my *Gorrogarah Binjul* series of ceramic diffusion ware—designs that grew from Burri's stories about the waters of that area, and also from my own sense of connection to that place. We were very close until sadly he died at the age of sixty-four in April 2017. He was an Aboriginal philosopher who had a deep understanding of western and other cultures—a Renaissance man whose name is widely respected in this area.

The ceramics design work I have produced has been commercially successful, and regrettably, to some extent I feel that this success may have negative repercussions on how I'm recognised as an artist.

I am concerned, therefore, that my production should always be considered as emerging through conceptual and cultural responses, even though it has functional value. My connection to identity evident in my designs connects with history, place, the present and the future. I am a maker—I think through my making. The work I produce is the tangible evidence of this process of connection.

In the last few years the frequency of my trips to Country has increased—last year on the Spring Equinox a group of seventy Gomeroi women met at Booberra Lagoon near Bogabilla to connect with each other on that very special site. We learned about bush medicines, painted up, danced together and made connections through our various family lines to place. The environmental degradation as a result of agricultural practices and water theft on our Country is distressing—so much of our water has been taken by the cotton farming and Bengerang Station is now a huge cotton farm. We are gathering again this year at Boobera—it's incredibly important for a sense of connectivity to Country and each other and being there transcends all the politics and issues that relate to our identities as decolonising peoples.

I am currently creating a body of work for the Indigenous Ceramic award at Shepparton Art Museum about freshwater mussels that I'm calling, "*Because you swallowed it hook, line and sinker*", referring to these damaging agricultural practices that need to stop on our Country. Entire ecosystems are in a state of major collapse. The freshwater mussels were one of the main sources of food for our ancestors evidenced by huge middens and also very important food sources for birds and animals. They provide a natural filtration system for Opur rivers and importantly were also used in ceremony. My boys are now twelve and thirteen and they've just been out to our ancestral waterhole for the first-time last year. This waterhole near where Nanna Caroline Carr was born is surrounded by many scar trees. It's like a time capsule from our past—our ancestor's camp ground near their bora—is surrounded by carved trees—it's a tiny time capsule from the past—it's part of our Songline that runs out to Narran Lakes past Walgett which is also very dry now. The impact on our Country distresses me on a daily basis. Connection to Country, my people and my culture is fundamental to my journey through this life as an artist.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Living in Northern New South Wales is much quieter and easier to negotiate; it allows me plenty of time to work uninterrupted in my studio as there are way less distractions than in the city. I am closer to my homelands so it's much quicker and easier to get on Country—to places like Mungindi, Garah, Boomi, Moree and Bogabilla. I'm also much closer to many national parks where I regularly camp with my children.

What might make it difficult?

Not having easy access to museum and art gallery collections in the major cities. Missing all the city has to offer culturally. When we flood in Lismore it can also be very difficult.

And what kind of benefits are there?

Clean air, space, time. Easier to bring up kids. Simpler lifestyle. Less choice can be good.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

We have a very creative community in the Northern rivers and a fairly diverse demographic for a regional area.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

I spent the first 35 years of my life in inner city Sydney so did not see myself living in Lismore at all—although I always had a fantasy about going bush and didn't realise it.

How does it feel now?

I'm settled here now with pretty good studio set up that there's no way I could afford in Sydney.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

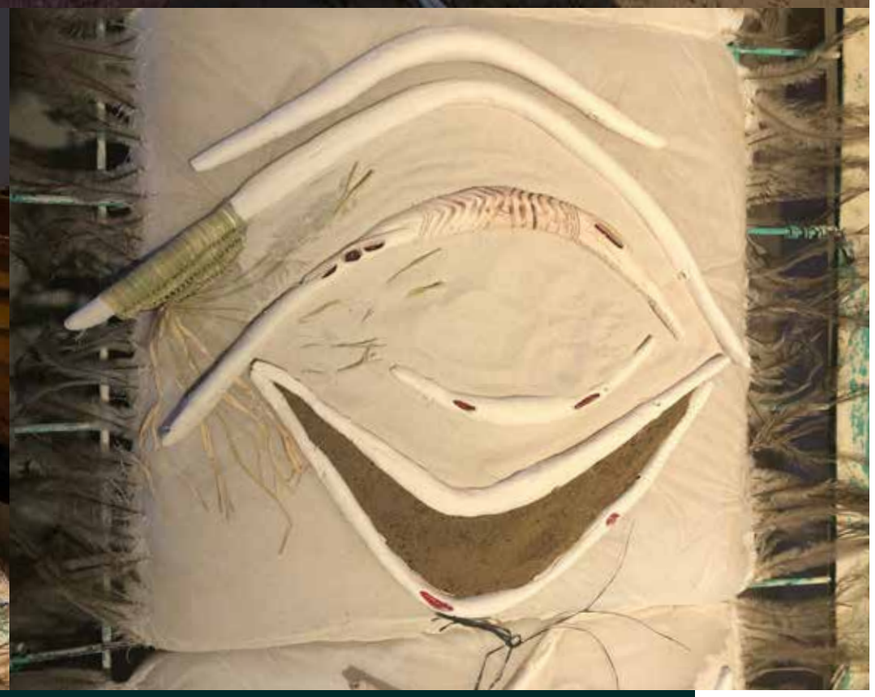
Much cheaper.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' and come back in again?

Not necessarily. With social media I get to see what's going on in the cities.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

This is very important for Aboriginal people. We migrate regularly back and forth regionally.



Photos: Vanghoua Anthony Vue (top and bottom-left) and Colin Langridge (bottom-right)

Penny Evans

Patient

2019

Cast iron bed, ceramic, emu feathers, sand, and cotton thread | Installation at Lismore Regional Gallery (2019), Riddoch Art Gallery (2020), and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

There exists a timeless relationship of interconnectedness. The energy that flows through trees is the same energy that flows through our selves. To destroy or damage the land is to destroy or damage part of ourselves.

I have been journeying back to my grandmother's Country—Northern Gomeroi/Gamilaraay Country—over the past 20 years and have been attending community organised gatherings in different locations throughout Country.

My Ancestors Country is what is referred to as the 'northern basin'. A waterhole, near where generations of my family were born survives between two massive cotton farms and is fed by Gil Gil Creek within the 'northern basin'. The waterhole is surrounded by scar trees—the memory and evidence of our occupation. Country is our spirit, culture, heritage. Our ancestors reside in Country. Everything is Country including our bodies and scars. This waterhole is a little gem just surviving in the vast ongoing monocultural nightmare created by the settler/colonisers.

Many of the creeks that feed these waterholes have been harnessed, the water being pumped through them at unnatural speeds carrying the stench of pollutant toxic chemicals used in conventional cotton growing. The northern basin is the epicentre of the Australian cotton industry which in my lifetime has developed into massive foreign owned agribusinesses. Our precious Country has been cleared and flattened to make way for broad acre monocultural cash crops. The development of the practice of damming floodplains has added insult to injury and are extreme in their size and the ecological damage and impact to land and waterways—our creeks, rivers, swamps, wetlands, warrambools….and everything that relies on freshwater, therefore the way of life of the Gomeroi Nation including plants, animals, birds, humans are severely impacted.

The settler state which suffocates Country, led by the agricultural barons in cahoots with politicians have been driving this destruction since the beginnings of pastoral migration in the 1830's. Our Gali, our cultural waters which are referred to as 'environmental flows' are tied up in deals for the next 10 years apparently…. How people will be able to remain on Country is hard to comprehend in the face of this shocking manmade disaster. Gomeroi have been locked out—fenced off Country and unable to perform ceremony and care for Country for 200 years.

This work comes from place which is within me, within Country, within damage, within spirit.

LISA GARLAND

My father comes from a family of twelve—one of his relatives arrived on the First Fleet in Launceston. My mother came from a family of three girls—part of a farming family that lived in a township called Milabeena, outside of Wynyard on the North-West coast of Tasmania. Mum and Dad met at a dance at the township of Myalla, near Milabeena. In those days Mum's parents didn't have a car, so she would have travelled to the dance on a horse and cart. Social events were held at the local hall, and Dad lived in the town and went to the dance with a bunch of mates. He was a footballer—the kind of guy my mother's friends used to plan ways of avoiding. They'd avoid even riding their bikes in front of his family home, famous for a range of raucous unruly local legends.

Nevertheless, they met, fell in love and married, and settled in Wynyard. My grandfather had bought my Mum a house. Dad was a miner, but he had a fall underground where he broke his neck and was unable to work from then on. I was about four at the time. I have an older brother and sister. My Mum worked at housecleaning every day to keep the household going. She worked at cleaning the same houses in Wynyard every day until recently—she turned 86 this year.

Dad was out of work and would try to do what he could to make ends meet, keep busy and fund his gambling habits. One of these alternative forms of income involved an illegal activity called whitebait poaching, a seasonal netting process where nets were cast to catch the 'tiddlies'. Our freezer was always full of packets of the sweet-tasting little fish. When he'd get caught, he'd usually keep his fines down by going to jail for short periods.

Everyone in the area knew about Dad, so my coping mechanism at Wynyard High was to maintain an aloofness. I loved school and didn't miss a day from grade 3 to grade 10. I liked the routine of it and I had a great bunch of friends. I also had a great art teacher—Michelle Round, who I felt kept a close watch on me. At home I always drew—I drew anything—I drew on anything—patterns, things that came to mind, mark-making on all kinds of scraps of paper—envelopes, the phone book, the margins of any reading materials.

By coincidence, Michelle moved to Hellyer College, a senior college in Burnie, to take up her role as the photography teacher at the same time I moved there. She was a brilliant teacher—a woman who saw value in everyone—who encouraged us towards developing an inner moral compass and a professionalism. It was a totally formal experience—Ms. Round encouraged me towards photography, and I was unaware that I had any particular strengths with the subject until she encouraged me to apply for art college. I was the first in my extended family to attend university. My parents had never really pushed a career pathway—my Dad was illiterate—most of my father's siblings had been expected to start contributing to the family income by Grade 3 through chopping wood, working on 'couta boats and other forms of work. Mum did it tough too, but both of them would always make sure they'd pick up anyone hitching a ride, and there was no-one in the area who would have to have an Orphan's Christmas on their own—our home and my grandmother's home were always open and welcoming to others. Mum had come from a well-to-do family, but she had a special spot for the take-it-as-it-comes attitudes of my father's side of the family. No-one was ever judged or was spoken down to because of the way they were dressed or their different ways. It makes a good mix. Still does. I was living with a friend's family in Ulverstone for my final year of senior college, and they helped me with my university application. I was accepted at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart and began my degree—I supported myself through Austudy and with some very important food post-packs sent in the mail by my amazing mother. She always did everything she could to help get me by, and food packs with some personal messages from home really worked. During my first year I boarded with a family at Austin's Ferry where I travelled in by bus every day to Hobart. Once I'd gotten on my feet I answered an ad on the art school wall and moved in closer to the city with a group of students. Art School years were some of the best years of my life. It was the first time I was making my own decisions—I had a growing sense of independence. I was aware of how good it was at the time—walking up those steps in the morning I'd catch myself thinking "this is just the BEST". I felt I could breathe—it was exhilarating meeting people who shared the same passions I did.

As the study progressed my confidence kicked in, my skills base developed and I loved the freedom of being able to choose a pathway for myself. When I look back there's some regrets from time to time that I decided to follow up those three years of studying art with a Diploma in Education rather than pursue Honours, but I was saddled with the responsibility of having to make a living—the responsibilities of work-and-income loomed large.

During my one year of Diploma of Education the art making was stopped in its tracks. I did two bouts of 'prac'—the second one, at a public all-boys school, was really enjoyable, and I could see the joy in education. My prac teacher was daunting and brutally honest; he would sit in the back of my classes and write pages of notes, but his frank advice helped me greatly.

But when I returned to the North West coast after training to be a teacher at the age of 22 I went straight into employment with a local newspaper. The job was really positive for my technical ability—it was during the days of film where we printed in the dark room. The newspaper work was challenging, but in the end I decided I needed a change. One lunchtime I walked around the corner, looked at the sign *Multicap* had posted asking for help setting up an art studio for people with disabilities. When I applied, they said 'yes' immediately. I resigned from the *Advocate*.

That job enabled me to move back towards working in a range of media—painting, drawing, sculpture—with some of the most entertaining and fun 'clients'. We began applying for grants on behalf of *Multicap* to bring a range of leading Tasmanian artists up to the North West coast to lead workshops. Although I loved it, the hours were high and the pay was low. After five years my application to teach photography and art at a local Catholic private school was accepted, I spent seven years working at Marist Regional College and then a further seven at Hellyer College, the college I attended as a student years before. After that I moved to a position of Learning Area Leader of the Arts at Don College in Devonport, a college for grades 11–12, where I still work.

When I returned to teaching I was able to devote more time to my own practice again. The excitement of making images again returned in full force, but the subject matter had turned around. The time that had passed had made me realise that I'd been 'taking my family for granted'—my

“Space, open space and time to consider and accept my space void of metropolitan interruptions. I spend my life near the ocean (twenty metres in fact). I always have (my childhood was doors away from a fishing jetty), I cannot imagine living without the sound of the ocean. It mirrors my pulse and my life rhythm. It keeps me in order”.

work opened a way to see them through fresh eyes. When I came back I could also see value in so many of the things I'd taken for granted—the incidental things—the people that make a community. Also, the work in the *Advocate* driving the country roads, and the work in the disability sector had opened paths into ways of seeing that changed the way I shot material.

Now I live in Preservation Bay, just before Penguin, with my partner who's a woodwork teacher and my son, who is 12. My partner is a doer—interested in constructing things that last. We live only metres from the ocean, in a wooden dwelling bursting with the stuff of our lives—books, objects, tools, toys, dogs. We cherish activities like fishing, jumping off jetties, bushwalking—all the things that my town had used to form me—space, quietness, the sea—they're all part of his life too now. And I keep on making visions of this.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Space, open space and time to consider and accept my space void of metropolitan interruptions. I spend my life near the ocean (twenty metres in fact). I always have (my childhood was doors away from a fishing jetty), I cannot imagine living without the sound of the ocean. It mirrors my pulse and my life rhythm. It keeps me in order. I did spend time living in a city and I felt muddled and at a loss; something was missing. This was when I was in my late teens, early twenties, hence too young to thoroughly process this feeling and find meaning in 'my home'. My mood and drive tends to be dictated by the weather. An Easterly brings a foreboding, heavy feeling, it becomes a time to reflect, worry and assess. A Westerly represents a cold change, a turn in your mood and time to work. A Northerly is directly off the ocean, this can bring a multitude of feelings depending on the temperature, a warm wind, and so on A Northerly brings breakthroughs and contentment. A Southern breeze, in my case, is off the land, an aging wind. I can write all this and know it but in reality I just go with the flow, I don't stop and process. It is innate. But due to my father, uncles and brother being commercial fishermen, the weather has always been mentioned, discussed and it has dictated life and how it rolls. It's funny really, what I have become in regards to my thoughts and lifestyle and where I live.

When life is busy and we are void of the impact of the land, the ocean and the elements, social trends and man-made issues impact on life and, I would imagine, the practice of an artist. My work is in response to the North West/West Coast of Tasmania and coastal living.

What might make it difficult?

The absence of a vibrant art community and happenings make it difficult. Living here, I am not able to be driven by viewing the work of my peers or the excitement in viewing new exciting work. This makes it hard and, at times, I feel I am missing out. Obviously the internet and publications become part of my motivation and art knowledge base. But it is still such a gift to see and witness the real thing. A visit to MONA is always magical and makes me just stop.

And where do the other challenges lie?

Being surrounded by folk that mean well but do not understand my practice and what I am driven by. It is not necessarily a challenge but it is just how it is. Artist conversations are few and am I mostly left to my own devices. Obtaining equipment and enlarger maintenance have had their moments, particularly when things go wrong close to an exhibition deadline and I have no-one to rely on in regards to expertise. It's frustration to the point of tears at times; small things such as when prints that are destroyed by framers or maybe it's just when people don't understand the making process. I mean it takes months—not just hours. Some of these grievances and happenings have stayed with me for years. I've learned the hard way and know that I have to be organised and self-sufficient.

But are these challenges worthwhile?

Totally. Nothing surprises me and if it does, hopefully I am organised and have the gear to problem-solve. I make sure I have the right fuses for my enlarger, extra lamps, multiple rolls of paper, fresh chemicals, an extra development tank, an extra enlarger. The list goes on.

And what kind of benefits are there?

Enormous benefits—the people are salt of the earth. I know where to go to get a fresh possum skin, bones, a fresh water lobster claw, I like this quirky stuff and I like people. Especially people that live off the land and have stories to tell. I am incredibly lucky.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

My local community (Penguin) has a small artistic community but the West Coast where I have a shack where I spend holidays and weekends is totally void of an artistic community. Our culture is the Sea Pod, a caravan next to the Arthur River that does great coffee and fish curry on the weekends. This is super exciting stuff and I am one of the first on her doorstep. Hopefully this doesn't bring an influx of hipsters. We like the beaches littered with driftwood, bull kelp and the footprints of dogs and locals enjoying the wild beauty of the untamed. Keeping it simple works for me and my practice—I simply document the find. Nothing is a façade or moulded; it is what it is, in its purest form.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

I never thought I would come home and live on the North West Coast of Tasmania, certainly not the West Coast. Without meaning to, I have just found myself in this space—returning home because of the importance of family, buying land because it seemed like a cheap block and then years on, here you are building a dwelling, raising children, surrounding yourself with animals and not ever imagining living anywhere else.

How does it feel now?

It feels content and just right. I really don't need anything (apart from a good reliable car to do the occasional overnight Hobart run to see some mighty fine art!)

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

There's a Print Prize and another Art Prize titled 'Tidal'. I would imagine that these would be the only occasions national artists would visit our shores or have any awareness of the North West Coast of Tasmania. Hobart is a different story. MONA has totally put Hobart on the map, but Hobart (I have felt) has always had a healthy art scene through Contemporary Art Tasmania, Despard Gallery and Bett Gallery etc.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

I would imagine so. I can live near the ocean, on its doorstep, very comfortably, in a home I own with a garden, two dogs, and chickens, an ocean in front, a farm behind me. I have a shack on the West Coast. A coastline that is wild and untamed. My home is 'cheaper' in regards to a passive lifestyle and space. However, I am lucky I have work. I would imagine that finding work that compliments your passion and interests would be hard to come by in a regional area. It also comes at a cultural cost. I am used to not being able to see good movies, eat great food, and see great theatre and art. But, I don't know any different really and I have evolved within this landscape; it's in my blood in a sense.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

It is. I know it is important to go to Hobart and Melbourne—it's important in regards to my drive and passion. I know I live in a great place that suits my personality and needs. I know this because I spent time living in Hobart and in Scotland. I know all this through comparison and just how I felt, I would neither be content nor productive artistically if I did not travel. I wouldn't know that my home has value and is totally okay and right for me.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

I think they are incredibly important; it is important to get out of your own backyard; to be open to new ideas and visions; to grow. It's also important for our youth and for our general wellbeing—important to share visions, stories and help great ideas become a reality. I read

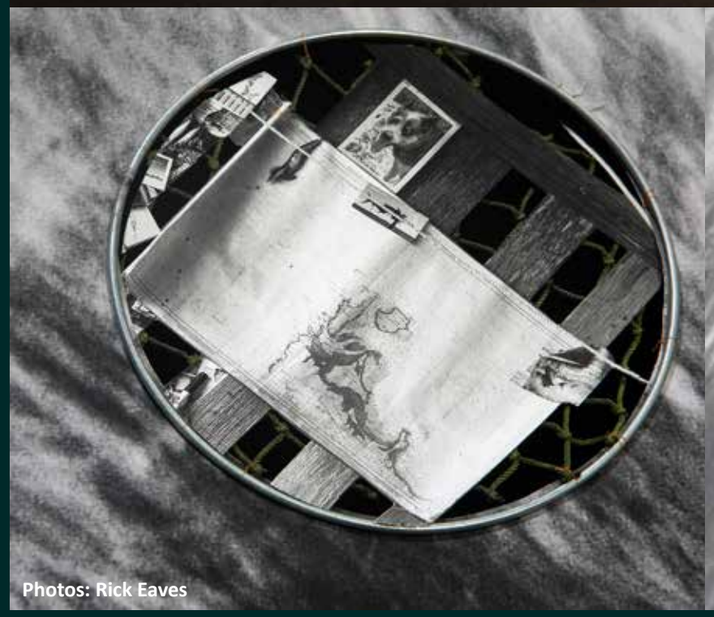
in the recent MOFO catalogue that during his visit to Launceston David Walsh realised the importance and value in bringing MOFO to Launceston. This vision and generosity shows empathy, and the fact that he understands the importance of culture and what it can bring to day-to-day lives. Such a lovely thing to do.

I think and believe people genuinely know that they are considered and listened to and, as a response, that they will give back. We need to share and consider all. Be one.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

I have a large family and luckily we all meet regularly. We discuss problems, rejoice in births, marriages etc. We help out with each other's children, grievances and general day-to-day problems. We are a tribe in a sense. This grounds me in regard to the statement above.

Luckily my phone rings regularly with news of family, coastal dramas and the hum of a close community. At this stage it is bigger than Facebook, Google and Netflix. That said, I do regularly ring Telstra with internet concerns or if I drop my phone it is like my life has ended. Hmmmm.



Photos: Rick Eaves

Lisa Garland

My Brother, the Fisherman

2018

Mixed media: photographic print, photographic printed silk, metal, net, fish carcass, rope, and bloats | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

Purdon fibreglass dinghy with a metal canopy montaged with photographs and a fishing net, placed directly on the vessel.

A metal spike is attached on each end of the fabricated canopy to suspend a fishing rope, spliced and attached to a shark hook and then attached to the carcass of a blue fin tuna.

Five circle shapes are cut out of the main form and five circle montages are attached, each cylinder form represents fish farming in Tasmania.

The images included document the ''wild fishing" as a craft and lifestyle which, with the inclusion and introduction of fish farming, will be lost.

I am from a strong lineage of fishing, my father was a fisherman, his father and now my brother. This is all centred on the North West Coast of Tasmania. From the North West tip of Woolnorth to the fishing village of Wynyard.

Wynyard is still home to tidal fish traps believed to be the result of the Aboriginal Tommeginer Clan. The rocks are still evident today and are protected under the Aboriginal Relics Act. The Tommeginer tribe lived in the region along the coastline around Wynyard and Table Cape until soon after the arrival of Europeans in the 19th century.

With European settlement came the Couta fishing trade. Wynyard wharf became a bustling port where Couta boats were being built on the banks of the Inglis River. The North West coast of Tasmania become home to numerous fishermen and a successful boat building trade.

Now we see the arrival of fish farming and the relocation of seal numbers from Southern Fish farms, wild fishing is on the decline on the North West Coast of Tasmania.

My family now fish for Southern Calamari (squid). It is sent to the fish markets in Sydney. This is what remains, it is sustainable and it enables my family to continue life on the ocean (for now).

I see my boat as a vessel to carry my sense of home and place.

DAVE mangenner GOUGH

with Nathan Slater

I'm a proud trawlwoolway Tasmanian Aboriginal man.

My mother is Tasmanian Aboriginal—my father, who is from Glasgow, Scotland, arrived in Australia when he was a little boy. I was born in Melbourne, Victoria in 1969 and while I was growing up the family moved when Dad was transferred to a range of destinations for work. He worked for Kodak for many years, and was eventually transferred to the position of Laboratory Manager of the laboratory in Perth.

My family separated while we were in West Australia—I was a young teen at the time. I wasn't completely focused on my schooling during that period—there were all kinds of personal upheavals and distractions, and when the family split up I stayed in Western Australia. I had formed a social connection with a group of friends during my teenage years, and spent about four or so years involved in crews of hip-hop street dancers. We'd meet in the city to dance together, and afterwards we'd split our earnings. It was a positive time—we kept an eye out for each other. Things weren't so easy, but there was a good supportive community feeling. I did an assortment of odd jobs to make ends meet, and stayed with friends. From time to time I travelled back and forth to Melbourne and Sydney to stay with Mum and then Dad, but eventually I ended up back in Perth again. I knew the city; I knew the streets. Although there was certainly a sense of harshness there, I knew the place well enough to feel a sense of security. I didn't really know a sense of community anywhere else. But as times changed and the scene changed and other music genres moved into favour, we all grew up and members of the groups moved on.

In my early twenties I got married. We wanted to move out of the city to seek some sense of peace and to remove ourselves from city life. The pull to return to bush on Country was strong, so my wife and I moved to the wheat belt in South-West Western Australia—one and half hours from Perth, where we purchased a run-down 1910 shopfront in a small country town.

Over twelve years, I restored and extended that building that stood right by the main highway. I became involved in the local Noongar community, and I learned a great deal about community, about Noongar culture, and developed a range of hands-on practical skills and survival skills. It was a time of great learning: about people, places and connection. It was a time that's shaped me a great deal. We were thirty-five kilometres from Narrogin, the nearest town that had a shop, so in the beginning I had to hitch-hike down the highway to get food every week until I had the skills to cobble a vehicle together from an assemblage of old parts.

During that time, my sister Julie had returned to Tasmania where our Aboriginal heritage and family are connected. I was always dreaming about ways to get back home; the draw to return was very strong. Julie was instrumental in helping me come back many times to connect with Country. Whenever I was away from my Tasmania I'd hold her in my heart; trying to create a sense of a supportive community when we lived in rural West Australia. We were a close-knit community at that time.

When I left the South West, we moved back to Perth where I undertook more conventional employment working in the automotive industry where I worked my way up within customer service. We bought a house in the city. But after I'd returned to Tasmania for a few holidays I decided I had to move to Tasmania. The yearning to be on home Country was too strong and evident. At the same time my mother was also talking of returning to Tasmania from living in rural Victoria. Julie was living in Hobart, but both Mum and myself were keen to move to East Devonport, where we have strong family connections and it's my mother's special childhood place. In 2010 we returned, and since then I've been heavily involved in my community, my culture and the protection of my land. I've served roles in Aboriginal conservation, with Tiagarra, the Aboriginal Museum and Cultural Centre in Devonport, and as Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Advisory board of the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston. Our aims to build a gallery for our people—the Gallery of the First Tasmanians through working with the Launceston Council and the State Government to acquire the funding to build a state of the art gallery, have been realised: we now have a gallery that's been nominated for three museum awards! And highly commended.

I constructed the dioramas and many of the objects in them. Because so much of our history has focused on the thirty years of fighting during the Black Wars, the decision was made to re-focus attention on the clans and tribes that had supported each other during the process of living on this land in a sustainable manner for at least fifty thousand years.

After I was elected to the Aboriginal Heritage Council of Tasmania, over a two-year period we focused on changing the state legislation protecting Aboriginal heritage sites in Tasmania. We've been successful in changing the former legislation by making six amendments to the Act, and as a result we have established recognition through legislation that Tasmanian Aboriginal culture is ongoing. The previous Act had stated that our culture had ceased in 1876 with the death of Truganini, so the overturning of this statement meant that we were able to make claims for recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture as ongoing and vital. The penalties for destroying Aboriginal heritage have also been raised to be equitable with those applied to the destruction of other cultural heritage sites. We've changed history in achieving these changes, and for me personally, this is a source of great pride.

For the past seven years I've worked as a sharer of Aboriginal knowledge working with the younger generations. For the past three years I've also held the role of Cultural Advisor to the University of Tasmania; in that role I advise the university on cultural matters and perform in a number of other roles at open days and education days at the university; serving on cultural awareness training; leading Welcome to Country ceremonies in the north-west of the state, and at the opening of Orientation Days.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Where I live, and the bulk of what I do now, is not located a city; I'm living seven kilometres from where my family survived during colonisation in a small town they started in 1847 and settled the area as the granddaughter of a chief of a nation on the east coast and a convict. I'm living and breathing on what for me is sacred land. It's taken me a long time to get here. I feel this through my

“There’s some land here that my community looks after and protects—it’s half an hour from here—I go onto that land to re-charge so that I can once again return to sitting at the same table as government members—to do what I need to do in terms of securing what needs to be secured for my people and my Country”.

family—they're all from here. We would have stayed here if we hadn't been displaced by British colonisation. I see it as my own Country. The effects of generational trauma and displacement are part of what tore me from here and what I deal with on a daily basis. I'm trying to help the younger generations and other generations understand what's happened in the past in order to move forward and heal. My main focus is on protection of Country and searching for ways of living on the land in terms of low impact. I've been involved in the movements to protect the Tarkine, our ancient forests and our landscapes—I feel I am a vessel driven by my ancestors to protect Country.

What might make it difficult?

That's a hard question—because so many people now want to know about our culture here, a lot of the questions inevitably come with the challenge of negotiating political decisions. I'm passionately driven to protect Country, and to teaching our young people and I have to engage with government to make these decisions. As a result, it's hard for me and also for the people around me who are affected by the amount of time and energy I have to devote to these objectives.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

The responsibilities of living on Country here—the responsibilities of community and place—weigh heavily on personal resources. It's had its difficulties, but in order to avoid overloading you have to mediate the ways in which you work, and the number of projects you take on. For the last Ten Days on the Island I did an installation called *Resilience*, that I situated in the grounds at Tiagarra—it's that kind of resilience that you have to build up and draw from if you are to survive as a cultural worker who's dedicated to working closely with community and place.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

The kind of projects I'm working with and developing are community based—I tend to try to build opportunities to develop 'art projects' into the kinds of cultural activities that are ongoing and that change the communities not only in terms of their engagement with the work, but also in building in ongoing practices that require the community to re-engage—both with each other and with place. So yes—these kinds of projects do fundamentally alter both local communities and local places.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

Yes to be honest, I did. As I matured, I was driven to return to doing what I'm now doing. My own Country, as a trawlwoolway man, is traditional Country in the North-East of Tasmania. It's a complex history—many of us carry hurt and sadness as a result of what's happened and as a result of dispossession, so that point of communicating again has not been an easy process. There are all kinds of issues involved in connecting with Country and heritage and the mixed feelings that come along with it, and dealing with them is more or less a daily struggle.

Much of my sister Julie's art has addressed the impact of the Black Wars on our family. Both Julie and I have discussed evidence of this history publicly—everyone is still trying to work through how these things have impacted on us to the present day. It's had a major effect on all of us. It's part of healing and part of continuing our traditions.

How does it feel now?

I know I'm where I'm supposed to be, and doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I light my fire sticks up, I walk on my own Country, and in the same week I'm also knocking on the door of government and doing the best I can to walk in two worlds. There's some land here that my community looks after and protects—it's half an hour from here—I go onto that land to re-charge so that I can once again return to sitting at the same table as government members—to do what I need to do in terms of securing what needs to be secured for my people and my Country.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

I know I have to regularly 'return to Country'. If I do too much, I get depleted. I go onto Country and I come back re-charged. But I also feel that when I'm sharing Country with people—with schools and children—I get fed back myself, and the symptoms of the generational trauma is appeased as my culture gives me strength and replenishes me. I am both a learner and a teacher—it's an ongoing process of learning from others and giving back to others.

What is the role of your work?

My passion for protecting my Country, my landscape and my heritage.

Photos: Rick Eaves

Dave mangenner Gough

with Nathan Slater

Te Waka a trawlwoolway (the Canoe/Boat of trawlwoolway)

2020

Tanned kangaroo hides, video, handmade rope, rock, wood, sand, and hand prints on hull | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018), Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019), Lismore Regional Gallery (2020), Riddoch Art Gallery (2020), and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

When non-Aboriginal people brought glass to my Country, and my ancestors found that broken glass, they identified its use to their gain and practices. They hit and shaped that glass into precision tools.

I decided to engage and work on this project with my friend, Nathan Slater. Myself, being a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, a trawlwoolway man and Nathan being of Maori decent, both from island cultures.

Together we hunt, skin and tan hides, fish, dive and stay on Country. Together we connect with cultural crossovers. We see place and landscape in ways to utilise in our practices, respect, and protect into the future. We also see how the changing world and different resources can become available to use in our practices. These new materials may alter some process but the result is still achieving our cultural aims: resilience and adaptability with cultural strength.

JAMIN

My Dad was a working-class man from the New South Wales central coast. His father—my Pa—worked for fifty years as a fitter-and-turner on the railways. Pa was one of thirteen children, an avid fisherman who could turn his hands to anything. He'd work with both metal and woodwork to make beautiful cabinets and tables where he'd fashion all the fittings, hinges and sliding brackets, and he'd produce finely tuned functional objects like fishing reels. He was always working on projects and most of them were completely practical. He brewed his own beer and, as the practical demands of that project necessitated a bottle-capping machine, that's what he engineered and constructed. He'd always hold us kids enthralled—he claimed he could knit two pieces of string together in his mouth with his tongue. And he did! To this day I'm not sure whether he could actually do this trick or whether his success lay in duping us for all these years—he had a ton of tricks up his sleeve.

Nan loved cooking and knitting and she loved Pa—they were sweethearts in kindergarten. She died at eighty-eight and Pa died at ninety-four. He'd been pushing his dinghy out through the mud onto the Hawksbury River to go fishing right through until his last years.

My dad was the third to be born after a sister and brother. Dad grew up during the depression and could well remember the family's struggle to get through the economic hardships. He recalled his years growing up as being a deep thinker; in his early teens he'd skip school to simply take long walks and think. Conscious of the family's economic struggles, he quit school at fifteen to work as a clerk at the Commonwealth Bank. Every week he'd hand his wage over to his parents. Throughout his life this kind of selflessness was a hallmark of how he operated in the world. But he was practical and just got things done as well. During his late teens when he grew tired of the challenges of his crooked teeth; he didn't waste any time mucking around—he just took himself to the dentist, had them all ripped out and got dentures.

After his stint at the Commonwealth Bank, he joined the Reserve Bank of Australia, and was offered a managerial job in Papua New Guinea where he worked for ten years. He learned Pidgin English and immersed himself in the culture there. He made friends with the then Prime Minister of Papua, and collected a lot of art and cultural artefacts from the region, often as received gifts, and brought them back with him when he returned to Australia.

Looking back, I realise that the artefacts and objects that filled our family home were a huge influence on my later development as an artist. There were creatures with cowrie shell eyes and alligator-skin initiation drums and a walking stick with a crocodile head that had a very powerful energy surrounding it. Amidst all these objects were other objects that my mother had brought from India. It was all part of our family's sense of home. But when I'd visit the homes of other children I realised that they weren't populated with the same kind of cultural menagerie of creatures, objects and sculptures that ours was.

When Dad returned to Australia he met Mum, who was also working with the Reserve Bank. Ten years younger than him, she had migrated with her family from India some five years before they met. My Mum is of Anglo-Indian descent—one of four children born in Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu. Her mother, of mainly English descent, was a magnificent cook of whose family had lived in India for several generations—she seemed thoroughly Indian to us! Mum's father was an engineer and architect of Indian descent. He passed away before any of us grandchildren were born, but he was apparently a stern and learned man whose focus on the importance of education and knowledge was shared by his children. But in 1969, when the family made the decision to move to Sydney from India, my mother had to abandon her Bachelor of Arts degree before her third and final year. To this day there's a sense that Mum looks back on this lost opportunity with some longing.

My parents courted for six months before they married, and my older sister was born a year and a half after that. Four girls and one boy (me!) were born across a space of nine years. Over that time Dad was transferred around the country for work at the Reserve Bank. The time I remember most vividly of those childhood years was the time spent in Darwin, where we lived for four years. I remember long hot twilight drives in the family car, the lush vegetation, the potent smells, silhouettes of the casuarina trees, and going to Berry Springs for swims. Those special times there were overlaid with an added spice—coz you just knew there were crocs submerged somewhere under that watery perfection. All of us kids were uncomfortably familiar with the terrifying spectre of *Sweetheart*—the stupendously large stuffed crocodile that holds pride of place in the Northern Territory Museum.

I can recall the occasion we had to tape up all the windows of the house prior to the onslaught of Cyclone Max—how we had to drive slowly through the sheets of horizontal gusts of rain to the bank, where we took shelter while the cyclone raged outside. And when we came home, I can remember being astonished about the fact that the huge tree in our backyard we always climbed on had been completely flattened. Our childhood in Darwin meant playing in the rain, sailing paper boats down rushing gutters, attacking a swollen banana bunch with a makeshift sword—and being amazed and terrified when the banana wasps swarmed in protest. The force of place and nature appeared in all kinds of forms during that magical time.

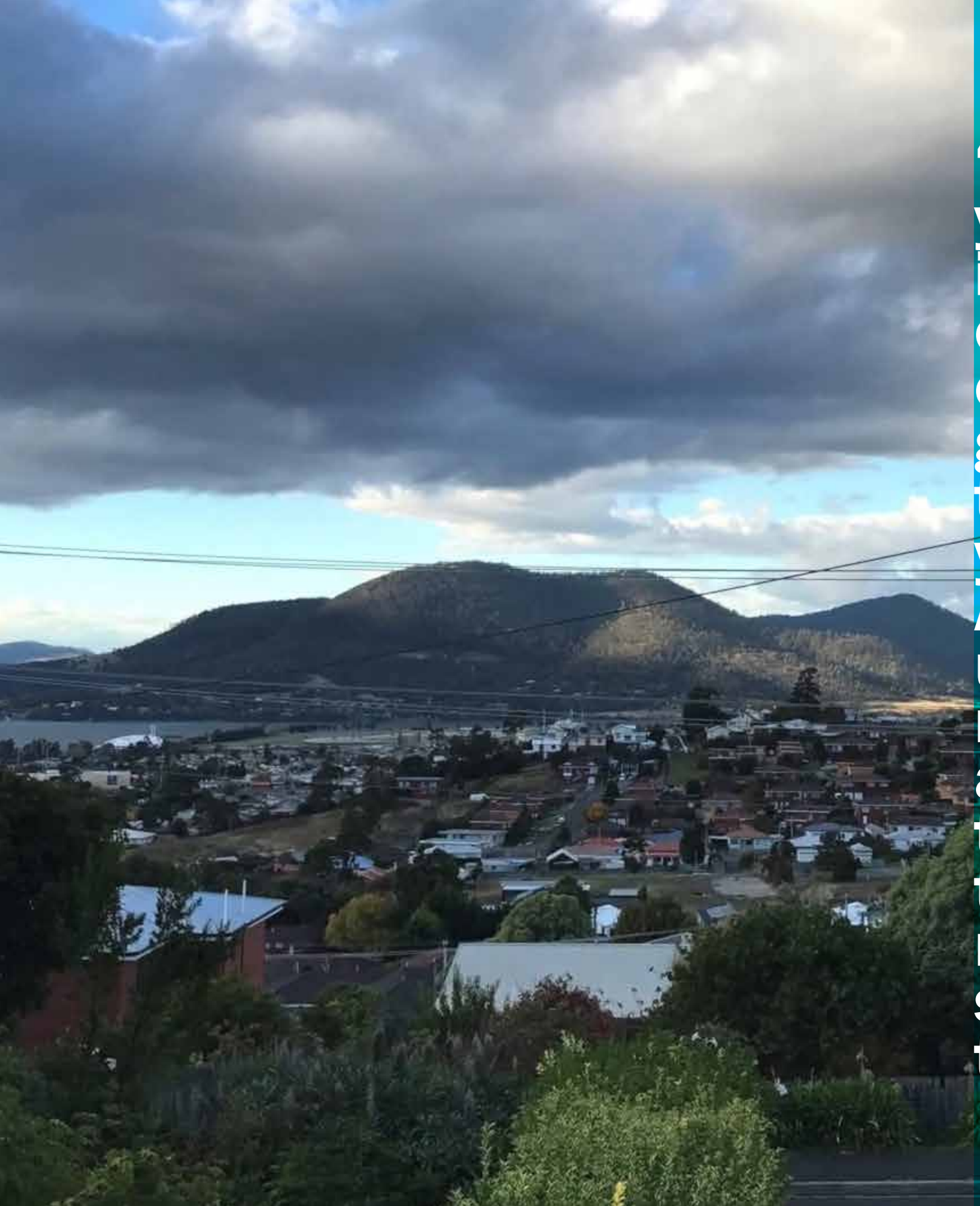
I was turning eleven by the time our family moved to Hobart. I loved school—especially art. I'd put a lot of energy into illustrating whatever I could—even if we had writing assignments. I can vividly remember Grade four. The 'class artist' was a kid who had a talent that everyone celebrated. I can remember looking hard at how he did things and when there was a class competition to draw an Australian bird, I put all my energy into the visuals and won with a drawing of a kookaburra. Looking back, I can see that subconsciously I would imitate and steal bits and pieces of ideas and recombine them in new ways. I'd been an altar boy for a time as we were educated at Christian schools, and so for some time I had considered joining the priesthood. That was all overturned when I won that Grade four competition with the kookaburra drawing.

But during grade twelve, a prolonged bout of glandular fever had affected my study badly. In the end, I'd had to drop nearly every subject but art. I'd wanted to go to art school but had been warned against it by an older friend. Instead, I continued into a year thirteen optional year at Rosny College concentrating on a variety of art subjects, and was doing well. But six months into it, I was offered an apprenticeship at a local printing press in graphic design. I ended up working there for five years, where I developed a good cross-range of skills in the pre-press area of the print industry.

But by 1999 I was tired with the industry. I resigned and my application to art school was accepted. 1999 was a big year. At the age of sixty, my father died of a sudden aneurism. He had lain suspended in a coma for two weeks until the family finally had to make the decision to switch off life support. I was twenty-four at the time. On the same year I broke off with my sweetheart of four years. The millennium—with all the gloomy predictions of the time—was on its way.

I loved my time at art school but the energy of dealing with grief took its toll. The joy of inquisitiveness that had characterised my experiences during the first year turned inwards towards a focus on death and grief and a kind of spiritual search. I was only half-way through the course when I decided to quit after second year—but even so, a lot of rich material had emerged for me. I set off on a driving trip with no destination. I lived in my van here and there around the island. After a few months living near Port Arthur, I met some people who'd been living in Mullumbimby. I moved up there to live for a year. I wasn't earning a living during this time—I was just focused on working through this grieving process—it was something I had to do. I'd always been lucky to have such a strong father figure; I felt like I'd lost my rudder.

I met my now-past but then-future wife, Sally, in Mullumbimby—she'd made her way to the region from Tamworth. I hadn't seen my mother for a about a year and I felt strongly the desire to go home to see her again. I felt like I'd reached some kind of inner peace and that I was ready to make the return trip, and Sally was keen to come with me. Whilst we were in Tasmania, Sally fell pregnant with our son. River was born in 2003. The period of pregnancy and the arrival of my son was a turning point for me. I was able to think with more retrospect, and it came to me that I had had difficulties in actually completing things—I hadn't completed my TCE, or my trade, or art school. I knew that this predisposition was going to have to change, so I reapplied for art



“... as an artist you’re much closer in proximity to all other sectors of the community—from government officials to gallerists and to your fellow artists. As a result, you end up forming these relationships, bonds and links that seem to take much longer to form in the bigger metropolitan cities simply on the basis that they’re further apart”.

school and completed my degree.And everything *had* changed—I had developed a completely different attitude—I felt I'd turned things around. I was offered Honours in 2005, and when I graduated with a first class Honours, I took on a Masters degree in 2006. While I was still enrolled in Honours, Criterion Gallery approached me to consider being represented by them. I was super-productive over that time—I also became immersed in street art and stencilling and protest art, and there was plenty of subject-matter to focus on in terms of the global wars and tensions that were erupting, as well as surfacing corruption of politics in Tasmania—and beyond. I became heavily involved in the early Australian street art scene, as well as the Artist Run Initiative (ARI) scene in Tasmania, as well as Melbourne and Sydney.

I also took on a raft of management and board responsibilities: I got involved as a board member and chair for *INFLIGHT* ARI over a five year period, during which time we took the exhibition schedule from twelve shows to almost thirty shows a year; we argued for and were successful in achieving increased funding—it was a time of energy and expansion. After that I helped kick-start *Redwall Gallery* with Clair Field, where we showcased emerging artists. My main responsibilities lay in the advertising and promotions for the gallery but we were both involved in curatorial decisions. Later on, I joined the board of Contemporary Art Tasmania (CAT) from about 2008–2010.

I started teaching at University while I was still undertaking my Masters; I was heading up second year graphic design as well as tutoring and lecturing across a number of other subject areas. I'm still in touch with a number of the students I taught during that time—many of them ended up getting jobs at MONA (the Museum of Old and New Art) later on.

Originally I was quite antagonistic to, or critical of MONA—I was cynical about the presence of such a large fish emerging from such a small pond—and I was sceptical about the impact it would make on the cultural ecology of Tasmania. I made an animation for the Plimsoll Gallery in 2013 that tracked the funding of galleries and art institutions in Hobart, tracing a process through which the arrival of MONA absorbed so much of the oxygen bubbles from the 'pond'. And whilst this has played out in such a way, MONA has brought many benefits as well, and stimulated the release of some new 'oxygen'.

The next significant turning point for me was in 2008 when my daughter Mia was born. I'd been teaching at the university for three or four years, and the workload had been steadily increasing. I was carrying the responsibilities associated with course writing as well as lecturing in a range of subjects with long hours of preparation as well as teaching and marking, but with no sense of ever being offered tenure. I was becoming increasingly exhausted—and aware of the fact that I was spending most of my time developing other people's ideas. The time I was able to spend on my own work was becoming increasingly cramped; I had begun to say no to lots of opportunities that were arising for my own practice as an artist. By 2011 my sense of disillusionment was reaching a pitch—I felt like so many of the things I valued most in terms of what I loved about art were slipping through my fingers as a result of the dedication required to teaching at the university.

But during the later half of 2011 all that changed, after receiving a studio residency in Paris through the University. I'd spent the first months there with my family, and later alone, and I realised how much my practice was appreciated and supported by the other artists from other countries who were working alongside me. I felt acknowledged as an artist. I'd gone there with a subliminal sense that Tasmania was so small and that therefore my experience as an artist was insignificant, but in Paris I felt equal to my peers—on a par with all the other artists who were working there. That's what kicked off the strength of conviction I needed to resign from teaching in 2012. It was a big step to take, and it was a scary one too. I haven't gone back to teaching. I also backed off the ARI commitments, the board commitments, the networking commitments that demand so much energy and time. And that's what I've been doing since—working full-time as an artist, whilst concurrently completing a PhD.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

I've been living and working in Hobart most of my adult life—I think of it as home, and while I was living in northern New South Wales during that crucial time of re-thinking, the fact that Hobart *was* home grew increasingly stronger, and so when I drove back, the community that I'd left behind was uppermost in my mind. That was the driver that pushed me towards becoming so immersed in the community work with Inflight and ARI's and in other areas. You give up a lot for these kinds of commitments, so the motivation has to go beyond self-interest. In fact, self-interest isn't going to provide you with the energy to push you through the fatigue that kind of work inevitably entails. All aspects of art have to be self-driven—not just the work in the studio, but also the promotion, the distribution etc.—whether you are with a commercial gallery or not.

Along with the gallery work, I've been involved with a very broad spread of community projects—from school groups, to groups over sixty five, to migrant groups. It takes a lot of energy encouraging techniques and conceptual ideas, but the benefits lie in the fact that some aspects of what you forge are lasting, I started doing this kind of engagement fourteen years ago, and now some of those kids I took in workshops have gone on to make a life through their art. I undertook a number of exchanges with Sydney and Melbourne during the mid to late 2000's, and the main difference I noted lay in how close everything is in Hobart; as an artist you're much closer in proximity to all other sectors of the community—from government officials to gallerists and to your fellow artists. As a result, you end up forming these relationships, bonds and links that seem to take much longer to form in the bigger metropolitan cities simply on the basis that they're further apart. In the music scene you can't really have a genre existing in isolation down here. If people just gravitated to their own particular scene in Hobart, it would be too small to support individual gigs, so a guy who might be an industrial techno fan would also go to a punk venue or a reggae gig. This creates a vibrant mix of style and interests, and that's one of the real strengths of the place. In my own work, that mix of styles and techniques is apparent and it's been productive. When I first started out doing the political stencil work I could have continued by focusing on that alone, but I was aware that it only appealed to a small part of my community, so I always feel motivated to have a 'broader palette' in my art practice—one that reaches other members of the public.

What might make it difficult?

Probably exactly the same thing—that closeness creates something I call a kind of 'held-ness'—as if something is holding you very closely and wants you to remain in a state of what it recognises you to be. You have to keep breaking out of this—to keep becoming. I've been doing abstract work for gallery exhibitions for some five years, but last year when I exhibited another development on that line of work, a newspaper review focused on my 'change in direction'. There's an unstated expectation perception that we should continue to produce art in a recognisable form … so that we're containable.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

Tasmania is like a microcosm within Australia—one where the small size of the population brings you into direct encounter with situations and experiences, rather than able to play the role of observer. For example, from time to time my own practice has often been politically critical, and the audiences to those exhibitions have more often than not included individuals who are directly connected with those things that I'm critical of.

The challenges are totally worthwhile—they're always what make us who we are. The unique challenges of a particular place encourage adaptation, and that in turn builds strengths. The benefits of living in Tasmania are immediately obvious—proximity to nature, the high quality of air, of food and of life in general—and once again, that sense of a shared community with supportive colleagues and great opportunities are also wonderful aspects of living here.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

Yes I think they have a huge effect. It's a curious one—'local community' is such a broad term—there are so many different communities involved in what could be described as 'local'. And there's different effects on different communities. On a personal level, for example, I've been involved in the fit-outs of five or six local restaurants and so those aesthetics and perceptions that have become closely linked with those environments have influenced a sector of the community who visit them regularly, and who may not be aware of my role as an artist per se. But the work is shaping their world in some way. And then there are the communities that are extensions of the exhibiting world—they're totally different again. As are the kinds of communities I work with in workshop situations.

