

Difficult Conversations



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UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

Difficult Conversations

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Cover image: The artwork Free Bird by the artist Bianca Loiacono was commissioned by the Danny Frawley Centre in Moorabbin, Victoria, to commemorate the St Kilda FC LOUD Fence created in front of the Centre. The artwork was made out of ribbons from this LOUD Fence. Image by Karen Walker.

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Connections, Understanding and Trust

Kate Ewart-Biggs, British Council

Trust and dialogue are at the heart of what the British Council does. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We do this through our work globally, be it through story telling for peace building in Colombia, documentary theatre in Argentina through projects like 'Minefield', or supporting New Narratives to strengthen connections between young people across the countries of Africa and the UK, through arts, culture, and education.

This *Difficult Conversations* publication has emerged from the 2022 UK/Australia Season, in which the British Council and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade worked in partnership to deliver a vibrant programme celebrating the diverse and innovative artist communities and cultural sectors of each nation. It highlights the important role of cultural relations in bringing people together through education and the arts, connecting across countries and time zones to encourage dialogue and to help build trust.

We live in an increasingly polarised age where public discourse is often divisive and hostile. There are competing narratives, a multiplicity of previously unheard voices, evidence of past injustices and calls for reparation, and a need to review previously accepted versions of history.

It has never been more important to find the need for space to connect to the legacies of the past and to come together to address their impact on our present and our shared future.

Artists and their practice can make a huge contribution to illuminating the past and provide new ways of considering shared, or contested, history. They can unlock new ways of viewing the present and imagining the future. They are central to having the 'difficult conversations' that can bring people together rather than further polarise them.

And there are certainly some challenging themes throughout this publication. The essays address many difficult, distressing and divisive moments in recent history: the abuse of women and children, murder, colonisation, destruction of culture, the search for the disappeared and the theft of land and of history. Yet each one powerfully demonstrates how art can inspire us to think differently about injustice and inequality in our societies. By looking through a new lens, we find new connections, and thus develop new connections in how we think and what we practice.

Difficult Conversations, in partnership with Ulster University and University of Canberra, is a shining example of cultural relations facing up to the challenges of the modern world, and we are proud to publish this new collection. We thank the authors for the insightful and thought-provoking contributions.

Narragunnawali – Walking and Talking Together

Paddy Nixon, University of Canberra

It's a real pleasure to see this volume of 'difficult conversations' come together as a result of the remarkable dialogue that has developed, with the support of the British Council, between two distinctive universities. While these are very different institutions – with different histories, cultures and contexts – the universities of Canberra and Ulster have both responded purposefully to some of the challenges faced by their local and national communities – and it is in these responses that this volume finds its common ground. *Difficult Conversations* focuses on the roles of creativity and culture in helping to navigate provocative issues and themes in our communities and in our research, and particularly on the role that creativity can play in facilitating discussions around these unresolved concerns and ongoing debates. This volume brings together visual artists, poets, performance artists and cultural researchers, who each explore how art, poetry, place, memory, heritage and museums can all trigger meaningful, and potentially reparative, engagement with past trauma and its lingering impacts.

Narragunnawali is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which the University of Canberra is located, that has broad meanings encompassing 'wellbeing', 'coming together' and 'peace'. We are very fortunate that

Ngunnawal Elders have given the University of Canberra permission to use this term to encapsulate our shared values and commitment to reconciliation, and to embracing Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in our work and our culture. From our side, *Difficult Conversations* has been an important means through which we have brought people together to confront uncomfortable truths and learn from the experiences of others. In the case of my Canberra colleagues these conversations have arisen from a broad range of examples, such as research on using art and creative practice to enable injured Defence veterans to tell their own stories, as well as the research on the outcomes of Australia's *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* that is featured in this volume. Most significantly these conversations have brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, often in creative collaboration, but also in an attempt to build more respectful cultures of listening to Indigenous knowledge, experience and stories. I am delighted that a number of established and emerging First Nations writers and academics from the University of Canberra community are featured in this volume. Their work exemplifies the power of culture and creativity to build greater understanding of our turbulent shared histories and of ways to work towards healing rifts and wounds in our societies.