In terms of the Green Movement and the protests surrounding old growth forests and other threatened ecological zones, many artists have turned their energies towards those agendas rather than promoting their own role as isolated artists. This kind of commitment to causes beyond the world of art is very self-sacrificing, but has resulted in an enormous influence on Tasmanian issues.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

The answer to that question might have more poignancy if I'd come from somewhere else—coz the response is a definite 'yes'. Because Tasmania is an island, it involves a boat or a plane to get out, and if you're considering a move, it's a bit more difficult. Plus it has so many things that keep you here. It's a hard place to get out of once you're here. My father used to talk about the importance of getting off the island at least once a year.

How does it feel now?

Since I returned from Paris in 2011 I've had a really strong desire to see other places and to work in other communities overseas. Having a young family, there's a limit to how long I'm able to spend overseas at the moment, but as my kids are getting older, new possibilities for travelling are growing. I'm committed to Hobart as a base, though—there's comfort and support that comes from having your community around you.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

I feel like I've had a good run with opportunities in other states—I don't feel disadvantaged in any way from operating from a regional base. When we first started out in 2004/05, we had a street art collective called *Die Laughing* made up of Tom O'Hern, Mick Pace and myself. When we were invited to the Melbourne Stencil Festival it seemed as though our work had a particular style and aesthetic that stood out—being different did us a favour—in that sense the experience of working away in Hobart was advantageous.

In other ways—such as finding gallery representation in other states, things are more difficult. Because you're not living there, you're seen as somewhat of an unknown, so there are positives and negatives. In general we don't see as much representation of Tasmanian artists in the metropolitan centres, and that's the same for music… for about thirty years our biggest contemporary music exports was Wild Pumpkins at Midnight. We have very few emerging or mid-career visual artists who have had that kind of national recognition—mind you, we only have five hundred thousand in the entire state, so statistically that might work out fine.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

There would be multiple schools of thought on that—my sister pays what seems to me to be a huge amount for rental for her flat in Sydney but a recent report found that Hobart is now the most expensive place to rent in Australia on a per capita basis.

There's an island tax that's applied to all goods that come into the state—including fuel. However in the last ten years we've had some stores moving in that have maintained a flatter pricing structure. But Australia is not a cheap place to live any more, post GFC.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Like my Dad said—it's super-important. This place is like a bubble—you could easily live your entire life here and not realise that it's a very odd and distinct microcosm.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

That's where a lot of the glue is—and possibly a lot of the solvent. When I was working with galleries and organisations I really enjoyed doing exchanges with places like Alice Springs and the touring programs that linked exhibitions to other galleries around the country. For me personally Ballarat has been an important regional town. The gallery purchased some of my work and as a result has involved me in workshops there. One of the benefits of Hobart is that it can be both a capital and a regional area—it can play the part of each

Do you think place is important…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

Place remains one of the most important things affecting one's life and career. We're indelibly linked to place in so many ways. Global marketing has created a 'global village' and might have gone a long way towards bringing down of some of those artificial boundaries. Yet if social media was as efficacious as it's claimed to be, then we wouldn't have that feeling of each being in our own little bubble. That being said, my recent invitation to Russia was made possible through my presence on Instagram.

What is the role of your work?

I think the role of my work is possibly the same as the work of the kind of art that's focused on challenging perceptions, hierarchies and the status quo. Art that performs those functions in any society can often be the first thing that's suppressed or even prohibited or controlled.

I see myself as a provocateur who's somewhat chameleonic, so the role of what I do and what I produce will probably continue to change.

Photos: Rick Eaves

Jamin

The Gap Between Worlds

2018

Assemblage: wood, mirrored mylar, LED lights & components, string, tape, and fixings | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

Within my practice as an artist, I come into contact with, and intersect, a broad range of social and cultural groups and individuals: producers, purveyors and consumers. I am intrigued by the depth of knowledge and specialisation that can occur within one person or grouping that remains occulted, or shrouded in mystery, to another. Like a myriad of worlds that can be glimpsed, but rarely, if ever, entered into. In the German language, the word *umwelt* (literally environment) has a nuanced meaning that describes how each organism has a particular experience of the world based on its capacity to sense, and make sense. How differently a bee experiences the world to a human! Cascading multiplicities of separate experiences overlapping each other through space and time.

This work is a meditation on *umwelt* and specialisation—of how connected we are, and yet ultimately how separate our experiences of life are from one another.

JOAN KELLY

I had a very interesting and enjoyable childhood; there were many things to keep me occupied. I always seemed to be surrounded by people from other countries whose different clothes, food and language presented never ending areas of interest. My maternal grandparents were from England and my father's parents, although born in Australia, were of German descent. Visits to grandparents were an adventure and at times challenging, as the German grandparents expected children to be seen and not heard.

My mother, who was born in England, had come to Australia with her parents when she was six years old. The family settled at Wonthaggi in South Gippsland, Victoria where her grandfather gained work caring for the pit ponies at the coal mine. The small horses were used to bring the coal to the surface. When an opportunity arose to purchase a small farm, the family moved to Labertouche and later to Modella in South Gippsland.

My paternal grandmother, whose parents were German, was born at Woods Point, a gold mining town in Victoria and after marriage to grandfather (also with German parents), they settled at Jeparit in Victoria. My grandmother was a music teacher and grandfather worked with German relatives on wheat farms in the area. My father was born at Jeparit during the First World War and as his family had difficulty finding work at the time, they moved to Melbourne where his parents managed a boarding house and a laundry. My father completed his schooling in Melbourne and afterwards trained as a plumber.

The Depression years left many without jobs so my father joined other unemployed young men and travelled to the country in search of work in the Modella area where land was being cleared and fenced for farming. It was during this time he met my mother at a dance at Modella where her mother was the pianist. Following a four-year courtship and marriage my parents share-farmed briefly at Bunyip before purchasing a small farm at Iona on the edge of the Kooweerup Swamp which had been drained in the early 1900's and divided into twenty acre blocks as part of the Closer Settlement Act for Soldier Settlement after WW1.

I was born during these years, followed eighteen months later by a brother and five years later by another brother. My brothers and I did not see much of our father during the early years of our childhood as he was gone before we were awake and arrived home after we had gone to bed. As a result my older brother and I were kept busy as jobs had to be completed before our father arrived home. Like many men on the land at the time, my father milked a small herd of cows, grew carrots for the cannery—the Second World War had begun—dug potatoes on surrounding farms and worked shifts at a local Butter Factory.

I can remember cutting maize with a brother and placing the cut stalks into bundles for my father to collect when he arrived home in the evenings.

During the war years life changed as food and clothes rationing was in place and many food items such as sugar, flour and chocolate were in short supply. Clothing from older brothers, sisters and cousins were handed down. Women in the family began knitting woolen socks for the soldiers. School children helped make camouflage nets for the army. In answer to recruitment advertisements, my father tried to enlist but because of his German ancestry and the fact he was a farmer, he was not selected. I remember that he was quite upset as he felt he was an Australian and was certainly fit enough for the army.

The early 1940s were alarming for me; as a small child I can remember peering through a hole in the front hedge to watch Australian Army personnel training on the road in front of our house. Iona was not far from Western Port Bay where rumours had spread across the country that a Japanese mini submarine had been sighted close to shore. The whole community was concerned; I can recall feeling frightened as I watched the soldiers perform their drill and listened to the women in the family discussing what might happen if submarines landed.

I was drawing at an early age and as I began to draw the things around me, my parents provided pencils, crayons and colouring-in books. However, I preferred to create my own pictures and always was on the look-out for paper which was scarce at the time. The local butcher wrapped the weekly meat order in white paper and I asked my mother to make sure the butcher did not put blood on it. My English grandmother also gave me the out-of-date Victorian telephone directories which contained many pages with small print. I could draw on these with a black crayon. Several years later, an aunt, who lived in Melbourne brought bundles of white paper off-cuts from a friend who worked at a paper mill.

When I reached school age, I rode a bicycle to a small country primary school at Iona. I had to ride past a large Catholic Church, Presbytery, Nunnery and primary school which had been established for the large number of small land holders including soldier settlers from World War 1 and migrants who were living in the area. Many were Catholics. My family were Protestant and were very much in the minority amongst the large Catholic community. However, there were other non-Catholic families living nearby. I observed my surroundings with interest and wondered why the students attending the Catholic School wore neat uniforms and the teachers, who were nuns, wore long dark habits with white wimples. The scene made an impression on me, and nuns and students in uniform began to appear in my many drawings. I even imagined that I might like to become a nun. This did not please my parents, and booklets which described the severe training nuns had to undertake began to appear in the house.

When I was ten years old, my father sold the small farm and purchased a larger property at Vervale, a nearby district adjoining Iona. This was also part of the Kooweerup Swamp and in very wet winters the farm house was surrounded by flood waters. Fortunately, the house had been built on a slight rise. I made many drawings of the sun rising in the early morning and turning the water into a golden lake with trees silhouetted in the distance. I realise now that my parents were probably quite worried, but the children found it to be exciting. Further draining each year reduced the flooding.

Following the end of the Second World War, refugees began arriving from Europe including many Dutch and Italian families. These newcomers provided a wonderful range of subjects for me to draw. The men from Holland wore heavy corduroy trousers and sometimes wooden clogs in the paddocks which were flat and similar to the country from which they had come. On special occasions the women dressed in national costumes. There were also a number of Italian families living in the area and the women in these families wore black from head to toe.

“This city offers all the things I enjoy—art gallery, entertainment centre, cinema, sports ovals, beautiful parks and gardens, close proximity to rain forest and mountains and most of all, I’m surrounded by many artistic and creative folk to work with and exchange ideas”.

The high school years offered further experiences, as children in the area travelled for an hour by bus to the nearest high school at Warragul. I enjoyed the new school, as there was much to learn. Following an entrance exam, my score was high enough to be placed in the science stream. However, it did not appeal to me and I asked to be allowed to join the technical and domestic science classes as I wanted to study art and craft. When this was allowed, I settled into the four-year course. Two teachers at the school, a science teacher and a geography teacher, were not very friendly or helpful to me. Hoping to change their attitude, I was determined to do well in both classes. I mentioned my concern to my parents, and was advised to continue to do my best. It was not until I had left school that I realised my German surname would have been the problem. However I enjoyed art classes, especially when watercolour painting, printing and book binding were introduced.

While at high school I thought it would be wonderful if I could become a teacher, especially of art. Both my grandmothers had been teachers, of elocution and music. I knew that if I could win a teaching bursary, my father would agree to my going away to teachers' college at Ballarat in Western Victoria. I attended a discussion session with the Minister for Education who was visiting the school to interview prospective teachers. He listened to my story and I assured him I would be able to transfer to the science stream the following year to study the additional subjects required to qualify. He listened to what I had to say; I can vividly remember his comment that I should not worry "as I would get married anyway". I was devastated. Ballarat Teachers College was now out of the question as my parents would not be able to afford to send me away. At the end of the year, which was the final year of the technical course, I left high school and stayed home to help with the expanded family. My mother had had four more children by then.

During my last year at high school I stayed for a weekend with a girlfriend in another district. The friend was allowed to attend dances in the local hall and invited me to accompany her. The friend's father delivered us to the hall and collected us afterwards. This was where I met Lindsay who was to become my future husband. I thought he was nice but I was not particularly interested in becoming too friendly as I didn't really want a boyfriend. I had examinations to focus on. I didn't realise he had his eye on me.

At the time I was fourth year class captain and occasionally I was asked to do messages for various teachers. Several weeks after the dance, the head mistress asked me to do some banking during the lunch break. I walked into town to the bank and there behind the counter was Lindsay. He asked if I had received his letter. I was completely taken aback and then we both realised that it had been sent to the wrong address. Undaunted, and completing the banking transaction, he asked me if I would like to come to a family bonfire night the following week. I told him I did not like bonfires, thanked him and walked back to school. While walking I recalled that he had been a prefect at the school when I was in first year.

He soon sent another letter—delivered via his sister this time. She was also attending the school, but in a junior class. I was a little annoyed, as final examinations were near and I did not particularly want the distraction of a boyfriend. However, when I mentioned this to my mother and showed her the letter, she encouraged me to accept the invitation. My father was not consulted. When Lindsay arrived at the door to take me out, he was so well dressed and courteous and handsome, that my mother was duly impressed. Without my father's permission, we were on our way to the dance. Much later, my mother confessed to me that she thought Lindsay was too nice to risk Dad saying he could not take his daughter out. Soon afterwards, Lindsay was transferred to a bank branch in Melbourne. Outings were restricted to weekend visits every two or three weeks. Four years later we became engaged. We married in 1957 and honeymooned in Tasmania.

Lindsay left the bank to work in an office at a Butter Factory in Drouin. He was studying accountancy at the time. During the first years of marriage when I was having children, my drawing was on hold; even so, the creative spirit was ever-present in the form of cake decorating that I entered in local shows (including the Melbourne Show), sewing and gardening. Also at the time Lindsay and I experienced at first hand, the treatment of Aboriginal families who were being relocated from their settlements in the bush to towns throughout Gippsland. Lionel Rose's grandparents were moved to a house one door away and Lionel, as a boy, often played in the yard with our two young sons. Lindsay sometimes gave Lionel a lift if he saw him walking into town. Lionel later became World Champion Bantamweight Boxer. Other Aboriginal families were living in caravans near a local race course until houses became available. Lindsay and I were not happy about this, especially as winters were cold and wet in the area. However words fell on deaf ears at the time. Much later, Daryl Tonkin, a man who was closely involved and a spokesman for the Aboriginal community, wrote *Jackson's Track* which documents the story.

In 1968, as our eldest son approached high school age, Lindsay applied for a higher paying job as accountant at the Cleveland Tin Mine at Luina in northern Tasmania. The application was successful and we were soon on our way to Tasmania. This was an exciting time, and although Lindsay was apprehensive taking his young family into the unknown, I felt all would be well. And it was; the move brought huge changes for each of us. The small township of Luina, with a population of five hundred men, women and children, consisted of a general store, newsagent and post office, a Community Centre, a library which was a branch of the Burnie Regional Library, a hall for badminton and indoor activities, an outdoor tennis/basketball court and a Village Green. The Adult Education Board (AEB) in Burnie provided tutors for popular classes such as art and drama. Tutors travelled once a week through rain, hail or snow to conduct classes in the community centre. I thoroughly enjoyed these classes, especially the art classes that started my skills in oil painting. Word that I was an experienced cake decorator had spread, and soon I was tutoring cake decorating.

The three school-age children had to travel by bus through the rainforest on a winding road to Savage River District School for three-quarters of an hour there and back. The headmaster of the school advised us to send our two sons to boarding school after grade six. The nearest boarding school was Marist Regional College at Burnie. Every fortnight the Catholic church conducted a service in the Community Centre and a friend, who had a son the same age as our eldest son, spoke to the priest who was Principal of the College. Father Hosie visited us to meet the boys. Our eldest son attended the College first and was followed two years later by our second son. Although both boys fitted in well they always looked forward to going home to the forest each fortnight. They enjoyed living in a small town with so many children their own age where they had freedom to enjoy the forest. Children were allowed to wander in the forest adjoining the town and at sundown, mothers would stand on their porches and call their children home. Luina is now a ghost town. and when I visit with family from time to time and stand quietly at the end of the day, I can still hear mothers calling their children home.

Five years later the family moved to a five-acre block of land overlooking Boat Harbour at Table Cape. A new house was built and the small property became a hobby farm. Lindsay was working as an accountant in Burnie and I had obtained a position as Secretary at the Boat Harbour Primary School attended by our two daughters. While living at the Cape the family discovered a number of stone tools in the garden and saw a number of carvings on a large rock at the top of the cliff. The view to the west took in Rocky Cape where a cave and middens could be found. We could feel a strong presence in the area. Another resident, Dr. Ian McFarlane, who spent much time studying the area, documented his findings in *Beyond Awakening: tribes of North West Tasmania,* a book that highlights the lifestyles of the Tommeginer people of Table Cape. While at Boat Harbour Primary School, a teacher who wrote poetry asked me to illustrate some of her poems. I accepted the challenge; *Of Fleeting Things* was published in 1986.

Eight years later the family moved to Burnie. As our two daughters were attending school in Burnie and we were also working in Burnie, we decided to sell our house and relocate to the town. I was working in the office of an electrical and furniture store and after training with IBM in Melbourne became Systems Supervisor in the newly established computer room—a position I held for four years. At the time, I was also weekend social writer for the Advocate Newspaper and completed a Freelance Journalist Diploma by correspondence.

After leaving computer work, I applied for a job as housekeeper at the APPM (Australian Pulp Paper Mill) Guest Lodge. This position allowed me more time for art work. During the eight years at the Lodge I became a member of The Australian Society of Miniature Art Tasmania (ASMA Tasmania) where I was elected to the role of President for twelve years. I represented Tasmania at the inaugural World Federation of Miniaturists (WFM) exhibition in London in 1995. I lobbied for the 2000 WFM event to be held in Hobart, and attended an event in Washington DC in 2004 where I was elected President. We hosted the 2008 event in Burnie at the Burnie Regional Art Gallery, attended the 2012 event in Moscow and in 2016, the event in Johannesburg.

I'm currently President of Friends of BRAG, a member of three of Australia's miniature art societies and I work as a maker at the Makers Workshops run by UTAS. Each week I conduct an art class for retired citizens at BRAG. As a child growing up in rural Australia, my dreams of being an artist, a teacher and travelling seemed to be just that—part of a world of dreams. But art has a way of making those dreams come true.

What makes the area in which I live different to other areas in which I have lived?

I currently live in what is known as a small Regional City on the north-west coast of Tasmania. This city offers all the things I enjoy—art gallery, entertainment centre, cinema, sports ovals, beautiful parks and gardens, close proximity to rain forest and mountains and most of all, I'm surrounded by many artistic and creative folk to work with and exchange ideas.

In the past, I have lived in a rural area in South Gippsland, Victoria, in a small country town, also in Victoria and later (1968) in a small mining town at Luina (which is now a ghost town) in the rain forest in Tasmania. While living in Luina we travelled regularly to Burnie for exhibition openings (at the Adult Education Centre) and to the cinema. This was before the Burnie Regional Art Gallery existed.

What might make it difficult living here?

The only difficulty I find living in Burnie is the distance from major cities in Tasmania and the mainland when an important international art show or musical performance is advertised. Costs associated with travel and accommodation in larger cities often prevents attendance at such performances.

Where do other challenges lie?

Distance from family members who are scattered interstate, and large art galleries. I sometimes miss the opportunity to be able to drop into a major gallery to view a visiting exhibition. However, these challenges do not concern me as much as they used to, as communication is easier and so much information is now available online. Although the internet cannot emulate face to face conversations or seeing a famous art work at close range or listening to discussions by informed lecturers, it suffices when it has to.

But are these challenges worthwhile?

The above challenges are not currently important to me, as family members visit regularly and I have the opportunity to communicate via email with the many artists I have met during my travels overseas. The benefits of living where I now live outweigh any challenges.

What kind of benefits are there?

The benefits of living here in Burnie are many, and as I am lucky to live on the edge of the Central Business District with a sea view and only a ten-minute walk to the gallery, civic centre, cinema, Makers Workshop and sporting facilities, I consider I am extremely fortunate.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

Yes, I do think the establishment of the galleries such as the Regional Art Gallery and Coastal Art Group Gallery and in recent years the Makers Workshop, have shaped and continue to shape the local community. The Burnie Regional Art Gallery, which includes travelling exhibitions from interstate and, in the case of the Da Vinci and Michelangelo exhibitions (which provided excellent opportunities for a large number of adults and children to visit the gallery) enables members of the public to experience famous works of art.

The Coastal Art Gallery provides an opportunity for local artists to showcase their work and the Makers Workshop is making a name for itself with artists and craftsmen and women working on site and talking about their art or craft. Their creative works are displayed throughout the building; other quality exhibitions are regularly displayed in the Makers Exhibition Space.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

No I did not. Coming to Tasmania in 1968 and arriving in a small mining town at the foot of Mt. Cleveland, where I found myself surrounded by beautiful rain forest and people from many countries where women who were not working filled their time by creating beautiful paintings, sculptures, printing, weaving and many other creative activities, felt as if I had arrived in a "creative heaven". As we became familiar with coastal towns, the same impression was gained—"that creative activities" were an important part of island life.

How does it feel now?

The feeling continues and has grown. I feel so very fortunate to be involved in the artistic creativity surrounding me.

What relationship does "your" place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

As President of the World Federation of Miniaturists (WFM) I had the privilege of arranging the 5th WFM Exhibition in the Burnie Regional Art Gallery in March 2008. With my committee I was proud to showcase the gallery to visitors not only from throughout Australia but also from many overseas countries including Russia, USA, UK and South Africa. We invited as many townspeople as possible (shop owners, cafes and coffee shops and restaurants) to become involved. You might say it was "partnershipping" at its very best. The large exhibitions mentioned previously were also listed as important exhibitions in various National and State Gallery publications. This information helped establish the Burnie Regional Gallery as an important venue.

Is it cheaper to live in the region?

Yes it certainly is for me and also for a number of young families who have relocated from metropolitan cities to Burnie.

Do you think it is important to get out and come back again?

Yes it is and for me, travel overseas to various WFM Exhibitions (London, Washington DC, Moscow and Johannesburg) provided an opportunity to meet and speak with artists worldwide, to view their work, attend workshops and discuss art with professional artists. This experience enabled me to share ideas with my students and local artists in the region.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

Very important, and as President of Friends of the Burnie Regional Art Gallery our members would definitely support any region-to-region relationships.

Photos: Rick Eaves

Joan Kelly

First Impressions-the Coastline

2018

Black scratchboard etchings, and Tasmanian timber | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

I have set out to capture in twenty etched drawings on black scratchboard, some of the views visitors and prospective newcomers to this island state see as their ship approaches the shore. I chose to work on black scratchboard as the black and white drawings capture for me the beauty, the mystery and the sad history of the North West Coast. Although my family and I spent the first five years in Tasmania living in the rainforest, we regularly travelled to the coast to spend time enjoying and exploring the many scenic beaches between Burnie and Circular Head. As we wandered, we observed middens and caves with an abundance of shells within and carvings on rocks. We were so attracted to the area we purchased a five acre block on Table Cape.

Living on the Cape, we experienced life on top of a cliff above an ever-changing seascape with fish, crayfish, oysters and mussels in abundance at that time. Mutton birds could be seen on their way through the sky, creating vast grey shadows over the sea as they flew east. It was here that we felt a strong presence of the Aboriginal people who had lived in the area long before Europeans arrived. We found circles on rocks on the edge of a cliff and many stone tools on the land we had purchased.

Wherever we travelled along the coast, we could feel that presence and wondered how much knowledge and information had been lost by not working with those that had been keepers of the land for thousands of years.We also spent time on Three Hummock Island and enjoyed its beautiful beaches with an abundance of bird and animal life and again, the evidence of a people who had lived here before. I now live in Burnie amongst friendly, creative people with an extensive sea view within walking distance of the Gallery, Museum, Makers Workshop as well as shops and cinemas. I do not wish to live anywhere else. Working and learning together, regardless of where we have come from, in a non-judgmental, open and respectful way and not decrying the intelligence of others but building strong partnerships together while caring for the land are, I believe, the most important things in life.

GREG LEHMAN

Mum was born in 1920 in Longford, a country town just out of Launceston in the northern Midlands of Tasmania; her father had worked first as a farm hand, then as a farm manager in the district, and when she was twelve, mum went into service as a domestic help working at a number of the big estates in the area, among them Entally House and Mountford (where she was born). Dad, Patrick Lehman, was born in 1930 in Ulverstone on the North West Coast and lived his whole life there. After leaving school he was apprenticed as a pastry cook, but after that term he ended up working at the Department of Main Roads as a bulldozer driver.

At the age of eighteen, after he and mum had got together, they left for Sydney for a kind of working holiday where for a while Mum worked at a kiosk at Circular Quay and Dad worked as a barman. During the 1940s and 50s people had to travel where the work was and just made the best of it. Mum and Dad returned to Tassie and started their family when my sister Toni was born at the hospital at Wynyard.

Mum's family was descended from a convict named Richard Chugg—he hadn't been one of those "but he only stole a potato" type of convicts—he'd been involved in a murder; Mum's mother's maiden name was True, and that side of her family had come from Ulverstone as well. Dad's grandfather arrived as a German immigrant to Tasmania in 1855. My father's mother's ancestry was Aboriginal and Irish; that's the lineage my own Aboriginality comes from.

While I was growing up Mum and Dad both worked as shift workers at the Edgells factory in Ulverstone; a food-processing factory locally referred to as The Cannery, even though by the time I came along, the move towards deep frozen food meant that there wasn't much canning being done. In those days Ulverstone had a population of around about eight thousand people, and was one of the bigger rural towns on the North West coast. Mum and Dad did rotational shift change-overs at The Cannery, which meant that I spent a lot of time being looked after by my sister Toni, who is eight years older than me, and a local woman called Pat McCullough, who had a family of her own, and who worked as our babysitter. Those were hard years of work for my parents—poor Dad's body clock had to be readjusted every three weeks when he was required to change to another shift cycle.

My brother Ricky left school at fifteen to take up a panel-beating apprenticeship in Burnie and my sister got a job in Myers in Melbourne when she was fifteen; I was the first in the family to finish high school and go to College. Mum and Dad had decided to send me to a Catholic High School in Burnie. Dad's mum Nana Lehman was a fairly strict Catholic, so we all went to Catholic primary schools, but the prospect of going to the Catholic high school was terrifying to me. I'd ridden my bike to school from about grade three right through primary school—my bike was the centre of my universe then—with other kids I'd be riding to town, through bush tracks, to the local beaches—it was a feeling of freedom that soon shut down with the prospect of having to take the forty-minute bus trip to and from the school in Burnie.

I did pretty well at primary school—I'd won some writing prizes, so I probably had it in my mind that my parents had seen that the Catholic school might give me a better chance. It wouldn't have cost them too much—probably around thirty dollars per term for school fees—and the school buses were free. High school was OK—I made some good and enduring friendships that continue to the present day, but it took a long time travelling to and from school. I didn't get home till 5.30 at night, and in winter I'd be leaving in the morning and returning at the end of the day in darkness. That removed me from the local social environment of the other Ulverstone kids… I just wasn't around to do all the after-school things anymore. In winter I would be catching the bus in the dark in winter and going home in the dark.

My earliest memories of talking about our Aboriginal ancestry came at the end of primary school—some of my cousins were dark skinned, but we never actually talked too much about things in detail, although during the early 1970s we were all aware of a lot of political change that was going on across the country: Charlie Perkins' Freedom Ride was getting a lot of publicity, and Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser introduced a number of education programs focused on Aboriginal people. At some stage during this time my family was contacted about support programs to assist Aboriginal people. I was the only one in the family who benefited from this; I can recall getting an allowance to help with books and uniforms every month.

At that time, my family was also contacted by Bill Mollison. During the early 1970s he studied in Environmental Psychology at the University of Tasmania. Later on, Bill became famous for his promotion of permaculture, but his project at the University of Tasmania focused on researching the family histories of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. He did a travelling tour of the state piecing together the family histories of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. That research helped leverage my thinking about my own family's ancestry and what it might mean. It happened at a time of life when you start thinking more about group identity and belonging and that's the point at which I began to seek out more and more detailed information in my attempt to make sense of what being a fair skinned, blue eyed Tasmanian Aboriginal person might mean. The 'official' history, of course, had taught that Trucanini had been the last surviving Tasmanian Aborigine, but at that time all of that assumption was being overturned.

In terms of academic life at school, my strength lay in the sciences—especially with biological science, and that's where my real interest was, even though I did well in English. When one of my teachers asked me what matriculation college I'd be thinking of enrolling in, the consideration that this could actually be a possibility for me hit me for the first time—I'd already been applying for jobs as a farm hand for when I left school. Even so, I knew I didn't want to stay at Marist College. Luckily there was another alternative—Don College in Devonport, and so as a consequence I spent the next two years travelling by bus to school for the same amount of time, but in the opposite direction from Burnie.

In Devonport I was able to concentrate on the subjects I enjoyed so much—Chemistry and Biology, some Religious Studies, English, Art. In year twelve they were changing the curriculum, so to my delight I was able to take up four Biology subjects! At some time towards the final year, when the question "What are you going to do at Uni?" came up, it just seemed impossible to consider. I hadn't even travelled as far as Hobart at that stage, but a bit of urging and encouragement from some of the staff and from my parents,

“Now, having travelled the world, one might think that my sense of home has expanded to encompass the continent of Australia—or even the South Pacific or South-East Asia. But no; the shoreline of Tasmania has contained my sense of who I am and how that is connected to a place. It is the shoreline and the knowledge of how it encircles me”.

together with the fact that some of my friends were going to go to Hobart for university, convinced me, and the following year I found myself sharing a house with a group of friends at Sandy Bay.

I didn't enrol in the course with any particular kind of career in mind. I'd done some teaching in primary schools and loved it, but when they offered me a high school science studentship I hated it—it was too close to my own experience. If they'd offered me a primary school studentship I would probably have still been there, enjoying a successful and rewarding life … but I wouldn't have ended up the person I am today.

After I was offered that studentship I didn't want, I applied for a job at the State Library as a photographic technician in their Archives Section. When I didn't get it, I decided to just focus on Biological Sciences, following my passion. But as I was completing my degree, I'd come to know a number of Hobart-based Aboriginal people. The Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs, through the Commonwealth Employment Service, offered me a one year trainee job as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. It involved visiting Aboriginal kids in schools and finding out whether they needed support at home or individual tuition. That was in 1984, and at the time there was an increase in initiatives aimed to improve the educational success of Aboriginal people. After that I applied for another job with the Australian Electoral Commission—they were offering a program that aimed to increase knowledge of electoral processes in the community and encouraging members to enrol to vote. I spent the next few years running electoral programs in schools; describing, for example, how the House of Representatives and the Senate worked. After that I ended up going into a mainstream role and became the Electoral Commission's Education and Training Officer for six years.

During those years I was socially and politically involved with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, an organisation that promoted land rights in Tasmania and had centres in Hobart, Burnie and Launceston. When the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody was established, I was approached to apply for the position as a Research Officer based at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. I worked there for twelve months researching the experiences of Tasmanian people in the Criminal Justice System, and preparing a report.

Following that there was a move, championed by Jim Everett, to form a Land Council in Tasmania. We drafted a constitution and elected a Committee, and over the next couple of years I worked at establishing the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council. In 1991 we moved into an old office above a shop in Hobart. We started from scratch; we painted it up and cleaned it, bought and borrowed a range of old furniture and an old photocopier and worked out ways of getting funding to employ some staff. One of the first initiatives was to set up a training program for Aboriginal Heritage Officers working alongside while at the same time advocating for land rights in Tasmania. We were successful in moving an Aboriginal Lands Bill into Parliament during a Labor government—the first Land Rights bill to pass the Lower House—but it was defeated in the Upper House.

I then had another change of career—as you might have guessed by now, I'm not a care and maintenance person—I like new initiatives. I was asked whether I would apply for the position as the leader of the University of Tasmania's newly established Riawunna Centre of Aboriginal Education. I worked there for ten years, starting as the Head of Aboriginal Student Services and ending up as Director and then as Research Associate. During that time I continued my involvement with Land Rights and community politics. In 1995, the Aboriginal Lands Act was passed through Parliament, resulting in twelve areas of land in Tasmania being transferred to Aboriginal Community ownership. It was largely symbolic in one way, but more importantly, the result opened the way for the community to become more closely and practically involved in heritage and land management issues.

But by 2002 I felt that I needed a complete change … all these 'battles' had been demanding and hard-going. There's a phenomenon referred to as burn out and that's what was happening to me at that time. I knew someone who owned an advertising company specialising in 'public good' advertising, and for the next two years I worked as a copywriter, writing ads for products and the promotion of things like health and safety in the workplace, anti-smoking campaigns and the like. I'd always been interested in creative communications, and had always had an interest and fascination in jingles and slogans. I'd taken a fifty percent pay cut to take up the position but I really enjoyed it—it was my first experience working in the private sector. I worked there for two years and when I was headhunted for a State Government job to run a public relations campaign to develop new Aboriginal Heritage Protection legislation, all the experience in the advertising company paid off. I worked in that role between 2004 and 2006.

After that I was head-hunted for job as Manager of Aboriginal Education in the State Department of Education, running curriculum development and education and student support programs. So in a sense I found myself back in the world I'd started in, in 1984! I was there for five years and during that time I moved into a Policy Analyst role and then I applied for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra as an Indigenous Research Fellow.

In 1995 I'd returned to university to undertake my Honours in Environmental History, around the time I was working on the Lands Rights programs. My thesis was on Aboriginal Land Management. My First Class Honours enabled me to enrol in a PhD at AIATSIS. During the third year in Canberra I was awarded a sponsorship to go to Oxford University to undertake a Masters. My PhD topic focused on Visual Representation of Aboriginal People in Colonial Art, but I was conscious of my lack of a strong disciplinary base in history and art theory. The Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation offered a scholarship for Aboriginal people to study at universities around the world, so when my application was successful, I asked for permission from UTAS to enrol in the Masters at Oxford while I was still enrolled in the PhD in Canberra. The Master of Studies in the History of Art and Visual Cultures at Oxford was a twelve-month coursework Masters with a dissertation. I focused on Benjamin Duterrau and studied portraiture and post-colonialism in twentieth-century art and medieval landscape painting. I was able to harness all this research to enrich my PhD thesis.

I'm interested in how things fit together—I'd looked at land and Country and history, but it had always seemed to me that while all these things are important, there was something else that was informing and guiding and influencing, and that the driving force was visual history. And I guess it's that interest in visual and textual rhetoric that gets into our bones—that might have been what led me into advertising—a lot of our knowledge comes from visual sources. Every time I saw an old colonial painting I was totally engrossed—I wanted to know answers to all kinds of questions the image raised: who did what to whom, where it was painted, what was that person doing at the time it was painted? And, ultimately, how did that artist want to depict that person? This big question about personal sovereignty is not ever completed in this business—we are influenced, inspired, conditioned, cajoled and pushed into all sorts of ways of thinking about ourselves—just like that person in the colonial painting: it came from a sketch of a real person, but that original figure gets placed in an other—in another's world. Our experience of cultural identity today is a bit like that. And that's what I'm really trying to get at with my postdoctoral research now—I'm moving the analysis into the twentieth century, as a way of continuing to try and unpack all those influences on how we see ourselves and how others see us.

With the luxury of the setting of the PhD, I also had the opportunity to make things again … When I was younger I was often drawing, and I've been keen to make art again … through photography and sculpture. I have a notebook list of things I want to make—that I'm trying to work through. As a kid I was always making things out of wood and drawing—making sense out the world by putting things together and shaping them rather than writing about them. When I was younger these things were simple—boats and bits of furniture or learning how to pull a pushbike apart. They were often practical things—right now I'm interested in trying to see how those things might combine in new ways.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

Tasmania is, more than anything else, an island. I was born here and, back in those days, the locality was everything. By my teenage years, once I had started to explore the north west coast a bit, it was the region that defined my sense of home. Now, having travelled the world, one might think that my sense of home has expanded to encompass the continent of Australia—or even the South Pacific or South-East Asia. But no; the shoreline of Tasmania has contained my sense of who I am and how that is connected to a place. It is the shoreline and the knowledge of how it encircles me.

What might make it difficult?

This island is bounded by more than sea. The perspectives, aspirations and vision of what seems to be the majority of its residents are also bounded; by a sense of disadvantage, of feeling threatened, forgotten or hard done by. There is a default defensiveness. A shyness of what unbounded imagination might offer. The island is bounded by small town thinking. To step out of those bounds is to experience a kind of ostracism. It's as if once you step beyond the bounds of familiarity, you are not allowed to return as the person that you were—you are not allowed to continue to be who you were, and still are.

And where do the other challenges lie?

When a place like Tasmania works so hard at being insular and distrustful of the outside world, it can only be expected that the world reacts in turn. To be recognised as Tasmanian is to be perceived as something that you have been forced to leave behind. This leaves many of us in a strange nowhere land between the home we once had, and the home we have dared to imagine for ourselves. It is a place of estrangement—a penalty for transgression.

But are these challenges worthwhile?

These challenges are inevitable if you are willing to live the life that you aspire to, and to realise that the things that make a place a home are not democratic. They are personal—an external manifestation of your sense of self, your spirituality and your way of being in the world. The number of people in your life who understand and respect this are few. But they are the people who you can truly love.

And what kind of benefits are there?

A knowledge that you belong somewhere. And that you are not alone in the world.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

Galleries and the artists who fuel them sometimes make a recognised impact, shaping the thinking of the local community. More often, their contribution slips quietly into the consciousness of the population—often unrealised or acknowledged. There is a quiet satisfaction in this.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

Always.

How does it feel now?

Exhausting. Exhilarating. In Tasmania now there is a sense of becoming. We are all working harder than ever to make the most of this. It is an opportunity for powerful change—for transformation. It's starting to feel like a home that I never imagined.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

It is a distant relationship in many ways. Our more commercially successful artists have galleries in Melbourne and Sydney or internationally, but it's also possible to be reasonably self-sufficient here—not to easily make a living from creative practice, but to keep busy and do what you have the impulse to do.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

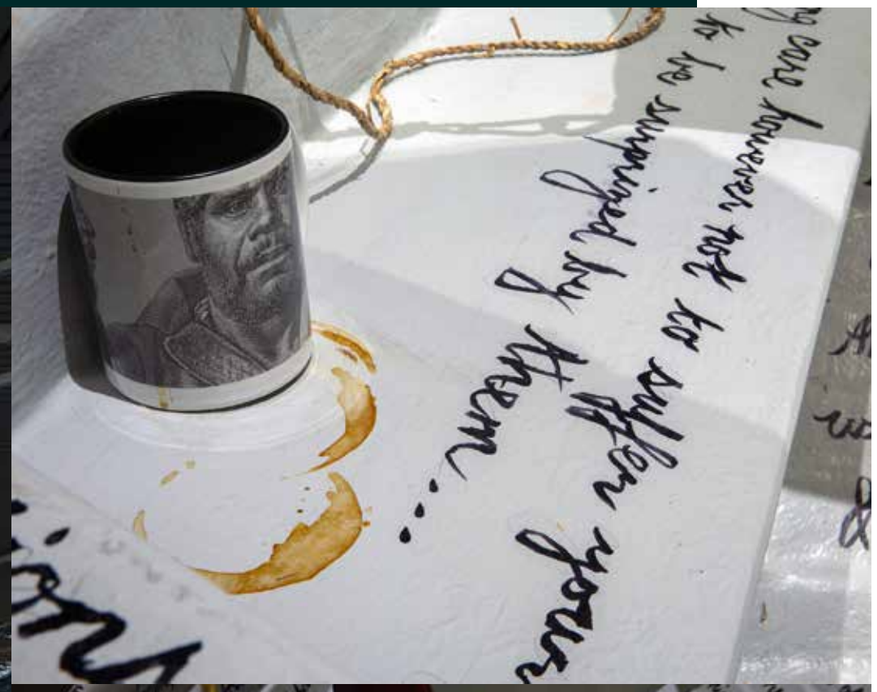
For some things. It's cheap to buy locally grown fruit and vegetables, it's easier to grow your own food than if you live in a big city. It's possible to gather shellfish and other traditional foods without having to travel very far. Supermarkets are more expensive. And petrol. There's lots of free entertainment and art—especially since MONA came along.

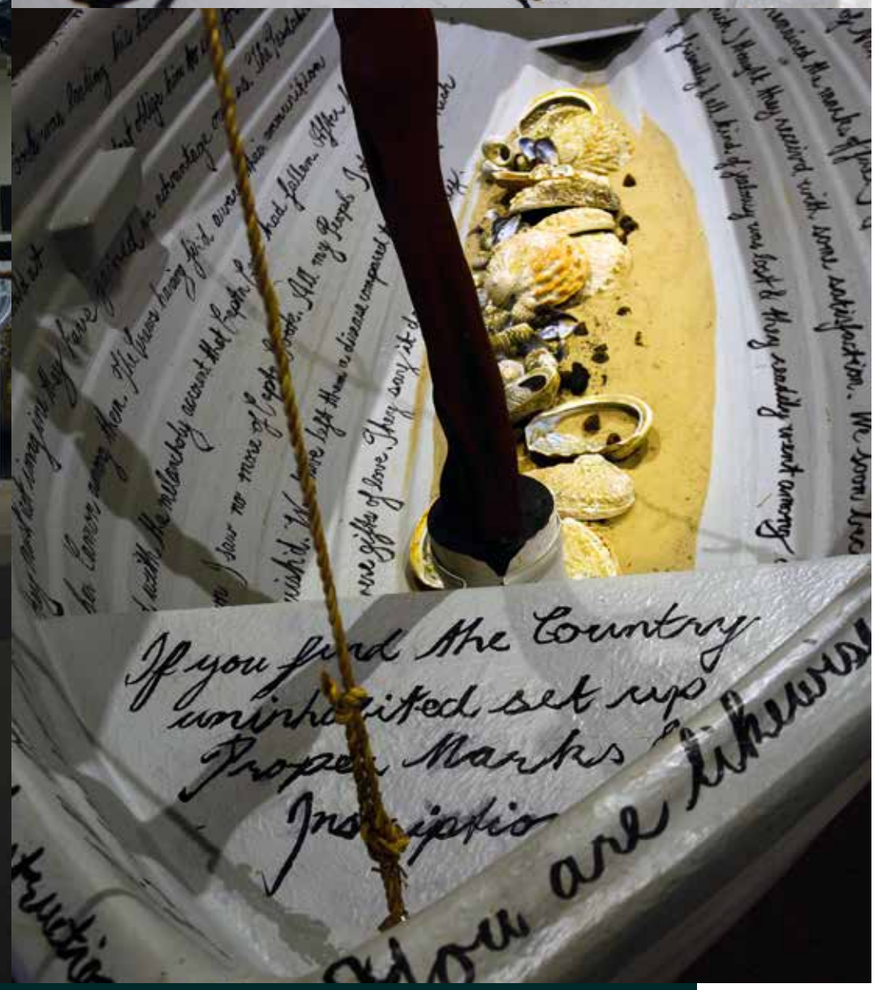
Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Yes. Some of our greatest artists are those who have come here from elsewhere. They didn't have to leave in order to 'come back'. Many artists find a natural place for themselves here for some reason. Maybe it's the air, or the water. Or maybe it's the Country speaking louder here than in many other places. This is a place that hasn't been over-run. The Old People were alone here for a long time. We have not had hordes of invaders, one after another like Europe has. I think that leaves the Country fresh and generous. It has not been so despoiled as many other places in the world. I wish more people would understand that. The land here is kind and welcoming. That's why strangers arrive and declare that, for the first time in their lives, they feel 'at home'.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

The most important aspects of culture and knowledge are local. Regions are comprised of constellations of locality. In this way they are a bit like a city that is made up of suburbs, but in regions the linkages are more natural and have evolved gently around rivers, tracks and coastlines. While city dwellers insulate themselves from nature and Country, regions are in its thrall. They feel and see the changes of the seasons and understand more of the reality that we are part of these cycles and natural systems. Creating links directly between regions is a necessity. It allows locality to engage directly with its diversity in other places. Brokering those contacts through cities dampens and filters those important relationships—it commodifies them and turns them into a currency that has value in the urban, but misses the point of the local.





Photos: Rick Eaves

Greg Lehman

A Short History of Cook

2018

Fibreglass, wood, fibre, canvas and ink
Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

An unfinished drawing by John Webber, *Cook's interview with natives in Adventure Bay, Van Dieman's Land* (1777) shows Capt. Cook presenting a medal to the leader of the *Neunone* nation—a trifle as trade for their Country.

Cook had secret instructions to take possession of new lands. The drawing marks the moment that the island of my Aboriginal ancestors was first touched by globalised trade and power—and is the first image ever made by a European artist of a Tasmanian Aborigine. But Webber missed the shell middens upon which the scene was played out. The place hardly mattered.

In this work, the key figures from Webber's Interview accompany uncannily similar figures from his later drawing of *The Death of Cook* in Hawai'i two years later as he tries to kidnap their king; corresponding moments of repeated theft.

A Short History of Cook incorporates local, handmade and gathered material and resources by Aboriginal community members into an 18th century sprit rig; creating a return journey for this visual record of encounter—despatching Webber's drawings back into the global milieu, restating our culture and confirming that we have not forgotten the lessons of the past.

GREG LEONG

My mother was born in Cobar, New South Wales, the grand-daughter of a Scottish woman and a Chinese man. Although she looked very Chinese to Australians, she didn't look sufficiently 'pure bred' to Chinese people. Australia was also very racist at that time. At the age of sixteen, when she accompanied her family when they returned her grandfather's body back to his home town in Guong Dong, she was put into a school for overseas Chinese girls, where she was met with the reverse racism from the other part of her cultural mix. Although she spoke Cantonese, at school she was absorbed into the company of other 'mixed blood' and overseas Chinese girls, with whom she maintained friendships for the rest of her life. When the family later moved to Hong Kong she met my father, a Malaysian Chinese. Prior to the Japanese take-over of Hong Kong, they were married as a way of attempting to avoid the possibility of rape that often threatened the fate of unmarried women. My father's job as a pilot for China Air Lines relocated him to India. In order to be with him, my mother had to seek whatever means she could to travel overland from China to India. It was a journey of enormous difficulties as she was pregnant with my older brother. The difficulties of that journey were to characterise her life. She joined my father in India, but their marriage was a very unhappy one.

I was born in Hong Kong in 1946 after the war. During my childhood I was witness to all kinds of emotional, economic and physical violence that have deeply affected each of my two brothers and myself differently throughout our lives. As far as locals were concerned, Mum was an outsider; even her parents-in-law treated her as a foreigner—she was 'white trash' over there. This sense of estrangement between cultures—of being treated unfairly for her lack of 'pure blood' earned her discrimination from both cultures on both sides of 'difference'.

My father walked out on the family when I was 12. It came with a great sense of relief. My older and younger brothers were sent to Australia for their education. My Mum had to work to pay for our education, and in order to set herself up for work, she had to approach her father-in-law for financial assistance. My grandfather's response to my mother was one of disdain and humiliating cruelty, even though he would hand out money at the end of the monthly tirade. This traditional patriarchal power exercised by both my father and his father has forever coloured my response to the cruelty that men can show towards women in their attempts to control them. When Mum came back to Australia she experienced discrimination yet again—and yet despite this she and my older brother agreed that his daughters should marry Chinese Australians if possible. Although this didn't eventuate, it is evidence that the rift between cultures continues through the generations in different ways.

I stayed in Hong Kong for my high school education. My mother decided that learning French would be useful, which meant that I missed out on learning Chinese—a fact I regret to this day. I am only versed in Chinese in a spoken every-day sense, and as a result I can't have an intelligent conversation in Chinese—I can't write Chinese either. These 'lacks' in my capacities have in turn contributed to my own feeling that I can't fully belong to the Chinese part of my identity.

I entered Hong Kong University with a scholarship. I loved European culture and literature and was actively performing in plays in the university drama society. During this period I had much less engagement with Chinese cultural experiences. No doubt this contributed to the fact that the thesis of my Master of Philosophy in Drama (1968–1974) focused on the work of George Bernard Shaw. After graduating I worked as a 'fine music' producer at the British Government-run FM radio station. During this time I applied for a Commonwealth Scholarship to university in Vancouver and was awarded one. However, the British Commonwealth Scholarship forbade my taking up the scholarship on medical grounds ostensibly on the grounds of the tuberculosis I'd contracted as a child. At that time I had two degrees in English and yet, as a result of the still-rampant colonial rulings, was forced to undergo an "English test". My appeal against the decision was eventually successful. But soon after that, I decided to throw in the offer of the scholarship to continue with a relationship I had embarked on. This is probably the first of a number of instances throughout my life where I'd followed my heart rather than my head. But in the long run, I have no regrets—each of them ended up leading to other experiences that changed my life in significant ways.

One of the life-changing decisions that followed my resolve to deal with the inevitable complexities of the relationship I'd entered was my decision to go to London. My family thought I was behaving in an irredeemably irresponsible way, but I enrolled in the Polytechnic of Central London to study Arts Management. I have to confess that the real pull that had drawn me to choose London was the lure of the opera and theatre at the West End and Covent Garden, as well as the wonderful concerts and art of the South Bank, but the training I undertook there was an investment that has never seen me out of work: I've been actively involved in the arts business ever since.

On graduating, I took up a position as a marketing officer in Youth and Music in London for a year, and after that I returned to Hong Kong to take up the role of Performing Arts Coordinator at the Hong Kong Arts Centre. Later I became the Head of Programs. There were difficulties being an openly gay man in Hong Kong at the time. The Chinese view was that homosexuality was not an inherently Chinese condition—they held the view that it was a morally decadent condition that had been introduced by the British! With like-minded supporters and colleagues I was part of a grass-roots gay lobby against discrimination, a role that was particularly fraught as a result of the political implications and the scare tactics used by the police.

Unbeknown to me, at the time my mother had meanwhile applied for my Australian citizenship through the Family Reunion Program. In 1971 I was notified that I had three months to accept an offer of a migrant visa to Australia. Even though I had not actively sought it, the fact that I was in a very unhappy relationship at the time contributed to my decision to take up the offer as a 'way out'. This decision, one that was not made in full consciousness of the outcomes, was the second of my great life-changing moments made as a result of my response to matters of the heart.

I took up my first Australian job in Devonport as Artistic Director of Tasmanian Regional Arts (formerly the Tasmanian Arts Council). I worked there between 1982 and 1988, during a period when Tasmania's homophobic attitudes made things very difficult. In Tasmania, anti-gay laws were not repealed until 1997. Towards the

“Whenever you leave this place, you look forward to the return—you can fly off to take in all the cultural nourishment you need elsewhere, and then return to the garden... I believe it’s a privilege to have a garden. I am told that it is very Buddhist to count out the seconds while you water these living things—for me counting while watering is part of the pleasure of being still”.

latter years of my role in Devonport I'd begun a relationship with a partner who lived in Launceston. I wanted to move there to be closer to him, and decided that enrolment in a visual arts course at the Launceston campus of the University of Tasmania might offer a good solution. My decision to embark on a course that led to one of the most significant aspects of my identity—my role as a visual artist—was, once again, made on the basis of a choice of the heart.

My practice as a visual artist began in the late 1980's. I'd realised that there was a large part of my identity I'd chosen to ignore. When I enrolled in visual arts in 1988 (the same year I gave up smoking) I majored in textiles. I used this focus as a way of building installations through which I could allude to the fabric of so many aspects of my life. My first break as an Australian artist came in 1992 when I was selected to show in the Tamworth National Textile Biennial. This first national exposure was followed in 1995, when the Crafts Council of Australia curated a show of gay craft artists with the unsurprising title of *Homocraft*. My contribution was a work about being gay and Asian in a hostile environment. I used the carp as a symbol of this experience—a species initially introduced from China to Australian waters for recreation and as a food source for colonial residents, but which has subsequently become identified as a pest. During that time I also embarked on my first solo show held in Sydney and Melbourne entitled *Remembering Chinese*. The works included a series of garments remembering my mother and the difficulties she experienced being discriminated against by two cultures. The installation featured a wedding gown where the traditional Chinese symbol of double happiness was altered to an emblem connoting double sorrow. During that time—the early 1990s—I lectured part-time in theory and drawing, and in 1996 I was appointed full-time lecturer for the textile studio at Tasmanian University of the Arts where I worked until 2000.

In 1994, after the death of my then partner of ten years in Launceston, his family's refusal to acknowledge our relationship resulted in a time of deep trauma for me. That grief and trauma went on to coincide with an upsurge in 1997 of anti-Chinese rhetoric fanned up by Pauline Hansen's One Nation Party. Despite the repeal of the anti-gay laws in Tasmania that year, public resentment took longer to subside. Once again my Chinese-ness and my gay-ness seemed to be burdens for which I was going to have to pay an emotional price. As a result, I made an installation of white garments as a kind of memorial to my partner (white is the colour of the virginal Western bride, but the colour of mourning in China)—and an homage to the pain I felt. The work toured, and I experienced the way work can salve wounds and change them towards positive outcomes.

In 2001, during the Centenary of Federation, I made *Greg Leong's Singing History Quilts for New Chinese Australians*—an installation in which the audience could participate by pressing a button in the hole of the quilt, in order to listen to some of Australia's most beloved bush ballads sung in Cantonese. The work soon developed into a performance work titled *Jia* (Chinese for family)—a cabaret about a princess who moves from China to Australia for a better life, finds it hard to integrate, so decides to introduce a Chinese cabaret program where she sings favourite Australian songs in Cantonese with a panache and aplomb to rival the spirit of Dame Edna. Of course this was, in part, a 'revenge' on life for the fact that I had not been able to embark on a career as a cabaret star myself, but it was, just as importantly, planned as a critical onslaught on some of Australia's most beloved icons as a way of re-writing Chinese presence into Australian history in an hilarious way.

In 1996 I moved in with Tony. I lived with him in Launceston and briefly in Burnie for eighteen years. Tony died in 2014. To assuage the pain of loss I ill-advisedly sold the house we shared. But I continue to work, to make art, and to enjoy life taking over from Tony in the garden.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

It depends on where you are in Tasmania—but in Burnie people have come out of their bias since the anti-gay law reform—people are more open now. Gayness is more accepted, and I don't feel 'noticed' simply for being Asian and/or gay, whereas in the big cities you notice racism more acutely, in contrast to what people think.

What might make it difficult?

Lack of opportunities to take part in and see contemporary art exhibitions. When I was the Director for both Burnie Regional Art Gallery and the Burnie Arts & Function Centre, you had to be aware of how your private life might impact on your public role as part of a relatively small community. But that kind of awareness also comes with growing older. The works I'm making now are less confrontational than they used to be.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

The challenge is always to be relevant—and to keep passionate. My passion currently is the changing relationship between China and Australia—a theme that very few people around me used to feel acutely. For example, when the Port of Darwin was recently leased to the Chinese for 100 years I was concerned well before others around me were. There's a sense of isolation here—people aren't always aware of that kind of global perspective. The benefits of living in a place like this are mainly to tend to one's inner self. In Sydney the concerns are more widely understood and may contribute to the broader debate.

Benefits? The lack of not feeling rushed and hurried—I may be lacking things in terms of 'cultural plenty', but you simply can't take up everything that's on offer in a larger city anyway and the intellectual and emotional rewards of the slower pace is good here. Whenever you leave this place, you look forward to the return—you can fly off to take in all the cultural nourishment you need elsewhere, and then return to the garden. Maybe it's a sure sign of growing old, but I believe it's a privilege to have a garden. I am told that it is very Buddhist to count out the seconds while you water these living things—for me counting while watering is part of the pleasure of being still.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery is one of the larger regional art museums in Australia and plays a very important focal point to the community here. Its two sites are situated right on the edge of the CBD and it's enormously popular with the local community. The art schools in Hobart and Launceston—the graduates and the contemporary art spaces and the phenomenon of MONA have changed things enormously. And the festivals associated with MONA are slowly moving up north—impacting the island as a whole.

I've also had the opportunity of watching the development of the influence of BRAG in Burnie. When I arrived, the powers that be wanted to turn it into a disco, but within 11 months the audience engagement had increased by twenty-four percent—this cultural facility means something to each member of the community. In 2009, the Burnie Arts and Functions Centre launched the first subscription season for performing arts events. Since then, on a per capita basis, during the subscription season it's doing better than Devonport, Launceston and Hobart. On that evidence alone you can say that the arts matter a great deal to the people in Burnie.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

When? Not until 1982—I'd always lived in large metropolitan cities up till then. When I arrived in Devonport I was shocked that movies were only shown two times a week—but six months later I noticed how I could see the stars in the night sky, and that whenever I spent time in Sydney my lungs would react against the smog and poisonous air. And another thing—in spite of small-town attitudes in the North West in the 1980s—I realised immediately that there was a kindness I could never find in the city.

How does it feel now?

It's home for me... I have great friends here in Launceston and still love the friends I made on the coast. There are also people with big backgrounds and experiences who have moved to Tasmania to retire—they've chosen to embrace regional life while still engaging in smaller scale stimulating experiences.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

Although I'm no longer in many shows, I was frequently included in metropolitan and regional touring exhibitions throughout the 90s. The last show I curated visited ten Australian venues (2012-2014). I think people do sit up and notice in the cities about what's happening in the regions. I don't think we suffer from being overlooked—many here enjoy national and international reputations. Coming from 'small' does not mean being 'lesser.'

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

Not always—real estate used to be cheap—but food tends to be more expensive.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

For younger artists it's very important, but that regional voice is also extremely valuable for the rest of Australia—not only does the artist benefit, it's also good for the big centres to see what's happening in the regions.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

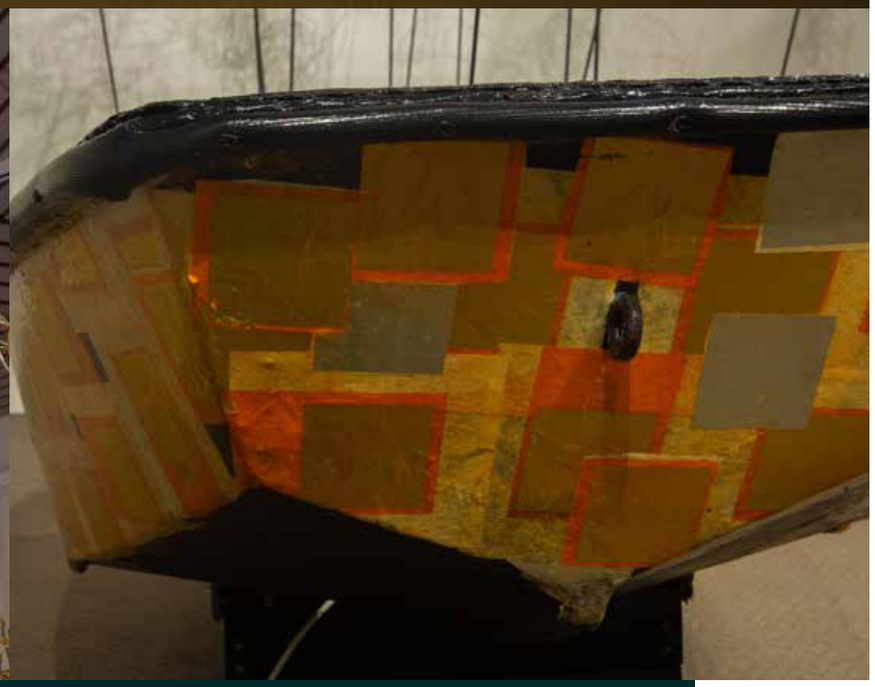
Many regions share similar problems, but there are also unique circumstances—networking is really important in understanding where you are in terms of being placed within a bigger context—and also to find points of commonality. You can feel a huge sense of camaraderie between the regions—one where you are able to see similarities but also the differences. You can come to understand a lot more about being a regional artist by comparing your experiences with other regional artists… it can be very powerful. My experiences of being part of such inter-regional gatherings has often resulted in a powerful sense of an extended family; it's very important to spend time being with 'your own'—whether it's from the city or the regions or another country.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

I hold to the belief that the places you have come to—and the place where you end up living—matter a great deal—if you start ignoring *place* then you're really ignoring a huge part of your existence. You need to feel fed by it and to feed it back in return. Social media has not eaten into my sense of place at all.

What is the role of your work?

To be provocative—to prompt people to wonder about what I'm saying. Hopefully it will add something to their own life experience. It's about contextualising your life and a way of reacting to the things that matter to you—and hopefully what you experience will ring true for others.



Photos: Rick Eaves

Greg Leong

The Tasmanian Migration of Oriental Carp

2018

Rowboat with wooden grid, joss paper, wrapped copper wire armature, metal rods, varnish, glue, and paint | Installation at Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2018)

Artist Statement

Greg Leong often uses cross-cultural symbolism to investigate the complexities of his identity as a Chinese Australian working in forms that traverse installation, sculpture and performance. His installation *The Tasmanian Migration of Oriental Carp* uses a 'pest' species in Australian waterways to refer to Australia's rejection of people from non-Anglo-Saxon countries.

Greg writes, "My boat in *Partnershipping* is the boat that symbolically brings new peoples here. My installation can be read simply as a ghost ship, referencing the many paper effigies of worldly goods the Chinese living burn during ghost festivals and so keep their relatives in the nether world in comfort and well-heeled. To the Chinese the carp (or koi) is a symbol of love, courage and wealth. However my carp skeletons, wrapped in joss paper (gold and silver for the dead) tell a sadder story of migration and the search for asylum, and perhaps the references are to pitiless governments, drownings at sea and off shore incarceration".

"Carp frames and installation method designed and completed by Mark Hoban, David Hamilton, Terry Ryan and the artist. Thanks also Michael Essex".

ANNE LORD

I grew up six hundred and forty kilometres west of Townsville on a grazing property called Kilterry. It was acquired through the 1900s on government-run ballots for people who were interested in purchasing land for grazing. At twelve noon on May 2, 1917 my grandmother won the ballot for a twenty-two thousand-acre allotment of land. And while that sounds like a big stretch of country, even that size of land proved to be unviable to run enough stock for the survival of families on such acreage. It's very sparse country in the dry tropics and you really need two or more blocks of this size to work on it effectively. Prior to this, the government sent out surveyors to draw up boundary lines, and then people could apply for the ballot where apportioned areas of land were awarded to them for purchase. My grandmother was still unmarried when she won the ballot, and the title stayed in her name. It was sold to my mother Mary Lord and father Robert Lord as Lyne and Lord partners.

My grandmother Margaret Lyne nee Gillespie worked alongside her three sisters helping run the family Hotel in Hughenden. Their mother Margaret Gillespie, was dependent on the girls' help as their father was an alcoholic. But still, it was accepted that Margaret Lyne would leave to set up a life of her own. Her mother was excited and hoped to live on the property after leaving the pub but she passed away before that was possible.

Hughenden was a lively place in the early 1900s. There was a decent social life and many people travelled west from Townsville. But while my grandmother was familiar with Hughenden and understood the ropes about how to be a publican, she had no idea about what she was up for in terms of working the land. In the early part of that same year that she'd won the ballot, she met a man called Percy Burton Phillipson Lyne who came from Tasmania. He had returned from the Boer War and had money to buy land. They decided to go and live on Kilterry, so he sold his property Saego Plains near Hughenden. They married in the November of that year, and my grandmother's mother and sisters gave them a new car as a wedding present. On the same day as the wedding ceremony they drove out to Kilterry. The existing Cobb and Co. roads were very rough and slow going. There were some Cobb and Co Coach Hotels where people stopped overnight. For the horse-drawn coaches, tired horses were rested at these stops.

In the months prior to that day, my grandfather had ridden to Kilterry with a packhorse and supplies to fence the new property and build a small shelter for them to live in initially. It would have been a very simple start, but they worked that property according to conditions of sale set out by the government. My grandmother Margaret Lyne always spoke of being very lonely, and of how she cherished social meetings where she would play the piano.

My mother Mary Lord, nee Lyne, grew up on Kilterry as an only child, and also remembered being terribly lonely. She hoped to have eight children of her own so that none of them would suffer the same loneliness. In the end she had six children, and there was no loneliness in our family. The property called Kilterry has for me always been associated with a sense of home, and my eldest brother's son is now in Succession Planning to take over looking after the place within the terms of what's called a 99-year lease.

When I was growing up, there were mostly merino sheep, but now it is mainly cattle—everyone recognises it's not suitable country for sheep. I can remember lots of bird life around the homestead, especially along the creek by the house. There are many kangaroos running through the grasslands, often seen when riding or driving through the country. I still love it and I'll always want to call it home—even though technically it's not my home any more. During the 1980s on breaks from TAFE at Townsville I'd go back there every chance I got, and I'd always come back to my studio with huge amounts of drawings and paintings I'd produced out there. I always love that kind of endless-seeming country that comes from natural grasslands; it's called black-soil country and it stretches out over flat plains. People and stock can live there due to the water from the Artesian Basin (underground aquifers). If it rains the soil is boggy and you can't drive a normal car through it. When Mum was growing up you couldn't cross the river during the wet season for several months of the year and provisions would be ferried across the river on little boats. Cars or trucks from the local railway siding and from the properties on the opposite side of the flooding Flinders River met on the riverbanks to take provisions to the homestead or send mail back to the train station.

We undertook primary school education through the Primary Correspondence School (PCS) based in Brisbane. The lessons were conducted at home. Sometimes Mum, sometimes the overseer's wife and sometimes a governess would supervise and check our work. The PCS would send out packets of mail every week of the term, and the governess would make sure you were understanding and following the instructions. By the time you'd reached Grade 6 you'd be following the instructions yourself. In the late 1950s the School of the Air started. Initially School of the Air (SOA) was only available to us for about an hour a week. Primary Correspondence School (PCS) was all very formal and your work would be carefully mailed out, corrected in Brisbane and mailed back to children living on the properties.

For secondary school I was sent down to Brisbane to enroll as a boarder at Stuartholme College, (Convent of the Sacred Heart in those days). I was very homesick for the country and I'd heard that one of our second cousins had tried to run away. It seemed adventurous to me but Dad came out to see me when he was in Brisbane on business and advised me "if you run away we'll bring you right back again". My sister loved it down there but I took a bit of time adjusting.

But there were benefits to boarding school. During the 1960s, the Dr. Behan art collection was hung throughout of the school. The works were so inspiring and we had a really wonderful art education—one of the teachers was Andrew Sibley and later, Betty Churcher. I can still remember how she taught art and the way she connected civilisations and cultures; styles and methods. Her teaching was instrumental in my wanting to be a painter.

We'd have to fly down to Brisbane for boarding school and back for the holidays on the old TAA Fokker Friendship that flew on kangaroo hops doing many stops on the Townsville/ Mount Isa run of the regional towns. It was a very a bumpy ride and every time we landed you could be sure that one of the kids would be sick. The travel time took a whole day from the property to Julia Creek airport with a 2 hour stop-over in Townsville where we changed planes. Friends met us at the Brisbane Airport and took us up to school.

“People who live up here like the tropics. Many like gardens and the laid-back qualities that come with the lifestyle here. It’s a place where you have the time to ponder and ask yourself what you want to be doing, creating! There’s a sense of time that’s different from how you experience it in capital cities”.

After high school I decided to take the equivalent of a gap year to return home. But I ended up staying three years. During the second year I was there, Mervyn Moriarty flew up to start Eastaus Art School, a venture that he'd initiated. He learnt to fly to teach art classes in the regions. He and his wife Helen produced booklets that students could follow between his stopovers, flying into the towns. Later Eastaus became the Australian Flying Arts School. I just loved it and he told me I was one of his star pupils. He suggested that I should go to art school in Sydney so I did. In those days I enrolled at what was East Sydney Technical College but I started at the suburban branch of the campus at Kogarah. In second year we all moved on to that wonderful complex that used to be the convict-built Darlinghurst jail. After those early years it changed to a College of Advanced Education and after I'd left, it transformed into COFA—the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Sydney. I majored in painting and enrolled in minor subjects: fine art printing and photography as well. One of the teachers told me I was doing too many studio subjects but my attitude was that I was going to need all those skills and information when I returned home, or at least to Townsville. Another lecturer asked in our final year what we would do next. He seemed amazed when I said I would go back to Townsville, north Queensland to work. He asked, "Why would you do that? What's up there? Why would you even go back up there?" And I said "That is where I want to be…" And even though Townsville was over six hundred and thirty kilometres from the place where I really felt at home, it was the closest professional centre to where I grew up and I could still be involved with producing and teaching visual art.

Within the first year of my return to Townsville, after taking three part-time jobs to make ends meet, I was offered a part-time job teaching at TAFE. I had become so tired of being poor in Sydney I felt enormously relieved. I had a studio that wasn't all that great when I was first teaching and it was a bit of a set-back to the progress of my work as an artist, but later I got a better studio and things improved a great deal. In the 1980s TAFE gave us a studio day a week so I was really able to produce a decent amount of work while teaching art. TAFE was housed in a beautiful old building in the city centre. I taught art between 1980 and 2013. During that time there were several transitions to the institution and, as a result, to the kind of teaching we were able to do. The TAFE art school was pushed out into the suburbs at Pimlico and then after that, when the institution was amalgamated into a university, the TAFE Diploma was offered as a degree. The university system of academic work and lecturing did not provide a studio day for artist/educators. It was focused on formal lectures and students enrolling in higher degrees. I was supervising Honours, Masters and PhD students before I was given a redundancy.

I now live with my husband in the suburb Mundingburra, about eight kilometres from the city. It feels good to be back in my own studio, able to do full time art work—I also have more time for a garden—art and gardening are a big part of what I do, and I have to make sure I discipline myself in terms of studio time.

I lived in Brisbane when I was undertaking my Masters, Visual Arts at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. My research focus was centred around a recycling project to do with big cities (including Townsville) and waste. Titled ROT, my project was included in IMA program as an off-site structure. Although I was motivated and productive there, living in Brisbane didn't give me the same sense of connection I have with North Queensland. I produced a parallel project building a site-work on the ground in clay at the Kilterry Artesian Borehead that has been well documented. I guess I'll always have a connection to the dry tropics where I grew up. The art work I'm currently developing is a re-imagination of the creatures that might have come out of the inland sea or water-mass in prehistoric North Queensland. Locals and scientists keep finding fossils around Richmond, Winton and Julia Creek. There are many that have been picked up on Kilterry. But I want to imagine what it might be like going back before fauna developed skeletons, to the time of *prima materia*—to imagine what it might be like when some creatures initially came out of the primal ooze.

From an ecological perspective we're at a point where we don't know what the future holds—and I'm making up a story that suggests that even back then, the future was already cast—the emergence of these sloth-like hybrid creatures from pre-history could bear signs and clues of what was to come. Ecological issues are key.

What might make it difficult?

Townsville is not a capital city and north Queensland is not yet a separate state. Thus we don't have the kind of support we need to sustain our community of artists and audiences. There are just a few commercial galleries, but it's hard to make sales here. I think the community could do with an injection of art support, human capital and infrastructure funding. For example, the commitment to building the new Cowboys Stadium is encouragement for people to invest money back into the community. The three tiers of government should do the same for visual arts culture and that would make a difference.

For many artists, cultural products are developed from and emerge from the open possibilities that their own region offers. In a city, people might go into a chain-store to buy a reproduction or print to put on their wall rather than support the production of the artists that live in the area. How do we learn to see our own sense of place unless it's through the way people and place are depicted by creative thinkers and artists? Creative practice, and all that involves, allows us to shift our own sense of the possibilities of what makes us different, as well as similar, and how we grow our sense of locality, perhaps through creativity. It's frustrating at times—I have seen the development and celebration of small places in other countries, but they also have to work at it. There are many visual artists in Townsville, many people creating art work, but not enough professional support and infrastructure for the amount of work to be presented to audiences.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

People who live up here like the tropics. Many like gardens and the laid-back qualities that come with the lifestyle here. It's a place where you have the time to ponder and ask yourself what you want to be doing, creating! There's a sense of time that's different from how you experience it in capital cities. I've always really valued the opportunity to build up the sense of a personal home and garden space. My studio exists across both. Nowadays that's in Townsville but even so, there's still that connection to North-West Queensland that I don't think I'll ever lose. The challenges are worthwhile because of the space we create.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

I don't know that artists actually shape any communities—they might provide things that help give a sense that people are connected, and other things emerge out of that feeling. There's a magazine called Huxley.Press (http://huxley.press/2018/05/03/staying-in-character/) up here that's been launched and supported by Sarah Mathiesen and Nathan Toll. The magazine and web site are devoted to the creative arts. At this stage it's connecting people to what's happening. I've been running Gallery 48 in Townsville for about 10 years. I open it for two afternoons a week. There's no money in it so you can't take out big ads for the shows but we are able to run interviews with artists. Other spaces like the Drill Hall and Sylvia Ditchburn Gallery are operating partly as ARIs (Artist Run Initiatives); they are also functioning as ersatz commercial galleries because there are so few other outlets. Umbrella and Perc Tucker Regional Gallery also sell artworks, as does Pinnacles Gallery in the Riverway Art Centre (a complex that houses a theatre, swimming pool, meeting rooms and coffee shop). They are funded partly or wholly by the Townsville City Council.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

Well as I've said, I've always remained deeply connected to this region, north Queensland and the dry tropics. Townsville has been a business centre on the coast for many people in the west. In the 1980s there was a yearly Pacific Arts Festival and people travelled from other parts of Australia for the festival. That would be a big challenge now—to bring back a similar event.

How does it feel now?

Well if you look around, you can see all these suburban developments, north, west and south of Townsville CBD; but one of the huge problems is that Townsville has a massive water supply problem. For three years the Townsville Ross River Dam has been down around fifteen percent—then a monsoon storm filled it to eighty-five percent in one week. But no one can predict the weather and there has been little-follow up rain since, so there's just no water security. What large city the size of Townsville has that kind of low-level water

security? It's an example of the kind of frustration that comes with living in a regional city where you know that so many of the things that are allowed to happen would never have been allowed to develop to the same extent in larger capital cities.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

I think that any attempt to make connections to other regional places is important—it helps to connect people in similar situations. It also helps to see how cultural differences are so important, maybe like biodiversity! Though, I think that in bigger places people don't bother too much about what's happening in the smaller regions. When funding is available for regional art projects: then things can happen in impressive ways in the regions.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

The houses are generally cheaper—getting around is cheaper but on the other hand a lot of the produce that's trucked in from the bigger cities is more expensive. Even so, there is a lot more produce coming from Ingham in the north, the Atherton Tablelands west of Cairns and just south of us, Ayr is a region that has a major irrigation system and produces seasonal vegetables as a result. Of course, sugar cane is a major crop north and south of Townsville. I'm currently growing my own vegetables, and it does seem that more people are doing that—we can't live off it in our small house block, but it does help cut everyday living costs. I also have four hens—they're my pets and I've given them names so I'll never be tempted to kill them and eat them—we get two eggs a day from the mature hens, with two about to lay eggs.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Yes—it's pretty essential. Last year I went with my husband to Italy and in 2015 to Europe. I always spend most of the time when I go overseas, in the art galleries, or at art events. Medieval and early Renaissance painting are two of my favourite periods; Giotto's paintings exude a sense of calmness, serenity and spiritual purpose… it's something I search for. But on the whole, contemporary art seems similar from place to place—it's good to see new work, but there tends to be quite a bit of homogeneity in those big international biennales or triennales. Well perhaps the same big names are often presented, although the shock factor is impressive in the big centres. In 1993 I took eight months to travel overseas. I was based in Paris and went to a lithography studio one day a week but most of the time I was just looking around, and that strengthens the sense of connection to place you have for your own country—I don't connect to Europe as a place but I keep seeing similarities. We have a different sense of heritage here in Australia possibly through painters and writers who have looked at place and reinterpreted it back to us. People say that the tropical regions are too hot most of the year but you have to put up with something, and at this time of year (May) and in winter over June, July and August, the weather is just perfect.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships? …or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

Social media helps to connect what happens in the dry tropics or communicate this place to other communities. Websites: annelord.com.au and connected Facebook pages, such as https://gallery48thestrandtownsville.com/?s=48.com are my methods of connecting art in Townsville to people here and in other regions. Similarly, I have a WordPress site Gardening in Townsville https://wordpress.com/post/gardeningintownsville.wordpress.com/76 because success is so joyous and revealing, due to the fact that it is such a challenge to grow things in an environment spanning monsoon weather and drought.

The possibility of building any sort of region-to-region relationships is an important way of seeing connections that go beyond the obvious. For me place is still important—I've got a sense of connection here in the city and suburban area of Townsville where I live. When I've gone away to travel overseas, it feels like I'm coming home when I return to Australia.

What is the role of your work?

I can only hope it has a role, as nothing is assured—it's something to do with the way you look at things and so that has a lot to do with your beliefs—if there's integrity in the way an artist looks at things and interprets them, that carries on into their art. I'm probably too cynical about the art scene, such as it is, to say there is a role for my work within that kind of framework, but you need to get it out there to audiences for the work to fulfil its role. Being a creative person and wanting to say something is one thing, but you don't have so much control over how your work is delivered to audiences and how it is perceived. If it does manage to reach many audiences and I've connected to someone about what I believe, I consider that a bonus.

Photos: Rachel Cunningham (left and top-right) and Angela Little (bottom-right)

Anne Lord

We are Creatures

2019

Wood, glazed porcelain clay, acrylic on canvas, markers on paper, nylon string and plastic | Installation at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019)

Artist Statement

My personal history is linked to north west Queensland. Movement and migration are inherent in living things: I created basic shapes to portray visuals about the region. Ninety-eight million years ago it was an inland sea and forests and ferns. We know this from fossil records. These link us to a largely unknown past. In this region where Julia Creek, the small township in north-west Queensland has just recorded the hottest temperature since records started, the future is linked to hotter as well as longer dry seasons with more severe weather patterns. We have problems learning how to deal with temperature but in addition we are only just starting to understand what plastic products might do to creatures and the environment.

My porcelain creatures have impressions of plastic on them: different types were used, some bio-degradable; some not. The elements of plastic have always been with us but how quickly can we do something about the problems we create? How will the environment, as well as creatures of the sea and land recover? What can we do about these problems? *The Partnershipping Project* provides an opportunity for discussion around these matters. I would like to see how the dry climate of Queensland might attract more consistent rainfall and less drought. Connected with these thoughts is my commitment to growing trees and being able to provide more data on the relationship of trees to climate and reduction of ground temperature.

GAIL MABO

I came from a family of seven, and when Mum and Dad adopted three other children, we were ten in all. We lived in Cranbrook in a home Mum and Dad had bought when I was six months old—it was our family home. When they originally moved here, Dad worked at the wharves, and then took on various jobs with Indigenous organisations, then he started a school called The Black Community School.

During that time, while he worked as the bus-driver, the gardener, the principal and cultural teacher at the school, he maintained a full-time job at James Cook University as a groundsman. The school took in Indigenous kids from the Torres Strait Island and Aboriginal communities—but lots of disagreement erupted during the 1970s because families wanted their children to integrate into the greater community. But Dad's belief was that the kids needed to stand proud within their own cultural traditions and communities in order that they could enter into the mainstream without falling through cracks. There were only two official teachers—but Mum, Dad and a couple of the Aunties and Uncles from the Community also taught there. Mum was the art teacher. The two non-Indigenous teachers came from Brisbane; they'd applied for the job when Dad had advertised it. Funding for the school came through the Department of Education and other government funding sources. Before the school had its own bus Dad would drive the kids in the family car, until the community fund-raised to get a twenty-six seater coaster bus.

I'm in the middle of the family—I've got a brother and two sisters older than me and a brother and two sisters younger than me. On the whole, my childhood was filled with more happy times than unhappy times; we were all given a strong sense of community and culture. Dad's convictions with his culture and beliefs were strong. Mum's culture was South Sea Island and Aboriginal but because Dad was so clear in his convictions about the need to teach us his culture and beliefs from Murray Island in the Torres Strait she was happy that we kids followed Dad's cultural teachings. Mum had to come to terms with her own culture and origins during that time, so when it was her time to tell us who she was, she did. That started to happen after Dad had passed away.

My grade one and two teacher in mainstream school was Senator Margaret Reynolds. She couldn't understand why I didn't want to read the books she was giving us, so she encouraged me to draw and design my own book based on the stories Dad told us about Murray Island. So I did; she gives a vivid description of that book I made in her autobiography.

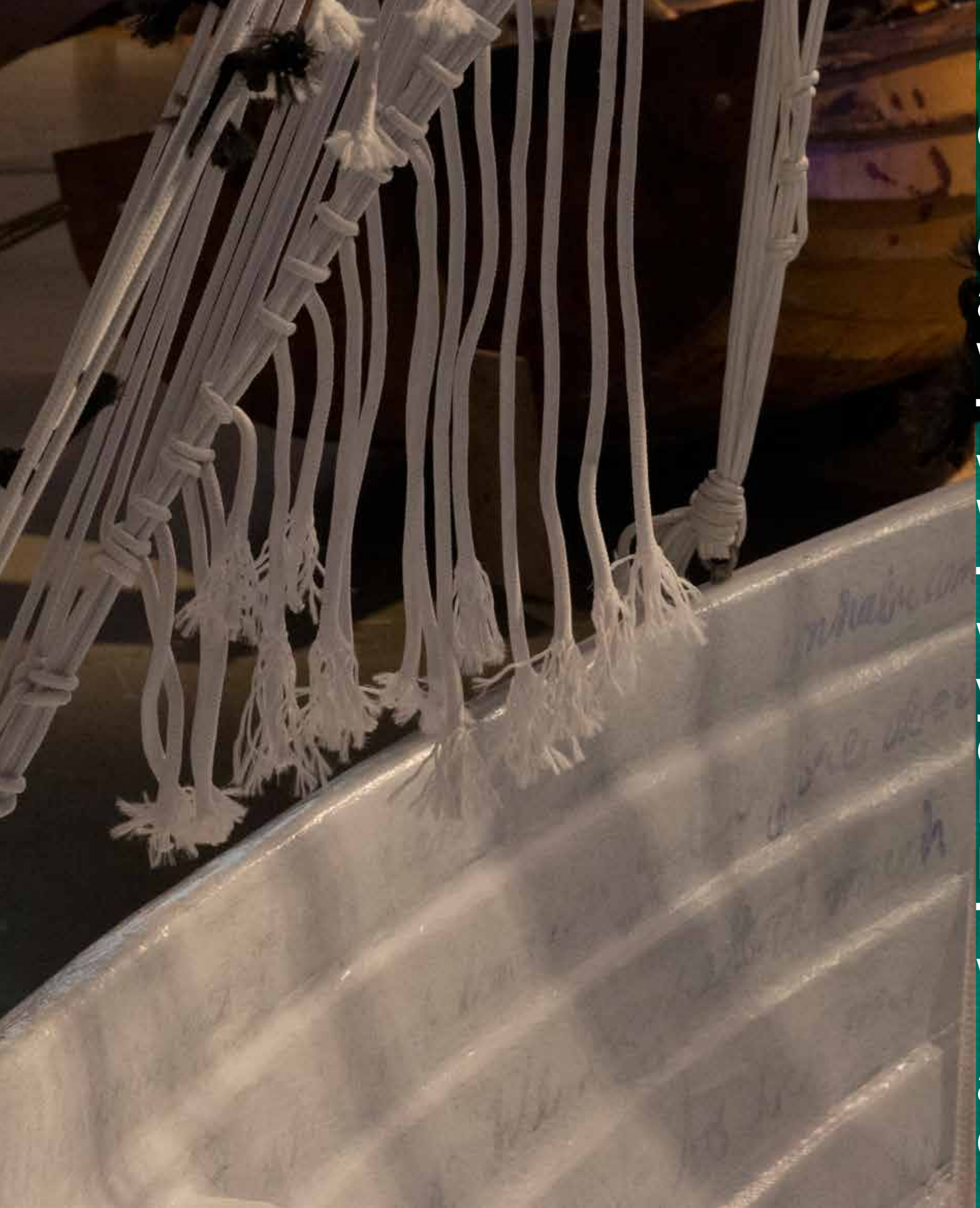
After twelve years of running successfully Dad's school was shut down on the basis of community fears that Indigenous kids were going to be taught black power. When I think about it now, so many of the students that went there have continued to maintain their strong cultural practices through a number of outputs—art, dance, story-telling. They still speak fondly of being taught by Dad in those classes when they were young.

I didn't have so many dreams and aspirations when I was young—just keeping myself going out of range of my younger and older siblings was enough. In my younger years I was an athlete—my strengths were in track running and javelin. Coming from a family of seven you had to know how to run and then you also had to know how to throw something at them when they browned you off. I competed in zones and represented the state in sprinting. One of the dark sides of being an athlete was training—I'd finish training late, but by the time I got home I knew I'd cop a flogging because I'd arrive home after the sun went down. But later I learned that the reason for the intensity of Dad's floggings came from the fact that he'd received death threats on the family and he was deeply fearful for those of us who might disappear at night. The intensity of the flogging came from the intensity of Dad's own fear… but none of it stopped me. I understood that I had broken the rule; I knew what the consequences were, and I was prepared to pay the price. I loved that running because it took me out of being part of the pack—the training took me to a place where I was able to just focus on myself. As a teenager everything is about you, but in a Torres Strait household, it's all about the family, and where you stand in relation to that in that family.

At fifteen I started doing contemporary Indigenous dancing with a local dance company called New Blood Dance Group. You'd train in the evening and then you'd prepare for performances that were coming up. Teachers were ex-dancers from the Aboriginal Island and Dance Theatre in Sydney who would return to teach the local communities. I danced from the age of fifteen through to twenty-one. I stopped dancing when I became pregnant with my first son Caleb. He's now thirty-one—I have seven children. My triplets will be seventeen on Sunday.

After I had my first four children I moved to western New South Wales. I needed something to do when my youngest went into primary school so I enrolled in a pre-school education teacher course. One of the first tasks in that role once I'd graduated was learning about how to get paint out of clothes—I knew the parents wouldn't be to happy if their kids' clothes were covered in paint after the activities, so I had to learn; that was the first time I started working with paint. My art started as a doodle—that's why I've taken on the name *doodle dreaming* as a business. I took my doodles and added colour and I just have fun with it. At first, I was frozen with the prospect of putting acrylic paint onto canvas, but once my teacher had showed me how to go about it, I was off and racing.

At the moment I'm working in a range of ways—I wear many hats—my wall is covered with hats. I have to regulate what I give out and what I am able to take on. I get so many emails with requests to dance, to create imagery, to produce written texts or seeking agreements or consultations with family and children and the work I'm doing now with juveniles who've come out of incarceration all keep me busy. I'm also trying to make a new home after having moved out of the place I've lived in since I was 6 months old. I've got Mum and Dad's history right down to my grand-childrens' to sort out and deal with—I ask myself "Where's the space? and "Where's the time?"—I have difficulty compartmentalising my life, but I deal with it on a daily basis.



“My spiritual beliefs come through my work. My star maps are a connection to my Dad—and to my forebears who used those maps to guide them across water—across Country. We’re only inhabiting this space for a while—when your time is up you leave, or you can choose to pack your bags before then and move on... The place that I don’t own, but to which I’m connected is Murray Island. When I arrive there I know I’ve come home”.

In what way is the place you're living different to other regions you've experienced)

Being born here is one of the reasons I'm still here—I moved away for a while, but I gravitated back here. Now that I've done my child rearing, I might move away again... but I might not, either. I like it because I know exactly where everything is—I'm familiar with it—I don't depend on Google Maps. Lots of memories are connected to places here—childhood memories that make up who you are as an individual. For me that generates a strong pool of memory and the feeling of belonging. For me Murray Island is home—that's where I feel I should be. My children are still in Townsville. Places are like shifting sands—different people come in, move out; it's the same with opinions—they change and move on too—they change like the sand does when the tide comes in. But what strikes me as a key difference is that underneath all these surface changes there has to be an acknowledgment that Indigenous People were here first…. Through art we can show connection to Country. My mother's connection is to Ingham and on my grandmother's side I have a connection to Palm Island.

What might make it difficult?

At the moment Townsville is more sport based, but we need to have artists have more of a say in the development of the place—to change the dynamics of how people think—at the end of the day, art should play a much greater role in the direction of how this town develops.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

Depends on whether you prefer dry and crunchy to green and lush. Green and lush has high humidity—Townsville is not as high humidity as Cairns. I prefer here.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

They have, to a point. There's an increasing push for art to be seen—now graffiti artists are working on walls around town and there's much more public works in car parks. During the Strand Festival the strand is flooded with art, but they're only fleeting moments. Umbrella is good because it's community based—and it showcases the diversity of people. Given that it's a place where we can get access to tools and space and access to other creatives, it enriches our lives. Umbrella is a place that can gather us together in terms of finding out what each other are doing. It's not a competitive arena—I feel that I'm still learning who I am as a visual artist. I work across a number of mediums—I do that because I want to show others who are willing to listen and learn that art just isn't acrylic on canvas. It can take many forms.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

When I was growing up I wanted to get out of here. Why? Because too many members of my family live here. And what do family do? They try to keep you out of trouble. But what does trouble do? It teaches you to be a better person. We all come with a baggage of things—the more you make mistakes, the more you learn. I tell my kids I don't want to know about their mistakes when they go away—I tell them I just want each of them to return a better person.

How does it feel now?

When I was growing up there was more appreciation of people as individuals—a neighbourhood was a neighbourhood where people knew who you were, and if you mucked up, they'd pull you up. But nowadays we've all become too Americanised—too afraid of litigation—so therefore the blinds are pulled down. We turn a blind eye. We don't want to get involved.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Art's an individual thing—if some artists think they have to be stimulated by other works, so be it. But that doesn't really worry me. If I'm in a capital city, I'll visit art galleries, but it's more important for me to follow my own path—my own ancestral ties and connections to what I need to do. It has to feel right to me. When I'm with creatives doing collaborative work, the energy is good when we're all working towards a positive outcome.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

Place matters.

Place is where you feel comfortable—where you feel at home and where you belong.

What is the role of your work?

Like all artists, to engage in conversation—to create discussion—to allow people to learn a little bit more about the beliefs of a person. My spiritual beliefs come through my work. My star maps are a connection to my Dad—and to my forebears who used those maps to guide them across water—across Country. We're only inhabiting this space for a while—when your time is up, you leave, or you can choose to pack your bags before then and move on.

But a place doesn't need to own you either. Unless you let it. The place that I don't own, but to which I'm connected is Murray Island. When I arrive there I know I've come home.

Photos: Rachel Cunningham (left), Colin Langridge (top-right and bottom-right)

Gail Mabo

Journey (Tagai)

2019

Whitewashed boat, rope, and shadows | Installation at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019), Lismore Regional Gallery (2020), Riddoch Art Gallery (2020), and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

For her work *Journey (Tagai)*, Gail Mabo chose to use a boat formerly used in artwork produced by Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Greg Lehman. Lehman had covered the boat in handwritten script detailing Cook's diary entries when he travelled to Hawaii and Tasmania. Gail chose to literally 'whitewash' over the text to leave the original words whispering through from underneath. She then began a process of weaving a stream of light ropes that, for her, represent the lines of a structure that otherwise would have been a sail. Therefore, the woven ropes represent a kind of skeleton sail on a ghost ship.

"The ghost ship", she says, "is one that keeps travelling—guided by those who time has forgotten".

"For us", she says, "*Tagai* is the spirit in the sky—the one we follow to lead us on our journey". *Tagai* is also the name for the constellation within which the Southern Cross sits. "For we Torres Strait Island people, *Tagai* is a celestial calendar that tells us when to plant, when to hunt and when to move on".

Although this installation appears minimal, its powerful presence is extended through the shadows it casts. "For me" says Gail, "these shadows are like the ancestral spirits that are always with us—who always guide us".

ARIS PRABAWA

Aris Prabawa arrived in Australia in 2002. As an artist who was part of the *Taring Padi* group, he was involved with the group's exhibition that year at the Adelaide Arts Festival, where they erected an enormous painted banner (approx. 8 x 9 metres) in one of the main streets.

Aris was born in Solo, and moved to Jogja in 1994 to work in a screen-printing business as a draughtsman and designer. During that time, he began the process of applying for a degree at the Indonesian Institute of Art in Yogyakarta. Aris is the youngest of five brothers, and as a child was always interested in drawing, guided and encouraged by his uncle. When he was young, a children's television series hosted and driven by local comic book artist Tino Sidin was a strong influence on his development. As part of this program, Tino Sidin worked with children to finish off their squiggles, much like the Australian icon, Mr. Squiggle, working with Miss Pat.

Throughout his high school years, Aris became increasingly aware of the works of Indonesian modernists that included the likes of Indonesian artist heroes like Affandi and Radin Saleh as well as European 'greats'. In Solo, an artist named Dullah, a contemporary of Affandi, ran an art shop, a place that was part of Aris' local beat. Yet at the time he was unaware of the importance of Dullah's contribution to Indonesian modernism. Looking back, Aris reflects on the fact that his dream was to study in the art school with the 'greats', when some of them were already living alongside him in his own home town.

Throughout this time, music was also a strong influence, and during high school he learned to play guitar. Jazz, local pop and *dang dut*—a form of Indian popular music with a strong sense of percussion that runs through the music of many cultures—were early influences in his musical education.

At art school, he majored in printmaking and he also enrolled in painting and sculpture classes, but he left after three years before completing the course. During that time, Aris had formed a punk band called *Black Boots* with three art school friends. The band steadily grew in popularity. There was a strong punk scene in the communities that surrounded the art school, but *Black Boots* was becoming increasingly identified as part of the pro-democracy movement protesting against corruption, militarism and violence.

The performances were not just about playing music; the three-piece band formed the core of a broader agenda where audience members were encouraged to speak up and speak out against the violence and corruption that characterised the Suharto regime. Aris recalls the front-line energy of these times, where the band and the collectives that formed around it were involved in a multiplicity of street actions. They used the stage to speak out from, not in terms of provocation for provocations' sake, but as a way of joining the community together in a sense of a supportive connecting spirit.

Throughout his candidature, Aris had also continued to support himself through his employment as designer with the printmaking business, and gradually, the demands of work and of the band made it impossible to give his visual art studio subjects the attention he thought they deserved. Although he was already holding his own professional exhibitions at this stage, his sense of responsibility to the work he produced contributed to his decision to leave the course, even though his lecturers were encouraging him to continue. In 1998, when the government announced that it was moving the Art School to another location within Yogyakarta, students and alumni and musicians and interdisciplinary performers and supporters who cared so much about the history of the building and its central role as a gathering point for communication and collaboration, gathered together to protest. They occupied the rooms and began a process of squatting that lasted a full five years. *Taring Padi* was born during that time, when a group of squatting art school students and their friends and audience members decided that they wanted to contribute to the democracy movement against Suharto through their art and activism that made such a contribution to the reformation movement. *Taring Padi* was mostly comprised of visual artists, but writers, poets, musicians. performers and activists came together through a shared commitment to social change through art and street action.

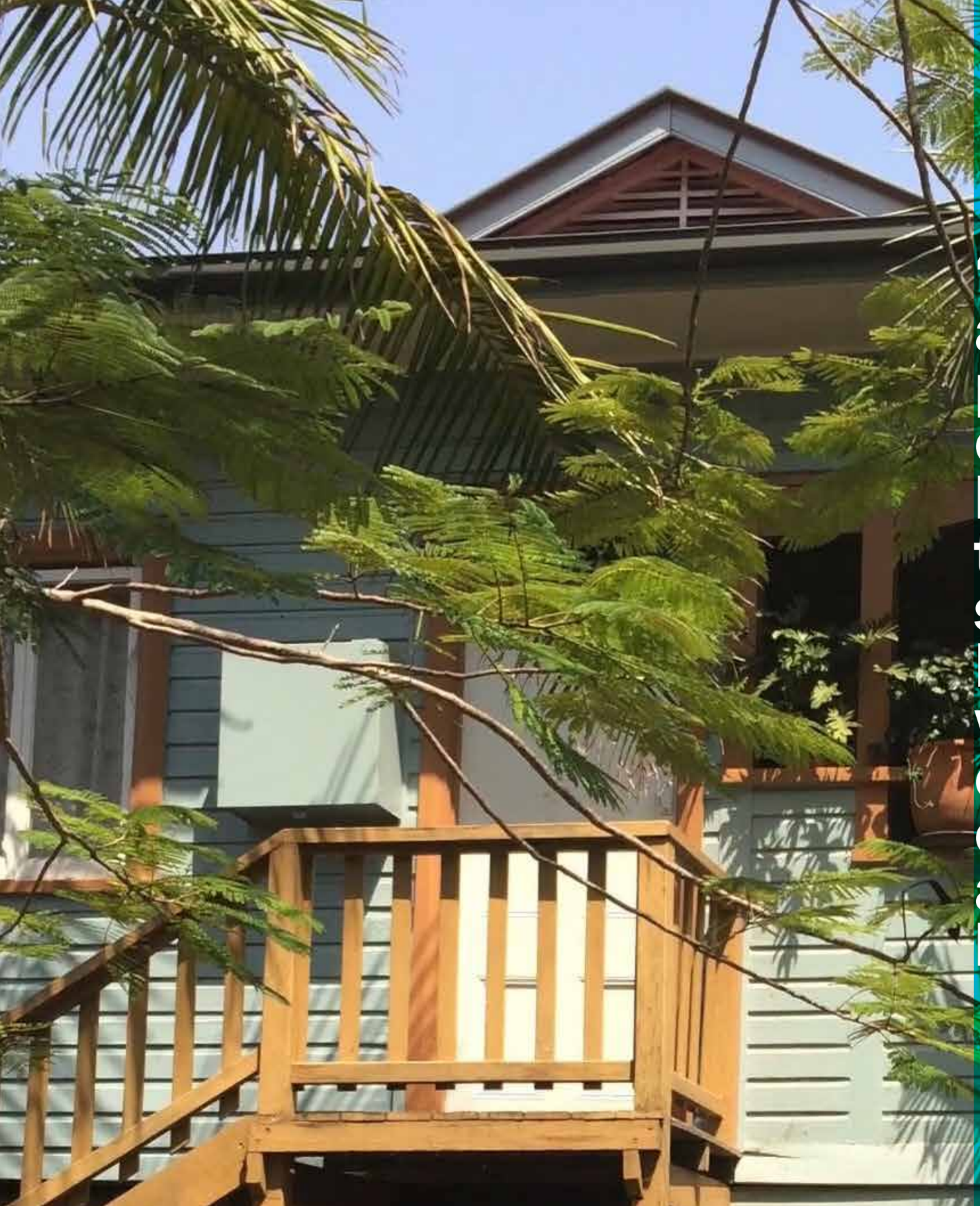
The group formed organically—they used the evacuated buildings to make massive banners and huge street puppets that were at times also used as weapons against the violence of the police and army. Many of the street posters were produced collaboratively by massive woodcuts; driven by the collective energy to make demands for change. But as Aris describes, the movement had its detractors. He says,

"We were also attacked by artists who didn't agree that art should be involved in politics. It was a divided scene in Jogja, where sceptics compared us with the communist LEKRA movement from the 1950s and 60s, the People's Cultural Organisation that had argued artists should concern themselves with political struggle. But we weren't like that—we just wanted to speak up about human rights. We were successful in bringing art into the community in terms of teaching technical art-making skills and also teaching them the collective skills of protest through consultation. It was driven by collaboration and consultation; we worked with a range of groups including farming communities where we used art and music to create positive mediums through which people could raise issues in relation to their own problems".