What Ever You Say, Say Something

Paul Seawright, Ulster University

The Vietnam War (1954–1975) was the first comprehensively photographed conflict, with visceral images of the suffering of war, screaming throughout the media. A parallel war of propaganda and protest placed the narrative of war, death and sacrifice at the heart of Western society and the early 70s were characterised by public discourse around the Vietnam conflict. After the fall of Saigon (1975), another quite different conflict was devastating communities across Northern Ireland – The Troubles (1968–1998). Within five years almost 1,500 people had been killed and whilst British and American journalists published reductive photographs of rioting teenagers and burning buildings on the streets of Belfast and Derry, there was an absence of discourse, a vacuum, filled by the voices of others in simplistic accounts of hatred and civil violence that represented this place, as too often the Irish have been portrayed, as barbaric and primitive.

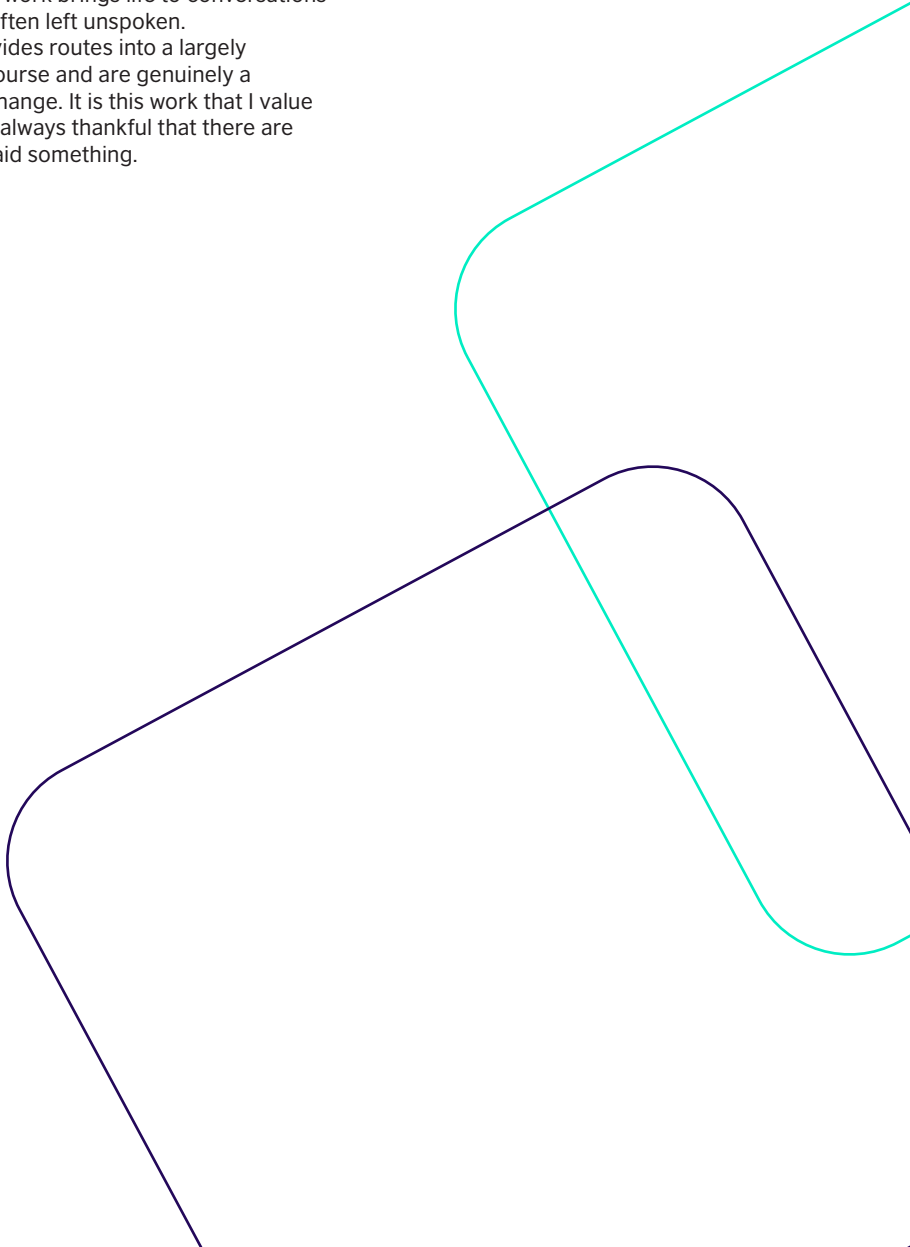
But what of the place and people who suffered through the upheaval of occupation, segregation, internment, sectarian murder, explosions, fires, population shifts, perpetual mourning? Where was their voice, where was the voice of resistance? Seamus Heaney writing that year described a ‘famous Northern reticence, the tight gag of place’ in his incredibly perceptive piece, *Whatever you say, you say nothing*, he recognises the impossibility of language and of conversation relating to the conflict, religion, or identity. His assertion that ‘smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us’ will ring true to those of us who murmured quietly about atrocities behind closed doors and conducted conversations in the street about the weather.