"I was an active member of *Taring Padi* for around four years; the entire squatting process in the old art buildings lasted five years, but by 2003, when they finally were kicked out by the government (who owned the building) and the Sultan (who owned the land), I was already in Australia".

"When I arrived in Adelaide with the other two artists from *Taring Padi*, I had already met my partner Jade, who had been studying art and language in Jogja in 2001. We met during the squat, and over the course of that year Jade invited me to live and work with her in Australia. At the time I had a cultural visa that enabled me to stay for an entire year—something that no longer exists. Jade had begun a course in naturopathy at Southern Cross University, and when my two pals went home after two months I decided I would stay in Australia to explore the possibilities, so we moved together to the Northern Rivers".

"During that time I worked in a range of jobs while I continued to make art and work on my music. I also played solo while I continued to write songs for my band *Black Boots*, which is still playing after twenty years. It's the longest running punk band in Indonesia; we have three albums, and toured Australia in 2016".



“I live here peacefully, and I feel like I am part of a community of newcomers who become stronger through their sense of support for each other. I use art as a positive way of protesting, exploring and speaking out about where I am and who I am becoming”.

In 2018 Aris returned to his former squat and art school in its current iteration as the Jogjakarta National Museum. One of the rooms still has an ink mural he produced in 1999 during the squatting years of a chaotic family birthday during the Suharto Regime. Aris arrived on the invitation of Heri Pemad, the Director of Artjog, the annual festival in Jogjakarta, and the creator of Art Bali, an annual arts festival in Bali. For many years Heri had been suggesting a solo exhibition, and so together they decided on a retrospective including works from over a period of twenty years, a total of eighty-eight works. A preview video of the exhibition is available on Youtube. It was a wonderful thing for Aris to return to a building that had provided the memories that bore the scars of so many aspects and phases of his life. He remembers how the lack of funding did nothing to stop the spirit of those days—of how fund-raising and collective spirit meant that the work itself became stronger. He recalls with particular pleasure how so many people were surprised when the mural of the work he'd produced all those years ago was revealed from behind the board that had been laid over the top of the original wall, and how even the Gallery Director was surprised about the scale and impact of the work, even after all these years".

Aris and Jade now have two children—Django (11) and Loretta (7) and Aris continues to move between Lismore and Jogjakarta on an annual basis. When he returns home, he makes contact with his Indonesian family, his band and his friends, and he is currently working on developing another album with his band. He quit *Taring Padi* five years ago when he felt his ideas and activities were moving in differing directions. Aris says that now his sense of 'home' lies in both Lismore and Jogjakarta, where his spiritual energy lies.

Aris believes that although media makes a difference to how we communicate, it is the nature of particular locales that lie at the fundamental core of how we relate to the world around us. In Indonesia, he is drawn to the identification of local spirits in the particular places he lives. And when he connected with Aboriginal Australians here, he was able to better understand the spirits and energies that keep this place alive. It's not too different from the sense of connection he feels in Jogja. "I'm not comfortable living in the city, but when I go into places of nature I feel connected" he says.

For this exhibition Aris' work about newcomers to a country draws from his personal experiences of living in a new place. It's about the feeling of being welcomed by a community—a land with a big heart capable of welcoming and supporting those who are coming here. "It's an expression of my own life here as I get more knowledge of local cultures. Even though racism and suspicions of security might abound here, they don't scare me. I live here peacefully, and I feel like I am part of a community of newcomers who become stronger through their sense of support for each other. I use art as a positive way of protesting, exploring and speaking out about where I am and who I am becoming".

Photos: Vanghoua Anthony Vue (top-right and bottom-right) and Brett Adlington (left)

Aris Prabawa

Shadow on Big Heart

2019

Mixed media | Installation at Lismore Regional Gallery (2019), Riddoch Art Gallery (2020), and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

In 2002 I moved to Australia from Java, Indonesia. It wasn't until I came to live in Lismore in 2003 that I started to feel a sense of connection to place.

In Lismore I found a familiar community of punks, activists, artists, and musicians. My sense of connection developed further when I met Thomas, an Anguthimri man originally from Cape York, who lived a couple of doors down from my house in town. I felt at ease with Thomas as his way of being resonated with my Javanese culture—we were comfortable sitting around sharing stories, drinking tea, enjoying silences, and recognising our common experience of having come to Lismore from faraway places. We collaborated on an artwork together in 2004 and the process helped me understand not only more about his life but also more about Australia and the ongoing impacts of its colonial history.

In Java I grew up by a big brown river that regularly flooded—living in Lismore by Wilsons River reminds me of this (especially when my home was inundated by the 2017 flood!). I feel nourished and inspired by the natural beauty of the Northern Rivers area and the abundance of bird life and other animals.

This artwork reflects upon my experience of being a newcomer in this land. The figures represent the many people who come to this place for a variety of reasons. For me it was to join my Australian partner; for others it is because they are fleeing violence, or because they are moving for work, or for family reunification. The native trees represent the great kindness and generosity shown to me by my local community here in Lismore; they represent shelter, protection, and the roots that anchor me to this place where my children have been born.

I have however also experienced suspicion and racism from police and border security here in Australia. The figures lurking in the hull of the boat represent this darker aspect of being a non-white newcomer to this place.

BRIAN ROBINSON

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

I was born and bred on Thursday Island and moved to Cairns after finishing high school in 1992. I moved here to undertake the Associate Diploma of Visual Arts at the TAFE college. While I was growing up on Thursday Island, I was always artistically inclined from an early age—I'd go around the island with a sketchbook and draw bits and pieces of landscape—or I'd sit at the kitchen table drawing for hours on end. I'd pull out the closest magazine or comic with images that interested me and away I went. Growing up I didn't connect art with the idea of an ongoing profession—I knew people who dabbled but there was no-one I knew who was really doing it as a professional career. In my primary and high school art classes I was one of the few males taking the subject. In year 12 there were about twelve to fifteen females and I was the only male. The majority of the art classes were practically based—the historical understanding I draw from now was really driven by me when I was later at the regional gallery. I'd disappear into the library at lunchtime and spend hours looking through books on all kinds of subjects from graffiti to primitive art, to Renaissance art and that kind of knowledge slowly started to build the visual vocabulary I continue to draw from.

I travel quite a bit now and spend weeks and sometimes even several months in other locations around the country and throughout the Pacific. Over the last eight to ten years I'm often island-hopping through the Pacific—over to places like Noumea, the Solomon Islands, New Zealand for a range of projects—and I've spent big periods of time in Brisbane working as a trustee at QAGOMA (Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art).

But for me the direct connection with the natural environment is what makes this place where I'm working special—at the moment the rainforest is right at the back door and the reef is right in front of the house—so it's perfect for anyone who feels the need to stay connected to environment. I spent my childhood swimming, diving and hunting in the ocean, and this kind of familiarity and connection is still what I'm drawing from for the creation of artwork.

What might make it difficult?

I'm about ten minutes from the city—one of the southern suburbs in Whiterock, but freight is a major problem, and the need to get away to access opportunities for the sale and promotion of artwork. I don't really create a lot of small work, so moving stuff around the country requires careful planning in terms of knowing when dedicated art shuttle runs are coming through the region—they come every couple of months, and building rapport with local freight companies (giving over a child if you need to) is high on the priorities list. Print based work is easy to move around, but now I'm working towards sculptural work that's more easily flat-packed.

Where do the other challenges lie?

Because I'm not living in the Islands any more, I don't have easy access to things like, for example, woven cocoanut mats, cassowary feathers, cowrie shells—the traditional materials that I use as part of my work. So I guess I'm at the moment a bit of a fringe dweller in between the metropolitans and Torres Strait—which I still think of at home.

But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

Yes I think so—going back to the Island would bring me access to traditions and materials but now I'm using contemporary materials to express these stories in other ways. And as Cairns is one of the main ports into the country I can get ready access to almost all the materials I need, and it's only a short two-hour plane trip to get back home.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

I think they have, and there are a high number of arts workers who have been drawn to the region for a number of decades. The galleries have an influence over artistic practice in the region through getting touring exhibitions out, and bringing new stuff to spark interest in contemporary developments happening elsewhere.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

As a young fella it seemed as though there was no world outside the Torres Strait and the only access off that island was by dingy. But as you start experiencing other worlds through television and the media your world starts to broaden. I didn't have any preconceived ideas—I just thought I'd go from art school and let things unfold … and from art school I did a year or two of consultancy work and a range of odd-jobs before starting as an intern curator at the Cairns Regional Gallery in 1997 under Alice-Anne Boylan. I spent the next fourteen years working as Exhibitions Officer, then Curator, then moved to the position of Deputy Director, Exhibitions Manager until 2010. I worked on my own art at night, on weekends and during any leave I took from the gallery. My entire life since leaving TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) has been consumed by art, but the last eight years after leaving the gallery has been full on—especially with the demands for public art. My first public art commission was in 1998 at the Cairns Convention Centre—it was a wall-based work featuring six large wooden shield forms based on canoe-shaped vessels.

How does it feel now?

I'm currently producing a lot of relief, intaglio and lino printmaking that I work on in my studio. I etch the plate or cut the lino and give it to a local printer to do the final prints. I'm also producing sculpture—both freestanding and wall-based. And then there's the public art, much of which is fabricated elsewhere. Lots of the early public art was produced completely in my studio, but the outdoor stuff requires strict Health and Safety requirements and it is exposed to a range of weather conditions so for that I work with fabrication companies.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

More recently there's definitely been an increase in metropolitan centres looking at what's being produced in the regions. I think there's a lot of really creative work being produced in the regions, especially in terms of Indigenous art. There's a lot of work that connects back to the links Aboriginality has with place—and there's also the sense that the art that comes from those links between people and place can result in a more authentic experience. Whether that's true or not is open to question.

“But for me the direct connection with the natural environment is what makes this place where I’m working special—at the moment the rainforest is right at the back door and the reef is right in front of the house... I spent my childhood swimming, diving and hunting in the ocean, and this kind of familiarity and connection is still what I’m drawing from for the creation of artwork”.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

Generally not—a lot of the large food chains transport their products come from the metropolitan areas to the regions and that trucking increases prices. However there's a thriving local produce market every weekend both in Cairns as well as in a range of smaller regional towns around Cairns that run a lot of unique markets that are stacked with local produce—tropical fruits, potatoes, a range of stuff—the place is dotted with farms. And then you have a whole host of trawlers that sell at the local fish markets. Every so often I get an Esky that's been sent down from family members who live in the Torres Strait; they're usually full of fish and crayfish and also include specialties like turtle and dugong that we all crave.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' and come back in again?

I think it's good to experience other places and have experiences that you wouldn't otherwise be able to have locally—it all becomes investment for your visual storage bank.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

I think it's definitely important to build those frameworks across the country, although it doesn't always happen as efficiently as you might wish for. Social media makes distant relationships and contacts more accessible, and it seems to be a good way of building on those contacts and relationships for a lot of people. But I'm not social media savvy, and in fact I avoid it, because it takes away from what I'm here to do, which is create work—I'm quite a private person, but it's good to know those avenues and frameworks exist. When I get back to the studio after being out and about at exhibition openings or to oversee public art productions, I like to pull into my shell again—I like to be a hermit.

Do you think place still matters …or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

Hmmm... is place so important when you can access places in the world so easily through the onslaught of media images of elsewhere? The thing is, the experiences when you're actually there are different. If I had to move elsewhere to make art I can see that it would be possible—I can see myself dragging my stuff elsewhere, but I think I'd always need to re-charge with home and family and place—those cultural experiences that I grew up with. I'm a story teller—I'm interested in narrative. It's a bit like the difference between reading a book and watching a movie—a book will take you far deeper into that experience than a movie would. Although in saying that I'm already thinking that so many people might be surprised by that kind of statement coming from me, because of the kind of work I create—a lot of it is so influenced by popular culture. But in the end I'd take the book.

What do you see as the role of your work?

I guess I see it as an extension of Indigenous story telling with a slight twist… the underlying basis for a lot of the work I create comes from a range of story-telling genres... sometimes individual works are layered with a whole host of different stories—not only from the Torres Strait but also from personal thoughts and from other mythologies and how they have parallel connections with aspects of art history. I guess I'm pretty much just telling my own story—of my own time. As a child I read Jules Verne, Marvel comics, Phantom comics, sci-fi, Steven King and Dr. Seuss. All these stories were woven through the stories of the Bible—big epics like Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark that came along with a childhood spent attending Catholic mass within a community in the Torres Strait where I listened daily to elders recite creation myths and tales based on our very strong connections with the sea and the currents, of star patterns and clusters and language and the dance lessons that were part of that entire cultural story.

Photos: Rachel Cunningham (top) and Angela Little (bottom)

Brian Robinson

Barter and Trade - Exotic cargo

2019

Wood and fibreglass punt, palight plastic, timber, enamel spray paint, beads, plastic skulls, dowel, cane, feathers, shells, and twine | Installation at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts (2019)

Artist Statement

The vast Pacific Ocean is populated with many seaboard and mainland peoples dependent on the ocean as a source not only of food but also of tools and trading objects. Trade in any culture has much greater significance than the simple exchange of goods—it is also an opportunity to gain kudos amongst one's own people, to forge alliances with others, to make matches—indeed, to contribute to the survival of one's whole way of life. Given the importance of trade in such a diverse area as that of the Pacific, it is not surprising that skills of navigation and canoe building flourished.

The earliest records of waterborne activity mention the carriage of items for trade—the evidence of history and archaeology shows the practice to be widespread by the beginning of the 1st millennium BC, and during the 14th and 15th centuries BC small Mediterranean cargo ships 15–16 metres in length were carrying 20 tonnes of exotic cargo such as raw copper, ceramic jars, glass, ivory, gold, spices as well as treasures from Canaan, Greece, Egypt, and Africa.

Trading was also extensively practiced throughout the Torres Strait. The Islanders were the middlemen in the movement of trade goods that originated in either *Naigai Dagam Daudai* [Papua New Guinea] or *Zey Dagam Daudai* [Australia]. One of the Islanders' major trading items was the skull. As well as skulls, shells of all shapes and sizes including turtle-shell were used by Islanders as trade goods. These were made into ornaments, pendants, necklaces, breastplates, water carriers and axes. Stone from some of the Western and volcanic Eastern Islands was also traded. Seafood was an important item of exchange; on those islands where gardening was not carried out to a great extent seafood was traded for garden foods.

Items such as arrows, feathers from the cassowary and bird of paradise, boar tusks and canoes were obtained from Papua New Guinea. From the Aboriginals of Cape York came red ochre for painting and decoration and hardwood spears. Trade between coastal Papuan villages still continues today. They bring with them mats, drums, feathers and baskets, which they sell for money. This money is then used to purchase goods from the local Island stores particularly on Saibai and Boigu.

OBERY SAMBO

What makes where you live different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

I was born on Thursday Island and lived in Mackay until I was twenty-one. I later left to move to Adelaide for two or three years for TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) training; then I returned to Thursday where I met my present wife. Together we went to live on Murray Island, and then we moved to Townsville in 1995.

We made the move to Townsville so we could raise our children in a church environment and also be schooled. Our religion—The Coming of the Light—is very important to us, and there's a big Torres Strait Island Community here in Townsville. When we first moved here I found out there was a Cultural Centre, so I started making small carvings and traditional objects that my Dad had taught me how to make, and selling them in the Cultural Centre. It was during that time that the Cultural Centre asked me whether I could also perform ceremonial dancing and performance. I'd been schooled in all those cultural expressions through my Mum and Dad—my Dad is a cultural elder on Murray Island, who teaches at the primary school there.

What might make it difficult living here?

Currently, as a TSI artist living here it's very hard to get the promotion and marketing of our cultural expressions across to broader audiences, as the Cultural Centre is no longer in operation. It closed down to bad management, but there's been no replacement arm through which to showcase our skills. I'm currently in the process of doing my own marketing and promotion and hope that in the future I'll be able to establish a venue to showcase not only my own cultural practices, but also those of other TSI artists. Townsville is an ideal location for this, as there's no venue to showcase our work not only to Australia, but also to overseas visitors. After all, Townsville IS the capital of North Queensland—not Cairns.

Where do the other challenges lie? …and are these challenges worthwhile?

We have a beautiful strand in Townsville, but nothing is currently made of the location as a potential venue for markets, or as a meeting place, or as a showcase for traditional foods, performances and entertainment. There's not even a stage on the beach where this could happen, and yet there's a wealth of diverse cultures on offer in Townsville—Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island and a range of other cultures.

The really crucial thing for my Torres Strait Island community is that so many of the elders are passing, and we urgently need a venue to celebrate and practice those traditions before they get lost.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

We have leading figures like Eddie Mabo who was a resident of Townsville—and his daughter Auntie Gail who is also an artist, also there is Aicey Zaro who's a TSI artist who had a gallery in the small community of Ayre. These artists, along with other TSI and Aboriginal artists in the community, have significantly changed the way all Australians think about our identity. And yet, at the moment, there's no local framework for bringing their work into the public's view.

There is an Australian Aboriginal artist group in Townsville—they don't have a centre either, so they've currently converted a space underneath one of the old Queenslander style homes in the suburb of Gulliver into a gallery space. The works they exhibit include Dreamtime stories that extend from the Mackay area all the way west as far as Mt. Isa and up to the Cairns area. They are the traditional owners of the land—the Birrigubba, Bindal and Wulgurukaba tribes.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this? And how does it feel now?

Yes I did—it was always my dream and passion to teach TSI culture as well as continuing my own area of practice and through holding workshops with the broader community—and to involve my family and my local Aboriginal and TSI and multi-cultural communities as a core part of these enterprises.

Right now, it feels like there's hope for the region, but it's about searching for that hope and finding the means to support it that's crucial. And we need to do it soon.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

I've been lucky enough to have been exposed to all kinds of cultural expressions throughout North Queensland as well as interstate, through traditional dance, songs and story-telling. And I've been fortunate that my art work has been purchased by major collections like the QAGOMA (Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art) and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra as well as having been part of overseas touring exhibitions. A pinnacle to this international representation is the collection of my work by the Cambridge Anthropological College in the United Kingdom. This is where a great many of our artefacts were taken during the1800s through anthropological collecting trips, so it's particularly appropriate that my work is there too, as an example of how our culture has continued to develop into strong contemporary expressions.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

My location in Townsville is central—in Mundingburra—I have local shops and a bus that stops outside my house, so that all helps. As a result of previous marriages and a death in the family I had an extended family of eleven children under the age of fourteen for whom I was responsible. I've worked at a number of jobs to feed my family and when the going gets tough, I go fishing. We extended meals into fish soup that we supplemented with rice and sometimes with damper and scones. Buying affordable vegetables was often a little more difficult, although we do grow cassava and banana trees. Now most of those children are grown adults with children of their own; only four of them are currently in high school, and at the moment I have nine grandchildren I'm able to teach in the ways of TSI culture.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' and come back in again?

The reason I like to travel and come back again is to gain a more informed idea of what's happening in the outside world—to come up with better ideas of how to have our voices heard and how to better our means of exposing our culture in the right ways.

How important are region-to-region contacts and relationships?

Very important—because so many of these regional areas were inhabited by TSI communities when the pearling industry closed down after the invention of plastic buttons. As a result, people moved in search of work to regional locations that were part of the cane industry and the railway industry. From that point on, TSI culture grew through region-to-region networks. We held, and continue to hold, regular festivals and celebrations and make sure that all the generations of children are always schooled in cultural matters by their families.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

In a way place—this particular place—is very important for marketing, because this is the home of Grandad Eddie Mabo—the library is named after him—but with the elections of new Councils every three or four years, all the focus has moved to issues like infrastructure and building to the point where the real importance of Townsville—as one of the TSI and Aboriginal heartlands of culture—is in danger of being forgotten. There should definitely be markers of this on the strand as celebrations of what has made this place so unique. On the other hand, in the centre of city there's a monument to Robert Towns, after whom Townsville was named—a man whose name is tied to the history of blackbirding—or indentured labour—in the area. Place—and history—always matter.

“There should definitely be markers of this on the Strand as celebrations of what has made this place so unique. On the other hand, in the centre of city there’s a monument to Robert Towns, after whom Townsville was named—a man whose name is tied to the history of blackbirding—or indentured labour—in the area. Place—and history—always matter”.

Photos: Obery Sambo

Obery Sambo

Ib Nog (Izib Ge)

2020

Mixed media

Artist Statement

This mask relates to partnershipping roles of protecting lands and boundaries, respecting ownership of certain particular tribal groups on the Island.

The Ib is a Lamar (spirit) that survives itself in the thick rainforest (sau) areas of Mer (Murray Island).
Izib is a location in the Island where these spirits along with other spirits live.
Its role is guarding particular areas that are taboo from foreigners to trespass.
Once confronted by this Ib, terrible fate lies at the hand of the trespasser, which includes terrible beating almost to death. These spirits have control of the wind to execute a mini tornado that would carry up the trespasser, throwing him/her to the roof of the forest canopy, with the intent of breaking the trespasser's bones at almost to the point of death.

The spirits have a partnership role that works in parallel to the laws of Malo Bomai (God/ Law giver) of Mer. That is to respect and honour so that there is no trespassing without consent on another man's property,

MALO's Law says,
MALO TAG MAUKI MAUKI
MALO TETER MAUKI MAUKI

Meaning:
Malo does not trespass
Malo does no allow his feet to trespass on another man's property.

DAMIEN SHEN

with Robert Hague

My Chinese grandparents lived in Hong Kong after they fled from mainland China at the time of the Chinese Communist revolution. My father was born in Hong Kong and subsequently sent to Australia in the mid-1960s to attend an Adelaide boarding school. My grandparents then joined him in Australia when my sister and I were born.

My mother was born at Point McLeay, on the Aboriginal mission, now called Raukkan, located on the eastern shoreline of Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. It just happens that the church from the mission is featured on the back of the fifty-dollar note behind David Unaipon, a Ngarrindjeri inventor, preacher and writer. The Ngarrindjeri lands extend from the Coorong of southern, Central Australia to the western Fleurieu Peninsula and about eighty kilometres southeast of Adelaide. Mum came from a large family of eleven kids. Half of them were born on the mission but the family later moved away from the area, eventually settling into the Adelaide metropolitan area.

I only made the decision to begin an arts practice about five and a half years ago. My very first project was a series of portraits based on my mother and her sisters and brothers who were born on the mission. I interviewed them about their experiences growing up on the mission and one of my key aims was to create a visual/audio experience to bring their story to life.

Fortunately, interest in my work developed across South Australia fairly quickly. I think it was partly due to the universal theme of my first project that was a large series of work around genealogy and place, and partly due to my initial enthusiasm to get some traction for my practice. I'd made the decision to build up a body of work and tour it around the regions rather than put it up for sale in a commercial gallery. I wrote to the association of Regional Gallery Directors with a proposal; most of them accepted, and the work was soon on the road and touring. It went to a range of destinations including Tandanya, the Adelaide Festival Centre, Adelaide Town hall, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Kapunda, Goolwa and Murray Bridge. As part of the tour I ran drawing workshops in most of the communities. The combination of having an exhibition and then engaging the community via drawing workshops worked really well—I really have a soft spot for the regional galleries and the way they bring the local community to the work and the way they're keen to participate in the dialogue.

In the beginning, I had a very basic, unwritten business plan in my mind: don't sell for three years, just focus on making, exhibiting and building my practice. So as things went on, one opportunity led to another and I would just work hard and keep motoring along. However, I think there was a key turning point where I was invited to do the Cicada Press Printmaking Residency at the College of Fine Arts, Sydney. That residency brought together Aboriginal artists from all around the country. I met Tony Albert, Ryan Presley, Dale Harding, Brenda Croft—a lot of artists with whom I felt a close affinity—and all of a sudden, I felt I was in the middle of it, so to speak. There was another really important outcome from that residency: I produced an etching that referenced an anatomical study by the Flemish anatomist and physician, Andreas Vesalius, who was working in the sixteenth century, at the same time connecting it to the dark history of the stolen Ngarrindjeri remains that were sent to a number of European museums to be studied. That particular work, titled 'On the Fabric of the Ngarrindjeri Body', went on to win the Prospect Portraiture Prize and the emerging category of the Blake Prize, both national prizes. Many doors have open since then.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced). What might make it difficult?

In terms of 'art world' considerations, I now consider myself an Australian artist rather than a South Australian artist, as most of the exhibitions I participate in are interstate. Property, transport and daily living costs are lower in Adelaide, and that makes things a bit easier—plus I'm only a one hour plane flight from Melbourne where my dealer is. I think it's important to turn up to certain events in metropolitan towns if I want to plug into the local arts community. But, that being said, there's still that sense of a distance between you and those who live and work in the big metropolitan centres, that leads to a sense of not completely being able to integrate—you end up feeling like a kind of FIFO (Fly In/Fly Out) artist I guess.

Where do the other challenges lie?

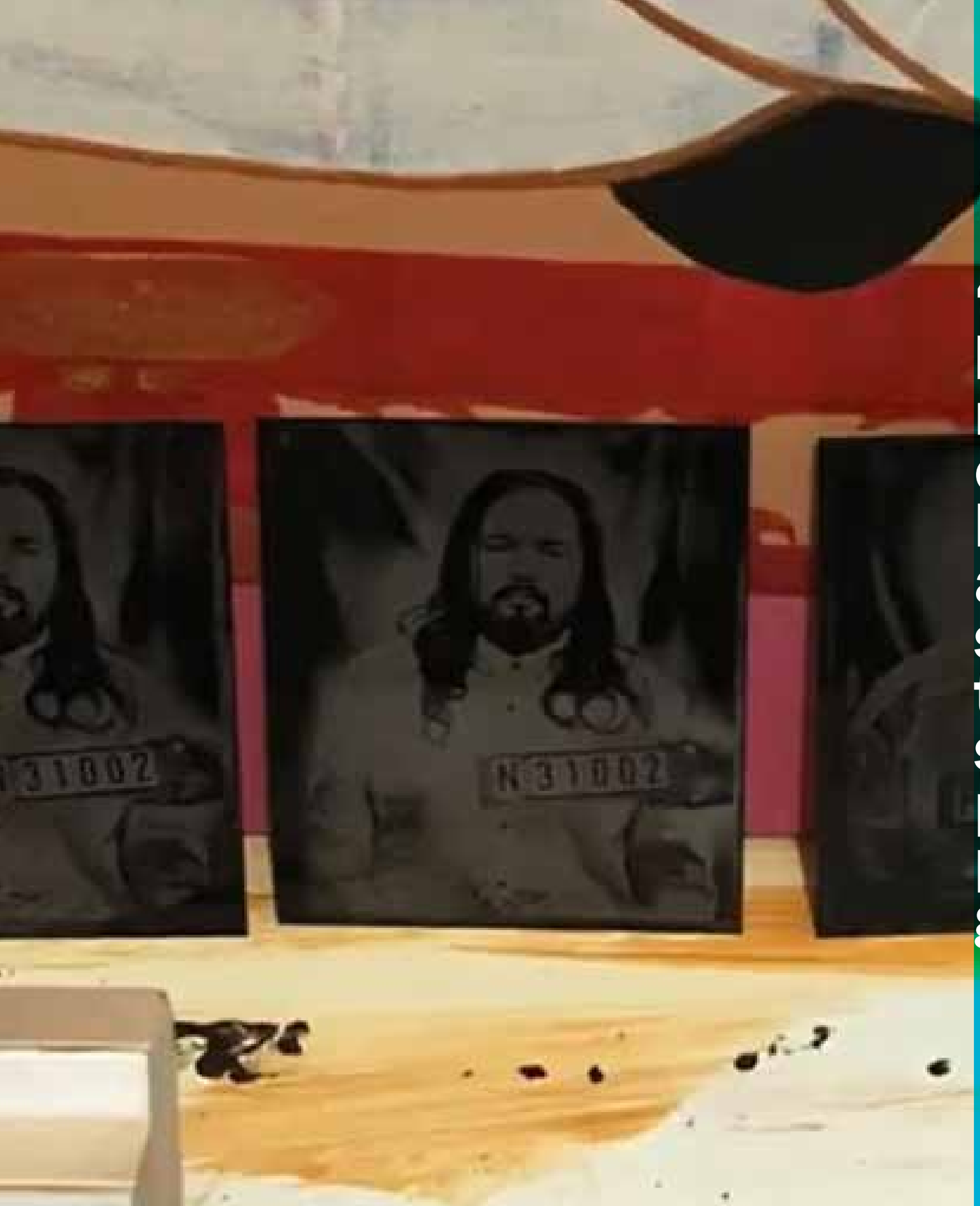
I don't tend to think of things as 'challenges' per se—I'm reasonably optimistic and tend to consider multiple angles of approach when I consider the making and business aspects of art. To a large extent my modus operandi in all this has been steered by my grandfather's influence as an entrepreneur. He used to talk to me about basic kinds of approaches and planning techniques when I was a child. The challenges, if you want to call them that, are more to do with life-stage priorities; I'm in my early 40s with a young family, a mortgage, a day job—the whole kit and caboodle—and the biggest part of that life stage is how does one fit everything into a day. The only way I can deal with the squeeze on time and resources is to think everything through very carefully. My time in the studio is limited, so I spend roughly ninety percent of my time on the conceptual development. The final ten percent consists of executing the idea to the best of my ability—and that can be done either by myself or through collaboration with other artists.

But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

I feel happy when I'm making art and my family is happy when the art/work/life trifecta balance is going ok. This is important to me.

Do you think your galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

I think Adelaide's creative scene is strong and flourishing. There are tiers of support for local artists, from ARI's (artist-run initiatives) to established commercial galleries and a strong link-up of regional galleries. There's also a group of artists who have established reputations for their work outside Australia and also contribute to the local scene. The SALA (South Australian Living Artists) festival is held every year, and this festival's contribution at the local grass roots level is important too—it drives the confidence of the emerging arts industry as well as showcasing mid-career and established artists.



“For my practice, the location or place of my history is crucial—I couldn’t talk about the kind of things I do, in an honest way, without sincere reference to them. There’s no substitute to being physically in that place and being on the ground...”

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

As I mentioned before, I'm considering my art making more in terms of being an Australian artist rather than a 'local' artist as such, but I have the privilege of being able to share my local stories and history. Through the growing interest in my work I've been given a platform from which to speak of these things.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions? Do you think it's important to 'get out' and come back in again?

I live in Adelaide. I guess you could almost call it a region in comparison to the other major cities. It's certainly cheaper to live in Adelaide than many of the other major cities in Australia.

It's important for me to go back into the region where all my history comes from—it's refreshing and re-charging and it's important for me to take my family there too. The other weekend we went down to Ngarrindjeri Country, near the Coorong, with Uncle Moogy (Major Sumner), and we all collected the reeds and sap for spear-making while Uncle took us through the processes and stories. My son Takoda really loved the experience and I plan to keep going back there with my children so they have a good understanding of their roots and where their ancestors came from.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

From my experience with engaging regions through exhibitions and workshops, the arts communities in the regions are reasonably small—so those inter-regional contacts are important in terms of the support and opportunities they can give each other—and there are a lot of logistical benefits to having regional networks. It's not easy for regional artists to get exposure in Adelaide, much the same as it's difficult for Adelaide artists to get exposure on the east coast.

Is place still important? …or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc.)?

For my practice, the location or place of my history is crucial—I couldn't talk about the kind of things I do, in an honest way, without sincere reference to them. There's no substitute to being physically in that place and being on the ground—social media can help in some ways in terms of making everything seem closer—and sometimes you meet people in exhibitions and you get a sense of connection that makes the nation feel smaller, but in the end you have to ask yourself about the extent to which you can really get to understand or know where that other person is coming from when you only get the online interpretations, because everyone curates their own presence online.

Photos: Damien Shen

Damien Shen

with Robert Hague

Where We Meet

2020

Direct life casts of the subjects' hands, feet and heads; large backlit x-ray images of their skulls; DNA data sets, including ancestral analysis; heart soundscape, contemporary tintype photographs, and hair | Installation at Riddoch Art Gallery (2020) and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

We, Damien Shen and Robert Hague, share little in our DNA or geographical and cultural backgrounds, we are about as different as you can get: one a South Australian man of Ngarrindjeri and Chinese bloodlines, the other a New Zealand migrant of Irish and English stock. Science might try to distil these differences through sampling, scanning and body part collection. It might compare our hair and blood and it may measure our hearts but it will tell nothing of the friendship and family that ties our lives together, or how we are made of so much more than skin or data.

This collaboration sets out to scrutinise the often cruel and indifferent methodology of science in the context of race through an autobiographical lens and is presented reminiscent of the 19th century collection of Indigenous people: a look at how science fails to describe much of what matters.

The ongoing collaboration speaks to the key concepts underlined throughout *The Partnershipping Project* of collaboration, diverse heritages, critical approaches, removing boundaries between life and art and how important is connection to place in a globalised world.

HIROMI TANGO

I was born in Imabari City in Ehime Prefecture on Shikoku Island in Japan. My brother is three years, eight months younger than me. Our mother was a housewife and our father created an insurance real estate company that served the local community. Since those early beginnings, my brother later developed that company to a major organisation for the island—one that employs a couple of hundred employees.

Imabari is a little fishing town surrounded by an inland sea. I grew up in a beautiful natural environment. As a child I would spend a great deal of time outdoors—we'd go fishing regularly, or hiking in the local mountains. We'd climb trees and pick fruits and food from the area surround the town and then we'd cook that food and eat it—it was a very satisfying experience.

When I think back on my childhood I remember my mother as silent. She didn't have a voice—in the regional areas of women are expected to not have a voice. My father, on the other hand, was an outgoing, gregarious, charming person—he was locally renowned for his hospitality and was a very popular member of the local community. Lots of drinking was an essential part of that hospitality, and I too was trained by him to drink sake by the age of three; my father was very particular about making sure his children were socially as well as physically resilient. He was also very keen to teach me the social skills and behavior necessary to be a subservient Japanese female, even though this wasn't appealing to me at all. He tried to chastise me and to ground me, but I wouldn't listen to him. I have memories of myself as little Hiromi—a two-year-old carrying hot cups of Japanese tea to my father. My father was very particular about the temperature of the tea and I can remember my mother's terrified but silent response as she watched me taking this tea to him; so worried about her little girl burning myself. In this sense, I remember my home as being a not particularly safe place to grow up in.

I don't remember much about my primary school years, but I have a fond memory of working as the caretaker of the school community garden during the summer holidays. I volunteered for the position, and I did it for six years. My parents were unhappy at the fact that I had to water the garden early in the morning and late in the evening over each of the forty days of the summer school holidays. My parents thought I was crazy giving that precious school holiday time to nurturing that garden. But it made total sense to me—we grew chrysanthemums from cuttings, cucumbers, watermelons, tomatoes, sunflowers from seeds and cuttings. I was fascinated with the process of tending and watering and watching things respond—you got almost immediate results and I was rewarded for my dedication—my stubborn dedication—to devoting that time.

Years 7, 8 and 9 in Japan are spent in Junior High School—I went to a local public school—everyone does in regional Japan. I had been a member of Rotary since I was twelve, involved in volunteering time twice a month and on weekends working with people with disabilities, picking up rubbish—lots of community-assistance activities. I have fond memories of the leadership those kinds of activities demanded; I learned a lot about the processes required to take care of local community during these times, and lots of those lessons have stayed with me. I dedicated six years of my work to Rotary; in a way I guess I was searching for a way to come into contact with humanity and for ways of connecting with other parts of the community and connections beyond my immediate family.

I can clearly remember Miss Tange, an English teacher in Junior High, who was always speaking to children in her classes in English, which was unusual at the time. I really liked the way she linked the world through overseas pen-pals who corresponded to her students. It gave me a sense of the spread of the world beyond my home-town.

Rotary selected one student a year who demonstrates compassion and service to represent the school in a particular activity; they nominated me to the Japanese Kendo Club and I began to undertake the strict training regimes.

My father was a judo athlete, and he was keen for me to become accomplished at that form of martial arts, but I really didn't like it. He thought it would help me but I wasn't interested in it at all, so he regretfully agreed that other forms of martial arts might also be good for my self-discipline. He thought I was a marshmallow, weeping all the time. He wanted me to toughen up.

Training for kendo was tough. In summer-time we'd do two hours training a day. For three years of Junior High School I was looking at the calendar to see when it would be all over. I hated it. But in Japan you can't be a quitter. It was all too stressful for me, and it HURT, but in the end, through default, I became quite good at it.

Between the ages of eight and nineteen, I was also practicing Japanese Calligraphy (shodo); that was my grandmother's wish. I had to also practice the arts of tea ceremony and floral arrangement. I was under the mentorship of one of the best shodo artists of the island—I knew I was fortunate to learn under him, and I also was awarded a scholarship at the age of eighteen to be sent to Shodo University. But I felt like a machine—not an artist—it was all about copying the work of the masters.

I guess you could say that in a way my only formal training in art is with shodo—I trained every day for about three hours a week for about three years. My sensei wanted me to be the best artist of the region. Looking back, I can't see how I managed it all—the stressful ongoing practice of shodo and the archery practice was incredibly demanding.

By Senior High School my father was still quite insistent that I continue to train in some form of Japanese arts; so when I quit kendo I chose Japanese archery–kyudo. Our team was so good that we qualified to the level of an all-Japan competition. I still have marks on my arm and fingers from the intensity of the training. Our coach was very serious—he was one of the members of the Japanese team. The exceptional results of our team meant that any of us could choose any university we wanted to. I never believed in sport—I was never really interested in it, but in the end, it really worked for me as a result of the success of the team because I was able to enter Japan Women's University—the oldest and largest private university for women in Tokyo.

In the Japanese Women's University I undertook a new course called Humanity of Culture of Arts. I was the second to graduate from the department. It was an incredible experience—we had many international professors from France, China, Germany and other countries. We had to study three languages. The classes were small—only around five students for each class, and for the first time in my life I actually enjoyed my learning. We were offered classes in anthropology, social

“Since moving here I’ve been involved in a flow of exhibitions; it’s almost like the once-voiceless person inside me has exploded. Even though I may have begun my journey with art as an ‘artist’s wife’, the urge to make art myself couldn’t be contained, so here I am, and I’m completely immersed in the making”.

linguistics, music, architecture and arts, English literature, comparative culture—all general learning—but incredible. I selected ninety-five subjects over that four years, and because I was representing my high school, I was very aware of the need to do well … especially as I felt that I'd 'cheated' getting in on a sports scholarship! It was here that I learned to speak and write English under an American professor. We also learned about equal rights for women. I studied to be a qualified Japanese language teacher in order to become independent and move overseas. I felt I couldn't fit in to society there; it was almost as if even complaining was forbidden. I guess from early childhood I had always questioned the order of Japanese culture, and that somehow my personality didn't quite fit in.

One particular subject I enjoyed was the study of Noh, where I studied under one of the very rare female exponents of Noh, Professor Kondo. She was so strict. She'd studied in America for many years; her view was dark, pessimistic and angry. But for the first time in my life I came across a female who was actually expressing her anger. I didn't actually like her, but I was empathetic with her situation and could understand and empathise with her anger at her situation. She had experienced profound discrimination as a woman in Japan—she was a kind of inspiration to me.

While I was in university I worked for the Australia Council as volunteer. I met my husband—Craig Walsh—when I was twenty-one while he was on an artist residency in Tokyo. When he returned to Australia, I followed to join him in 1998. We lived in Brisbane for the first few years and during that time Craig was involved in a number of national and international art projects. After the Tokyo residency—which was his first artistic residency, other residencies and exhibitions followed in places like Hanoi, Vietnam, New York, Korea, Germany, the Yokohama Triennale in Japan and a range of other international destinations.

Technically speaking, I've always been an artist. My father was a great father in terms of letting children do whatever they wanted to do, so my brother and I were allowed to draw all over the house. He was always supporting us, buying crayons and paint. Throughout primary school I'd take projects home from the class so that I could continue them at home. I was completely focused on doing things well. I was obsessed with doing well: when I made a mistake on one of the woodcraft projects by cutting through the wood, I hid in the cupboard and cried. I loved art and I was winning painting awards throughout all levels of schooling, but I was also good at science and biology, and when I look back now, it has all become connected through the kind of artworks I'm engaged in now.

I think I've always wanted to contribute back to society, and I've always maintained a passion to have a voice through which I can directly communicate—both of these needs (or desires) are fulfilled through art making. I didn't think I could pursue art through a formal training institution in Japan because it was such a formal process; my cousin was a very good artist but she'd had to study two full years even just to enter one of Tokyo's best universities for art—that wasn't very attractive to me.

But when I met artists, and especially through working with Craig, other avenues opened. My first exhibition was in 2005 when Craig invited me to be part of his mentorship workshop at the Gold Coast Regional Gallery. I was completely immersed—I loved it. I told Craig I wanted to be an artist and he shook his head and tried to explain how difficult the path was, but I replied that I was very sure about my choice—I guess you could say that this was the beginning of my artist's career.

Between 2010 and 2012 we travelled around Australia creating installations while we stayed in a range of caravan parks. Towards the end of that cycle of travelling and working with communities, after a very long, challenging day, I remember looking out at the water and realising how important proximity to water was to mental equilibrium.

With a new family, it was also important to have family support. We'd lived in Sydney for a while, but we knew that the need to be in a natural environment was important, and also proximity to an airport. Both Craig and I grew up in regional environments—Craig grew up in Lismore and we both shared a lot of similar experiences and it was a number one priority that we had access to nature. We chose to buy a house in Tweed Heads because it offered a great deal of what we value most in terms of the natural environment: we both fell in love with the Tweed river—that and the accessibility of the region to the hinterland, the airport and to Brisbane makes it a special spot. We regularly fish from a little boat, and we see water every day—so many of those experiences were important to us when we were growing up and it was important to be able to hand experiences in the natural environment to our children.

Since moving here I've been involved in a flow of exhibitions; it's almost like the once-voiceless person inside me has exploded. Even though I may have begun my journey with art as an 'artist's wife', the urge to make art myself couldn't be contained, so here I am, and I'm completely immersed in the making.

Photos: Brett Adlington (top) and Vanghoua Anthony Vue (bottom-left and bottom-right)

Hiromi Tango

Roots

2019

Digital photographs, family heirloom silk kimono, recycled and new textile | Installation at Lismore Regional Gallery (2019)

Artist Statement

U-ki-fu-ne heart

A boat adrift in the waves

Hoping to find home

Friendly shores beckon

At last finding safe harbour

My spirit can rest

VANGHOUA ANTHONY VUE

I was born in Sydney, the seventh of eight children. We only lived there for a year. My parents had arrived there from a refugee camp in Thailand where they'd been waiting for Australia's approval of their refugee status for over a decade. My mother and father are Hmong, a minority cultural group with no country of their own. Hmong peoples are found throughout South East Asia, southern China and beyond. They met each other in that refugee camp after the interrelated wars in Laos and Vietnam.

During the French colonisation of Laos, the French government had supported the Royal Lao family to stay in power. After the French left, the American CIA continued the support of the Royal Lao family and their government, recruiting among the Hmong to resist both Lao and Vietnamese communists during the conflicts. There were also Hmong who sided with the Pathet Lao (Lao Communists), which stemmed from divisions formed during French colonisation. My father and my grandfather were part of the CIA-backed force; my father was recruited when he was around 12-13 after his parents were killed by Vietnamese communists who raided their village. After the Pathet Lao gained government control of Laos in 1975, the Hmong who had sided with the CIA fled the country. In fear of his life, my father trekked across the country to get to the border of Laos and then swam across the Mekong River in order to make his way into Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, located in Thailand's northeastern district of Pak Chom. Like a few others in the camp, he continued to risk his life by going back and forth between Laos and Thailand, acting as a guide for new groups of refugees.

On the other hand, my mother hasn't spoken much about her time before and after the war. I know that she was orphaned at a young age, which she talks about with a lot of sorrow. I'm not entirely sure how she arrived in the refugee camp, but it was with relatives. Her brother, her only family member who survived, immigrated to the USA soon after arriving.

In the refugee camp my parents gave birth to my four oldest sisters and my oldest brother. Dad did a lot of odd jobs to get the family by during that time. Fixing shoes, teaching at the makeshift schools, helping the Thai's with construction work, and even working as a family planning consultant. Whatever was necessary to obtain some money to buy necessities for the family.

The next leg of the family's journey—getting from the Thai refugee camp to Australia—was difficult in all kinds of other ways. The Australian government was not interested in recognising the plight of the Hmong, but help arrived from members of a small group from the Hmong community who were already in Australia. Prior to 1975, the Colombo Plan had sponsored six Hmong students to study in Australia, with two other students sponsored privately and by the church. After the war, that small group of eight people began the slow process of sponsoring Hmong families. They fought the argument on cultural grounds, arguing to the Australian government that unless more Hmong were allowed into the country, Hmong cultural traditions and language would die. Slowly, year by year, the community of Hmong refugees gradually grew in number on the basis of extended family connections. According to some sources, a number of those families had changed their name in order to claim relationship status to the ever-spreading branches of the family tree.

Contrary to the popular imaginary of refugee arrivals into the country, my parents and my siblings did not make their way here via refugee boats; they flew into the country via QANTAS. For a few months we stayed with the Hmong family that had sponsored us in Sydney, and during that time a few Hmong families travelled to FNQ (far north Queensland) to check out the potential for farming areas. They returned with reports about bountiful areas of country well suited to Hmong farming.

We moved up to Innisfail first, lured by the promise of banana farming. While in Innisfail my youngest sister was born. For the first couple of years there, Dad focused on making a living while learning English, and Mum looked after the children. With Dad's previous experience in construction work, he was able to find a range of jobs in residential construction. We moved to Cairns where he took up positions in a range of trade areas. Over time, my parents and other Hmong people who had settled in pockets all across FNQ started small stores at Rusty's Market in Cairns, where many continue to sell fruit and vegetables they'd grown in backyards and from farms around the surrounding towns. Some of my fondest memories growing up are of the weekly drives to Innisfail to visit other community members, and of the drives to farms around FNQ in search for produce to sell. Long hours were spent staring out the car window, watching mountain after mountain pass. Income wasn't great, so we rented until 2004 when my parents were able to afford a house on a small plot in the Cairns southern suburb of Edmonton.

Straight after my high school education in Cairns I moved down to Brisbane to enrol in the Queensland College of Art at Griffith University. While I was growing up I was interested in the Japanese cartoons like Dragonball Z, Pokémon and Digimon I watched on TV—I drew all the characters repeatedly, so I guess popular culture was my real entry point to visual culture. I'd only visited the Cairns Regional Gallery once as part of a high school activity and the only other art I'd been aware of while I was growing up in Cairns was touristy kitsch art. But of course, Hmong art, or 'cultural traditions' was *always* there in its many forms. Before I entered the art college, I guess I'd had a vague idea in the back of my head that I'd continue to develop paintings that drew from the anime/ surrealist-inspired images I was already interested in. But after moving there, Hmong cultural references started to creep into my work. My first painting in undergraduate was about Hmong history—this was the first time I can remember openly acknowledging the importance of my heritage to myself. I can remember exactly when it happened: during a project focused on the HMAS Diamantina, the war frigate docked in the Maritime Museum adjacent to the QCA, I made the decision to link the subject matter to the recent history of Hmong peoples in Laos.

By the end of my undergraduate majoring in painting, although interest in my Hmong background had continued to grow, I was still repressing full acknowledgement of my attachment. Instead, I was working through the materiality of the paint, addressing formal concerns like colour, form, texture and working through the processes of painting rather than referencing any concerns beyond those of art for art's sake. After I graduated, I turned away from art for a while to embark on a double degree in international politics and communication at the University of Queensland with the expectation that the information would provide a way of feeding my art practice and also make me more 'employable'. But I pulled out after six months, feeling that I had taken on an excess of theory that I wouldn't really need as an artist.

I returned to Cairns for 6 months, where I focused on rebuilding my portfolio and submitting my application for Honours. I was accepted and moved back to Brisbane before quitting, feeling that the art world wasn't for me. A great deal of the art I was seeing and the art conversations I was hearing didn't seem to speak to me in connected or relevant ways, and at the time I was more interested in setting myself up financially, career-wise and relationship-wise.

I made sushi every day for two years in Brisbane. The monotonous routine of rolling sushi and over flavouring everything with mayonnaise from 9am to 11pm made me realise I had to make art to be happy. Even so, during that time I hadn't given up my curiosity to learn, and enrolled in a range of different courses. The entire process was a bit like moving in and out of a series of revolving academic doors that included a few months each in architecture, graphic design and engineering

“The picture I have is of me working on my veranda surrounded by cane fields, lush vegetation and mountains. In the wet season the rain is so soothing. That’s very appealing to me—also the fact that it’s half-way between South East Asia and Brisbane makes it seem somehow perfect. It’s a home-away-from-many-homes for me”.

drawing. I kept quitting each of them as soon as a sense of deep underlying dissatisfaction with the work they entailed descended. In the back of my head the image of being in a studio making art kept haunting me.

In 2013 I returned to Cairns—this time interested in pursuing a Bachelor of Sustainability—but instead I took on a range of jobs and redeveloped my portfolio for submission. At the end of the year I backpacked through South East Asia from October to January. It was an amazing, eye-opening time during which I met many people and visited many communities. To this day I still want to re-make connections with some of those communi .

In 2014 I finally returned to QCA to undertake my Honours. This time I had a research focus I could commit to: my thesis focused on reinterpreting and reinventing Hmong textile traditions through a more-or-less auto-biographical approach. At the end of what was a very productive and successful year I was offered a scholarship to further my studies as a PhD.

Since then, I've increased my experimental approach to art making; a key to the development of my work has moved towards the role community plays in the conceptual and material development of the work. Over the course of my doctoral studies I've undertaken a number of residencies and projects locally and overseas including at the Minnesota Museum of American Art, USA; in Tokyo, Japan, and in Hobart, Cairns, Brisbane and Logan. At the moment I'm looking forward to getting into regular studio production focusing on the links between historical records and personal photographs collected by members of my family.

What makes where you live and work different? (to a metropolitan area/to other regions you've experienced)

For me, staying in FNQ has been about keeping the connections with my family. The decision to not be there right now is driven by my studies and work: I'm towards the end of my PhD now and I also need to find further work, and feel metropolitan cities offer more opportunities for that. I've also come to enjoy the lifestyle in Brisbane—I cycle, and the pathways and bikeways here are more expansive than those in Cairns. But I still want to return permanently to Cairns. Growing up in Cairns offered me less distractions, and that contributed to the long hours I spent drawing, and also long solitary hours walking or riding my bike through the sugar-cane fields thinking—which was quite terrifying, especially on pitch-black nights, but it was really peaceful. I do miss that quite a lot, but those sugar-cane fields I rode through near my house are now gone, replaced by suburban houses, shopping centres and sporting facilities. A lot of that time growing up I was sullen and resentful of my family and the wider community, like many teenagers, and I guess that part of the FNQ landscape—and its moodiness—will always be a background to my consciousness.

What might make it difficult?

Despite the fact that Cairns is associated with a multi-cultural environment, my experience there was much more culturally one-dimensional. While I was aware of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultural groups, I wasn't too aware of many Asian sub-groups. I was aware of the Hmong community through my family, but I went through a period where I suppressed my connection with that part my cultural heritage. Perhaps I was just young at the time, but I felt the place stifled who I could be. I had to conform to certain roles or risk being an outcast.

The greatest difficulty in terms of my art practice and development has been the lack of visual art programs in Cairns universities. When I graduated from high school in 2006, there was no visual art program at James Cook University in Cairns. Although it was available in Townsville, I decided to enroll at the QCA instead—also wanting to experience the bright lights of 'Brisvegas'. Since then it's been a process of going back and forth between Cairns and Brisbane, mostly for art study purposes.

And where do the other challenges lie? But are these challenges worthwhile? And what kind of benefits are there?

The heat is a challenge—long hot summers make it difficult to work for long hours in the studio—especially if there isn't any aircon. But the rain is always a welcome respite. As I've said earlier, the real connection to place in FNQ for me is through family and community. It's also been because of the community there that I've been invited back to make some work there that directly engages and addresses the community.

Do you think that galleries and the artistic communities around them (the artists, designers, arts workers, volunteers) have shaped the local community? To what extent?

KickArts Contemporary Arts, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, UMI Arts and some other local initiatives are making a growing impact, adding to the culture and image of FNQ beyond tourism.

For myself, because so much of my work has been focused on local Hmong communities, I've had to travel to their particular destinations, and to spend time in consultation with them before planning and making projects. My own work is often focused on reawakening cultural pride and connection within a range of Hmong communities.

As Hmong people have traditionally never had one single homeland, they've had to make connections with whatever place they've been permitted to settle on. That's been a strong part of my own art practice too.

Did you ever envision yourself living and working in a place like this?

At the moment I'm living between Cairns and Brisbane. I've always imagined myself as being more fixed to one spot, but the fact that I grew up there making art there (in Cairns) and the fact that my family has more-or-less always been there meant that it's home to me. But it feels completely natural to make art wherever I am.

How does it feel now?

I still hold an image of the possibility of me living and working in Cairns—I just haven't worked out how yet. The picture I have is of me working on my veranda surrounded by cane fields, lush vegetation and mountains. In the wet season the rain is so soothing. That's very appealing to me—also the fact that it's half-way between South East Asia and Brisbane makes it seem somehow perfect. It's a home-away-from-many-homes for me.

What relationship does 'your' place have to the general scene in metropolitan-focused art in Australia?

Because the focus on my work is essentially on diaspora—and specifically the Hmong diaspora—my work and 'place' are connected in a global as well as a specifically local way. Over the years of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (at QAGOMA, Brisbane) I've grown increasingly interested in the work of a number of contemporary artists who also deal with these issues.

Is it cheaper to live in the regions?

Not really—but the travel between places is very expensive. The costs to fly between Brisbane and Cairns a few times per year can add up. I've yet to really consider buying a house, but I do think it is cheaper to buy in Cairns than in Brisbane. In terms of art, some materials can be a challenge to get in Cairns and require purchase and shipping from elsewhere. But that doesn't happen too often—and it does encourage you to be adaptive and resourceful.

Do you think it's important to 'get out' from the regions and come back in again?

Yes—diversity of experiences is important. Also, it's become increasingly important for me to maintain contact with a range of regions both in Australia and in South-East Asia. Growing up in Cairns has made me aware of other places—of wanting to be elsewhere. But once I am elsewhere, I've always felt the urge to return—for family and for nostalgia.

How important are region-to-region contact and relationships?

In terms of the Hmong community in Australia, that kind of communication has been instrumental in assisting their initial exit from refugee camps. As the Hmong Australian population is also small and widely dispersed, maintaining region-to-region relationships has also been crucial for economic, social, and cultural assistance across the community.

And in my own experience, region-to-region contacts have helped build networks for future possible engagements. At the moment I'm hoping that these contacts will provide a basis for new ones in the future. But aside from work purposes, it has also been about sharing and exchanging experiences, and about feeling connected to others of shared history, culture and identity.

Do you think place still matters…or do you just think that the importance of place has been dissolved by social media, international marketing and the onslaught of the multi-national conglomerates (Facebook; Apple; Amazon; Netflix; Google etc)?

I think it's still important in terms of a feeling I can get from a place when I'm actually there. In terms of making art, I don't feel that not being at a certain place makes too much of a hindrance to my production—I use a lot of social media and online research to make my work. Nonetheless, nothing compares with the experience of spending time and making connections in a particular place and with the people there.

What is the role of your work?

Connecting people and connecting stories and histories to people. I think that work can give people—individuals and communities—a sense of connection—of counteracting that feeling of being adrift. Also, it's about making use of the opportunities that make my life worthwhile—doing work that makes a difference to others in terms of opening up opportunities and making their presence felt—the importance of feeling listened to and acknowledged. A lot of it comes down to the feeling of not feeling overlooked. It might have something to do with my experience being the seventh child in the family … maybe not? But a lot of that motivation also comes from the Hmong experience, which like many minorities, is often neglected and disregarded.

Photos: Brett Adlington (top-left), Colin Langridge (top-right), and Vanghoua Anthony Vue (bottom)

Vanghoua Anthony Vue

ev-cog-ciaj (carry-plant-live)

2018

Printed paper, bamboo from Far North Queensland, soil and rice straw from the artist's parent farm and backyard, twine, tablets, hydroponic lights and basil | Installation at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts 2019, Lismore Regional Gallery 2020, Riddoch Art Gallery 2020, and Burnie Regional Art Gallery 2020

Artist Statement

ev-cog-ciaj (carry-plant-live) is a collaborative-based work between the artist and his parents' and explores the 'shipping' and translation of home and belonging from South East Asia to Far North Queensland. Included in the work are photographs and videos that document the artist's family's migration from war-torn Laos to Thailand's refugee camp, and to their making of home in Far North Queensland since the early 1990s. *ev-cog-ciaj (carry-plant-live)* includes natural materials found in both Far North Queensland and South East Asia, and the use of Hmong cultural and agricultural practices.

Although forcibly displaced from homes of the past, the use of these materials and practices enable strong roots to seep into Far North Queensland's soil—enriching, nurturing, and contributing to the place.

SERA WATERS

Growing up in Mount Gambier I had a stable, comfortable and protective family life. I remember my childhood and teenage years as being cocooned by nature and full of potential mystery: the dark soil, caves underfoot, strange creatures (like the Tantanoola Tiger), limestone and mineral-rich waterways, our 'deadly' bike-riding hill, giant holes in the ground, or being surrounded by pine forests in which all manner of things occurred. For me, there was a cocoon-like security in the rich volcanic black earth, the lush green growth, and high-water levels that I still carry deep inside of me today. This equated to survival, and by contrast I feel uneasy in desert scapes. As an adult I came to realise my understanding of this region was a biased one based upon historical gaps, untold narratives, with only small glimpses beyond the pioneer and pastoralist history that things may have once been otherwise. I benefitted from this giving land and sensed there were other stories but had little understanding of its past. My sense of belonging there (or anywhere for that matter) is rightly unsettled, and my art operates from this ambiguous and questioning position, always seeking layers and gaps.

I've since learned that my ancestors were some of the earlier settler colonists to make their home in Mount Gambier, and not so long after opened a cheese factory in Tantanoola in the 1850s and 1860s. These areas had a lot more water in them before settlers, including my ancestors, petitioned for drains to be put in to send the water out to sea to make the land easier to farm. Other ancestors, these based in Port Adelaide, had ketches and would deliver goods and building materials upon the sea all along the South Australian coastline. This undoubtedly sped up the rate of growing settlement, building, clearing and infrastructure. My practice continually asks what do I do with this knowledge? Where do I belong? How can I take responsibility for my ignorance, for theirs, for the damage that has been done, all the while acknowledging that histories are complex and messy and important to know for going into a future. Water is critical to this future which makes the south-east a region of great interest.

In my practice I turn to intergenerational and passed-along textile traditions to literally grasp how my ancestors could have navigated and internalised the unsettling side of their settling. How they might have reflected the great changes they inflicted on Country, and how I have at times unwittingly carried on these colonising habits. Truth-telling is a key part of my practice. In traditions and in artefacts I search for their knowledge and evidence of their experiences (and that of their wider family) that weren't passed along with historical narratives, and I look for clues to how they survived. I also search out other ways of knowing a place, knowing its past, and then I shift these trajectories (these textile traditions) to head towards a different future where recognition and responsibility, listening and caring, are central.

My proposed response will be based upon these carefully handmade textile traditions, as well as in the knowledge of local communities, which come to not only know a place but to embody it and replicate it in their makings, in order to survive. My work brings together the dark palette of the South-East, sculptural and homely textile forms in bodily scales (thinking of door snakes, cushions, quilts, and domestic decorative textiles) with the natural features of the South-east, such as caves, forests, limestone and water. This installation manifest spaces and gaps of knowledge in the forms of caves, drains and holes, to point to pasts and presents that are unknown, unacknowledged, disavowed or under-scrutinised.

“I remember my childhood and teenage years as being cocooned by nature and full of potential mystery: the dark soil, caves underfoot, strange creatures (like the Tantanoola Tiger), limestone and mineral-rich waterways, our ‘deadly’ bike-riding hill, giant holes in the ground... For me, there was a cocoon-like security in the rich volcanic black earth, the lush green growth, and high-water levels that I still carry deep inside of me today”.

Photos: Sera Waters

Sera Waters

Cave Thinking

2020

Mixed media: hand-dyed repurposed textiles, cotton, family bed sheets, stuffing, felt, wool, tent poles, and LED light | Installation at Riddoch Art Gallery (2020) and Burnie Regional Art Gallery (2020)

Artist Statement

My entanglements with the South-East stretch back generations, to early settlers colonising and making homes and growing livelihoods, ketch sailors who travelled the coastline of South Australia delivering home building materials, and ancestors who petitioned for drainage across the region. They were drawn to this area for its rich water and fertile volcanic soil, and used that to their advantage. Though it is unsettling, my work necessarily grapples with the repercussions of this inheritance, and the damage that has impacted balanced ecologies, water supplies, and the Bungandidj people of this region. This cave, tent, or cubby-like artwork uses textile materials and techniques, many garnered from family collections and traditions, to recognise that comforting homely acts, like making door-snakes or quilts, are traditions through which I can keep interrogating how settling occurred, the labour of my female ancestors, and how I can work to shift the future trajectories of these family inheritances.

Cave Thinking suggests a soft shelter, yet also offers a glimpse below the surface of this region. The hand and machine stitched quilt, which makes up the outer layer of this cavern, has been geometrically pieced together to reflect the topography of Mount Gambier and its surrounds: fenced paddocks, forested areas, roads, crop rows, quarries, townships, and surveyed divided land. By contrast, the dark tangled underside invokes the organic weaving of what goes on below; cave systems, water ways, and other ways of being. From growing up in Mount Gambier I have come to realise my thinking has been shaped by this idea of caverns, layers and of gaps underfoot where unknown happenings occur, and I use this to re-examine and understand the complexity of our past and the ways it manifests in the present. Perhaps more than anywhere in Australia the internal happenings of the land are visible and accessible in the South-East. Reconsidering them through art making provides the potential to deeply grapple with other ways of thinking moving into a more precarious future.

GALLERY DIRECTORS' STORIES

BRETT ADLINGTON

Director of Lismore Regional Gallery,
Lismore, New South Wales Australia

The arts sector, particularly the regional arts sector is a small entity, and so interconnected, that there really is only about half a degree of separation between anyone—if that.

I was reflecting on this as I read Jonathan McBurnie's essay for this publication. There seemed to be so many similarities in our life journey; indeed I worked in the cultural sector in Townsville and knew his dad—but we've never crossed paths. Until now.

Like Jonathan, I also grew up where I now work (Lismore), but spent many years away in other cities (Sydney, Townsville, Gold Coast, Newcastle). While each of those cities brought their own particular flavour, and they were great for certain times in my life, the Northern Rivers always beckoned with its sense of familiarity. This was keenly felt many years ago when I rushed from Townsville to Lismore to be with my dying grandmother. The trees, grass, rivers and ocean all felt 'right', like I belonged, and understood where I was at a challenging time.

I also carry Jonathan's pertinent observation of his hometown with its "aspects of adoration, indifference and sometimes even contempt, and all of these are couched in memories, emotions and experiences". And while we may not be able to claim a communist for a mayor (though we can also claim Julian Assange as being a one-time resident), progressive politics have been alive and well in our area for decades, indeed Australia's first environmental blockade happened just outside Lismore. More recently, the anti-Coal Seam Gas movement galvanised vast swathes of the community—with an ultimate win.

I read Jonathan's essay while I was in Hobart (where *The Partnershipping Project* originated) and it's where I'm sitting now as I write this.

And as I sit here, gazing up at Kunanyi/Mt Wellington, I think back to the view out the back of our Townsville house to the equally dominant (but less snow-clad) Castle Hill—and think about landscape. And what landscape means when you are living in the country, or indeed in a small city where the landscape is very present; and how it shapes the very personality of the town and its inhabitants.

I was discussing this with an artist in Hobart the other day, about how living with a dominant landscape that you can't escape grounds you—much more than is possible in Melbourne or Sydney (well, yeah, there is the harbour, but you have to be rich to see it).

Lismore has an equally dominant aspect in our landscape, but it isn't as 'in your face' as Hobart or Townsville. It's not as visible or reaching to the sky. It doesn't act as a vantage point for distant views. The dominant part of Lismore's landscape snakes through it, and to many people it remains invisible. But when it rains, and rains heavy, people's minds turn to this weaving serpent, wondering if it will be unleashed. It is then that this part of our landscape dominates in ways we are kind of used to, but really don't want to face.

Lismore is one of the most flood-prone towns in the country. Our European forebears saw the river as great for transportation, with the confluence of two rivers being great for turning boats. It is this confluence of two rivers in the Lismore CBD that is the major cause of floods in the town. These rivers rise in the verdant hills of the Northern Rivers, cascading down to the flood plain of Lismore.

These hills to the north of Lismore are part of a landscape that beckons outsiders to the region—and was where the 1973 Aquarius Festival took place. This festival brought with it an influx of students, artists, environmentalists and activists to live here permanently. More recently the annual Tropical Fruits festival has ensured Lismore is home to one of regional Australia's most vibrant, and largest LGBTQI communities.

Many of these new arrivals in the 1970s developed a market culture to earn a living that persists to this day. Out of this developed a very strong community of ceramicists, which over the years expanded to encompass all artforms.

The result (and here Johnathan and I may beg to differ), is the Northern Rivers being one of the most creatively rich regional areas in the country.

The festival culture that was first stirred in the 1970s continues today, which much larger, and professionally organised events. We are home to Lismore Lantern Parade, Splendour in the Grass, Bluesfest, Falls Festival, Byron Writers Festival, Byron Bay Film Festival and Mullum Music Festival. This is when the world comes to our area.

And we can even claim Margaret Olley as one of our own, not so much as a practicing artist, but by token of Lismore being her birthplace.

More recently, the Northern Rivers has seen an upsurge in established artists moving to the region, or indeed those wanting to establish themselves as artists. They come here for the landscape, and the climate, cheaper studios, and

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because we are known to have such a strong creative economy and thus the support that goes with that. However, unlike North Queensland, a move to our region is a much less ambitious leap. Both Sydney and Brisbane are easily reached for day trips, so there is less of that sense of 'making it against the odds', than say, a move to Tully, would.

I could name check a number of these recent established artists, but I won't; as many, while not shying away from the fact that they live here, are keen to keep a fairly low profile.

The four local artists selected for this exhibition, Penny Evans, Hiromi Tango, Aris Prabawa and Karla Dickens have all moved here over the years. They have all established very strong practices since their arrival. Their careers are clear evidence that being located in a country area is no inhibitor to establishing yourself as a professional artist.

And lest I present too glowing a picture of creative and political life here in Lismore, all these mixes of personalities, ideas and activism keeps us on our toes. There is an edge to Lismore I haven't encountered elsewhere. The Australian, 'she'll be right' attitude doesn't really seem to exist here. It's more an, 'it's not right, and we demand change'.

The schism that developed in the 1970s between those that represented the 'new arrivals' (hippies, artists, leftists, LGBTQI community, environmentalists), and those that represent the 'old timers' (everyone else), continued for decades.

For those of us at the gallery, it's a continual dance between all those groups. But I feel it's changing. In 2017, as a post-flood recovery effort to get people back in to Lismore to shop, the local chamber of commerce engaged locally renowned drag queen, and son of an ex-mayor (Maude Boate), and 'son of Murwillumbah'—Bob Downe—to create an advertisement that totally hit the spot. At once gloriously camp, creative and heartfelt, it celebrated the distinctiveness that is Lismore. And it also summarises what the floods are about. While there may be some divisiveness between camps of people, come flood time, this evaporates with the weird excitement that comes with the pack-up of the town, and then the devastating clean-up. As gut-wrenching as it was to see our amazing town so devastated last year, the armies of locals out to support each other was truly something to behold.

For me—that's the reason I'm working where I am. Lismore is really a 'team effort'—it relies on what lies at the true core of 'partnershipping'. There are challenges, but more and more we're working in creative ways to overcome them.

JONATHAN MCBURNIE

Former Director, Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts, Townsville, Queensland.

(note: at the beginning of *The Partnershipping Project* Jonathan was working in the position of Director, Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts)

Reacquainting myself with my hometown

Summing up my relationship with my hometown, Townsville, is more difficult than I expected when I agreed to write such a thing. I suppose this makes sense—living in the place for seventeen years, living elsewhere, but still with a number of familial attachments drawing me back periodically, for another fifteen, before returning. Like any relationship, there are aspects of adoration, indifference and sometimes even contempt, but all of these are couched in memories, emotions and experiences.

When I left in 2000 for Brisbane, I found myself having to defend my hometown, and its cultural offerings, regularly to people that had never been north of the Sunshine Coast. When I moved to Sydney in 2011, I found myself having to defend Queensland and its cultural offerings to people who had never been north of Byron Bay. In both instances, I found actions would speak louder than words, and as a proud North Queenslander, it became easier to show the naysayers what we had to offer simply by outdoing them. Bigger, better, smarter.

We emphasize the 'bigger' a lot here in Queensland. It's a big state, full of big dreams, big personalities and big fibreglass fruit and cow sculptures. It is part of what gives southerners a chuckle, but it's also the way we dream things up: always bigger.

Townsville has the strange distinction of being, historically, the 'most communist' city in the nation, so-called, due in no small measure, to noted communist Fred Paterson's service as Alderman on the Townsville City Council. 'Red Fred', a barrister known for defending the working class and (successfully) fighting racist employment policies, was elected in 1939 and re-elected in 1943. This was, in fact, the first and only time in

"Leaving Townsville at seventeen and coming back at thirty-two has been an interesting and sometimes confronting process for me, specifically in coming to terms with my own past, and acknowledging what kind of effect it has had over me throughout the years. Smells, sights and sounds so familiar, spurring visceral reactions, from pleasant nostalgia to overwhelming despair".

Australian history a member of the Communist Party would serve in local government. Paterson then went on to make history again, serving two terms in the State seat of Bowen. I find it strange that this controversial figure is not more widely celebrated, not necessarily for his socialist values, commendable though they may have been, but for his active fight against racism. In his way, Red Fred is an incredibly typical Townsville political mind, joining others such as Eddie Mabo and Julian Assange, figures whose politics were shaped and tempered here, culminating in actions verging on complete paradigm shift.

Similarly, the Townsville artistic community has always punched above its weight, with artists such as Judy Watson, Thierry Auriac, Ian Fairweather, Jim Cox, Margaret Olley, Ian Smith, Kim Mahood and Ray Crooke spending important periods of time in the region, not to mention the many artists who have made Townsville home. Additionally, we're part of a North Queensland contingent of artists that seem to sprout up in the humidity like mould spores. You can drive from Townsville to Cairns and see some excellent work all the way up. In fact, I consider the Townsville-Cairns axis as one of the most artistically vibrant and diverse stretches of geography in Australia. Robert Preston, James Brown, Ken Thaiday Senior, Jo Lankester, Len Cook, Ben Trupperbäumer, Marion Gaemers, David Rowe, Barbara Cheshire, Arone Meeks, Charlie Street, Hannah Murray, Brian Robinson, Roland Nancarrow, Glen O'Malley, Anneke Silver, all located nearby a four hundred kilometer stretch of highway. If you wonder what all of these artists have in common outside a vibrant, nuanced vision of life, they're prolific and hard-working. Is there a better place to avoid the heat, or at least make use of it, than the studio? I think not.

Leaving Townsville at seventeen and coming back at thirty-two has been an interesting and sometimes confronting process for me, specifically in coming to terms with my own past, and acknowledging what kind of effect it has had over me throughout the years. Smells, sights and sounds so familiar, spurring visceral reactions, from pleasant nostalgia to overwhelming despair. For the uninitiated, Townsville has an all-encompassing summer humidity (keeping in mind that 'summer' in the sense most people know it is at least six months long here) that can be overwhelming; thick, warm air and heavy masses of clouds that tease the prospect of rain for weeks at a time. Unless they have spent time up here (or further north) people really don't quite understand. Brisbane can get humid, no doubt, but it is bracketed in a nice three-month period on either side. Townsville really only has two gears: hot and very hot. I laughed in many Sydney faces when they complained of humidity; if only they knew. At any rate, the weather here punishes you for being away too long, and I arrived back on January 4, 2016. It was close to forty degrees. It was devilishly hot, even for here.

That summer I returned home was particularly brutal, with barely any rain. It's a bit like being offered a glass of water again and again, except that the glass of water is pulled back each time, and you find yourself repeatedly punched in the face with a damp, but oversized, fist. However, once realizing that I had no more ninety-minute Sydney commutes, no more entitled children of rock stars playing artist, no more 'shit-on-plinths' aesthetics of Euro-centric art magazines, I knew life could be much fuller than I had imagined. I can look back now and see that there was merit and comfort in solitude to be rediscovered after the undignified scrabble of Sydney, as well as a higher level of artistic productivity made available with space and time. Despite my uncertainty at the time, I set to work trying to capture this sense of unease, familiarity and deep summer melancholy in a series of skyscapes, heavily clouded, framed by the structures of the railway yards and South Townsville houses. I certainly enjoy Sydney more since I left it. Pretty as a picture, and twice as mean. But if Sydney is mean, it is in a knowing, bitchy way; Townsville's meanness comes from indifference. A shrug can be just as brutal as a mean word.

I have always told people, southerners specifically, that the further north you go, the crazier people get, and the more surreal day-to-day life becomes. My father has a long history of committing these colourful stories of North Queensland life to paper, and I can tell you, they're all true, every one of them. The cat with the button eye, the duckling flying lessons, the toad-shooter. All of it. This is big open sky country up here, and we tend to fill it with colours, images, dreams and stories. There are many strange and wonderful things that I see here that I don't see in the South: ice cubes in wine, deep-fried fruit bats on the powerlines, bower birds' treasures on front lawns, flat cane toads on the bitumen, bird nests on traffic lights. Clearly the muggy atmosphere is ideally fertile for dreams, just as it is for palm trees, rutting dogs and mangos. My hometown.

DAWN OELRICH

Director of Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tasmania

It wasn't long after *The Partnershipping Project* first got underway that Dawn Oelrich was appointed to take up the position as new Director of Burnie Regional Art Gallery. Over the years Dawn and I had met on a number of occasions: in her role as Director of the Redcliffe City Gallery and later at the University of the Sunshine Coast Gallery. But as is all-too-often the way in the visual art sector, Dawn and I had only had the chance to meet on a professional level, with little time for 'digging and delving' towards a more informed understanding about the source of the particular passions and motivations that drive people in the visual arts.

Although both the Redcliffe Gallery and the University of the Sunshine Coast Gallery are associated with beautiful stretches of shoreline in South-East Queensland, each of them are topographically very different, with very different kinds of energy. The shoreline at Redcliffe is sheltered from the strong waves of the Coral Sea by the line of offshore islands that act as a protective barrier to the waters of Moreton Bay, while the 'Sunnycoast' is a stretch of exposed rocky headlands and rolling surf beaches. From Bribie Island to Noosa, the Sunnycoast beaches are pristine white, whereas the beaches of Redcliffe are tinted by the wondrous rich red soil that the local Aboriginal people named Ka –win Ka-win—meaning 'like blood'—a name-place that was later retained to refer to a light-house on Moreton Island in its anglicised version as Cowan Cowan.

As a fellow Queenslander, I guess I'd subconsciously wondered how Dawn might fare taking on the far colder climes of Tasmania—but I needn't have spared it a thought. Dawn grew up in a logging camp in a very remote part of north Canada—a place where the harsh climate tests people's resolve, and where, at the time, only the hardiest immigrants rose to the challenge. Many of the early settlers hailed from the Ukraine and Scotland—places where challenging northern hemisphere winters had prepared them for the new country. She remembers it as a place of overwhelming natural beauty peppered by small encampments resolutely maintained by hardy newcomers seeking jobs in mining, logging and pulp milling industries.

The small settlement where Dawn spent her early childhood was situated on the edge of the Rockies in British Columbia. So many of these remote temporary camps had sprouted up along the edge of huge lakes hundreds of kilometres long—places where the logs were floated down from where they were felled to be hauled ashore at the sawmills. In the winter those lakes were frozen solid.

She admits that yes, while she was well aware at the time of how exquisitely beautiful the landscape was, as a kid she couldn't wait to get out of there. She was aware, as were so many children growing up there, of the limited opportunities the region offered to those who wanted to engage with the changing world in a meaningful way.

Dawn's great-grandmother was a First Nations woman—a member of the nomadic Interior Salish people. When she and Dawn's great-grandfather, a man from Yorkshire, fell in love, they had to apply for permission from a French bishop to accept their marriage. Dawn's great-grandmother's name was anglicised to Marguerite Sauvage or 'savage', (daughter of Hsel hwt brin and Bwe him mit bw). Her daughter Sarah, Dawn's grandmother, married a German 'homesteader' and they raised twelve children together—that's where the 'Oelrich' came from. 'Homestead' farms were granted by the government to non-indigenous settlers who committed to clearing, 'improving' and building a house on an allotment. The Canadian government, in complete denial of the fact that the land belonged to the First Nations peoples, took on the role of dispatching parcels of the country out in a haphazard way all across the country.

As I listened to Dawn's story, ghosts of comparisons flitted between the histories of non-indigenous arrivals in Australia and Canada.

Dawn's dad had worked at saw-milling and logging until the day he died at the age of eighty-three. It was a life that demanded dedication, and that commitment and purpose infected all aspects of life. On each day of their early education, Dawn and her two sisters spent an hour and a half each way travelling to the school. Every morning, five children from the settlement were dropped off by the logging camp's four-wheel drive at a lonely bus-stop on the edge of the lake. From there, the school bus delivered them to a small town called Barrier in the North Thompson Valley.

When Dawn graduated in year twelve there was a total of two hundred and forty-eight children at the school. The long hours of travelling were just accepted as part of their school day, although the kids from the more remote saw-milling camps were well aware of the fact that their distance from the school prevented them from participating in the extra-curricular activities after classes. In winter, the days began in dark, freezing mornings, and at the end of the school

day, evening darkness was already descending. Occasionally there were avalanches when roads were blocked by snow, and the bus had to be turned back. On such occasions, the kids would be billeted in the homes of volunteer families.

Memories of that early life have returned frequently since her move to Tasmania—she admits that although it's not quite as cold as Canada, there's a similar sense of wildness, and also a sense that people have had to build a certain kind of resilience, and shared values about the necessity of being able to rely on each other when needed.

Comparisons notwithstanding, the demands of growing up in a logging camp in northern Canada seemed, to me at least, to be almost completely incompatible with the desire to work in the visual arts sector. "How did you get the idea you wanted to be a curator?" I asked.

Dawn relates how she'd always made drawings and painted from early childhood. There were family members who were painting landscapes in a representational way, and by her first year of high school she was already completely captivated when she'd read Janson's *History of Art* from cover to cover several times. Although art galleries were a long, long way away, she'd closely study images from the history of western art through slides in the classroom. When she finally mustered the confidence to announce to her family that she wanted to become a curator, she describes how they were horrified for three major reasons: 1. it would mean that she had to go to university; 2. that, in turn meant she was going to have to live in a city, and 3. it would mean she'd be doing lots of hanging around in the dubious company of artists. Unabashed, she persisted in chasing down her dream.

I asked her how she'd managed to get the funds together to do such a thing.

After high-school she'd taken a gap year to work in the sawmill. Her Dad's best friend was the head sawyer—a man called Mr. Koblen. One of the men on the late shift had lost his fingers in a saw accident and Mr. Koblen needed a fill-in fast. As Dawn explains it, she got lucky when he offered her the job. At this point of the narrative I was having difficulty understanding why she seemed so nonplussed by the idea that filling in for a guy who'd paid a very high price for his role in that kind of dangerous work was a stroke of luck. She was, after all, eighteen at the time. I was also struggling to fathom why she seemed to be skipping lightly over a situation that seemed to me—to say the least—to be one that might make extraordinary demands on a young woman just out of school. But Dawn didn't miss a beat in the explanation, recalling the process with an impressive precision.

"She believes a regional gallery can provide a heartbeat to the community—one that grows it and that grows from it. She knows that regional galleries offer communities something that extends their humanity".

She explained to me that when a log comes into the mill it has to undergo several processes where every amount of care is taken to ensure minimum wastage in the most efficient turn-around time. The logs come into the sawmill cut to specific lengths, but then the bark has to be removed to make a square profile; a guy feeds it through one end, and then the sawyer has to make a series of decisions about how to cut it depending on the size and shape of the timber. After it's gone through the 'barker' it moves on to the head sawyer, then to an edger and a bandsaw, until eventually the finished product goes out on a green chain. Once it's completed into its particular profile it finds its way to various destinations around the world; evidently some of the western red cedar found in Bunnings hails all the way from the forests of Canada.

The mill ran two shifts—Dawn took the night shift where she was paid the handsome wage of seven dollars fifty cents an hour—the same rate of pay as the men—at a time when most girls her age were being paid one dollar fifty cents an hour to work behind a counter.

The money she'd made that year was enough to pay for her university studies with enough left over to fund her trip to Europe. At the age of nineteen she met two friends at university who were keen to visit Oktoberfest; she decided the time to leave was right, and took off before completing her course. But by the time they'd all done a stint of working in London the idea of moving on to Munich had palled—she figured that if she'd wanted to meet the kind of drunk Canadians she was sure Oktoberfest would be over-run with, she could have stayed at home. Instead, she headed off with Titian and Tintoretto in her sites, and then roamed further afield to study the art at a great number of those museums, galleries and cathedrals of Europe Janson had prepared her for.

In the big cities of Europe money ran out fast. However, the region of northern Canada she'd grown up in had prepared her with skills a-plenty in anything to do with snow, and so she found herself in high demand teaching skiing at Grindewald near the Eiger. While visiting near-by Geneva she met an Australian girl who remains one of Dawn's closest friends, and together they travelled to Marseille and on to Carcasonne and then out across the Loire Valley. When the money eventually dried up, Dawn returned to Vancouver in 1978 to be met by a heavy university debt that she endeavoured to whittle down by working at a range of hospitality jobs across Canada. All the while her thirst for travelling burned away in the background, and after meeting and marrying her Australian husband in Vancouver, they moved to Sydney. Eventually, after raising two children, Dawn got the chance to complete her degree in a Bachelor of Business with a keen focus on Arts Management at the Queensland University of Technology.

While she was working towards her degree, the family had moved to the bayside suburb of Redcliffe. One of Dawn's local friends had tipped her off that the local Council was rumoured to have a substantial art collection stored somewhere in the basement of the Community Centre underneath the library. The first major practical step she took towards returning to her long-held dream of being a curator began with a cold-call to the Council and a request to view the collection, followed up by a foolscap page of notes describing what she'd found. The collection dated back to 1957 and included a number of impressive works. She told the Director of Cultural Development at Redcliffe that she believed he had a 'very good collection'—one that was estimated at the time to be around three hundred and sixty five thousand dollars—and that what the collection really needed was someone who'd document it, make sure it was looked after properly and, most importantly, would bring the works out to the light of day for public viewing. She must have done an excellent job at persuasion, because after that meeting she was hired for two days a week as the first Director of what later became the Redcliffe Regional Gallery. She continued to lobby hard, managed to get funding to build an appropriate storage system for the works, and later was successful in convincing the Council that it needed to build an art gallery.

A large part of the Council's collection had accrued as a result of their local art competition. The well-known Redcliffe Art Prize was among the first of its kind in Queensland, and during the 1950s and 60s the seaside village ambience plus the excitement of the competition drew large numbers to view the exhibition of the finalists. The competition also had the support of the Schonell family who sponsored a prize for works that featured the subject matter of children, and the popularity of the prize among artists was raised by the calibre of the judges—William Dargie came to judge it one year. But by the time Dawn arrived, the energy around the prize had settled into a comfortable annual activity. She estimated that an injection of more challenging contemporary work might shake things up a little, not only for local artists and audiences, but also in terms of regenerating interest in the Regional Gallery's activities among

artists and audiences further afield. With Ross Searle, who had been hired as a consultant to write the Collection Policy, she recalibrated the terms of the competition to create the 'Fifteen Artists Award', where fifteen artists who had a connection with the city—through teaching or workshops or who already had work in the collection—were pre-selected and invited to enter work into the exhibition/competition. There was, inevitably, resistance from some of the local artists who felt that maintaining the status quo was just fine, but the new format brought a challenging, sophisticated profile to a regional town that had developed rapidly into a city.

By the time Dawn left her position as Director at Redcliffe City Gallery in 2003, the Award had brought the work of 73 leading contemporary artists to the region, and was attracting larger audiences to the exhibition; the idea of taking a new twist on an old style of art prize had breathed new life into it. She'd worked at the gallery for 8 years, starting in 1995, overseeing the building work towards the opening of the art gallery in 2000, and, in search of a new challenge, she left her position at Redcliffe to take up a new position at the recently opened University of the Sunshine Coast Gallery.

Emeritus Professor Paul Thomas AM, the inaugural Vice Chancellor of the University of the Sunshine Coast, was a visionary leader who encouraged staff to forge strong links with the relevant sectors of their various communities. For Dawn, this was a welcome change from the more controlled management practices of local government. When Dawn took up the role of Director of the Gallery, the university had a limited collection, even though it did house a number of works from a range of private collections. However, in 2012 the collection received a generous boost when renowned local architect and benefactor John Mainwaring donated his private collection of 86 artworks to the university. In 2016 Dawn was awarded the "Distinguished Companion Award" for her commitment to the University of the Sunshine Coast's art collection and campus life.

Over those years of service as a gallery director Dawn had also maintained contact with a range of art communities in regionally remote areas. In her various roles in outback Queensland she was regularly reminded of the kind of inner strength of character she'd known and experienced in remote Canada. She's got a storehouse of memories of people she's spent time with in places like Springsure and Emerald and Winton; places where local people are keen to support the cultural aspects of their lives when they can manage to take time away from the demands of life on properties.

So even before Dawn made the move to Burnie, she had been attracted by a range of values and experiences that ran deep in what she's come to value. Although she's always been drawn to, then dedicated to, cultural aspects of life, she's also quick to note that there's a mistake in thinking 'culture' has to be introduced to communities that may not overtly appear as 'cultured' in an artificial or refined way. In explaining this, she refers to Thomas Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders*, that extolls the presence of qualities of 'honesty, goodness, manliness (sic), tenderness, devotion' that exist 'in their purity now in the breasts of unvarnished men'.

Dawn expresses a keen desire to extend on the considerable achievements The Burnie Regional Art Gallery has already made towards enmeshing and enriching its local communities through its collection and programming, and she's excited about building on the success of the Burnie Print Prize—an award launched in 2007 that's recognised as the second richest print prize in Australia after Fremantle, and one that attracts printmakers from right across Australia. Her understandable enthusiasm for the landscape is evident in her words: "With an icy blue Bass Strait on our doorstep, Cradle Mountain looming behind and row after row of hazy grey mountains to the east and west, this is a place to breathe deeply, to think and rest your mind".

But she's equally cognizant of the work that needs to be done. She believes a regional gallery can provide a heartbeat to the community—one that grows it and that grows from it. She knows that regional galleries offer communities something that extends their humanity. And she knows that the visual arts are as vital to these communities as are work and sport. In her own words, she believes that "artists are expert at being ahead of their times—the images they call forth broadens and deepens the experiences of this world we live in for all of us". Dawn's early experiences growing up with dreams and aspirations in a remote region have continued as a deep wellspring of influence to the present.

MELENTIE PANDILOVSKI

Director of Riddoch Art Gallery, Mt. Gambier, South Australia

I was born in Skopje Macedonia in 1963, a few months before the catastrophic earthquake that demolished seventy percent of the city. More than a thousand people were killed and six thousand were injured. Although I was too young at the time to remember it, my parents lost everything in that earthquake, and until a new house was built we lived on one of the Dalmatian Islands. In the big reconstruction that followed the earthquake, different international organisations, including Russian and American, worked right alongside each other to assist in the reconstruction of the city. This had happened right after the Cuban missile crisis, and it was a sign of hope that the world might be able to avoid blowing itself apart.

There are three children in the family. My brother Alex and sister Sonja are younger than me. My earliest fond family memories are of spending time by the sea—of beach days spent on the shorelines of the Dalmatian Islands with my siblings and cousins. We either went to Dalmatia or Montenegro in those days.

After Macedonia we lived in Greece where my father and mother had worked in the Yugoslav General Consulate. My father had abandoned Law Studies and graduated from Art History and Archaeology and travelling with him meant stopping the car every so often to delve into local archaeological sites, monasteries, and churches. I guess you could say I received a very early education from my father in understanding art through being taught to read the semiotics of the church frescos and icons. While I can say now is that it was important and very interesting; but when I was a kid I was more aware of the fact that trips with my father were inevitably going to take a very, very long time.

Early school years were spent at Pinewood—The American International School in Thessaloniki, Greece, that ran classes from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Classes were very small (5 – 8 students in a class) with only about two hundred students in total. We returned to Skopje when I was in high school. My high school was called Josip Broz Tito, after the Yugoslav President. It had a big emphasis on the Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and the like) which I wasn't particularly interested in. But I was interested in the social studies—History, Geography, Logic, Psychology, the contemporary languages as well as Latin, and a subject that was offered called Marxism, where there was less of an emphasis on the economic aspect of those studies, and more on the socio-political teachings of Marx and Engels, as well as on Self-Management, as the dominating socio-economic system in Yugoslavia (which probably represented the most democratic form of Socialism at that point), as opposed to Etatism (State Socialism) of the Soviet Union and its satellites.

I remember I already knew I wanted to study some kind of artistic subject but that I wasn't sure whether I wanted to go into film, the performing arts, the visual arts, or the humanities. I bought myself a Super-8 camera and started shooting everything I could (too bad the film was so expensive those days). I guess it was inevitable that I'd end up having something to do with art: my father who was studying Law switched halfway and graduated from art history, some of my family members were painters or sculptors, one of my aunts was a famous archaeologist, another a piano teacher, and one of my grandfathers was an art historian, so there was almost no escape. Even my neighbour Nada, who was running Student Affairs at the University, suggested subtly that it would be very good if I applied to be accepted at the Faculty for Art History with Archaeology. At that point I was genuinely interested in Philosophy, but in the end the Art won out. I actually thought that after graduating from Art History I would switch to Philosophy, but that also didn't work out (long story).

Back then you had to go into the army for twelve months if you attended university—fifteen months service if you didn't—so naturally I chose to begin my tertiary studies. During the time of my army service I was stationed in Belgrade where I was part of Guard of Honour otherwise known as Tito's Guard. We had to stand still lined up before dignitaries entering government buildings, or arriving at the airport, and spent most of our time standing by Marshal Tito's grave in the "House of Flowers", as his resting place. This was a year or so after the Yugoslav President for life, Josip Broz Tito, had died, so in those days there were thousands of people lining up daily to pay their respects to the Marshal.

One of the episodes includes my mother visiting the House of Flowers, and she starts crying once she spots me in the Changing of the Guard ceremony which happens every twenty minutes (It is quite an elaborate spectacle really!). One of the officers approaches her and tells her not to cry for the Marshal, as he had lived a unique life and was eighty-eight after all when he died. The thought that she might have cried for her son never occurred to him. That kind of sums up my army experience—a lot of standing still—but the uniforms and boots were really neat.

"We're on the verge of starting something new here—consolidating the visual art scene, through the Riddoch Art Gallery, the Railway Lands project, numerous Public Art initiatives and the overarching Cultural Plan for the City of Mount Gambier".

After that I returned to study art history and archaeology and ended up torn between Contemporary Art and Archaeology. What to specialize in was the big question!? I attended several archaeological excavations in both Macedonia and Switzerland throughout the eighties, on Neolithic as well as digs of the Antique period. In Switzerland I joined the excavations from the Roman period in a beautiful town called Martigny in the Canton of Valais. Each of the thirty-one Cantons in Switzerland had an archaeological centre, and they invited archaeological students from around the world to work with them. They also paid you while you worked in what seemed like a very good profession. I spent a whole summer there. I also made study trips to the museums of Amsterdam. In the end this helped me decide which way to go. Goodbye Archaeology; Hello Contemporary Art!

In 1987, when I was twenty-four, I presented my first solo exhibition, a media art show, in the gallery of the Youth Cultural Centre in Skopje. The sculptural installation includes many broken TV screens, videos—things that are quite common as materials now, but at that time it seemed ground-breaking in Skopje. I had to dumpster-dive for the materials and work on them by breaking them and re-assembling them. I can recall being drenched in the poisonous silver nitrate that I was exposed to while cutting my hands frequently when I smashed them. But it didn't worry me at the time. Some of them were suspended, after being smashed into beautiful glass elements, others were arranged on the floor, and there were performative elements that happened between and around them. I can remember one brave woman who smashed some of the TVs on the marble gallery floor. The sound was of a room being bombed, or similar. On the opening night, I kept the audience of two hundred people waiting for the door to open for about two hours; in the interim I went to town to buy some good-looking shoes for the opening. On the way back to the gallery, seeing that these two hundred people were still waiting for me, I guess I felt like I was the local Nam June Paik (the practice was similar) or even Andy Warhol, as I did get my world famous for fifteen minutes moment for sure!

All the while I was travelling, the university had been sending me nasty letters reminding me that I hadn't sat for my final exam yet. In that university system it doesn't matter that you've passed all your subjects and courses—unless you sit your final exam, nothing counts. So I did, and I graduated.

After that I decided I had to get serious and started working. I took on a number of jobs including as a Public Relations Officer for a chain of casinos. I then started my own computer company for a while, and I also worked in Catholic Relief Services—a US-based institution that would take ships laden with wheat, rice, oil, lentils and other provisions to the Balkans during the wars of the nineties. The ships would travel from the Bay of Mexico through the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black seas, docking in Burgas in Bulgaria, where the goods were unloaded to be driven to a central warehouse in Kumanovo, Macedonia. They were then dispensed where needed for the refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo, etc. At first I was a field monitor and then I worked as a co-ordinator. While I was engaged in the field we were working with International Red Cross and Local Red Cross branches, providing food and lodgings for refugees who had moved to Macedonia and were trying to find their way back to their war-torn countries.

Although fully immersed in humanitarian activities, I was made an offer to work with the Soros Foundation, otherwise known as Open Society Institutes, who were about to open a Soros Center for Contemporary Arts in Skopje, Macedonia, as a part of the SCCA Network of contemporary art centres. It was named after George Soros, an American entrepreneur of Jewish Hungarian descent, who used his wealth to develop the first Open Society Foundation in Hungary in the eighties. Following that, Soros Foundations were established in each of the ex-socialist countries (the new democracies) in Central and Eastern Europe, charged with the aims of democratising the formerly communist societies and making the transition from communism, building bridges between the west and former communist societies, and re-building those societies. The Open Society has expanded in the past few decades to become the largest private funder of groups that work for human rights, justice, and democracy around the world. Interestingly enough, George Soros was mentored by Karl Popper, a philosopher who advocated the concept of open society.

When we were given the Soros Centre for Contemporary Art in Skopje, Macedonia, we became active in a range of activities in the domain of arts, including financially supporting individual artists. One of the first projects of the SCCA Network was organizing a big presence of artists from Central and Eastern Europe at the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1994. Each of the Centres was organising big annual exhibitions of artists, comprehensive databases, and a big production of catalogues for the artists (seen as something which was lacking). The Centre also operated as a sort of a private arts council, financing even the state museums and galleries. In the final instance we started curating our own exhibitions, and even opened our own gallery in Skopje.

I stayed for almost ten years—at first as Deputy Director and then Director—it was a very fulfilling job. Another initiative I am proud of is the Skopje Electronic Art Fair, which launched the careers of media artists from around the world, which I curated for 6 years in a row. One of the projects of the Soros Foundations was 'Artslink' (I was the Macedonian Coordinator for the project) which provided a connection between the US and Central and Eastern Europe by providing International Fellowships to hundreds of artists and arts managers—there was a high level of exchanges in the areas of visual, performing, media arts, music, etc.

In addition to this, I became active with the newly established networks in Europe, such as Net-Time, concerned with issues of the quickly developing net culture, and the 'Syndicate' Network which was a link between artists in the West and Eastern Europe. I was even given an honorary Viking helmet in Sweden, for my contribution to one of the memorable actions of the group!

In 2002 I was invited to run the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide so I moved to Australia with my wife and my two year old daughter Isidora in 2003 (it took about eight months to get the Australian visa). It also signified the severing of the connections with Europe. For example, the tyranny of distance prevented me from participating at the opening of "Blood and Honey", an exhibition of seventy-three Balkan artists at the Sammlung Essl Museum in Vienna. One would say that it is a low price to pay in order to start a new life and move to Australia, but on the other hand I spent a few years of my life conceptualizing and coordinating this very exhibition, as Director of the Balkan Art Network, with its Curator, the late Harald Szeemann, numerous artists from the Balkan countries, and even the industrialist Karlheinz Essl, founder of the Sammlung Essl Museum.

My second daughter Isabella was born in Adelaide in 2005. I ran the EAF for six years and one month, and this made me the second longest serving Director in the forty-two year history of the EAF. (Sounds good, but I was eleven months short of getting Long Service Leave when I left!). At first I was very excited—the name itself was exciting—and the logic behind its formation was encouraging too—the emphasis on the 'experimental' and 'radical and only incidentally aesthetic' were the best bits. And I liked the history of the place—how it had emerged from

the shared dreams by a small group of Adelaide artists and theorists, such as Donald Brook, Bert Flugelman and Ian North. The story I heard, and believed, was that they had conceptualised the EAF in 1974, while gazing at the magical waters of the Gulf of St Vincent. Apparently they agreed that what the world really needs is an Experimental Art Foundation! Of course their motivation was that there was no place in Australia to exhibit experimental art. And they succeeded, despite all odds, in establishing a model of an ideal but practical art space that subsequently resulted in tens of other similar spaces opening around Australia.

But, wait a minute! Just remember that this is a time that seemed as if the world had gone mad—the Vietnam War was raging, Greece and Turkey were in serious military confrontation over Cyprus, the United States President Richard Nixon resigned from office, the IRA begun the bombing campaign on mainland Britain, the global recession deepens, there is U.S.-led clearing effort for sweeping of mines in the Suez Canal following the Yom Kippur War between Egypt and Israel in 1973; there are gasoline shortages and price increases throughout the world, the world's population reaches 4 billion. Against this background there's no wonder that I liked the concept they dreamed up that experimental art would save the world!

However, it seemed to me that the Adelaide scene had grown a little more stale after the energy of the early years, so I tried to reinstate the experimentation by venturing in the area of new media. We did many exhibitions with robotic art, biotech art, virtual reality, as well as more traditional media. I remember inviting Stelarc to do a show at the EAF. After his initial shock after hearing this, (due to a rift in his relations with the EAF from 32 years before, caused by the EAF suspending what was going to be EAF's first exhibition and Stelarc's first 'hanging performance') he agreed, saying: "if you can do it, I am in!"

Not only was the exhibition at the EAF spectacular, but I managed to get Donald Brook (the first Chair of the EAF and by default responsible for cancelling Stelarc's exhibition) to open it. And Donald did, with a great speech invoking many memories, in a spirit of forgiveness, but not of the EAF towards Stelarc, but the other way around, as stated. I continued to invite artists such as Chico MacMurtrie and Amorphic Robot Works from Brooklyn, who did inflatable robotic sculptures, Van Gogh TV—a cutting edge Virtual Reality group from Germany, one of the first video installations of Shaun Gladwell and TV Moore, Eduardo Kac's 'Genesis' Bio-tech Art installation, included in the 'Art in the Biotech Era' exhibitions, Misha Kuball's light spectacle, conferences such as Ideology of the Imaginary in the 21st Century… the list is quite long. We tried different media to see whether the experiments were still producing positive results.

While I was there I started my PhD focusing on biotechnology and contemporary art at the University of South Australia, with the late John Barbour as Supervisor. But when I moved back to Skopje in Macedonia in 2009 I transferred and completed the thesis there. I had to formally defend the thesis. The university system over there requires candidates to send a synopsis of the PhD to ten 'blind adjudicators' from different schools before you present your defence. It all went well, and the PhD with a title 'The Formation of the Bio-Political Apparatus' was awarded in 2011 in the area of Cultural Studies.

Following that, I moved to Canada where I ran Video Pool Media Art Centre in Winnipeg in the province of Manitoba. I stayed there for five and a half years. One night in January 2014 the temperature reached minus fifty-five! But the Canadians do a wonderful job of cleaning the snow every morning and the town is set up so it can cope with problems brought by the cold; the city centre (the iconic Portage and Main intersection) is underground and the buildings in the nearby streets are connected on the first floor. The summers are wonderful—it's a prairie—a vast expanse that runs from Hudson Bay to Texas. The land is similar to South Australia in some ways, and the sun looks huge, although the rays don't seem to have the same impact. Because the summer is so short, the plants grow very quickly. The province of Manitoba has about one million two hundred thousand people and one hundred and ten thousand lakes—a lake for every ten people.

In the Canadian summer of 2016 I was offered the position as Director of the Riddoch Art Gallery and Manager of Cultural Services with the city of Mount Gambier, in charge of cultural plans, running the cultural fund and developing public art strategies.

We're on the verge of starting something new here—consolidating the visual art scene, through the Riddoch Art Gallery, the Railway Lands project, numerous Public Art initiatives and the overarching Cultural Plan for the City of Mount Gambier. We have also established various new media art initiatives, such as the inaugural International Limestone Coast Video Art Festival, Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality programs, and Video Editing Suites. We're also in the process of dreaming up a big Land Art project. Some thirty years ago there was a sculptural symposium held here in one of the quarries, and we're moving towards re-developing a similar kind of focus on the land. Perhaps the Limestone Coast will grow a reputation like Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty at Rozel Point, the northeastern shore of Great Salt Lake, Utah, or Marfa, Texas, with Donald Judd's and others' huge indoor and outdoor installations, where so many people travel from all across the planet to see what's happening here. Watch this space!!

KELLIE WILLIAMS

Director of Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts, Townsville, Queensland

I was born in Brisbane, the eldest of three kids. My parents both grew up in Brisbane—Dad grew up on a dairy farm in Wynnum and Mum grew up at Darra which at that time was used to home immigrants. I can remember hearing family stories about the Vietnamese community and children of Polish Jewish refugees who'd moved from Europe to re-settle after the war. Mum is one of nine children; Dad is one of seven—I have over sixty first cousins and twenty-six aunts and uncles and we're still all very close and gather regularly. That closeness and family community feels like a village—and they say you need a village to raise a child. It's been a huge influence on me growing up. Every year we all still gather together –usually a minimum of one hundred people for a chaotic family Christmas.

We take turns to meet in a each other's back yards—everyone brings a plate and we all share Christmas dinner together sheltered from the Queensland sun under tarps. We usually do Mum's family for lunch and Dad's family for dinner, so it's a long day with ongoing festivities. I know there's a lot of us but we all know each other intimately—I've changed lots of the nappies of my younger cousins, and some of them have changed mine.

I went to primary school in Alexandra Hills and to a Catholic girls' high school in the city. Although Dad and his siblings had a wonderful time growing up on the dairy farm, none of them had been given the opportunities of a formal education. Even though Dad is currently the editor of three Fairfax media newspapers (the Redland City Bulletin, Jimboomba Times and the Beaudesert Times), it still concerns him that he hasn't had a formal education! So Dad and Mum were very keen for their own children to have a formal education; they pushed us hard because they wanted us to have opportunities. However, the down-side of this was that Mum and Dad weren't too keen on me following my own passion: art. Because they'd come from poor backgrounds, they were very concerned that their children would be capable of making a living for themselves.

At high-school I had a wonderful teacher in Miss Artuso. I can remember coming to her crying, explaining that my parents were not going to let me take grade eleven and twelve art classes. She looked at my 'spares' in my timetable and told me, "Kel, you're doing well at art—in those spares come into the art classroom and I'll take you through the course whether you get marked for it or not". So I actually got to do those classes anyway. My brain didn't work 'naturally' for maths and science, but I stuck it out and went on with the kind of dogged determination I've probably inherited from my parents, and after high school I graduated from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor in Environmental Science (Ecology) (Hons). While I was undergoing my university studies I'd continue to draw all the time—in order to take in the concepts that were difficult for me I'd spend hours and hours doing drawings and mind-maps and memory-diagrams-drawings, of cells and plants and botanical details and anatomy … I just kept drawing the new knowledge into my own framework of understanding.

At the end of that degree I came across another wonderful teacher, Dr Daryl McPhee, who helped me to realise that what I was good at was working with people—that I didn't have to sit in a lab to qualify as a scientist—that I could apply science knowledge to working with people. So my Honours involved working with a group of commercial fishermen in Moreton Bay who were trying to prove that their fishing practices were sustainable. I spent a year working with them evaluating their outcomes, and the success of that thesis catapulted me into a career; It made me very employable.

My first job as a university graduate was for 12 months as a Research Officer in a science legislation branch of the Queensland government, working under lawyers to draft legislation. It was a great entrée to becoming more familiar with the machinery of government and with the processes of community consultation. Not long after my honours year, the Federal government invested in a pilot program about the viability of environmental management systems being adopted by commercial fishermen, and I was hired to manage the scheme for Queensland. During that time, I was invited to present my findings to the Fisheries Managers of the United Nations World Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. In the three years during which I worked on this Queensland Pilot Project I split my time by spending two weeks in Cairns and two weeks in Brisbane because I was working with two core regions—the Great Barrier Reef and the other at Moreton Bay. Out of that work I got incredible training in participatory approaches to managing people and the environment. This was the time I first started falling in love with tropical far north Queensland.

Towards the end of that period, the Moreton Bay group of fishermen invited me to continue working with them. I took a risk and worked out

“I’m really impressed and enamoured with the people here too—I’ve spent fifteen years travelling the world but now I can get to work in a five-minute drive. I now get the chance to really connect with people in more meaningful, slow ways, instead of rushing. I just feel there’s more capacity, possibility and potential in the regions for experimental ideas”.

of my lounge room for six months to set up a new not-for-profit membership-based organisation comprised of commercial fishermen who were prepared to demonstrate that an environmental management system was working in their own business. I received a range of government grants and was able to secure rental on an office above a seafood shop; we hired staff, and we ran the organisation for three years. Although it was always a humble operation, we were awarded a United Nations World Environment Day Award for the work we’d done in introducing sustainable practices into the fishing industry. This period involved years of blood, sweat and tears working for the cause. But it was starting to wear thin—I was spending all my energy on someone else’s cause and I really felt like I somehow had to find my way back to my art.

Around the same time I married, and we took a year off and travelled, with the intention of working overseas for two years. But by the time we landed in the United Kingdom the GFC (Global Financial Crisis) had hit. Even though the professional job market had dried up, I managed to get work in a pub in East Sussex where I had plenty of time to slow down and think. All I did during that time was work in the pub, keep drawing, and also work as an au pair in return for board. Although we’d planned to spend two years there, a number of events had ‘plotted against us’, and we returned to Brisbane after having spent four months in the United Kingdom.

Money was the main driver in the job search after that time when I returned to Australia, so I used my government and science skills to get a job in the Queensland Government’s Office of Sustainable Transport for two and a half years. After working there for a couple of years I applied to study a visual arts degree. The voices of my parents were still ringing in my ears, so I initially applied for a Bachelor of Creative Industries. After 12 months however, I moved into taking a number of studio-based subjects and my grades immediately jumped higher—it certainly seemed to me that this was the most enjoyable study I’d ever undertaken. When she surveyed my studio outputs, one of my lecturers—Dr. Courtney Pederson—encouraged me to swap into the Bachelor of Fine Art degree; at last I’d arrived at where I really wanted to be. The Creative Industries studies hadn’t been a waste of time, though—there were lots of art history studies I still draw from. I completed an additional six semesters over three years—a total of four and a half years of formal study. I have to say that throughout my working life I’d never completely abandoned studio art studies—I’d trained at the Brisbane Institute of Art in silver-smithing for two years at night classes and also had taken Fashion Design for twelve months at TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) while I’d been working. So in fact I’d been fitting it in wherever and whenever I could manage it. But during my period of full-time study my marriage broke down. The financial responsibilities, and all the things that go with leading a responsible adult life, made that period very difficult. However, my lecturers were totally supportive, encouraging me through the struggles I was having during this time. I was given support and understanding by the institution and in the end, I achieved several Dean’s Commendations for consistently high Grade Point Averages, and was eventually issued an invitation to membership of the Golden Key International Honours Society for my grades.

During the final year of my studies I worked for Arts Queensland as a Senior Investment Officer for one of their major funding programs; they supported me by allowing me to work a nine-day fortnight and I was therefore able to use the other days to focus on my practical studio areas of my degree. In the second year of my degree I’d also taken on a year-long internship at QAGOMA. I graduated in 2016; at the end of that year my new partner, who is in the army, was posted to Townsville. I was keen to look around for a good job in the arts, so I applied for a new role that had just been created by Dancenorth as a Company Manager—which in dance-world-speak means a ‘producer’. At first I was concerned that I was going towards dance rather than fine art, but I was immediately impressed about the fact that every member of their board was a woman. That fact, and also the sense that the feeling around the company was very positive, made the role a wonderful fit. I worked there for eighteen months, after which I applied for the role as Acting Director at Umbrella Studios. During that time the board offered me the Director’s position permanently when previous Umbrella Director Jonathan McBurnie confirmed he was taking up the position of Director at Perc Tucker Regional Gallery.

I’d spent a great deal of time visiting Townsville over the years, but I’d never really counted on falling so much in love with the place in the way that I have. I’m an outdoors person—I love hiking and camping, and my photography is inspired and engaged by the kind of uncompromising landscapes typical of this region. I’m really impressed and enamoured with the people here too—I’ve spent fifteen years travelling the world but now I can get to work in a five-minute drive. I now get the chance to really connect with people in more meaningful, slow ways, instead of rushing. I just feel there’s more capacity, possibility and potential in the regions for experimental ideas. In the big cities there’s all the competition and clamour around ‘great ideas’ whereas up here there is actually space and time for innovation and the building of great ideas, rather than the act of paying lip service to them. And with that there’s more of a feeling of solidarity and support. I love that.

INSTALLATIONS

BURNIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY

10 NOVEMBER– 16 DECEMBER 2018

Dave mangenner Gough with Nathan Slater, Greg Lehman, Greg Leong, Jamin, Joan Kelly, Lisa Garland, Ritchie Ares Doña, and Selena de Carvalho

“The boats differ in shape and scale, but each of them seems to share the same purpose: each carries its cargo of art; each has been transformed into a metaphor for meaning beyond the utilitarian”.

The fleet of eight boats appear to proceed in echelon, headed towards the entrance of the Burnie Regional Art Gallery. Lead by Lisa Garland’s *My Brother, the Fisherman*, each member of the flotilla points in the same direction—out towards the entry door, where, across the street and beyond the lay of the land, the waters of Bass Strait beckon. The boats differ in shape and scale, but each of them seems to share the same purpose: each carries its cargo of art; each has been transformed into a metaphor for meaning beyond the utilitarian.

Lisa Garland is known for her considerable skills as a photographer and for her outstanding skills as a sensitive interpreter of imagery. In this new work, a large-scale black and white photograph of a lone man against the seas of a choppy bay has been re-fashioned into what seems to be an ersatz tarp. Stretched across and suspended within the bars of a metal frame, the stretched photographic ‘skin’ takes on a shape that is a graceful inversion of the hull’s curve. The form looks like a kind of attempt at water-tighting—a provision for keeping the water out should the vessel roll; or perhaps a flimsy cover to ward off the worst of the sea’s wrath. But the same image—the lone man—is used again, printed on fabric ‘wings’ that suggest this boat may be preparing vestigial wings with which to attempt to fly.

Around the ‘skirt’ of the structure run scallops of fishing net. The main image is perforated with cut circles that detail other aspects of this reality—perforated images of Lisa’s brother’s ‘fishing life’—nautical maps and aspects of the landscape of wild fishing in North-West Tasmania forced into changes brought about by the onslaught of commercial industrial-scale salmon farming. And above it, from bow to stern, is suspended the arched frame of a once-mighty blue-fin tuna. Even in death the wild strength of the fish is still evident in the powerful curve of its spine, in its massive fighting-fish head.

This work is intensely, movingly personal for the artist, but it is also captures a deeply political moment—one that has had repercussions right across Australia. *My Brother, the Fisherman* features the artist’s brother Craig Garland, a small-mesh fisherman whose traditional livelihood has been gradually pushed towards the impossible by the steady encroachment of commercial fish-farms on Tasmania’s North-West coast. Craig Garland’s staunch one-man challenge to political apathy—his decision to run for an independent seat against what he described as “the non-inclusive nature of (political) decision-making”, garnered a swell of local support that emerged as the ‘third force’ in the 2018 Braddon by-election. Since then, the swell has surged forward to national attention, and Craig Garland’s ‘threadbare campaign’ is viewed as a successful test case for those voters across Australia who feel increasingly alienated by mainstream politics.

Lisa’s photographic *ouvre* has held true to its close attention on the people of Tasmania’s North-West coast; her images bestow each of her subjects with a respect and candour that makes their inner dignity apparent to the most cursory of gazes. This work shares that commitment. The boat—a purdon fibreglass dinghy—is one of Craig’s own; the dried carcass of the fish was caught by him; the ropes that connect the flotation bobs were spliced by him; the nets are tatters from those he depends on for a living. For this work, the photographer has moved towards including material evidence as part of her ongoing dedication to documenting the people and places of Tasmania’s North-West coast; together, in one boat, she weaves images, flotsam, jetsam and hope into a story immersed in commitment to place; a tale that documents aspects of what her brother Craig described as “an act of faith”.

Following behind the work of Lisa Garland, Ritchie Ares-Doña’s *Cultural Transmission* is held within the belly of a relatively long, cool-blue and white wooden vessel. The paint is cracked and peeling. The boat has seen better days. The shallow space of the gunwales is crossed by four simple planks for seating, and from underneath each of them light shines upwards to illuminate the cargo—a transparent, glittering, shimmering bow-to-stern installation of diamond-shapes. Any precise definition of what these shapes allude to proves elusive: meaning is refracted in any number of ways back from their folded, fluted surfaces. For these crystalline forms are not solid—their appearance of three-dimensional density is an illusion; they have been constructed by the systematic and careful folding of thousands of sheets of overhead transparency plastic. The technology that made use of overhead transparencies in teaching institutions is now redundant; Ares-Doña has retrieved his materials from waste matter. Then, through a laborious process of attaching each tiny reconstructed ‘booklet’ to a central spine, he begins to fold and tuck until the geometric forms take shape.

In order to ‘float’ these forms above the floor of the vessel, Ares-Doña has meticulously constructed a system of clear-plastic holders glued to another floating ‘floor’ of clear acrylic. The artist’s intention to produce a minimal, liminal affect has only been made possible through a labour-intensive process of repetition and concentration.

So what relationship might there be between this small boat and its sparkling, weightless cargo? Ares-Doña’s homeland is Cebu, an island among the Visayan group of islands in the Philippines. Part of this island-group is nearby Bohol, a little landmass known for the unusual topography of the ‘chocolate hills’—a system of small, evenly placed, perfectly formed conical hills that Ares-Doña states have been, in part, an aspect of

“This installation, then, is one that mourns the attitudes that spurn others from our shorelines. The artist uses the metaphor of the carp, a fish that was once introduced to Australian waterways as a food source, but that is now recognised as a dangerous interloper that has imbalanced local ecosystems”.

memory that draws him back to his homeland. The work is also evocative of marine life—the transparent, floating shapes of jellyfish, or perhaps the geometric forms of invisible plankton. And as some of the small, precise forms accrue height when the artist builds one on top of the other, they give the appearance of crystalline structures like salt, or perhaps the aggregations of coral.

But the process with which Ares-Doña’s work proceeds is also important to understanding other possible implications. For many years now the artist has worked with disadvantaged youth—with children whose experiences have not allowed them to see their full worth and potential. “They are treated like social waste,” says Ares-Doña, “and yet they have the power to shine like diamonds. Working with art helps them realise some of what they’re capable of”. Ares-Doña’s boat carries a cargo of fragile diamonds. The cargo grows and glitters. It floats and refracts light in ways that surpass and transform the material waste from which it was created.

Behind Ares-Doña’s boat, the small, flat-bottomed, blunt-nosed skiff carrying Greg Leong’s work raises its bow to the swell. Glittering and shimmering, its high-carried cargo of carp throws a myriad shadowy ghost-forms onto the two walls of the corner of the gallery, so that the vessel appears to be moving from beyond a soft grey cloud of carp-shadow. The work casts a golden glow upwards and outwards from the belly of the vessel and through the gold, silver and yellow-wrapped forms of the carp suspended on long fragile poles above the boat. On first sight, the vessel appears like a ceremonial palanquin—part of a celebration of an arcane rite. However closer inspection reveals that the silver and golden squares with which the glossy black sides of the vessel have been applied are in fact pieces of joss paper—a material used by Chinese only for rituals of death. The carp, too, have been wrapped closely—embalmed, in a sense, with the same material.

Leong has worked in theatre and the visual arts, and this work, *The Tasmanian Migration of Oriental Carp*, draws from each of these areas. With uncharacteristic simplicity of form, Leong has taken aim at an issue that is at once as deeply personal to him as it is political. Leong speaks eloquently of his experiences as a gay Chinese immigrant, and of the experiences of ostracism from both his adopted home of Australia and from within his Chinese heritage; he tells of ‘never quite fitting in’—and narrates how his experiences as an outsider have helped him empathise with others who have been forced to the margins. This installation, then, is one that mourns the attitudes that spurn others from our shorelines. The artist uses the metaphor of the carp, a fish that was once introduced to Australian waterways as a food source, but that is now recognised as a dangerous interloper that has imbalanced local ecosystems. He describes the irony of how, to the Chinese “the carp (or koi) is a symbol of love, courage and wealth”, and yet how its only association in Australia is with that of ‘an introduced pest species”. Leong’s boat is a dark reminder of our fear and dismissiveness of other points of view—it floats on the artist’s will that things will change, and that new, more inclusive futures are possible.

Beside Leong’s boat Greg Lehman’s *A Short History of Cook* assembles data from history and materials gathered from the present in the bows, across the sides and onto the mast of an eighteenth century sprit rig. The sides of the vessel—inside and out, run with script; on the canvas sail, a charcoal drawing details an encounter between two men. The drawing closely follows the forms used in an unfinished drawing by John Webber, an artist who in 1777 documented Captain Cook’s presentation to the leader of the *Neunone* nation at Adventure Bay, Van Dieman’s Land. Cook proffers a medal to the custodian of the land he wishes to claim as England’s—a small trophy of conquest made unbearably heavy under the full weight of history’s reassessment of colonial plunder. Webber’s drawing is the first image of a Tasmanian Aborigine to be rendered by a non-Aboriginal person; it marks a first encounter through an act that history has revealed to be simultaneously naïve and misguided and ultimately, treacherous.

A highly regarded scholar and an expert on the history of Tasmania’s Aboriginal peoples, Lehman is a Trawulwuy[1] man who claims ancestral rights to the re-telling of such stories. His narration draws from well-known data and accounts—from words and images that privileged colonial readings—and re-weaves them in a way that opens up ironies, misconceptions and the possibilities of alternative historical accounts.

He assembles his evidence with a clean clarity—the matter-of-fact observation almost appears as though it has been transcribed from the scholar’s desk into and onto the sides and along the gunwales of the boat. Along the bottom of the boat runs a neat, aesthetically pleasant, carefully composed still-life arrangement of shells, sand, objects from the shoreline. Here the wash-up from the littoral zone becomes re-framed by the literal transposition of history’s words. Yet the pretty tidiness of the arrangement belies the commanding weight of its role as ballast: the objects are part of the land itself; they are the markers of shorelines, middens, homelands where the custodians have continued to live for what is now estimated to be well over 60,000 years. And on the back seat of the boat, Lehman has placed a coffee mug bearing the historical image of William Lanney, best known as the last “full blooded” Tasmanian Aboriginal man. Lehman states that he intends the mug as a “prompt to the presence of a sailor in the boat, or perhaps (to) the artist at work”.

“... Lehman is a Trawulwuy man who claims ancestral rights to the re-telling of such stories. His narration draws from well-known data and accounts—from words and images that privileged colonial readings—and re-weaves them in a way that opens up ironies, misconceptions and the possibilities of alternative historical accounts”.

On the 'reverse' side of the sail Lehman again traces the likeness of another of Webber's drawings completed only two short years later: *The Death of Cook in Hawai'i* uses a remarkably similar compositional structure to depict Cook's death in Hawaii as, according to Lehman, "he tries to kidnap their king". When viewed as the front-and-back of an object—a sail—that powered empires towards their goal, the sad ironies and empty outcomes of colonial ambitions flounder like flaccid failures. Lehman's insistence that "we have not forgotten the lessons of the past" offers a powerful means of reconsidering the future of Aboriginal peoples in a globalising present.

Following close to the portside of Lisa Garland's vessel, a small flat-bottomed boat bears a squadron of black oars held aloft. Its bow is painted with the white designs common on the prow of the vessels of Greek legends—a simple system of intersecting semi-circles suggesting waves and currents that carried so many ancient voyagers towards personal as well as cultural and political odysseys. Each of the black paddle blades has been carved into to provide a shallow frame for twenty tiny etched drawings featuring specific viewpoints of the North-West coastline that has been Joan Kelly's home for many years. Joan Kelly's *First Impressions – the Coastline* uses the intimacy of miniatures to draw the viewer up close and personal. From this vantage-point, each of the works bedazzles with detail and the sheer energetic vibrancy with which the artist has created every tiny mark and line.

While the work is predominately black, its spirit is not negative; rather, its energy soars with a spirit of joyful observation and celebration. The limbs of sinuous tree-forms carve across a wind-scattered cloudscape; the grasslands of a headland undulate and writhe; the waters of a bay scatter back the light of the moon; small creatures emerge and disappear again into the flora. These are little glimpses of enchanted landscapes—but each rendered with the unfaltering gaze of an artist devoted to intrepid observation. The first records of non-indigenous responses to Australian landscape belie a similar enchantment; according to John Northcote, an officer on HMS *Rattlesnake* observing Port Philip for the first time in 1836, "The country here is enchantingly beautiful—extensive rich plains all round with gently sloping hills in the distance all thinly wooded and having the appearance of an immense park". Joan Kelly's artistic tradition draws from the age-old practice of miniature painting and drawing, a genre that enjoys a cross-cultural diversity in contemporary as well as throughout historical epochs.

Joan's vessel carries forward evidence of the ongoing importance of the 'slow gaze'—of the willingness to sit quietly to record and interpret the world of which you are a part. Her twenty little black and white landscape images, each held within the shallow dish of a paddle, offer us a means of transcending seas of indifference through personal connections with place.

Behind Joan's boat Selena de Carvalho's *100 Year Flood* floats like a short, squat pirate ship laden heavy with the charred remains of an unlikely cargo. The title refers to the flash flood of May 2018, and harvests details of de Carvalho's personal saga in her efforts to respond to yet another local iteration of global environmental disaster. While the subject matter may be immense, global, statistically insurmountable, her references are personal: the artist rakes and scrapes and collects and bags charcoal from a charred and blackened rainforest coup in the Weld Valley; she salvages the half-burnt belly of a tree from the North-West Bay river and claims it as the boat's mast. Bent on 'tattooing' the flanks of the boat with a kind of personal confessional, she fashions a crude sleeve for her car exhaust, an implement used to collect the carbon monoxide dust particles from which to make the toxic 'ink' to emblazon the vessel's flanks. Her choice of this method offers another layer to the small boat's dark allusions—her contraption for collecting car exhaust serves as a suicidal 'weapon of choice' for the hope-lost. De Carvalho has been protesting and fighting against environmental crises since she was a child. Now the artist has two children of her own. Faced with the prospect of creating yet another artwork addressing such issues, she weaves her own personal sense of hopelessness and futility into her material choices—and to the written words of the work. She speaks of the 'haunted' landscape; she confesses what she sees as the dual 'poetic, pathetic' nature of her ruminations. The words she scrawls across the old wooden sides of the boat in the home-made poisons of her ink are elegiac and heartrending:

I make ink out of car fumes and take on too many projects/ driving doughnuts around my garden/ a ghetto of ideas, weeds and non-indigenous species/ home.

The words whisper of the flood of her personal doubts—about the enervation of her solipsism; about the fact that even she has had to find a way to come to terms with her bruised, battered and burnt ecosystem; about how 'home' must be reconstructed always from the shards of what we have.

Above the vessel a tattered, toxiferous flag flutters belligerently. Made from the stiff burnt shards of black plastic waste-bags, it flies as another element cobbled together from the damaged offerings of a wasted world. Nevertheless, the little boat sails forward, buoyed by the artist's as-yet undiminished passion and commitment.

To the portside of de Carvalho's boat Dave mangenner Gough's vessel leans-to with the opulent weight of its kangaroo-pelt sail. The original wooden vessel has been transformed by material repossession—worked on by Gough and his collaborator Nathan Slater, each of the original boat's surfaces has been extended or modified and repurposed.

Gough writes of his ancestors' discovery of the ways in which broken glass, brought by non-Aboriginal people to Australia, was redeployed by Aboriginal Australians to make tools. Perhaps he makes this statement in direct reference his current role as an artist who comes upon another 'discarded object'; a wooden boat that he repurposes to construct new meaning. The title of the work, *Te Waka a trawlwoolway*, or the *Canoe/Boat of trawlwoolway* belies the bi-cultural origins of the work; Gough is a trawlwoolway man and Slater is of Maori ancestry. Together they fish and dive to hunt, and skin and tan hides 'on Country'. But this collaboration extends beyond the contemporary 'bromance' of mateship; together they work to imagine new ways of connecting with place and landscape; ways that respect the practices and traditions of the past in order to move forward into a resilient and adaptable cultural future.

If the vessel itself has been rendered redolent of the hand-made qualities of materiality—the stitched-together pelt sail, hand-made rope, a refashioned transom, a hull bearing the ochre hand-marks of its (re-) makers, a carved keel and so on, Gough has also been keen to incorporate aspects of technology into his installation. Across the skin-side of the sail, a video traces a brief encounter: two men, each from different 'tribes', approach an empty, abandoned vessel on a strip of shoreline. The boat is beached half-way across a freshwater stream that flows to the sea. The two men approach from different directions—they pause. They have options—they could wrangle over the booty, they could walk the other way. Instead, they make the decision to collaborate; to draw from each of their cultures to refashion their discovery

“Gough speaks of his drive to make work that avoids the repetition of mourning the mistakes of the past and instead to make work that revisions place and landscape in new ways. He calls on respect for the practices of the past in order to protect the custodianship for Country into the future”.

to suit their contemporary purposes. Fast-forward to the man-cave. Literally. Where the processes of the re-build tumble on top of each other in quick succession: a range of tools are applied, the men move back and forward across the frame, across each other’s pathways as they make decisions and combine their knowledge to re-fit their vessel. In sharp contrast to the frenetic activity, the final moments show the two men sailing their vessel, armed with hand-made fishing spears in an idyllic environment.

Gough speaks of his drive to make work that avoids the repetition of mourning the mistakes of the past and instead to make work that revisions place and landscape in new ways. He calls on respect for the practices of the past in order to protect the custodianship for Country into the future.

Following in the wake of Gough’s vessel, the prow of Jamin’s wooden vessel emerges from a relatively dark part of the gallery. At first sight, it appears that the boat has been fashioned with three rolled sails, but on closer inspection it becomes evident that the artist has fashioned three layers of highly reflective surfaces constructed of lightweight mylar, wood, string and tape. LED lights are arranged around the edges of each of the flat suspended structures.

In one sense, Jamin’s *The Gap Between Worlds* reflects his experience as an artist whose practice must, of needs, move fluidly between the worlds of fellow producers, purveyors and consumers; an experience that makes him acutely aware of the ironies and inconsistencies that erupt when juggling multiple expectations and interpretations of meaning and resonance. He uses the German term *umwelt* (that literally interprets as ‘environment’) to describe how each experience of the world is contained and inflected by the individual’s capacity to understand that world according to immediate needs. It could be argued that Jamin’s response to the question “does place matter?” is a philosophical one where the observer’s particular ‘point of view’ of place is governed by their own capacity to apprehend it.

However, the effect of the artist’s use of reflection is immediately experienced as a poetic, rather than a rational expression: as the viewer approaches the vessel the mirrored, LED-lit surfaces appear to recede and extend exponentially so that, when gazing down, it seems as if the vessel is hovering in a depthless, ever-receding blue pool. And looking up, the mast appears to extend through endless realms to an infinite blue sky. The humble shape of the little battered vessel hangs suspended between these two limitless realms.

In his statement, the artist addresses his interest in how the fundamental inter-connectedness of the world is nevertheless separated by infinite self-contained and self-referential categories. This work is a meditation on how connected we are, and yet ultimately how separate our experiences of life are from one another. Art can be a means of connecting through those skeins of separation to produce images that reflect back to us the tenuous bonds, links and relationships that communication and interaction depend on.

Each of the vessels in this fleet carries cargoes as different as their makers. Most of them draw from communities and relationships and places wider than their own. Yet as a cohort, do these multiple approaches to the central question “does place matter” come together to suggest an underlying perspective that is characteristically Tasmanian?

Many of the issues are simultaneously personal and political; local and global; specific and general. Most of them are informed by public discourse ingested and modulated by personal experiences. If a sense of sombre misgivings about the political seascapes we currently face inhabits these works, would it be fair to argue that that is peculiar to the predisposition of a ‘Tasmanian Gothick’ undertow? Or is that sense of skeptical disavowal of traditional approaches and histories common to critically reflexive work produced elsewhere?

Collectively, the works deal with issues that are key points of reckoning for contemporary Australia: issues to deal with the acknowledgement, recognition and understanding of Aboriginal Australians’ prior occupation of this country; to do with the threat of ongoing environmental degradation and the necessity of imagining new ways of playing our roles of custodianship of Country; to do with the necessity of valuing inclusiveness, participation and celebration of a range of cultural expressions within this country; and the need to reconsider how we accommodate those who, forced from their homelands, seek refuge here.

So is there significance in the fact that this first iteration of *The Partnershipping Project*, one that seeks to involve a cross-section of regionally based artists and art-workers in an analysis of “does place matter”, is launched from Burnie, Tasmania? History reminds us of Tasmania’s role in spear-heading all kinds of new thinking and development. In 1835 the chair of the Colonisation Committee for South Australia noted that:

> *in proportion to her population, (Van Dieman’s Land) has a commerce nearly six times greater than that of the Canadas; five times greater than that of Nova Scotia; (and) four and a half times greater than that of the Cape Colony.*[2]

That is, in terms of the Colonial Empire, Tasmania was an outstanding test-case for prosperity. And as noted by James Boyce, all this was in no small way due to the thousands of years of careful custodianship of the land by the Aboriginal Australians:

> *The easily accessed and well-watered native grasslands which stretched from Launceston to Hobart had been created and managed by the Aborigines as their principal hunting grounds over thousands of years.*[3]

In our era of post-colonial, trans-national and globalised trading patterns there might still be lessons to be learned about place, possession and dreams for more positive futures. And maybe artists are the ones to re-invent such tales, cobbling them together from flotsam, jetsam, scraps of history and half-remembered dreams, then carrying them back towards where we stand waiting, on the shoreline.

Pat Hoffie
2018

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[1] Spelling of Aboriginal names varies, reflecting the diversity of languages in Tasmania.

[2] Torrens, R, *Colonization of South Australia* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman 1835; Facsimilie edition, Public Library of South Australia, 1962):222-3 in Boyce, James, 2012, 1835 *The Founding of Melbourne and the Conquest of Australia* (third edn.) Black Inc., Melbourne

[3] ibid p. 17

Installation view at Burnie Regional Art Gallery | photo: Rick Eaves

UMBRELLA STUDIO CONTEMPORARY ARTS

17 MAY–23 JUNE 2019

Anne Lord, Brian Robinson, Gail Mabo, Obery Sambo Rob Douma, Vanghoua Anthony Vue, Dave mangenner Gough with Nathan Slater, and Selena de Carvalho

“Outside on the streets, the last hours leading up to the federal election continued to stir up debate about the crucial issues that confront the country, while inside, installed in the darkened space towards the rear of the new (temporary) Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts Gallery, the flotilla of little boats with their cargo, faced bravely towards uncertain futures”.

The *TPP* shipping crate from Burnie, Tasmania was on schedule when it arrived on the platform at Townsville in January. But the time-table of the travelling exhibition had not factored in the possibility of the massive weather event that struck Far North Queensland in February. The town and the region were devastated. Houses were washed away; the damage to property, stock and lives was shocking. The nation looked on in horror. In the face of this disaster, all plans for the exhibition were held off. But no-one—not the collaborating organisers at Umbrella Studios nor the artists—decided to call it quits. Instead, they worked onwards to complete their work, to refine their ideas and to move towards the possibility of locating an alternative venue for *The Partnershipping Project* exhibition.

The three full-time staff at Umbrella Studios—Gallery Director Kellie Williams, Gallery and Media Co-ordinator Angela Little and Business Manager Alan Marlowe—are understandably reluctant to continue running their publicity against the background of the flood devastations for long. Instead, they’re already moving towards bright optimistic futures; towards new exhibition programs, the possibility of extended reach into broader communities and new, centrally located gallery and studio spaces. The positive energy of the team is infectious, and attracts a solid core of support from the broader community, who chip in when extra help is needed

The Partnershipping Project opened on Friday, May 17 in Umbrella’s temporary space—a downstairs area off Flinders Street in Townsville’s city centre. The opening night coincided with two other exhibitions featuring the work of local artists, and the entire venue was jam-packed with visitors. The generosity of the hospitality, the general good-will and public interest in finding out what the project was about generated a good crowd at *The Partnershipping Project’*s curator’s talk at 5.00 pm and at the opening itself. Few visitors in the room would have been aware of the full extent of the efforts that had been taken to get the exhibition up and running; the fact that the exhibition space had no connection to electricity within the room had taken its share of creative problem-solving.

Despite set-backs and technical challenges, *TPP* Townsville is a visually enchanting experience. Outside on the streets, the last hours leading up to the federal election continued to stir up debate about the crucial issues that confront the country, while inside, installed in the darkened space towards the rear of the new (temporary) Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts Gallery, the flotilla of little boats with their cargo, faced bravely towards uncertain futures. The same issues that were proving critical to the nation were carried as cargoes in the small convoy of vessels: concerns about the environment; about the need to listen to Indigenous ideas regarding land management; about the ways in which traditional knowledges might be able to address critical environmental futures; reconsiderations about the way a longer historical awareness of the geography and geology of this country might be brought to bear on future planning for the country’s arid north; issues that centre on immigration and refugees, and the contribution migrant communities are making to the country; issues dealing with mining and land-clearing; about gender and education and the necessity of consultation, communication and collaboration.

Leading the convoy, Cairns-based artist Brian Robinson’s diminutive vessel titled *Barter and Trade – Exotic Cargo* glowed and glimmered with cargo from a range of destinations both imagined and real.

Brian draws from his Torres Strait Island heritage to make comments on issues of global pertinence from a local perspective. His works are laden with references to how his personal experiences, his heritage, and his vigilant research into reconsidered details of history together positively link the past to the future. But the weight of these cultural, social and ultimately, environmental ambitions are often off-set by a ‘lightness of being’ that manifests through his adoption and adaptation of contemporary stylistic iconography.

Brian has a love of super-hero imagery, and recognises the spell it has with contemporary communities, just as it had during his years as a boy growing up in the Torres Strait. He’s also an artist who’s been quick to harness the appeal and efficiencies of contemporary technologies, engaging highly skilled jigsaw cutting techniques to re-present traditional Torres Strait Island designs and motifs. The decorative immediacy of his works is generated through patterns and repetition; through bright flashes of colour and the use of everyday objects he redeploys with wit and irony.

His work for *The Partnershipping Project* uses all these strategies. And although at first glance the decorative, brightly patterned appeal of the vessel signals positive-brightness-and-light, closer attention to detail reveals other, more sinister references. The artist uses the boat to refer to the water trade that has passed between the shorelines of Australia, the Torres Strait Islands and New Guinea for centuries—trade that united different peoples, different ideas and ideals. The surface of the vessel is laden with floral motifs, references to vegetation in gardens grown where his mother grew up. But in Brian’s interpretation, many of these are compiled with a range of found items from domestic kitchens and sheds—scrubbing brushes and screws and other strangely familiar components—as if the tropical abundance of the cargo has had to be ‘cleaned up’ or ‘brought to order’ in some way. The most jarring realisation of the work’s content lies in the presence of

colourful human skulls that rest at the centre of so many blossoms. Like 'strange fruit', they jolt us into consciousness about the trade in people—and in human parts—that has long played a deep, malevolent undercurrent in trading practices across these waters. Running like a decorative tide beneath the little wooden boat, the patterned water forms remind us that contemporary currents draw us forward to meet similar challenges.

On the other side of the room, the boat in Townsville-based artist Anne Lord's *We Are Creatures* appears to be carried forward on a shoal of mysterious, strangely-shaped marine forms. A fragile, translucent sail has been hoisted from the vessel's mast. Its battered wooden prow seems to be shedding its very skin.

Anne has worked and lived in the region for many decades; her forebears bought and worked land outside Julia Creek generations ago, and the artist well understands the light, the heat, the weather-patterns of the far north. Paintings and prints and drawings in her earlier work were—and remain—remarkable for their dry, minimalistic eloquence; for the way they bid us to look hard into the searing light to respond to landscapes that evoke, at first glance, uncompromising indifference. There is a spare, brittle poetry in these works that has been won from the artist's commitment to working in the landscape season after blistering season, to listen more closely to its elusive language.

For *The Partnershipping Project,* the artist looked back into the far distance—to ninety-eight million years ago when the same tract of country was overlaid by the ancient and vast Eromanga Sea—a cold and shallow passage of water that covered much of what is now arid inland Australia. She outlined the contours of this sea on the sail—a fragile skein made from the lined pages of paper from a writing pad, each page carefully and laboriously connected at the edges. Within the contours of that sea she traced another outline—that of the Great Artesian Basin—the inland, underground sea on which life in this country still depends. And over this again, she traced the outline of the recent floods to form three maps in one, all laid out like a study in geography and history learned through studies of the effects of time on place. The simplicity of the material and of the making—the details that re-appeared like childhood stamps and corrections grant the work an increased poignancy. Hanging as an almost-tattered mainsail, it whispered of the fragility of our knowledge and understanding in the face of the enormity of time and country.

The ceramic shapes that surge like a swarm of half-formed creatures beneath and before the boat have wrinkled, hand-pressed forms that give clues about the cladding of recycled plastic within which their forms were produced. The artist describes them as the kind of creatures that would have existed all that time ago, seeking out new territories of sustenance, light and safety as the waters of the Eromanga Sea slowly retreated.

The prow of the boat suggests a surface weather-beaten by years and sea-leagues of travel. The artist made the decision to use the disintegration processes of a rag saturated in linseed oil to apply to the boat's prow—one that evoked the water-and-wind-weary carapace of the little vessel. Within the planked belly of the boat, a few dried leaves (left over from the long wait while the tide receded in the artist's backyard) extend allusions towards processes of peeling, drying and decaying followed by cyclic renewal that are underscored by the creatures beneath. The artist's own words, "The school of half-formed creatures moving beneath and around the boat are caught in a migration towards safer spaces, more convivial currents, brighter futures. Like the Cretacean creatures millions of years ago, today all kinds of species continue that ageless urge to migrate towards better futures," remind us that the passages and histories of times past continue to inform our experiences in the contemporary world.

"Rob's life experiences stretch across a number of continents and cultures; his occupation as an international security consultant, and his post-army career followed by employment on oil rigs and drill ships brought him into a range of challenging situations and contexts. Rob's rich and varied experiences in Australia and overseas have made him aware of the way skin is used—for better and sometimes for worse—as a demarcation-line for identity".

The long connection between ships, journeys and tattooing is traced in Townsville-based artist Rob Douma's *Grounded*. Although tattooing practices are evident in traces of a range of prehistorical cultures right around the world, the word 'tattoo' was introduced into the English language as a derivative of the Tahitian 'tatau' after Captain James Cook's return from the South Pacific. Although the practice spread to the upper classes of Europe by the nineteenth century, in the mind of the public and the press, tattooing was most closely associated with sailors and seamen, exotic realms and adventurous sojourners.

Rob uses these connections to refer to a contemporary world where changed ideas and associations of 'travel', together with changed responses to the exotic altered by the rapidity, efficiency and (for some) affordability of trans-cultural movement, are now associated with being the accoutrements of the affluent. His lightweight vessel lists to one side as if caught in a sudden squall. Its hull has been radically simplified, pared back to a mere skeleton across which a new, fragile indigo skin has been stretched. Its sail is a triangular patchwork of tones—white and off-white glimpses of detail provisionally adhered together in the service of function.

Rob's life experiences stretch across a number of continents and cultures; his occupation as an international security consultant, and his post-army career followed by employment on oil rigs and drill ships brought him into a range of challenging situations and contexts. Rob's rich and varied experiences in Australia and overseas have made him aware of the way skin is used—for better and sometimes for worse—as a demarcation-line for identity. As a self-employed tattoo artist, the artist sees a continuity between this practice and his role as an artist; in fact, his skills as a draughtsman and his own innate sense of aesthetics are stretched and at times creatively distorted through the requests of his clients, a predicament he views as a 'crossing of aesthetic territories' that offers a positive exercise through the necessity of having to extend yourself in order to realise the dreams and ambitions of others.

The business name of his tattoo studio—*Death Proof Tattoo*—is a title that is as honorific as it is ironic. The artist cites the beliefs held by many cultural groups that tattoos will provide a means through which to cheat death. At the same time the title alludes to the longevity of tattoos, and their incorporation into the corporeal matrix of the bodies into which they are inscribed. As the largest organ in the body, the skin is far more complex than the common literal understanding of it as 'skin deep' suggests; rather, it is the organ that enfolds and supports and protects and that serves as a semi-permeable membrane; the perimeter at which the outside is allowed in, and where the interior body can exude outwards to the world beyond.

By cladding the hull in an indigo skin made from a collage of pre-used tattoo carbon transfer papers, Rob brings together a plethora of designs

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he has made over the past three years. In so doing, the vessel’s skin is comprised of a thin transparent ‘hide’ made up from the designs of many members from all kinds of communities and demographics and sub-cultures within the immediate regional community. As such, the boat ‘floats’ on a skin of graphic registrations provided for, and by, those communities, and serves as an ersatz historical recording of details of their lives.

In the words of the artist, the sail is comprised of “used tattooing stencils; the joining of these together in a single format brings individual identification together into the collective—a skein that will provide the vessel’s power to move forward”.

The work points to the innate strength of collective community; the artist sees the vessel in *The Partnershipping Project* as a metaphor for setting out in search for new directions by working through collective navigational strengths.

Behind Rob’s boat, towards the back of the room, an almost invisible vessel emerges through its cast shadow more than through its material presence. Gail Mabo’s *Journey (Tagai)* consists of a white-washed hull bearing faint traces of handwritten script beneath transparent layers of paint. The script was originally written by Greg Lehman, a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, as part of his own artwork that utilised the boat in *The Partnershipping Project* in Burnie, Tasmania. In that work, Greg traced words from the diary entries of Captain James Cook when he travelled to Tasmania and Hawaii. In an ironic reversal, Gail chose to ‘white-out’ the script so that the historical European account is overwritten from the perspective and for the purposes of a first nations artist. Through this process, the script is rendered into playing a subliminal role in the boat’s ongoing transformation.

As Gail’s work reminds us, the currents and seaways off Australia’s coastline carried voyagers and seamen long before the arrival of European sailors. Rather than profiling the words of Cook’s journal as indicators of the most momentous of occasions, her whitewashed vessel cleverly locates the coming of the white-man as yet another among many comings and goings with which the first nations peoples of Australia have dealt.

The hull of the boat is propelled by a sail that has been reduced by the artist to a network of sinews—light, white ropes woven together in a system of interconnected skeins. The knots and criss-crossings suggest the outline of a mainsail—a kind of linear skeleton-sail perfectly suited to the contours and purpose of a ghost ship. The ghost ship, she says, is one that keeps travelling, guided by those who time has forgotten.

“For us”, she says “Tagai is that spirit in the sky—the one we follow to lead us on our journey. Tagai is also the name for the constellation within which the Southern Cross sits. For we Torres Strait Island people, Tagai is a celestial calendar that tells us when to plant, when to hunt and when to move on”.

In Meriam culture, Tagai can be seen in the sky as a fisherman-hero; an upright figure standing in his canoe with a fishing spear in his left hand and a fruit in his other hand. The stars of the Tagai are represented by a large constellation that includes Scorpius, Lupus, Centaurus, Crux and Corvus among others.

The stars of the Tagai provide a constellation network that underpins the integration of culture and tradition for people of the Torres Strait. Passed from one generation to the next through oral tradition, understanding of the Tagai provided the means through which the Mer people of the Torres Strait were able to argue and win their claim for establishing Meriam rights to the Murray Islands before the Full Bench of the High Court in 1992. This ground-breaking win, led by Gail’s father Eddie Koiki Mabo, was the landmark legal case that ended the fiction of Australia as a terra nullius—a land owned by no-one—established since the non-Indigenous invasion of the country.

The skeletal white knotted sail of Gail’s boat is marked by black knots—punctuation marks that trace out the celestial pattern of Tagai that continues to guide Torres Strait Island people towards the future. Although this installation appears minimal, its powerful presence is extended through the shadows it casts. “For me”, says the artist, “these shadows are like the ancestral spirits that are always with us—who always guide us”.

Alongside Gail’s white ghost-ship, the mast of Vanghoua Anthony Vue’s wooden boat is slung with a cargo of horticulture. Titled ev-cog-ciaj (carry-plant-live), the installation gives witness to a rich organic potential—a vessel expanding with the bounty of agriculture and culture. Hollowed-out bamboo stems stuffed with soil and seedlings hang in the place of a sail, while the fat belly of its hull swells with the dry sheaves of harvested rice-stalks. Sprouting from pots across its seats, and carried along in the bow-wave beneath its hull, a growing crop of egg-plant seedlings appear as if set afloat on smaller fragile paper vessels.

Other paper vessels undulate across the sheaves of rice-stalks in the hull of the boat like a nervous rivulet; they are long and thin in proportion, and made from grainy, pixelated images featuring people, children, war equipment and details of devastation. Anthony is aware that the paper ‘boats’ will be seen as vessels, even though his own Hmong culture folds joss paper in this way as an allusion to bullion bars burned as offerings to ancestral spirits. In sharp contrast to the organic nature of other aspects of the installation, two inner green ‘wings’ of the boat carry iPods screening clues about the work’s origins—one bears images of a range of idyllic waterways—rivers, streams, pools, waterfalls—in the vicinity of Cairns, where the artist grew up. The other screens clips and details of a little-known war—the Laotian Civil War (1959–79) also known as the “Secret War in Laos”, one in which each side of the Cold War superpowers at the time made heavy and costly investments.

This war was the impetus that forced Anthony’s parents into refugee camps in Thailand, and eventually to refugee status in Australia, where Far North Queensland’s wet tropics soon beckoned with its familiar resonances to the home to which they could not return. Anthony’s parents arrived with little more than memories and remembered skills; ones they set to good use in building a new life for themselves and their eight children. Yet in spite of their success in building new lives together, the longing for home, family and community they have left behind persists. Parts of the video are laced through by haunting, melancholic, breathy music created by Anthony’s father blowing into a leaf, a traditional singing practice that links him to those places and people he has left behind.

ev-cog-ciaj (carry-plant-live) was constructed as a collaborative endeavour between the artist and his parents—the bamboo was harvested and cut with his father; the eggplant seedlings were raised by his mother in between working in and for local market-gardens and vegetable markets. The little boat’s harvest is a rich indication of the ongoing contribution of the Hmong communities to the life of Far North Queensland.

Sailing before Anthony’s wooden boat bearing agricultural bounty, the tattered black plastic flag of Selena de Carvalho’s *100 Year Flood* offers a grim reminder of the devastating costs of deforestation in Tasmania. Joining in with the fleet in Townsville, the tragic appeal of Selena’s work chimed in with concerns about land management shared by the work of the North Queensland artists.

And out in the foyer, right on the edge of the regional capital’s small-city streets, the massive, stitched kangaroo pelt sail of Dave mangenner Gough’s *Te Waka al trawlwoolway or the Canoe/ boat of trawlwoolway* reminds passers-by and visitors alike of the positive benefits of trans-cultural collaboration. In a city like Townsville, where a higher proportion of first nations people walk the streets than most other Australian cities, it’s a cogent reminder of the transformative possibilities of shared futures.

Pat Hoffie
2019

Installation view at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts | photo: Rachel Cunnigham

LISMORE REGIONAL GALLERY

7 DECEMBER 2019–
2 FEBRUARY 2020

Aris Prabawa, Hiromi Tango, Karla Dickens with Leigh Arnold, Penny Evans, Dave mangenner Gough with Nathan Slater, Selena de Carvalho, Gail Mabo, and Vanghoua Anthony Vue

“The area, famous for its green folding hills that meet together in winding dark verdant creek-beds, is now cracked and parched. And on this particular summer, the sky has settled down close to envelop the water-starved country in a blanket-film of smoke-cloud. All around the scarred, cleared pasturelands, bushlands are burning”.

One of the ground level pylons of the new Lismore Regional Gallery has a series of short marks in different shades, different sizes, running up its length. Within the pristine spaces of the new building, the written line has the quality of a grungy old tattoo that someone, who now aspires to a more upmarket lifestyle, forgot to have removed. Next to each line, a number documents the year the high-tide mark was registered; a ‘careful graffiti’ demarcating the level each flood reached. It’s kept as a reminder of the long relationship the town has with its rivers, and the fact that it’s been kept there suggests that, to some extent and purpose, a kind of pact has been made: one that acknowledges the severity and insistence of the rivers’ reminders that they have seasonally come down to make their claim on the land in the past, and that they will surely make those claims again, sometime in the future.

But in 2019, as the drive from the coastline winds uphill towards Lismore, the paddocks on either side of the road are evidence there’s been no rain for a very long time. The area, famous for its green folding hills that meet together in winding dark verdant creek-beds, is now cracked and parched. And on this particular summer, the sky has settled down close to envelop the water-starved country in a blanket-film of smoke-cloud. All around the scarred, cleared pasturelands, bushlands are burning. For the length of Australia’s coastline, and inland, sudden outbreaks of bushfires and grassfires are fanned by an erratic weather-pattern of winds that chop and change and fan the fires anew.

The Partnershipping Project has moved to Lismore. It seems a long time ago—an entire mindset ago—since the project’s shipping container, and all the art inside it, survived the floods in Townsville. Yet it’s been but a few short months. Emblazoned with *The Partnershipping Project* logo, the container has found its next temporary camp on a flat spread of grass outside the gallery, right on the corner of Rural Street and King Street. And while behind it and to the right of it, the contours of the Lismore Regional Gallery appear to offer a more resilient sanctuary than the temporary basement space annexed by the Umbrella staff in Townsville after the floods, that pylon inside serves as a reminder of the fragility of all buildings in the face of rising flood-levels.

Right now, however, the country is in the grip of a disaster of another kind: the fires burning on the borderlines of every settlement pervade the daily air we breathe. This, then, provides part of the background context for *The Partnershipping Project #3*.

Installed in an upstairs room, the chilled dark of the exhibition space glitters with light. The hulls of the boats have re-assembled, the convoy laden with bounty and portents from other places; from different dreamings. In the centre of the fleet, one vessel seems to float upturned. Its curving underbelly is scattered with the details of an unknown galaxy, bound from aft to rear and from side to side with Union Jack-like stripes fashioned from strips of rusty tin. The bands wrap the dimensions of the galaxy like inhibiting restraints.

But the upturned hull appears to have been repurposed; inserted into its curve, the futuristic smoothness of a stranger kind of craft points its snub nose forward and upward. Its red mono-eye is insect-like, other-worldly, covered in dots. And inside, the head-torso is stacked with a bounty of old, polished bones and looping lengths of filthy fat rope.

What is this strange craft? And where is it going? For what kind of mission has it been designed? Artist Karla Dicken’s *Colonial Bottom Feeders* reminds us that, to the original peoples of this land, the first white invaders must have appeared as strange as aliens. And she reminds us also that the processes of colonialism are ongoing and unlimited. Yet, like so much of this artist’s work, the issues raised eclipse the dimensions of a straightforward politico/cultural historical critique. Dickens salvages a great deal of her material from outlying dumps; she’s a reclaimer with an eye for overlooked potential. And her commitment to working with the discarded, the undervalued, the misunderstood, the mistreated, often demands a reworking of surfaces and a re-positioning of material relationships in ways that coax these objects to new ways of being in the world.

The dynamic streamlining of the cockpit, the loving details of the hull-galaxy painted by the artist’s colleague Leigh Arnold are impressive and challenging. The scale, the finish, the grand gesture of the craft at first make it seem unconquerable. And yet, as the artist reminds us, in order for it to ‘function’ in its new form, a vessel has had to be overturned. And an overturned vessel is a powerful reminder—in any culture—that things: lives, ambitions; directions, perhaps even destinies, have been lost in the process.

The work rocks on the imaginary seas caught between unfathomable potential and the humilities of broken dreams. It speaks of the seas of unknown galaxies and whispers of the deep oceans of sadness of a colonial past.

Suspended in the far-right corner of the room, a triangle of three panels cast a rich green glow onto the small black boat beneath. Images in the panels reveal a fern gully in a rich, verdant rain-forest. Mosses and ferns are dappled by the light coming from the canopy of leaves above; it’s a wet, fecund secret place; a place of tranquillity and peace. Only a single form diverges from the green palette—rounded and smooth, it’s unclear just what the form might be—somewhere between a rock and a human body folded into itself—embryonic, becoming.

The boat's cargo is equally elusive—handmade from precious heirloom kimono silks, clusters of small, spore-like forms are wound through by sinuous hand-bound fabric tendrils. The rounded spore-forms are fat and full; their pastel colours reflect those worn by the curled figure on the rainforest floor above, and woven through with gentle greens. It's as if the fecund magic of the forest has somehow materialised into the cargo borne by the boat; as if the figure in the image has spawned herself into a thousand micro-organistic possibilities in the form of tiny mushroom-and fungi-like nodules; as if these spores of dreaming might have mushroomed up magically from between the shiny black planks of the little boat.

Biology tells us that spores are single-cell organisms produced by non-flowering plants and fungi, and that, despite their microscopic dimensions, are capable of surviving extremely harsh conditions. Many spores have a built-in regulator that allows them to stay dormant until they are able to reach conditions where their survival is assured. They travel like night-stalkers, soundlessly dispersed by the faintest of air currents, or are carried along by water flows. On other occasions they choose their transport through adhering to the bodies of selected creatures.

The spores in this particular little black boat have been meticulously and time-consumingly fashioned, we are told, from the silk kimonos that once enfolded the body of the artist's grandmother; a tiny woman who would fiercely fight her own personal horticultural battles against seasons and pests, infertile soil and pillagers, to make sure her garden was able to fulfil its full abundant potential each year. And every day she entered that horticultural commitment to regeneration and fecundity, she would be wearing one of her fragile, meticulously detailed kimonos.

Those familiar with the work of Hiromi Tango's *Roots* will recognise her delicate methods for reconstituting her precious personal booty of fabrics and twines. They will also be aware of this artist's commitment to conversation, community and collaboration, and will know that it is as vital an aspect of the artmaking process for her as are the richly inventive forms she creates. And those who were present on the exhibition's opening night will remember the artist's sleeping form, wrapped in several thin, fragile layers of her grandmother's kimonos, as she lay in her boat, cradling her bouquet of verdant spore-seeds. On that night it was as if the artist herself had become a seed; a small curled-up form of possibilities; a form that could not be extricated from the materials of the work around her.

And although those who are new to this work may not have yet been in possession of such contextual knowledge, their background understanding of the world beyond the room provided ample empathy from which to draw: outside the fires are burning. Outside the creek-beds have run dry. Outside even the deepest secret recesses of the rainforests are cornered, reduced; many dying. And inside the artist speaks of the personal and communal impact on this assault on our dream-places. Beneath the magical green glow of the secret rainforest corners, the little black boat carries spores of hope and the regeneration of care into the currents of future possibilities.

In the adjacent back corner, a small dark blue boat carries a gathered group of standing figures that cast long shadows across the wall behind. The dark silhouetted shapes of the flat, upright forms stand as if in anticipation of a landing. The shadows they cast are huge—long and looming—in proportion to the actual scale of the assembled group of eight. The branches of a leafless tree zigzag behind and between them like the sharp energy of a lightning bolt. Together these flat forms, the spiked tree-forms and the full contours of the craft on which they stand coalesce into a shadowy nightmare. The kind of nightmare that is whispered between new reports that connect new arrivals with fear—even terror. On closer inspection, the sense of dread continues to hold sway—each of the figures are swathed in black so that only their faces are revealed. And the features of each of their faces are all-too-easily dismissed into the category of coming from 'elsewhere'. Here they stand, clearly a group of people from a range of other cultures, all united in their will to move the little boat forward to seek refuge.

But longer observations of this crowded little vessel slowly reveal other details: the faces are smiling; their empty hands, their vigilant pose make it seem as though they are ready and willing to share the tasks ahead of them. Beneath and before them, in the bilge of the boat, the jagged contours of two heads face each other like chattering skulls in military caps, reminding them of the dark pasts from which they've fled. But their feet stand on soil. And the soil they stand on nurtures other possibilities—behind them a tiny forest of indigenous species promise future forests capable of sustaining new potentials and options.

The artist, Aris Prabawa (*Shadow on big heart)*, is well versed in the will to oppose restrictive regimes. As a founding member of the group of artists and activists called *Taring Padi* (literally, the fang of the rice seedling), he used cultural practice as a means of resisting the vicissitudes of the Suharto regime. Aris moved to Australia with his partner Jade seventeen years ago, and since then, with Jade and their two children, he has fabricated a life and a creative community that spans Lismore and Jogjakarta. Aris is well aware of the social and political implications of the place—or places—you choose to live, and he retains a strong commitment to the capacity of collaborative cultural action to leverage positive change.

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Aris' boat is also filled with a cargo of hope and a ballast of future potential. Just like the seed-spores in Hiromi's boat, the little black-clad figures offer the promise of new beginnings, changed awakenings and exciting inter-connections with all kinds of 'heres' and 'elsewheres'. It moves forward on a bow-wave of barbed wire, and the shadows it casts loom with the darkness of obscured fear. But inside the boat, as we become steadily more familiar with the faces of the little bright-eyed travellers, we can see something of ourselves in their retreat from danger; we can recognise the hope and collective determination of realising new futures into being.

For this iteration of the exhibition, Penny Evan's tiny white, battered boat leads the fleet. Flat-bottomed and fragile, it tips its nose towards the oncoming swell. The chipped wooden rails of its perimeter carry the equally battered frame of a metal hospital bed, together they offer what seems like a precarious palanquin for the ailing. The mattress that lies on top of the old, interwoven bed-springs is thin, clad in what appears to be a slender skein of wound-dressing. And carefully, tenderly, lovingly stitched all around the edges of this mattress run the double-quilled feathers only found on emus. The light, semi-transparent lacery of the feathers catch even the slightest movement of air. As they undulate and quiver, it almost seems possible that the entire mattress and its contents might be levitated upwards.

Along the length of the single-bed mattress a system of forms has been laid out with the precision of ceremony. It is not clear exactly what the forms connote, or from where they have come. But whether bone or ceramic, whether found or retrieved or created, together they connote a sense of some kind of body. At the head of the bed, a half-shell ovoid form has been carved and darkly striated. It's encircled by a double-row perimeter of curved forms that suggest boomerang-shapes, or perhaps the smaller bones of the upper ribs. Within them, river sand has been carefully placed to form a light halo around the ovoid 'skull'.

Below that, the curved forms, some bearing what appear to be incisions into which a dark red material has been baked, take up a range of patterned intersections. In the middle of the bed, above where the vital organs might lie, intersecting curved forms create a space in which a small pool of sand has been measured. These encircling bleached 'bones' bear the marks of striations and scarring. They have been sutured to the scar tissue of the hospital bed and in places carefully bound to each other by connecting string.

The simple arrangements of the forms suggest a measured cadence—a rhythm that evokes a cultural connectedness capable of bringing together the land, the body and song. Those of us unfamiliar with the age-old rhythms of these cultural forms are

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nevertheless drawn to the simple geometry of their logic, and over the years many non-indigenous Australians have been increasingly pulled by the magnetism of the cultural cadence that lies at the very heart of the country.

The work, *Patient*, was created in response to a succession of journeys artist Penny Evans has made to her ancestors’ Country; long, ten hour drives from her home in Lismore to spend precious time with fellow custodians on a land that bears the deep scars of centuries of agricultural mismanagement. The sand used in the work was gathered from the now-dry creek-beds and river-ways; the ceramic forms continue the patterning the artist has been using in her work for some decades. The artist describes this devastation as having followed years of ill-conceived cotton farming and equally brutal processes of extraction and stock mismanagement. As a result, the land now stands silent, waterless, exhausted. The artist also speaks of a personal exhaustion—an emotion shared by so many burdened by their awareness of the current ecological tragedies unfolding in the country.

Yet if the title suggests that the land, and those who act as its custodians, have been reduced, bruised, diminished, *Patient* also evokes the timeless forbearance of Country that repeatedly regenerates and heals itself. The Country’s fortitude in facing, and then overcoming the ravages of fire and flood have been evidenced and recorded over time. Even so, the current global environment crisis is one like no other; we daily watch newsreels of unfolding unprecedented ecological calamity. As the artist suggests, while a turn towards the teachings of those who held the ecological balance of this land in a precarious balance for over sixty thousand years may be too late, and while acknowledgement of the inextricable links between our own well-being and that of the land is well overdue, it is a start that must be made. The little white boat carries the precious clues to former bodies of knowledge towards a doubtful future.

The vessels with cargo created by the artists from the Northern Rivers region are joined by two from Tasmania—Selena de Carvalho’s heavily laden little vessel (*100 Year Flood*) the sides of which have been poison-penned by the artist herself through harvesting the emissions from her vehicle. In a wry exercise of self-confessed-implication, de Carvalho’s poem takes up the challenge of her personal responsibilities and critically self-questions the weight her life and art-making might contribute to the current global ecological disasters. Flying a dark black toxic flag of tattered shame, the grubby little vessel grows even more dirty with every exhibition, as the dust and residue of its cargo of burnt forests are re-loaded into its bilges.

In stark contrast, the pristine white ghost-sail of Gail Mabo’s work (*Journey Tagai*)weaves into its skeletal rope-sails the black knots delineating the ‘Tagai’—the spirit constellation that provides the navigational cartography through which Torres Strait island people negotiate the waters of the far north of our country. Yet the white-washed planks inside the belly of the boat fail to completely obscure the hand-painted diary entries detailing Captain Cook ‘s voyages,[1] written when he first laid claim to what was falsely described as a “Terra Nullius”. As history tells us, many years later that assumption, that no-one had existed for an extensive period of time in the Great Southern Land prior to European occupation, was overturned in the high court as a result of her father, Eddie Mabo’s successful challenge. However, despite this high court decision, the land-mark Indigenous land-rights claim continues to be disputed in a number of ways. Calling upon the guidance of the ancestral spirits that have and still remain as offering guide-lines to First Nation peoples, Gail calls up the spirit of the Great Fisherman, the Tagai, whose celestial constellation offers a pattern through which journeys can be guided and order maintained.

In front of Gail’s ‘star ship’, the kangaroo-pelt sails and details of Dave mangenner Gough’s vessel (*Te Waka a trawlwoolway*) are a tribute to cross-cultural collaboration. Working with his Maori mate Nathan Slater, Gough re-purposes the boat as an exercise in shared cultural homage. A video screened on the boat’s pelt-sail documents two beachcombers coming across the vessel’s hull as an item of flotsam washed in on the high tide. For a moment, a stand-off suggests the possibility of a wrangle for possession, but instead, the two men determine to take on the challenge of working together to re-build a vessel that might better negotiate a journey to a culturally shared future. The result is a creation rich in personal and cultural detail, one that is both familiar and strange, and one that benefits from the medley of cultural references brought together to secure its final form.

From the Cairns region in Far North Queensland, Vanghoua Anthony Vue’s vessel (*ev-cog-ciaj*) is the carrier of hundreds of smaller, even more fragile boats. Constructed from folded paper, these little offerings have been made from black and white photographs of Hmong refugees who have made the long journey from war-torn Laos to our shorelines. Vue’s parents were among those refugees, and not long after their arrival in Sydney, they were part of a second movement of Hmong families who headed up to Far North Queensland to an environment that more closely resembled that of their adopted homelands in South-East Asia. The Hmong have no one homeland; community pockets exist across Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and in expatriate communities across the world. Wherever they are given space to settle, the Hmong make the most of the borderlines and wastelands overlooked by dominant cultural groups, and transform them into production sites for remarkable crops and extraordinary craftworks. As in the rest of the world, in Cairns, much local produce has been tended by Hmong market gardeners. The little paper boats lie across cut rice sheaths grown and cut by Vue’s own family, and hollowed-out bamboo tubes slung from the central mast contain soil and seedlings, symbolising the positive potential of regeneration and new life.

Two tablet screens have been affixed to the inside of the vessel’s prow—one showing images from South East Asia, others of Vue’s family home just outside Cairns. In each of them water and waterways feature as a life-line of sustenance.

In each iteration of *The Partnershipping Project* the fleet alters and transforms as different artists from different places launch their hopes, concerns, interests and celebrations into the mix. And each time the context changes, particular concerns move towards the forefront of considerations. Paradoxes abound. The deluge that overwhelmed Townsville seems like a distant and far-away place in Lismore today, even though this town, too, has had more than its fair share of flooding. Instead, the fires are still burning; the taste of ash is still on the tongue, and the entire country holds its breath in anticipation of what form the next ‘extreme weather event’ might take. And the fleet of little boats continue to bear witness to the capacity of art to act as a language capable of articulating the concerns, fears and hopes of entire communities.

Pat Hoffie
2019

[1] These words had been left on the boat after its initial use during the Tasmanian iteration of *The Partnershipping Project*. (see previous essay on Burnie Regional Gallery)

Installation view at Lismore Regional Gallery | photo: Vanghoua Anthony Vue

RIDDOCH ART GALLERY

6 MARCH–24 MAY 2020

Damien Shen with Robert Hague, Sera Waters, Dave mangenner Gough with Nathan Slater, Selena de Carvalho, Gail Mabo, Vanghoua Anthony Vue, Aris Prabawa, and Penny Evans

“Through all the uncertainty of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is impossible not to notice that where we are matters, and that the people around us matter. Our quality of life is directly linked to these things in a way that often only emerges in times of extreme challenge”.

Partnershipping in the Time of COVID

The premise of *The Partnershipping Project*, which asks the question ‘in a global world does the local matter’, has taken on additional levels of meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus has turned almost everything we knew (or thought we knew) about our interconnected world on its head.

For decades, globalisation has changed our economies, and largely, our standard of living.[1] It is a major force behind the collapse of the manufacturing industry and many see it as destablising national autonomy and identity.[2] Yet, this global pandemic has had the curious binary effect of both unifying humanity under a common struggle, while also serving to highlight vast differences from country to country, state to state and city to city.

This is to say that, while it might have been a global pandemic, it became more evident over time that an individual’s experience of it, very much depended on where they were experiencing it. It reinforced that, despite the fear of homogenisation, our local communities really are at the heart of our experience. It has cast a spotlight on the weaknesses of globalisation, and the importance of immediate communities, which must adapt and work together to keep each other safe. For the most part they have risen to the challenge, as evidenced by Australia’s success in flattening the infection curve to date.

Flattening the curve however meant that the Riddoch Art Gallery had to close its doors to the public on 23 March, following advice from Federal, State and Local Government. As a result, *The Partnershipping Project* was on display to the public for a total of 16 days and, though across the country, in many galleries exhibitions would remain in stasis while the doors were closed, *Partnershipping* was slowly decaying. I had fears that the live plants featuring in both Aris Prabawa and Vanghoua Anthony Vue’s boats were always going to struggle to survive in gallery conditions. However the lock-down was a death knell for the duration of this iteration of the exhibition. When we shut the doors and were sent to work from home, uncertain of what was going to happen next, I knew one thing for sure, it would be the end for those plants. In my mind, day by day I could picture this exhibition falling slowing into disrepair, decaying in silence as organic matter morphing unchecked into an unwelcome state.

Despite, or maybe because of the plants demise, I was reminded that from its conception *The Partnershipping Project* has always been a living exhibition. Changing at every venue, responding to its local surrounds and stimuli, *Partnershipping* brought with it stories from other parts of the continent, reinvigorated and reshuffled at every stop. It was the project’s unstable nature that meant it carried a multitude of voices with it, and in so doing sought not to reduce the conversation of locality and immediacy but to expand it. For the Riddoch Art Gallery in Mount Gambier, located in the South East of South Australia, artists Sera Waters and the collaboration of Damien Shen with Robert Hague became the placemaking anchors for this leg of the project.

Sera Waters, an accomplished textile artist from Adelaide, grew up in Mount Gambier, and through her work, she connects to an undercurrent that flows throughout this region. Frequently calling into question her unavoidably colonial relationship with Australia, Waters’ practice draws on a combination of her own history and *Cave Thinking*, the work she has made for *Partnershipping*, is no exception. Mapping the topography of Mount Gambier through dyed, second-hand textiles, Waters stitches in the plantation pine forests, farmland, sink holes and dormant water-filled volcanos, iconic to this region. This carefully parceled out landscape, designed by colonial settlers, forms the outer layer of her work, wrapped over the boat like a domed tent or mound. Underneath this ordered surface however, lies a dark and tangled space, beckoning the curious into the depths.

While many settlers found caves by accident, following rabbits or dogs as they disappeared into the dark, in Mount Gambier it is now unavoidable to consider what happens underneath the ground. Alongside the famous caves dotted throughout this region, and the sinkholes that provide recreational swimming or wellsprings for entrepreneurial gin makers, our most iconic landmark is a volcanic crater that forms a catchment for our drinking water.

Once the core of bustling primary industry in Mount Gambier, limestone, the very feature that formed many of these caves and sinkholes, is a precarious material. These geological formations remind us that over thousands of years and exposure to water, limestone is capricious and prone to collapse. Waters’ work speaks of the unease of geology made from insecure material and formed in timelines that dwarf human existence. In the artist’s psyche these underground caves have travelled with her becoming dark woven arms, reaching out and tangling around themselves in the shadows, inviting the adventurous with a flickering warm light. Reminiscent of those settlers forging through the unknown, we are drawn into this mysterious space. What dark tendrils lie under the city unexplored, hidden, waiting to draw the unwary in?

The traditional domestic practices of sewing, stitching, and reusing contrasts with the wild and dark caves that underpin it, creating a sense of

“Through all the uncertainty of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is impossible not to notice that where we are matters, and that the people around us matter. Our quality of life is directly linked to these things in a way that often only emerges in times of extreme challenge. It is timely then, that *The Partnershipping Project* poses its question, reminding us that knowing who we are is bound to where we are, where we have come from and that the ongoing journey of becoming is inextricably linked to place”.

the binary experience that white Australian history often fails to address. This binary reflects the subtle narrative that frequently underlies much of Waters’ work, that underneath the surface of our ordered parcels of land, is the dark and uncomfortable truth of the violence and force that all settler descendants must, and should, sit with.

The premise of *Partnershipping* was partially inspired by the Hanseatic League and the ensuing collaboration between companies from neighbouring countries for their mutual benefit. The collaborative work between titled *Where We Meet*, Damien Shen and Robert Hague has tapped into that premise in a very personal way. Shen, based in Adelaide and Hague based in Melbourne have brought together their artistic practice, and the building blocks of their physical selves, to destabilise the authority placed on scientific data to describe who we are and how we relate to the world. Using their mapped DNA, ancestry tracking, resin moulds of body parts, x-rays of their heads and tintype portraits, Shen and Hague modify traditional scientific techniques to challenge our ideas of same and difference. Through scientific methodology they explore their heritages, Shen, a South Australian man of Ngarrindjeri and Chinese bloodlines, and Hague, a New Zealand migrant of Irish and English stock, to challenge the historically problematic scientific practices that fail to capture a deep and personal relationship.

Nearly every work they display in *Partnershipping* has a Shen and a Hague version. Four backlit x-rays are on display, two each for Shen and Hague. For every tintype, there is a matching partner either opposite or next to, so the collaborators are always in view of each other, always participating in the push and pull of a partnership. In some cases their essence is mixed, with their projected DNA sequence, or their heartbeats overlaid, playing through the gallery, and with their cast limbs in the orange and white fiberglass boat.

The centerpiece of their multimedia installation, the boat, features deep ruby red resin casts of Shen and Hague’s heads, hands, arms and feet scattered throughout a bed of sand, strewn with pieces of limestone and organic detritus. The multiples of each head, arm and foot look like dismembered or discarded parts, perhaps the abandoned cast-offs of a more sinister project. In part, it seems to echo the famous Romantic painting, *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) by French painter Théodore Géricault—there is the sense of abandonment, of people fleeing unsuccessfully and left to their (terrible) fate.

Despite this bleak visage of abandonment, it is a story of journeying together. Shen and Hague’s work is faultlessly blended and in some cases where one artist’s hand starts and another stops is not discernable. Their bond, their partnership, flies in the face of the factual ‘science’ they present. Instead, what has brought them together are the ‘invisible’ similarities that have formed their friendship and forged their practice into one collaboration.

Through all the uncertainty of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is impossible not to notice that where we are matters, and that the people around us matter. Our quality of life is directly linked to these things in a way that often only emerges in times of extreme challenge. It is timely then, that *The Partnershipping Project* poses its question, reminding us that knowing who we are is bound to where we are, where we have come from and that the ongoing journey of becoming is inextricably linked to place.

Serena Wong
2020

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[1] Saval, Nikil. Globalisation: the rise and fall of an idea that swept the world, *The Guardian*, published Fri 14 Jul 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/14/globalisation-the-rise-and-fall-of-an-idea-that-swept-the-world

[2] Ibid

Installation view at Riddoch Art Gallery | photo: Michael van der Linden

BURNIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY

30 OCTOBER–12 DECEMBER 2020

The fleet assembled and exhibited in Mt. Gambier returned to Burnie Regional Art Gallery for the project's final iteration.

Installation view at Burnie Regional Art Gallery | photo: Rick Eaves

ESSAYS

TRANS-LOCAL, GLOBALISM AND CHANGING PATTERNS OF BELONGING (DOES PLACE STILL MATTER?)

We live in an increasingly globalised world. We are all expected to be 'global citizens'. But to what extent is it still important to be part of 'local communities'? Does the emphasis on being in touch with what's global affect the way we are able to recognise the little idiosyncratic differences of what's right-in-front-of-us in our everyday lives? Where do our relationships to 'place'; to the local, to the here-and-now of community, stand in relation to these changes? Or are these everyday details of our local lives made to seem too small, too local, too trivial to matter? The enormity of global environmental and social problems is presented in the media as beyond the scope of local concerns. But we also know that everything is inter-connected. We understand that the tiny, the specific, the local, the immediate all have implications for what happens elsewhere. To what extent might it be possible to be both global and local?

The topic 'global/local' immediately suggests a raft of questions about the impact of homogenisation (i.e. the concerns about 'everything') on diversity (i.e. on the details of the immediate). While the term 'global' suggests *in*clusive and homogeneous tendencies, the term 'local' is associated with ideas about the specificity of places (with their precise conditions and contexts) and the specificity of times (with an understanding that the concept of time is not necessarily universal). A simultaneous apprehension of both these experiences is an important starting place from which to work towards understanding that the world is composed of a conglomerate of inter-linked, diverse, contextually-specific and locally cared-for locales or regions.

Between the concepts of 'global' and 'local', the epithet of 'nation' hovers like a ghost from the past. As globalisation advanced, nationhood was beginning to seem like an out-moded, out-paced way of claiming unified control, communities and culture. However more recently, ideas about the benefits of nationhood are being revisited:

> *In his 2011 book The Globalisation Paradox, Rodrik concluded that "we cannot simultaneously pursue democracy, national determination, and economic globalisation". The results of the 2016 elections and referendums provide ample testimony of the justness of the thesis, with millions voting to push back, for better or for worse, against the campaigns and institutions that promised more globalisation.*[1]

Recent climates of fostered fear have contributed to the emergence of some conservative, controlling iterations of nationhood driven by populist impulses that include "public opposition to mass immigration, cultural liberalisation, and the perceived surrender of national sovereignty to distant and unresponsive international bodies".[2] These surges in popularity of authoritarian leaders now threaten the sustainability of the culturally diverse, sustainable and inter-active local and regional communities[3] that were once part of these nations.

regional diversity and the changing iterations of the nation-state

Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson defined a nation as an "imagined community"—a group composed of peoples from a range of cultural, social and ethnic groups who could see past their differences through their embrace of common visual and written languages.[4] Inclusive frameworks of belonging are part of what binds social, economic and cultural diversities into the binding entity of 'nationhood'.

Many of the world's current nation-states emerged as a result of the European colonial period that extended, roughly speaking, from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth century[5] when colonies were established in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Pacific. The British invasion of Australia was part of that process. The colonies were bound by trade and the administration of public matters to the colonising country. The first phase of the creation of national identities through colonial power has been described as follows:

> *Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.*[6]

But all hubris has its use-by date; and as the second World War moved the focus of colonial powers to issues of self-preservation 'closer to home', the countries and territories they'd claimed as their colonies seized the opportunity to embark upon the processes of de-colonisation. As part of independence, nations embraced self-directed policies that affirmed, enshrined and celebrated their differences instead of having them recognised as second-rate or hybrid or pidgin or creole emulations of their former colonisers.

However, there were still value-systems that ranked the diverse cultural groups included within these new parameters. Recognition and acceptance of intra-national cultural diversity varied from nation to nation; while some nations mandated cohesiveness through restricting recognition of plural identities and expressions; others established tiers of governmental directives that encouraged and protected diversity.[7]

post(?)nationalism, trans-localism and belonging

In the decades following the second world war, the power of nations to control their own destiny, their own boundaries and their own trade legislations was faced with another world order. As inter-dependent trans-national corporations gradually emerged as global controllers of capital, nation-states again were challenged with the need to readjust the parameters of their identity. The move towards trans-global trading softened the rules binding nationally controlled trades and tariffs, weakening the policy-making hold of nations while increasing the power of the trans-national corporations:

> *Many corporations are richer and more powerful than the states that seek to regulate them. Through mergers and acquisitions corporations have been growing very rapidly and some of the largest TNCs now have annual profits exceeding the GDPs of many low and medium income countries.*[8]

Increasingly, we all experience living our lives in a trans-national world, no matter where we live. Whether we are refugees, immigrants or were 'grown here', we're aware of living in at least two places at once: whether in the 'here' of community and the 'there' of the places we have left behind; or the 'here' of the present and the 'there' of our past; or the 'this' and 'that' of our cultural origins. With the emergence of such bifurcated, hyphenated, provisional identities, with the need to build ideas of ourselves that must, of necessity, suture together scraps of experience, memory and belonging, to what extent is it possible to build new connections to place? Because surely, in an era that faces all kinds of global ecological crises, our local connections to place will play pivotal roles in re-thinking ideas about our communal custodianship of land and our relationship with those with whom we share that land. In the short life each of us is given, we have limited time to devote to limited issues; confronted with the tsunami of facts and figures and news stories about the crises of the planet, perhaps for most of the planet, the best way to begin to respond is through a trans-local awareness—a mindfulness that the 'here' we inhabit is given to us by the 'there' of somewhere else—by someone else, sometime else. As temporary custodians each of us is delivered the small but do-able job of making sure we pass somet small plot of local-ness on to someone else after we move on.

instruments of change

The economic trans-nationalism that has been described as the stage of capitalism that fosters the flows of money and goods and people across national boundaries, has resulted in changes in work patterns and workforces, globalised money flow, global information flow and global research cooperation. Two major 'inventions' made all this movement possible: the internet and the shipping container. Internet communication made the offsite organisation of the various sequences of this production possible; and containerisation for international freight transport significantly reduced the global costs of transportation. While the internet's role in securing global

The shipping container outside of Lismore Regional Gallery. Photo: Colin Langridge

communication is well recognised, there's been less awareness of the pivotal role containerisation has played in breaking old cycles of supply and demand.

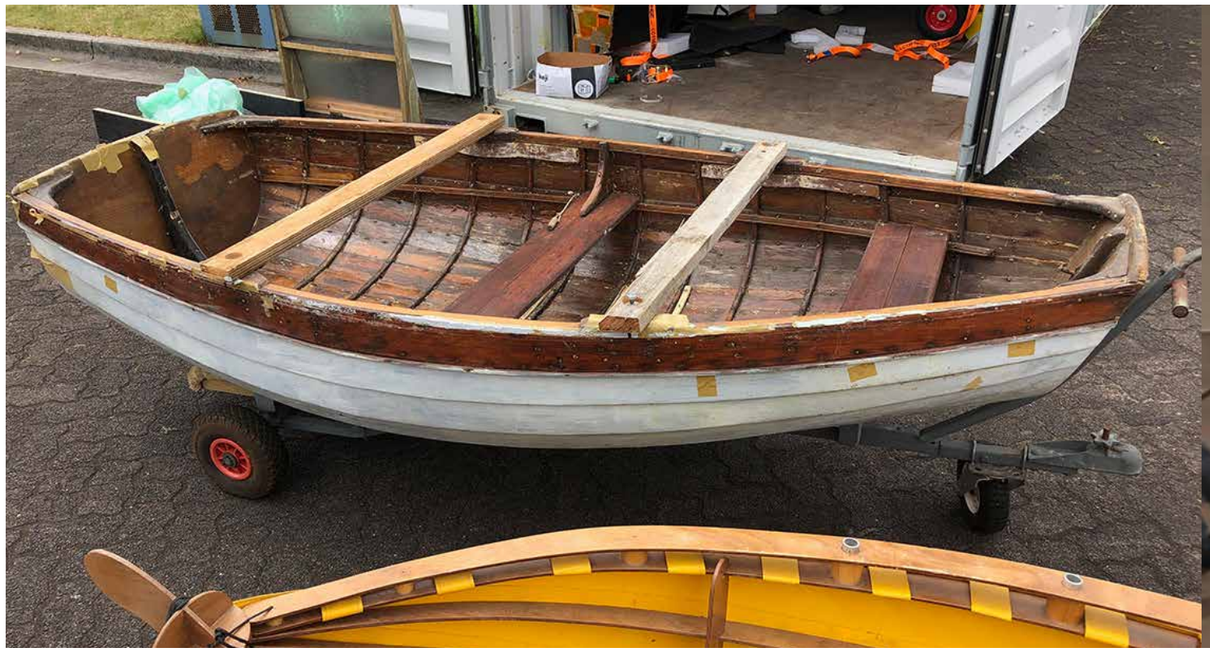
Shipping containers can be loaded and unloaded, stacked and transported efficiently over long distances, and transferred from one mode of transport to another. Their standardised dimensions mean that they can be transported on specialised container ships, rail carts and semi-trailers, and thus have reduced the number of employees needed for the process. Containerisation did away with the spaces needed for the manual sorting of most shipments and reduced the need for warehousing. The use of containers has displaced many thousands of dock workers who formerly handled cargo. Containerisation affects our everyday lives in all sorts of ways, including the fact that manufacturing itself has evolved to take advantage of containers: the sizes of some of the objects with which and in which we live are now designed and produced to precisely align with the dimensions of shipping containers.

Globalisation's trans-national market penetration through the internet and containerisation of goods has brought systematic structural changes to the work forces across the planet as new economic, cultural, and ideological links between industrialised and developing countries produce bridges for international migration.

Today migration accounts for three fifths of population growth in western countries as a whole. The development of many of the nations that are inextricably linked into these processes of exchange is dependent upon the economic activities of their respective diasporas. Diasporas by their very nature are founded on experiences of 'here' and 'there'—of 'before' and 'now'. They are communities-in-transition. They are communities who live within the awareness of contingency—that what happens in one locale directly affects others someplace else.

And it's not all 'bad news'—as travel and communication become more affordable, members of diasporas can better afford to keep more closely in touch with their home countries. These immigrants create new 'social fields' that link their original country with their new country or countries of residence; they create new diasporic regions with interconnected economic, socio-political and cultural activities, and transnational socio-cultural activities and transactions through which ideas and meanings are exchanged. The global sharing of values, rules and traditions is exemplified in international sporting competitions like the Olympics, while global celebrations of cultural concerns are epitomised in the biennales, triennales and art fairs.

The global movement of people is much, much larger than the imagined threat of 'refugees from



Panel discussion at Burnie Regional Art Gallery, 2018. Photo: Colin Langridge

another country'. While the fastest growing tide of international immigration is from the global South to the global North by professionals seeking work, this contributes to forty percent of global migration, while thirty-seven percent migrate within the global South. The impact of these global flows of culture and trans-local, trans-national cultural activities is re-forming the way we see the world.[9]

art and making place in a globalised world

So how have these changes in our relationship to place, communities and notions of belonging affected the way art is produced? The "imagined communities" described by Benedict Anderson are dependent on the imaginary images and words that bind people to people, and people to place, that are formed by artists. Yes, they are also formed by legislation—by rules and templates and boundary lines—but the emotional glue that binds those principles to individuals, and then across to others who respond to, and then share those principles, is provided through the communicative power of art and culture.

Artists—and other cultural workers—create the visual, verbal, auditory and performative templates through which communities can engage in shared discussions about new possibilities of engaging with each other and with the changing world order we live in. But the selection of what knowledge and information gets disbursed is increasingly controlled by global oligarchs collectivised under the appropriately alarming acronym of FAANG (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google). As global entertainment steadily shapes the way we dream and the way we can 'imagination' ourselves into being, to what extent will locally specific and responsive cultural models be able to survive into the future? Some critics, like Professor Julianne Schulz, argue that the juggernaut-flattening of cultural diversity by trans-national cultural conglomerates makes the need to support and generate local and specific cultural even more pressing. She writes,

> *In the Age of FAANG, we need to find persuasive and creative ways to answer those who argue that the national and local are now irrelevant. In the Age of Fang, we're all global citizens, which threatens to make national cultural institutions both more vulnerable, but also more important than ever.*[10]

And sometimes the drive to produce culture from, by and for local and specific communities is capable of enfolding the global and re-presenting it in new ways: back in 1993, the Queensland Art Gallery took the cultural bull of globalisation by the horns from the improbable position of a relatively small, regionally-based state art gallery. The audacious punt to host the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was based on the hunch that somewhere out there in 'the region' made up of countries of the Asia-Pacific—an area we Australians knew very little about at the time—thriving pockets of contemporary art might very possibly exist, fueled by the passion of artists engaged in responses to the 'elsewhere' of globalisation while wrestling with the changing traditions of their own cultures.

The hunch proved to be a good one, and the first Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art launched to the world an exhibition that bore witness to the fact that not all modernisms were equal; that tradition was not the antithesis of change; that the cultural diversity of the region was exciting; that Australia *could* (might) play a part in it; and that artists working a long way away from the spotlights of global metropolitan centres were as informed and sophisticated and critically responsive as artists can be anywhere, any time.

The members of the curatorium of that first Triennial were acutely aware of three things: Brisbane's relationship to Australia; Australia's relationship to the Asia-Pacific region; and the region's cultural relationship—at the time—to the rest of the world. The first lay in the fact that, in terms of the Sydney/Melbourne cultural axis of metropolitan Australia, Brisbane was regarded as a *regional* outpost: the state collection was relatively insubstantial, and the decades of conservative Queensland politics had made sure cultural issues were regarded as of relative insignificance. Secondly, Australia's long-distance cultural focus on the United Kingdom and the United States had blindsided (with the exception of a few visionary artists) the country to the possibility that the *region* in which it was geographically situated might offer lively contemporary cultural counterpoints. And while some northern hemisphere cultural institutions had given attention to cultural production in the region, it had been represented, on the whole, as either ethnographic or exotic in nature.[11]

The Director of the Queensland Art Gallery at the time, Doug Hall, was well aware of the importance of recognising the energy of *regionally based cultural production in Australia*; prior to his role at QAG, he'd worked as the Director of Bendigo Art Gallery between 1980 and 1987. Hall shared, with his curatorium, a conviction that the *regionally-produced art of the Asia-Pacific region* would also generate the kind of energy, vitality and critical responsiveness to the images and issues propagated by the 'international art world' he'd witnessed in regionally based Australian art production. In the first APT catalogue he wrote,

> *If the regional debate fails to be image-or practice-driven, it can only force or exacerbate the now numbing argument of the centre and the periphery, a self-perpetuating argument destined to reinforce isolation and separation. If art produced in particular areas is regionally specific, relevant to the community in which it exists and is held in high regard by it, it is of no lesser intrinsic value because an urban-based intelligentsia is largely unaware of it.*[12]

The first three Triennials were cultural explorations attuned to the specifics of context. More than subsequent Triennials, those first three projects were driven by curiosity about how the artists they included related to their communities, to their place and to the traditions that bound them. The work was, even beyond what had been anticipated, explosively vital and critically challenging, and the popularity of the exhibition was evident both within Australia and beyond. Since those years, many of the artists who had travelled for the first time beyond their own shorelines to make work at the first three Triennials are now international household names in the trans-global art world. Many of them now travel from one international exhibition to the next, as if the trans-national, trans-cultural sites of globalised cultural practice have become their new home.

partnershipping: making place

The parameters of *The Partnershipping Project* share two of the pillars on which globalisation relies—digital communication and the shipping container. The success of its proposal was reliant on harnessing funding from national cultural agencies into trans-local, trans-regional directions. Unlike products fitted to the demands of exchange efficiencies and smooth transactions, the project is tailored to the idea that each stop, each iteration of the exhibition, each node of the project will add something more. It shares the conviction of the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art that regionally specific, locally-conscious art production is vital to developing models of engagement that go beyond tired concepts of metropolitan versus regional or that separate global concerns from those of the local.

The artists participating in *The Partnershipping Project* are each regionally based; but the issues addressed in their work reflect the changing global order. Many of them have come from elsewhere to settle in the regions, others are Indigenous to the region, and others have families who have lived in the region for many generations. And the concerns of the communities they reflect and are part of must be addressed locally as well as globally. Issues to do with the environment; issues related to traditional knowledge and custodianship of the land; issues of gender; issues of immigration and diasporas and the need to keep memories and stories alive for us and for generations to come; issues of mental health and community connectedness; issues related to the necessity of feeling valued, included and capable of making a contribution to local, national and global issues all fill the cargos of the eight 'tenders'—the little wooden boats that carry the artists' work.

Associations with maritime trading provided the historical origins of the term 'partnershipping'. The partnerships developed during medieval Europe provided the framework from which the Commercial Revolution of the European economy evolved in the thirteenth century. From then and right through until the middle of the fifteenth century, the partner-shipping of the Hanseatic League referred literally to the ships that traversed the coastlines of those countries that agreed to share cargos with other members of the League. The association was built on the need to save time and money, but just as importantly, on the recognition that new connections were going to be essential for new futures.[13]

Times pass and global orders change, and as the Age of Discovery brought trade from new, far-flung shorelines into European connections, the partnershipping of the Hanseatic League disintegrated into irrelevance. By the end of the sixteenth century it was moribund.

Each era experiences changing patterns of trade alignments and movements of peoples and ideas, and each needs new ways of re-establishing connections between people and place. This particular iteration of 'partnershipping' was set afloat in the belief that connections to place—and to each other—remain as issues of vital importance in a world absorbed by global problems that include human rights, multiculturalism and trans-culturalism, environmental sustainability, world peace concerns, world famine concerns, global medicine and health concerns. Artists can perform the role of visionaries who suggest new visual languages through which we can simultaneously comprehend the world we now live in as one unified, interconnected system, the future of which relies on transformational approaches that are acutely aware of the trans-local interdependence of our places and communities.

Pat Hoffie
2018

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[1] Saval, Nikil, (14 July 2017) *Globalisation: the rise and fall of an idea that swept the world*, (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/14/globalisation-the-rise-and-fall-of-an-idea-that-swept-the-world_

[2] Galston, William A., 2008, The *rise of European populism and the collapse of the centre-left* https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/

[3] Shuster, Simon, *The Populists*, "It is a world where the international agreements of the past are up for renegotiation and the interests of the nation-state are not bound by an established global order". http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-populism/)

[4] Anderson, Benedict, (2016, revised) *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Bloomsbury, London)

[5] Although at this stage of the twenty-first century there are sixty-one countries in the world currently maintained by eight countries.

[6] Osterhammer, Jurgen, trans. Shelly Frisch, (2005) *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Markus Weiner Publishers, p.16.

[7] Stewart, Devin T. 2008, *The Myth of the Nation State*, https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/state/2008/0902mythstate.htm "The nation-state myth conflates two ideas, one that is concrete, the state, and one that is fuzzy, the nation. The utility of the state is clear. It is a necessary organising principle that allows people to pool their resources for the common good and mobilize against common threats, whether they are floods or invading armies. The state is also the final arbiter of law. State power is even on the rise, partly as a backlash to globalisation and as a result of growing wealth from energy markets. But the nation-state as a basis for statecraft obscures the nature of humanity's greatest threats. Pollution, terrorism, pandemics, and climate change are global phenomena. They do not respect national sovereignty, and, therefore, they necessitate global cooperation".

[8] *Global Policy Forum. Transnational Corporations* https://www.globalpolicy.org/globalization/globalization-of-the-economy-2-1/transnational-corporations-2-6.html

[9] UNESCO, *MIGRATION AS A DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE ANALYSIS OF ROOT CAUSES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS* January 2017, (http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002470/247089E.pdf)

[10] *Schultz, Professor Julianne, May 2, 2016. (an edited version of the Brian Johns lecture, the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University and the Copyright Agency.*https://theconversation.com/australia-must-act-now-to-preserve-its-culture-in-the-face-of-global-tech-giants-58724

[11] *Magiciens de la Terre*, (1989), curated by Jean Hubert Martin, at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette in Paris, was an attempt to challenge the international contemporary art world's representation of non-European art as 'primitive'. However, the exhibition ultimately attracted a great deal of negative criticism for its failure to move sufficiently far away from the exoticization of non-Western artists in the exhibition.

[12] Hall, Doug, 1993, *Tradition and Change*, Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery, p.130.

[13] Hibbert, Arthur Boyd, *Hanseatic League, German Trading Organisation* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanseatic-League

THE OTHER SIDE

"Without memory, without the past, there are no stories and no novels, no theatre, no poetry. Memory is the source of all our arts. Without memory, without the past, we have no interior life".[1]

The crossing between 'the Mainland' and Tasmania is a stretch of water named Bass's Strait. And 'the Mainland' is what Tasmanians call the rest of Australia. There, in two short sentences, are the nuts and bolts of what people call these days 'the islandness' of my home. We exist, according to this definition, in a sort of subservience to another place. The Mainland is big; unimaginably big. So big that members of your family will go there and never return. Or if they do, they would be different. On return they would be somehow taller, or richer. They would be equipped with a habit of speaking more quickly and with a confidence that made no sense of who they were before they left.

Where I grew up, in Ulverstone on the north west coast of Tasmania, we had another name for the mainland. Actually it was a bit more complicated than that. The name required a person and an action. Without these two components, the phrase would not be uttered. It was a way of explaining absence. 'Away over the other side' is where your cousins lived now. It was where your older sister was going next week to get a job. It was why your uncle was now uncommonly sad—because that's where he was when your aunty died. These were the consequences of travelling to the other side of that stretch of water.

It was on the coastline of Bass's Strait that I grew up. My most cherished years were spent exploring the rock pools for anemones the colour of clotted blood, transparent shrimps that darted faster than your eye could follow, and blue ringed octopus that flashed silent fear as your fingers brushed by their weedy lair. Standing atop a rocky point and gazing northwards across the water, the edge of our world was geometrically pure. There were no distant mountains to break the impossible curving line of horizon, just the odd ship returning from its voyage away.

Anything that came from beyond that line brought with it stories of change. Change, you see, comes from somewhere else. At home, we lived in the embrace of a reassuring *present*. Out beyond the horizon is where the past could be found if you travelled far enough. And it was from that place of unbounded vastness that our futures would arrive. In the Tasmania of my childhood, there was no past or future. The past was not spoken of. A clumsy or naïve question would be met with furtive glances and a quick shifting from whatever was being discussed; onto a more mundane and comfortable subject. The past, I was soon to learn, was populated by Germans, convicts and Aborigines. None of these things could be discussed. No-one knew how or, it seemed, even wanted to know. At night I would dream of a more distant past, in which gigantic waves pounded the shore; breaching the dunes to flood the land and carry away all that was known. The future was much simpler. There was no point in raising it. The response was predictable; a shrug of the shoulders and an inevitable "well, I dunno… ".

To be a Tasmanian Aborigine today is a complicated affair. Yet, after all these years, as I approach old age, I still find myself standing on that rocky shoreline of my childhood, gazing out at the unknowable horizon; half-remembered dreams swirling in the anxious pit of my stomach. It was from over that horizon that the convict

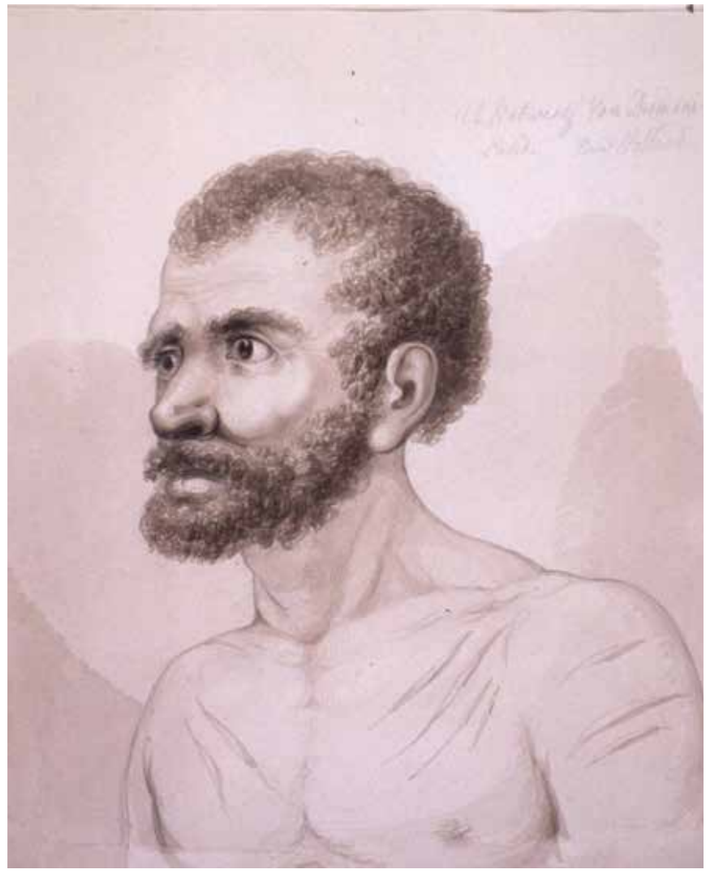
ship Caledonia brought my mother's great grandfather, convict Richard Chugg in 1820. There was no pick-pocketed handkerchief, poached pheasant or stolen sheep behind his transportation to Van Diemen's Land. Chugg, a native of Devon, was sentenced to life for murder. My father's grandfather also arrived from afar. Via Liverpool, from the Rhineland vineyards of Lehrensteinsfeld in Bavaria, Jacob Lehman fled with his young wife, Catharina Geiger, on the immigrant ship Montmorency. They were economic refugees from a failed German revolution.

Another of my ancestors once stood on a shore like this, watching a whale boat heave to past the breakers on a beach where his own children had been born, along with babies for a thousand generations before. This was a beach further to the east of where I grew up. From atop the dunes of Tebrekunna Bay, the horizon was different. Instead of the blank line of horizon, a short climb to the top of the sand dunes made it possible to see the Furneaux Islands that lay to the north between Tasmanian and the Mainland. It was the abundance of seals on these islands that first attracted European seafarers to Bass's Strait in the late 1790s. Seals and woman. Like all colonial frontiers, there was always labour to be carried out that was more suited to the work of slaves. In Van Diemen's Land the first slaves were Aboriginal women, and the rugged bunch of sealers landing in Tebrekunna were there to trade—with the persuasive currency of force if needed. Before the establishment of the first official British beachhead of the colony at Risdon Cove, it was sealers who first brought the violence of European trade to this island. It is not known how many were killed in resisting these raids, but the numbers were significant. George Augustus Robinson wrote in his journal in 1832, 'there is not a boat harbour along the whole line of the coast, but what number as of the unfortunate native have been shot: the bones are to be seen strewed on the ground.'[2]

In one of these whale boats was George Briggs. Barely twenty years of age, Briggs had somehow taken the young woman Woretemoeteryener as one of his *tyrelore*, or 'island wives'. Either by 'blackbirding' (kidnapping of local Indigenous people for labour or sale), or through a more amicable arrangement of allegiance with her father, Briggs and his like removed at least seventy Tasmanian Aboriginal women to the Furneaux islands. On the many Outer Islands their expertise in the hunting of seals could be exploited.

The man standing on the shore watching the whale boat heave to was Manalargena. His daughter's name was Woretemoeteryener. He and his brother were chiefs, or *Bungana*, of this region. Amidst the murderous raids, *Bungana* like Manalargena had commenced trade with the new arrivals. Dogs, tobacco, flour and sugar were valued by the chiefs, and were accepted in exchange for seal, kangaroo and swan meat, or the loan of women for seal-catching. But the terms of trade were hardly free. The sealers were armed and, while party's like Briggs' seemed to have a preference for peaceful transactions, the chiefs were aware of the effect of their muskets—and actively sought them for their own purposes. In the meantime, many sealers converted women in their service to chattels, trading them with other sealers. The original labour agreements, with their promise of a return for the women's clansfolk, became broken and redundant. The *tyrelore* were marooned on a remote frontier of global trade. A few married their captors, but many were tortured or killed. Most bore children to their masters; too often resorting to infanticide, rather than extending their future into a world so cruel and outside of their control.

It was on this horizon of fractured hope that a new generation of Aborigines was born. In just a few decades the *Bungana* and *Tyrelore* were gone. The seals, whose fur was traded in China for tea, porcelain, or shipped to Europe for use as material for coats, hats and boots were almost wiped out too. Global trade made short work of all it encountered.



John Webber, *A native of Van Diemen's Land*, New Holland, 1777, drawing, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, State Library of Tasmania.

Generations of children like me were left, like flotsam, on distant shores that were soon forgotten in the cities of Asia and Europe that grew rich on the plunder of our world. Not just lives and culture, but time itself was ruptured with a trauma that has lasted for generations—haunting our dreams and lurking just beyond every blue horizon.

Violence is man re-creating himself.[3]

When William Dampier became the first Englishman to arrive on the Australian continent, he wrote that the natives stood around 'like statues' and 'grinn'd like so many monkeys' at his unsuccessful attempt to gain their labour in carrying barrels of water to his boats. Dampier greeted this affable gesture of ridicule by writing in his *New Voyage Around the World* (1697) that, 'the Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the World… setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes.' This condemnation was widely read, influencing the prejudices of almost every European navigator to visit Australia over the next two centuries. Amongst them was Marion Du Fresne who, on arrival in Van Diemen's Land in 1772, was invited by the Pydairrerme who met them on the shore, to accept a flaming torch and set fire to a pile of wood assembled for the occasion. As soon as he did, he was attacked. The Pydairrerme then refused to allow him to land again. Determined to take on water and timber, he fired on them. Tasmanian Aborigines had been isolated from the rest of the world for ten thousand years since the rising seas at the end of the last Ice Age. Now, their island refuge had been breached.

Five years later, James Cook arrived on the same shores. He presented the Neunone men he met at Adventure Bay with medals and pigs, and was assisted by them to cut timber for his ships. The ship's artist, John Webber, recorded the scene and made the first known portrait of one of these men. There is nothing miserable or brutish to be seen in his sketch.

Captain Nicholas Baudin, arriving in 1802, had also read Dampier's description. But on the first morning of the French expedition's arrival, his zoologist stumbled upon examples of Tasmanian maritime technology. Francois Péron described a canoe made of three rolls of bark, tied together with string. Without realising, he had probably already met a canoe-maker a few hours before. He wrote in his journal,

> *'He was a young man of from twenty-two to twenty-four years of age, of a strong general appearance, having no other defect than the looseness of the joints of his arms and legs, characteristic of his nation, and of which we shall take occasion to speak in the conclusion of our work. His physiognomy had nothing fierce or austere, his eyes were lively and expressive, and his manner displayed at once both pleasure and surprize.*
>
> *Moreover, our chaloupe (ships boat) seemed to attract his attention still more than our persons, and after examining us some minutes, he jumped into the boat: there, without troubling himself with, or even noticing the seamen who were in her, he seemed quite absorbed in his new subject. The thickness of the ribs and planks, the strength of the construction, the rudder, the oars, the masts, the sails, he observed in silence, and with great attention, and with the most unequivocal signs of interest and reflection …he made several attempts to push off the chaloupe, but the small hawser which fastened it, made his efforts of no avail, he was therefore obliged to give up the attempt and to return to us, after giving us the most striking demonstrations of attention and reflection.'* [4]

This was a moment of great potential. The fascination with the small French boat that was displayed by the young man could have marked the beginning of a creative exchange across the gulf of millennia. Elsewhere across the globe, wherever seafaring nations came into contact, diverse technological approaches to the task of traversing waterways would inspire and influence adaptation and change. But in Tasmania the moment was lost.

I can't help but wonder what that young man might have absorbed of what he saw of French boat-building; how he might have experimented with these new ideas on his next construction—even collaborated with the French sailors on the task. The Baudin voyage was one focussed on scientific discovery, and the French made no immediate plans to return or to establish a more permanent presence. The British however, upon hearing of the French visit, hastened to send a colonial expedition and had set up a military beachhead at Risdon Cove by September of the following year. Within months, they had opened fire on an Aboriginal hunting party of men, women and children. The scene was set for an escalating conflict that, within a generation, had resulted in the First Nations of Tasmania being reduced from a population of over 5000 to fewer than 500.

As I stand on that same Bass Strait shore today, half a century distant from the child who pondered with excitement and fear what the world might be like 'over the other side', I still feel the same familiar ache in the pit of my stomach. But I know now that it is much more than a naïve fear of the unknown. It is the imprint of a deeper past. A faint, irrepressible murmur of warning, driven deep into my genes through multiple traumas of ancestral lives. Each one has something in common. The source of fracture lay beyond the horizon. It was brought to my ancestral island home across seas from more distant shores. The ships arriving at our ports today, laden with cars, televisions, and other exotic treasures, distract from the pain of our history, but they do not heal. Our Elders warn us that such material wealth can do no good—only draw us further away from our connections to our Country and our past. My lingering dreams of hungry, rising waves affirm their wisdom.

I have questions that my *tyrelore*, convict and immigrant ancestors cannot answer. My child-self still stares anxiously out to sea from amongst the rock pools of my birthplace. I must, instead, speak with a young man who, like me is neither fierce nor austere. I will gaze into his lively eyes and inquire of his surprise. I will ask him what he sees in thickness of the ribs and planks, the strength of the mast, the spread of the sails. I will ask him what he will make, and where he will go.

Greg Lehman
2018

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[1] Alex Miller, 'Truth in Fiction and History', (Melbourne: Victorian Writer's Centre, 2006).

[2] Brian Plomley (ed.), *Friendly Mission : The Tasmanian Journals and Papers*, 1829-1834 (Launceston: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966). p. 111.

[3] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1965).

[4] François Péron, *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Hemisphere* (London: Richard Phillips, 1809). p. 174.

SPIRIT OF PLACE: MY TASMANIAN RIVIERA

In barbershops, intimacies grow. One day in North Adelaide I surprised myself with a response, not quite serious, to a delicate enquiry about religion: “I’m a pagan”. The Italian–Australian didn’t miss a beat: “Oh, they’re the ones who worship rocks and trees”.

Only an Italian, I thought, would be immediately familiar with what came first. Especially a man from Sicily, a Mediterranean (*Centre of Earth*) island colonised by Greece long before the ancient Roman empire had conquered the Western world, and spread the Christian religion.

I am now retired and living with rocks and trees near my birthplace in Tasmania. Colonised by Britain two centuries ago and more than twice the size of Sicily, it’s a very island-minded place, and pre-settler-minded. My particular site gazes out from sheoak groves of *Allocasuarina littoralis* on rocky dolerite headlands that frame a view of beach and ocean. Here I have become more confidently ‘pagan’.

Of course one doesn’t abandon the Christian philosophy of human kindness and forgiving. However, on my secluded shore I can’t help observe that the other parts of nature—plants, animals, earth, water, air and fire—are all behaving differently, and at times dangerously, under unkind management by thoughtless humans. Over the years since childhood, the sandhill coast of the family farm has been eroded to expose pre-colonial Indigenous peoples’ middens. Storms no longer heap seaweed kelp onto the sands and instead I clean away a tideline fringe of waste plastics. Fire, never previously known to race along the dune-grasses, in 2002 threatened to climb a gully and attack my newly built house.

Micro-regional management of the earth is best, informed by knowledge of very small places: “Think global, act local”. Geography rules; it determines cultures. And coastlines are our most important geographical feature.

At Hamelin Pool, Shark Bay, Western Australia, I once visited ‘living-fossil’ stromatolites that had evolved 3.5 billion years ago. They constitute the world’s largest remaining group of survivors from our first ancestral life-forms. Stromatolites are cyanobacteria that look like water’s-edge rocks.

There I remembered that eighty years ago, a small child at my ancestral place, I had embarked with adults on a Field Naturalists Society excursion upstream on Port Sorell to fossil cliffs where we pondered deep time and the total extinction of trilobites. They were crab-like creatures that for a quarter of a million years were among the world’s most successful animals. The encounter with living rocks at Hamelin Pool also reminded me that thirty years earlier in New York’s East Village I had entered a participatory sculpture, or ‘happening’, by Yoko Ono, in which I sensed how it might feel to be a rock. She issued body-sized ‘Eye Bags’ of cloth fine enough to see out from but not into from outside, and then instructed us to spend time inside the big bags. On a raised polished floor, doing whatever we wished, humans thereby became rocks looking out at fellow rock-creatures, mostly meditating, but sometimes standing, dancing or rolling.

Art history teaches that Surrealism, notably Salvador Dalí’s, emphasised the creativity of

John Glover, *Swilker Oak*, 1840, oil on canvas 76 x 114.5 cm, painted at Patterdale, Mills Plains, Deddington, Tasmania. Collection Clarendon House, National Trust of Australia, Tasmania, near Evandale Tasmania. After pen & ink and ink wash drawing, Needwood Forest, Staffordshire, mid-1790s.

John Glover, *The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen's Land*, 1837, oil on canvas 76 x 114 cm.
Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

evolution on littoral edges. The particular history of Tasmania includes Australia's greatest early-colonial artist, John Glover; a century earlier than Dalí he recognised that not only nature's elemental edges but also cultural pressures create our spirit of place.

A native of the English Midlands, Glover emigrated late in life to join farmer sons who had preceded him to Hobart. In a southern-hemisphere summer, his first sight of his new home was from a ship sailing along my northern Tasmanian Riviera and on 17 February 1831, a day before his 64th birthday, he inscribed a sketch as "*Eastward of Round Hill point*". Round Hill encloses Emu Bay at present-day Burnie; in the inland background he clearly depicts Mount Roland, which is visible from my sheoak groves near Port Sorell, and in Glover's foreground, protecting a grassy coastal plain, are my own sandhills.

A century later, Tom Roberts, another great Australian artist, in his final years took to Tasmanian coastal sheoaks and also painted a portrait of Mount Roland, a too-picturesque

1828, and after three years was killed, along with his overseer, by Aborigines—the last deaths in Tasmania's so-called Black War.

In my 1930s childhood I knew of Uncle Bartholomew's death but thought of it as a natural part of life in the past. Aged seven, to escape the great 'infantile paralysis' epidemic, I and a twin brother spent a winter in Central Australia where we met the famous Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira at Hermannsburg and duly admired his skill. Of Tasmania's Black War, we knew chiefly that the Aborigines were *clever*: the Black Line that swept across the settled areas to net Indigenous populations caught *only two small boys*. We were also aware of the painted boards hung on trees with a picture-story asking black and white Tasmanians to live peaceably together. (Eighty years later, attending Handel's opera *Orlando* in a season of Hobart Baroque in the 1830s Theatre Royal, I wondered if the Black War idea of peace-messages hung on trees had come from the stage, where love messages frequently appear on trees. *Orlando* brought to mind the best-known example: Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.) Farmers

John Glover, *Hobart Town, taken from the Garden where I lived*, 1832, oil on canvas 74 x 150 cm.
Collection Dixson Galleries, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

conglomerate rock rising above the small town of Sheffield. Glover in the 1830s had promptly gone for more iconically Tasmanian rocks, the stately dolerite mountains above the cities of Hobart, where he lived first, and Launceston, near where he finally settled. It's an uncommon rock in most of the world, but for geologists Tasmania is "dolerite heaven". We will return to Glover, and to a modern artist, Bea Maddock, whose work has further reinforced my sense of place. Now let's consider the childhood place itself. The North Down Beach that Glover sailed past in 1831 was where my great-great-great-uncle Bartholomew Thomas had started a sheepwalk in

inevitably gain intimate knowledge of their land, and I remember my father solemnly showing us Aboriginal rock engravings on the Mersey Bluff at Devonport, the far end of the North Down plain.

However, more than associated stories and people and excursions, it was the childhood place, its micro-characteristics, that created wonder. All visitors arriving at North Down exclaimed about the sudden revelation of a *beautiful view*. It comprised sea and distant rocky headlands and islets, dunes and wetlands, foreground farmland, black and red soils, mature trees—mostly English elms—and an unusual hill, the Sugarloaf, that sheltered an unusual open crater, the Punchbowl.

John Glover, *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point*, 1834, oil on canvas 76 x 152 cm.
Collection Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart, and National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Later I realised there were many 'Sugarloaf' hills and 'Punchbowl' craters throughout the world, and realised the words signified human conviviality and light-headedness, but the geology and botany were enough to lift a child's mind out of self-centredness.

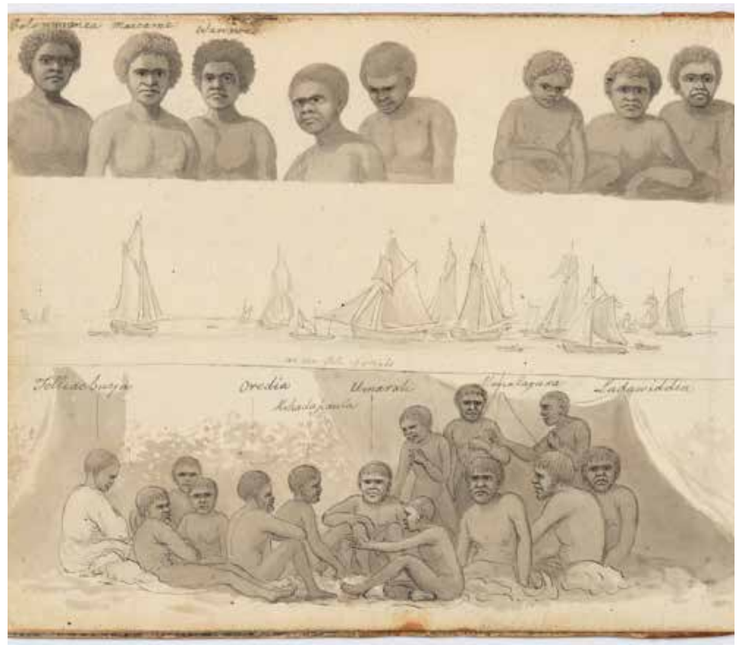
The calm warmth inside the northeast-facing Punchbowl was a pleasant mystery when prevailing north-westerlies raged. That explained why sheep had created the strange rib-like horizontal paths for grazing on the steep Sugarloaf slope. It explained Uncle Bartholomew's choice of a house site, close above a capacious spring, and with a view as beautiful though less sweeping than that from his nephew Sam Thomas's more elevated site where I was born. Bartholomew's first North Down House was abandoned after fifty years but its soft-brick ruins, and a bravely surviving mulberry tree, were still there for a child to explore. Years later I learned that the immigrant Thomas family had brought with them Uvedale Price's 1790s handbooks for landed gentry, his *Essays On the Picturesque, as compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful and, On The Use of Studying Pictures, for the purpose of improving Real Landscape*. Bartholomew wrote of the beauty of the place as reason enough for living in what was then extreme solitude.

Most of my childhood trees, the mature elms, were gathered in hedgerows and clumps. There were huge pre-settler eucalypts looking down into the Punchbowl. Close to the homestead I was taught to recognise sycamore and ash trees, and a pair of Norfolk Island pines planted for our father's birth. Most wondrous was "*The oak tree*", at the edge of the garden, already a hundred years old and with strange long, low, horizontal branches that welcomed the presence of small children.

Towards the end of his life in Tasmania, Glover returned to a mid-1790s sketch captioned *Swilker Oak, Needwood Forest*; it was a particular tree then celebrated as over 600 years old, and in 1840 he produced a large canvas. (The painting now hangs in Tasmania's most beautiful historic house, Clarendon Homestead, close to Glover's final home.) Google tells that "swilker" occurs only in the Black Country dialect of Staffordshire near Needwood Forest and Lichfield, where Glover first worked as an artist, and the word means to spill or splash. So the name emphasised the outgoing generosity and ease of oaks.

Glover found spiritual sustenance in his micro-regional memories, just as I remember reclining airborne on the low-slung arms of a great oak, which in 2018 still grows in the garden at North Down.

Lichfield was a hotbed of eighteenth-century scientific and literary life, centred around scientist-activist Erasmus Darwin and farmer poet Sir Brooke Boothby. Boothby befriended Jean-Jacques Rousseau during the French philosopher's fifteen months in Staffordshire, he published Rousseau's *Confessions* in Lichfield in 1780, and in 1781 commissioned from Joseph Wright of Derby the bizarre two-metre-wide portrait of himself reclining full-length in fashionable but loosened London dress in a woodland glade, holding a book by Rousseau. The picture, of a sophisticated gentleman absorbed into earth and trees, illustrates Rousseau's idea that humankind's troubles and unhappiness are caused by self-



Sketchbook no.43, page 40. Top left Aborigines *Colammanea*, *Maccame*, and *Warwee* and others at coronial hearing, Launceston, September 1831, pen & ink, ink wash, pencil. sheet 18.5 x 23 cm. Dixson Galleries, State Library of NSW, Sydney.

removal from the world of nature.

Glover's only Australian canvas to display Classical learning focuses upon rocks. *The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen's Land*, 1837 (the colony was not yet named Tasmania) depicts Aboriginal women in their designated bathing pool, where they are surprised by a huntsman; he will be punished for the impropriety by metamorphosis into a stag, as in the ancient Roman myth of Diana and Actæon. The pool and its interesting rocks were encountered and sketched by Glover when riding out from Hobart to a farm he had bought near one of his sons' properties; it was permanent water on an intermittent stream across a plain, a good place. It was also on an Aboriginal trackway and Glover doubtless knew that the chaste goddess Diana was in charge not only of hunting and woodlands but also of travellers and crossways.

A farmer's son, Glover did not need to make a Rousseauesque return to nature; he never left it. His art and life demonstrate a tactile love of animals, minerals and plants as well as humans. As for Australian trees, although he did not neglect eucalypts, which feature in his small oil *A Corrobery of natives near Mills Plains,* 1832, in his sketchbooks he was equally in love with sheoaks. And the most philosophically ambitious of his largest colonial canvases, *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point*, 1834, is centred upon an extremely graceful sheoak—the most spiritual of trees, I once learned, for the Kaurna people of Adelaide and maybe, too, for the Palawa of Tasmania. In both these paintings, Glover accompanied the trees with Aborigines dancing joyously.

Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point was preceded by a companion same-size reciprocal view, titled *Hobart Town, taken from the Garden where I lived*. The pair constitutes an optimistic proposition of future bi-cultural happiness for the island colony. The highly populated Aboriginal *Kangaroo Point* gazes across the harbour to a seaport city where worldwide voyagers meet. The unpleasantly unsettled Black War had concluded at the time of Glover's arrival to settle on their land, but in this pair of metre-and-a-half canvases he declares his deep respect for the First Tasmanians, and his hope for a continuing accommodation between the nations.

He took an interest in the specificity of Aboriginal names of places and people. In 1831 on his first reconnaissance of northern pastoral country, Glover noted "*Tudema Tura, the Native name for Ben Lomond*", the mountain above the farm at Mills Plains where he finally settled. It would please him that in 2013, under a new dual-naming policy, Hobart's great dolerite rock officially became "*kunanyi* Mount Wellington".

Tasmania's artists and historians all know about my ancestral connection to the Black War. Indigenous artist Julie Gough teases me that

her people once killed one of mine. In 2003, art historian David Hansen was preparing his splendid exhibition and book *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* and startled me with the information that Glover had happened to be in Launceston in September 1831, had observed the coronial enquiry into the death of Captain Thomas and his overseer James Parker, and there sketched eight Aboriginal portraits including the three men held for the murder—and provided their names: *Colammanea, Maccame, Warwee*.

Art historian Mary Eagle further proposed that the two women unnamed by Glover are Nonganeepitta, the chief witness at the inquest, and Timbruna, who had helped find the bodies near Port Sorell on the way to North Down Beach. The other three, a child and two men, are probably the remaining members of the tribe brought in from Port Sorell but not accused. The coroner's finding was murder "assisted by the residue of the tribe of Aborigines to which they belong, known by the name of the Big River tribe". The Attorney General declined to prosecute, the three men were shipped to the Bass Strait islands. Along with many others, it was an exile equivalent to a death sentence. My great-great-grandfather Jocelyn Thomas arranged the burial of his brother and the overseer in the Cypress Street cemetery in Launceston, and composed a political inscription for their gravestone: "*BART. B. THOMAS* / *ARMIGERI* [soldier] / *Late a Cap^tn in* HIS MAGESTY'S SERVICE / *Who lost his life in an* / *Attempt to Conciliate* / *The black Natives of this* / *ISLAND* / *together with a faithfull* / *FRIEND* …". In the 1950s, when the cemetery was closed down and converted into a sports ground, my father transported the gravestone from Launceston and re-erected it in a cemetery where the first North Down church once stood, close to the original North Down House; his grandchildren care for the stone today.

The colonial idea of 'Conciliation' is part of my spirit-of-place. Knowing the faces and melodious names of the three black natives who killed two white settlers, with blows from a waddy, a snatched rifle, and tea-tree spears, enriches the fact of inter-racial stress. It enables a thought of somehow making a personal apology for taking land away.

Bea Maddock, Tasmania's great twentieth-century Australian artist, became in later life a maker of strange panoramic landscapes, as if seen from small ships circling an unknown land. Her multiple-panel paintings conceal secret stone objects, small tools that remain scattered on the onetime Aboriginal trackway along my coast and elsewhere around the island. Her portfolio of stencil prints, titled *TERRA SPIRITUS—with a darker shade of pale*, 1995–97, emphasises the materiality of red earth, mined from the artist's personal ochre pit in Launceston, and depicts, in 52 sheets, profiles of the entire coastline of Tasmania. All Maddock's late landscapes are filled with Aboriginal words, mostly place names, a retrieval of Aboriginal presence.

Sheet no.30 from *TERRA SPIRITUS* includes, in inconspicuous typeset lettering, the settler names *Northdown Beach*, *Handsome Sugarloaf*, and *The Water Rat,* which is a rodent-shaped rocky islet below *Eagles Lookout*. The last is a headland rock that I gaze at from the house I named *Loeyunnila*, the Port Sorell tribe's word for "high wind"; wedgetail eagles still soar. In the *TERRA SPIRITUS* sky, floating high above the obscure settler-bestowed place names at the edge of the sea, are great clouds of Aboriginal names, in curling script, of significant interior places.

Place names are powerful. On the opposite shore of Port Sorell, the Asbestos Range National Park in 2000 became *Narawntapu*. We already have "*kunanyi* Mount Wellington". The whole island could become "*lutruwita* Tasmania".

Thirty years ago, for *Creating Australia: 200 years of art 1788–1988*, the catalogue of an Australian Bicentennial Authority exhibition, I wrote, with the approval of specialist curators from the South Australian Museum, that "The Aboriginal people are re-conquering the minds of their invaders, just as the Greeks re-conquered the ancient Romans". The statement was provocative, and generated some mirth. Today I think it is a truth universally accepted.

Daniel Thomas
2018

Daniel Thomas AM, Emeritus Director Art Gallery of South Australia, was in 1958 the first-ever curatorial appointment at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, where he eventually became chief curator and head of Australian art. In 1978 he became founding head of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and from 1984 to 1990 was director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. The publication *Recent Past: Writing Australian Art*, 2020, Fink and Miller (eds.) Thames & Hudson is a collection of seventy-three essays by Thomas over the course of half a century.

CRITICAL RESPONSES

THOUGHTS ABOUT *THE PARTNERSHIPPING PROJECT*

It is a delicate subject, but relevant nonetheless, and the couching of the question has the ring of stand-up comedy: "How long do you have to be in a particular place before you get called indigenous?" Not many people would doubt or dare to affront Australian Indigenous people with this question, given their ancient possession, and now recent dispossession of their lands and countries. But albeit in hushed tones, it is tenable to question claims of indigeneity by peoples like the Maoris just happened to arrive in New Zealand from Polynesia around four hundred years before European explorers.[1] Then again, if indigeneity is a relative term, it continues to be a potentially explosive notion for the reason that the grounds of its justification and contestation lie in the need for justification which arises when peoples are under threat. Yet we are living in an age when the flows of people are more plentiful, if not more visible and exigent, than ever before. "Refugeeism" is now a legitimate world, while the numbers of people existing in a permanently transitory state are enough to constitute small nation states in their own right. The series of exhibitions under the title *The Partnershipping Project*, curated by Pat Hoffie, attest to the manifold states of mobility and exchange between cultures, the flows of transactions that are coaxed or coerced, and the ways in which these flows constitute and shape the changeable bit still omnipresent concepts of identity and home.

Another loaded term for Australia in particular is "regionality". Weighing against the generic meaning (a region is any place whatever) is the mild pejorative of provincialism and isolation. As the most urbanised country on earth proportionate to population, as one of the largest countries with proportionately the least amount of arable land, "regionality" can carry other implications of what is forbidding, remote, unassailable and last of all, undesirable. But the flows of information that comprise our understand of "globalisation" have changed the perception of "regionality" and in particular those who chose to participate in it. The amenability of information—from news and fake news to the Netflix, Facebook, Amazon and Google—ensure that there is next to no discrimination between regional and urban, provided that the internet connection works (another delicate subject for Australians). The new, indiscriminate status of information has afforded those living in places that were once deprived of it a wholly new perspective on both their own status and of those who operate in more populated places. And perhaps these places—the more intermediate zones—can now be seen as privileged loci for observation, not least because they are less perceptible, less visited, less "named". It is also in such places that the difference between what transpires from natural causes and social isolation, and what occurs in the universalising but still wildly dispersed information stratosphere, can be so pronounced. Put another way, now that remote communities have a sense of overlap with the rest of the world, what is out of conformity, what cannot be assimilated, becomes all the more noticeable. We are told that we are all "global citizens", but then again, some still have more rights than others. The rhetoric of equalisation masks a number of blind-spots and elisions that are conveniently maintained.

The *Project* was not strictly a touring show, but better thought of as a cipher, a material and conceptual receptacle, organised according to the principle of eight boats that in their siting in four regional galleries are then mediated

upon by a new set of artists. With the boats as the connecting element, the emphasis was on mobility, understood on a number of levels. First, the migratory patterns of people over centuries and millennia, now seen against the cultural exchanges that also now occur on a virtual level. Second, the way art can be used as a vehicle for communicative mobility between different cultures and social groups. And third the changeable nature of the landscape itself, subject to seasonal floods, rising tides and sea levels. While the number of messages in your email in-box is rising, so are the coastlines, such that many atolls in the South Pacific are brought face to face with their imminent disappearance. As Hoffie states in her exhibition statement, the emphasis on mobility also extends to art as a continuous act. She advises that "those of us involved in the project like to think of the word 'art' as a verb, rather than a noun. That is, it's a kind of 'doing, being or having or helping word'—a word that informs an action, rather than one that acts as a passive subject".[2]

Seen this way, the exhibitions are better thought of as one exhibition, connected according to the different modes of action and reaction in each place. The "exhibition", then, bears witness to the inexorability of time, where the different iterations, or better, dimensions, are connected according to the impulse to intervene and to invent. The artists in the exhibition all have some involvement with the local communities, imbricating the inner walls of the gallery with the local world outside. After one venue has run its course, each boat brings the memory of the previous incarnation to the next, much as a piece of wood might be a staff then a spear then an axe and then firewood and ash. It was the philosopher Bergson who proposed a similar kind of lateral thinking when he said that one can either conceive of a block of processed sugar as such or as but one point in its evolution thus far, from the sugar cane to its refinement and packaging, to its eventual dissolution in a cup of coffee. The *Project* speaks to objects and being in transit, and to the peregrinations of objects in space and time. Philosophically the project places change and perpetuity in balance, in this case the way in which regions may respond to outside forces, but translating these force to integrate with what is specific to the local place in question, a form of osmotic social resistance that seeks to assure that place and community maintain its particular character and identity. Importantly, the final part of the exhibition will be held in the place where it was launched, in Burnie Regional Art Gallery. This is not so much to close the circle but rather to suggest the next set of exhibitions ad infinitum, as if the gallery were a symbolic equinox in the revolutions of the planet. While it lives on as a pregnant hypothesis (the exhibition as taking place into perpetuity, accreting with each addition), it will live on as a web presence, adding to the multiplying presences of "small", molecular presences that push against the molar.

The late cultural literary and cultural theorist Edward Said theorised the term Orientalism as a specialised form of cultural repression by the West through the propagation of stereotypes and simplifications, ranging from linguistic usage to political decision-making. Since its publication, *Orientalism* has sparked heated debate and contributed in large part to cultural revisionism, as well as residual Western guilt. One such revisionist tack has been to emphasise that the relationship between Occident and Orient was not so one-sided, nor was it so neatly characterised as oppressor-oppressed. Many so-called Orientalist countries as distinct as Japan and Turkey actively engaged in their own self-Orientalising as a means of opening global markets and making themselves attractive to foreign tourists and trade, while also harnessing signifiers that could give them a particular national edge. One of the terms used under the rethinking of Orientalism is "exchange", where the focus is more on the ways in which different countries absorbed and translated others, the selectiveness of the process, and the kinds of pressures, external and internal that precipitated these changes. Instead of "Orientalism" was can more broadly think of exoticism and difference as "Transorientalism", especially considering that many people (and artists) identify as a national such as Palestinian or Iranian, in foreign countries. It is indeed only in exile that they can manage to express their identificatory traits—what makes them as such—freely.[3]

The condition of the enforced or voluntary exile, the refugee, the displaced person, while nothing new, has renewed resonance in the age of globalisation, where the cost for the availability for communication, information and entertainment come at the as yet not fully felt price of overpopulation and climate change. While unprecedented peoples have been displaced because of natural or human-made factors, the condition is ongoing and promises not to abate, only accelerate. The current state of dual, or even multiple identity (take the artist Mona Hatoum who was born in Lebanon, identifies as Palestinian, and lives in England) will be far less of a choice but as a result of external impositions. It is also the case that societies are deployed from place to place. Language, as with family, association, and memory, once presumed rooted in place are now forcefully floating identifiers, avatars of identity, but also subjective anchors that bind people to one another. The present moment brings home to us the extent to which identity is invented across the flows of time, place and language. Despite being invented, that does not make such identities any less authentic.

"The condition of the enforced or voluntary exile, the refugee, the displaced person, while nothing new, has renewed resonance in the age of globalisation, where the cost for the availability for communication, information and entertainment come at the as yet not fully felt price of overpopulation and climate change".

As if in some kind of reckoning, in its second edition, *The Partnershipping Project* arrived in Townsville after the devastating floods that all but ruined the venue, Umbrella Studio. After the floods, the staff of the gallery were made to work off-site and were anxiously uncertain as to the future of the space. The exhibition finally opened in a temporary space not far from the main venue. Recent upheavals and the efforts made to surmount them made the salient issues of the exhibition more salient still. As Hoffie wrote in the catalogue to the exhibition, in addition to the themes already discussed, these included:

> *concerns about the environment; about the need to listen to Indigenous ideas regarding land management; about the ways in which traditional knowledges might be able to address critical environmental futures; reconsiderations about the way a longer historical awareness of the geography and geology of this country might be brought to bear on future planning for the country's arid north; issues that centre on immigration and refugees, and the contribution migrant communities are making to the country; issues dealing with mining and land-clearing; about gender and education and the necessity of consultation, communication and collaboration.*

In addition to all of these concerns, *The Partnershipping Project* brought another important issue to the fore, which was how these were to be expressed in art. At the same time. back in Sydney, *The National* was on exhibit in three venues. But it has long been commented that such large exhibitions, with their curatorial agendas and their marketing apparatus, have become increasingly toothless in the face of the "real" events and as means of authentic commentary. The Biennale which comes next promises to be another entertainment event that transforms cultural criticism into vaudeville. I am not the only one who believes that the future of art and exhibition lies in the more fragile, less prepossessing of arrangements. Unlike the Big Show, they are less seen and less known, and unlike the big show, their memory in fewer number of viewers remains stronger and more poignant.

Adam Geczy
2019

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[1] The arrival of the Maoris from Polynesia is estimated at between 1250 and 1300, while Abel Tasman ventured to New Zealand in 1642. After decades of trade, New Zealand began to be settled in earnest by Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century.

[2] https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ed0bcc_1523d1b00ce8443091c270672a878ed0.pdf; accessed 6 June, 2019.

[3] See my *Transorientalism in Art, Fashion and Film: Inventions of Identity*, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

NULLA SINE MEMORE VOLUPTAS (NO PLEASURE WITHOUT REGRET)

Greg Lehman reflects on his participation in *The Partnershipping Project* on its conclusion at the Burnie Regional Art Gallery in an interview with Pat Hoffie.

Pat Hoffie: Looking back to when you were first invited to participate, what was it that drew you to *The Partnershipping Project*?

Greg Lehman: As a historian and writer who has lived in Tasmania all of my life, I've been involved in a range of positions and roles that related to Aboriginal Community Development, Arts and Heritage. It remains a consuming fascination, driven in part by my ongoing personal exploration into aspects of my own relationship with Aboriginal art and culture. Central to the way I proceed is by progressively learning the language of history through not only information of the past, but also through a careful decoding of what we are presented with by the archive. I try to look at this process deeply and slowly. It is a cumulative or an iterative process, and this is what led me steadily into art history. This research has unfolded as a trail of mystery and intrigue into the visual aspects of Aboriginal culture and its relationship to world culture.

Two years ago, when I was invited to be part of *The Partnershipping Project*, my initial response was one of reluctance. I already had enough on my plate to keep me busy and engaged. And yet, during the conversation with the curator a key point in the discussion—the invitation to actually make as well as write—retuned me to a line of research I had been engaged in for some time. The invitation seemed to fit.

This research was focused on a sketch by John Webber, the artist who travelled with Cook to Van Dieman's Land in 1777. The drawing depicts Cook offering a medal to a group of Aboriginal people. I realised through our conversation that one of the many things suggested by that simple image was the start of the involvement of the First Nations people of Tasmania in global trade and commodification. And while the event was performed as a kind of abstract, faux act of diplomacy, represented the beginnings of British colonialism in the land of my Aboriginal ancestors, it also powerfully echoed some of my ideas about global trade.

These are the points at which the objectives of *The Partnershipping Project* presented interesting synergies for me.

Pat Hoffie: The fleet has now returned to Burnie Regional Gallery. How do you feel about it two years on?

Greg Lehman: It's clear that the final form of the exhibition, as well as the project's original intention, was upheld. What I respect most about the project is that it's succeeded in holding to its original mission, which at a surface level appeared to be relatively simple, but was in reality a complex challenge: the idea of using eight small boats as a vehicle and a location for the making of art, while not really knowing what was going to unfold at each of the four exhibition locations. The unpredictable elements of the journey were part of the project's appeal and somehow capture the inherent chaos of globalised trade that is commonly perceived as economically rational—in the same way that art creates material presence from the mercurial impulses of artists to make sense of our mad world!

Also challenging was the fact that the work of a number of artists comes to an end at each of the destinations. Even though there is a digital record,

“During times of calamity or catastrophe, art slips back into its natural place—into a closer relationship with the personal and the local—as a functional and central part of the life of people and their communities. All those infrastructures that drag art into the milieu of trade—and that have been brought to a grinding halt as a result of the current COVID-19 crisis—bring about a realisation of the extent to which the art market has been globalised”.

most of the boats travel forward with ghost versions of their compatriots from the previous exhibition. When the hull of my own boat was selected by Gail Mabo in Townsville, she used it in a way that incorporated a whitewashed version of the text I’d applied to the inside of the hull. In this way each of the previous works forms a palimpsest of what comes next. And in that sense the process of what happens throughout the project emulates what happens in the business of global trade. Commodities are remade and transformed.

An obvious example is when a Tasmanian forest is clearfelled; we understand that our trees are being woodchipped and exported. What escapes us is that this later comes back to us as a cardboard box around a flat screen TV. It’s no longer recognisable as the original product. It’s been translated and re-translated by a succession of processes. Its value has been changed. Its very meaning has been re-engineered.

First Nations people in Australia are caught up in global trade in a way that is illustrated by *The Partnershipping Project*—perhaps in a way that has not been done before. Our creative practice is little different to the work that any other artist does—it’s about pursuing an idea, a story, a view of the world—finding ways to express this as a tangible work of art. But when you drop it into that global swirl of trade, it gets re-presented, re-translated, re-contextualised, and re-made, and we’re lucky if the original motivations and intentions of the artwork survive those processes!

It’s no wonder that many artists refuse to be identified as Indigenous. To do so puts us at the mercy of a market and a culture of reception and exhibition within which we are, also as people, bracketed off; exoticised or categorised as something Other. One of the project’s great strengths is that it inhibits that kind of categorisation.

Pat Hoffie: You have often said that you see collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists as being extremely important. How well did this work in *Partnershipping*?

Greg Lehman: The process of collaboration, an inherent part of the project, might not offer a way of avoiding othering but it does provide a means of working through it. It’s a practical way of embracing the synergies and contrasts that occur across work by artists from different cultural and geopolitical settings. In the creative setting of *Partnershipping* this helps to disrupt postcolonial processes that function to separate Indigenous people from everyone else—processes that were put in place to legitimise the exploitation and commodification of Indigenous culture. *Partnershipping* reframes these processes to expose how globalisation exploits us all, while creating space for new conversations and collaborations to occur. For me, collaboration offers a means of following new pathways. These might explore ideas about a particular image of object, or about how these objects—in particular, art objects—move through history, accumulating resonances and layered stories as they trace and re-trace journeys across time.

Pat Hoffie: The past year or two have been immensely disruptive, with natural disasters and, most recently, the pandemic. How do you think these events impact on projects such as *Partnershipping*?

Greg Lehman: During times of calamity or catastrophe, art slips back into its natural place—into a closer relationship with the personal and the local—as a functional and central part of the life of people and their communities. All those infrastructures that drag art into the milieu of trade—and that have been brought to a grinding halt as a result of the current Covid-19 crisis—bring about a realisation of the extent to which the art market has been globalised. In times like these, the circulation of art returns to local gallerists, arts organisations and communities who step forward to pick up the game. Our art, our practice, and our perspectives can be refreshed by this return. We can shake off the dust of our global journeys in a place we can feel at home.

Pat Hoffie: I wrote about the Hanseatic League in the original catalogue for *The Partnershipping Project*. You seem to share an interest in this through your art-historical research.

Greg Lehman: The project’s initial premise in the catalogue traced the origins of globalisation to the undertakings of the Hanseatic League that formed in the twelfth century as a collectivised means of furthering trade. During earlier research into the ideologies emerging from Renaissance art traditions at Oxford I too had become fascinated by these early merchant cartels and their relationships with artists. As a result of one of these relationships, Dutch artist Hans Holbein (1497–1543) painted a portrait of Georg Giesz, one of the members of the League. The portrait was intended as a means of reflecting the merchant’s success (and his attractiveness as a suitor).

One of the ways you can look at that painting is as an example of how an artist and his art became complicit in global trade and commodification. The painting promoted personality and celebrity at a time when this was the exclusive domain of the wealthy and powerful. The subject is painted surrounded by the accoutrements of mercantile trade, indexing the moral and ethical framework of the time. Hanging on the wall behind Giesz, for example, is a set of keys, placed there to assure the viewer that he is a competent and secure merchant. But it is the security that is important, not the goods that he trades. They become immaterial.

In the same way, the nature of the commodities that are stripped from the places we call home do not matter. It is their value in these systems of trade that is important. No one in these globalised systems cares about the tree, or the place from which it came, or the people who honoured and loved that tree. Traded commodities are there to simply energise these global systems of power and security. World trade today is equally amoral. It disregards place. It is ruled by commerce, not community.

As an artist, Holbein is not blind to this dimension. He incorporates contradictions into any simple reading of the work, and inscribes the merchant’s personal motto—*Nulla Sine Memore Voluptas* [No Pleasure Without Regret]—next to a set of scales behind Giesz. The picture plane is sprinkled with memento mori—a glass vase suggesting fragility and wilting carnations the impermanence of life and love. Holbein includes the reference to each of these human emotions as a means of holding a pictorial tension between the subject and life; between commerce and humanity.

Pat Hoffie: Do you think this has also been the experience of the artists in *Partnershipping*?

Greg Lehman: For many of the participating artists, *The Partnershippping Project* reflects the pain of present-day realities, through the everyday impacts of globalisation. So many of the works reflect sadness and deep tragedy. Greg Leong’s work for the initial exhibition in Burnie, for example, reflected an eloquent appeal to reconsider the contribution of Chinese immigrants to Australia’s history and culture. This work, by an artist of such huge standing, was one of beauty and sadness. And the fact that it had to be left behind, as the fleet moved forward, moved the work’s role into that of an ersatz contemporary version of this project’s internal memento mori. Another work that was “left behind” was Joan Kelly’s installation of tiny, beautifully intimate records of her quiet meditations on the northern Tasmanian shoreline. There’s such a rich sense of place in these images—conceived slowly and quietly over time.

These beautiful, fragile, transient works that summon the collective memories of this project aren’t lost; rather, they reinstate art an essential aspect of memories of place that matters immensely. And I think of your own experience as the curator of this project over this time, and of this broader process of crossing into the boundaries of the unknown. These are the real things about being alive—about being human—and they all become entangled in the central core of the project as art pulls us that little bit closer, just as Holbein was bringing us closer to the realities of his own time.

As *The Partnershipping Project* has unfolded, it’s revealed rooms within rooms as part of the overall framework. We can look back on those images, stories, reflections, documentation and analysis now to consider what’s transpired. There aren’t too many projects that reach quite so far into these deeper processes of being.

POSTSCRIPT

I'm writing this in the final month of 2020; at the end of a year where 'unprecedented changes' rocked all our lives, right across the globe. Some five years earlier, when I put forward the proposal for *The Partnershipping Project* for consideration in 2015, I argued for a curatorial premise to examine the cultural contradictions and synergies emerging when the slower, deeper, ground-truthing processes of localism come up against the vast, fast, diversity-engulfing behemoth of globalisation.

The central question—to what extent does place still matter?—suggested other questions about the extent to which artists might still be able to stay in touch with both the 'here' of localism or regionalism and the 'elsewhere' of globalism in positive, productive ways. At the time, I had no idea that a global pandemic stood in the wings, poised to respond to this question in its own special way. And when COVID burst onto global centre-stage, evidence of the extent to which we still depend on local communities and their jurisdictions, their initiatives ad support-systems, emerged as a surprise for many.

Now, at the project's close, these same massive themes loom even larger. These are the themes that underpin our understanding of the broader issues contributing to the damages wrought not only by the pandemic, but also from the succession of natural disasters caused by floods and fires and droughts and the continuing slow creep of global warming.

And we now know that the cohesive glue to community resilience in the face of the worst weeks of COVID lockdown were the stories—collective accounts of how things were unfolding; tales of overwhelming responsibilities responded to by shared care; unfolding narratives that spoke in multiple ways about how the choices we make as individuals ultimately affect the survival of our communal selves.

By the end of the *The Partnershipping Project*, all those involved were left changed in profound ways. The work may have vanished, but the stories and the connections continue.

Pat Hoffie
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THE PARTNERSHIPPING PROJECT

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#PLACE MATTERS
#AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL ARTISTS
#FIRST NATIONS/ NON-INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS
#ENVIRONMENT
#COMMUNITY
#HISTORIES
#CULTURAL DIVERSITY
#COLLABORATION
#RADICAL REGIONALISM