Twenty-five years after the Good Friday Agreement and the cessation of violence, there has been much to discuss. As society transitioned into a new context, it became possible to speak of the past, perhaps because it wasn’t the present. There was an acknowledgement that difficult conversations lay ahead, and still do. The Ulster Museum’s, *Art of The Troubles*, (visual art, literature, theatre, music, and film) have given voice to a place rendered silent by the circumstances of conflict. The arts can facilitate those difficult conversations about what happened to us, what happened in this place. The museum has presented our Chancellor, Colin Davidson’s powerful, *Silent Testimony*, exhibition (2015, 2021) which revealed the stories of eighteen people who are connected by their individual experiences of loss through *The Troubles*.

What art can offer is unique. The gaps which exist in a work of art can be filled by those who engage. As a result they discover a path to a different, uncomfortable place, to see the world from another perspective, to awaken an awareness of our common humanity.
(Dr Colin Davidson, 2022)

My own work, *Beasts of Burden* (2021), considers a seemingly impossible journey of reconciliation in Rwanda, where almost one million people were slaughtered in just 100 days. 25 years after the genocide a unique initiative pairs perpetrators with surviving victims. They raise a calf together, in an effort to reconcile and develop a sustainable future as an integrated community. The photographs present the innocence of the animal as a conduit to think about healing, rebirth, forgiveness and they open up a conversation for others about the possibility of reconciliation in the most extreme circumstances.

The artist refuses the allure of otherness, the simplicity of violent imagery and by-line reporting. A political artwork does not surrender its meaning easily, it requires something of the viewer, invites analysis and it is that exchange that becomes a site of discourse. The artists in this publication have all experienced their own struggle with silence. Their work brings life to conversations that are too often left unspoken. Their art provides routes into a largely invisible discourse and are genuinely a catalyst for change. It is this work that I value most and am always thankful that there are artists who said something.

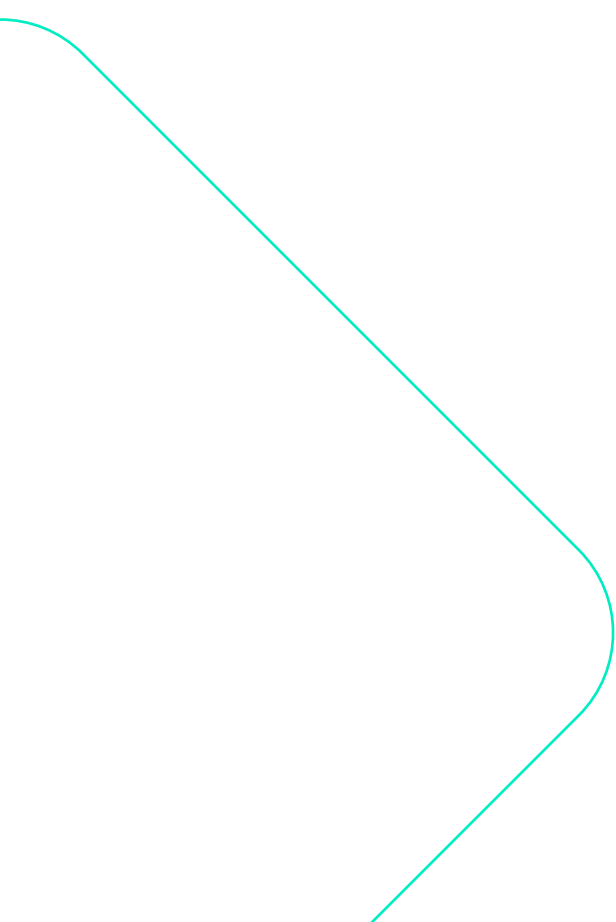


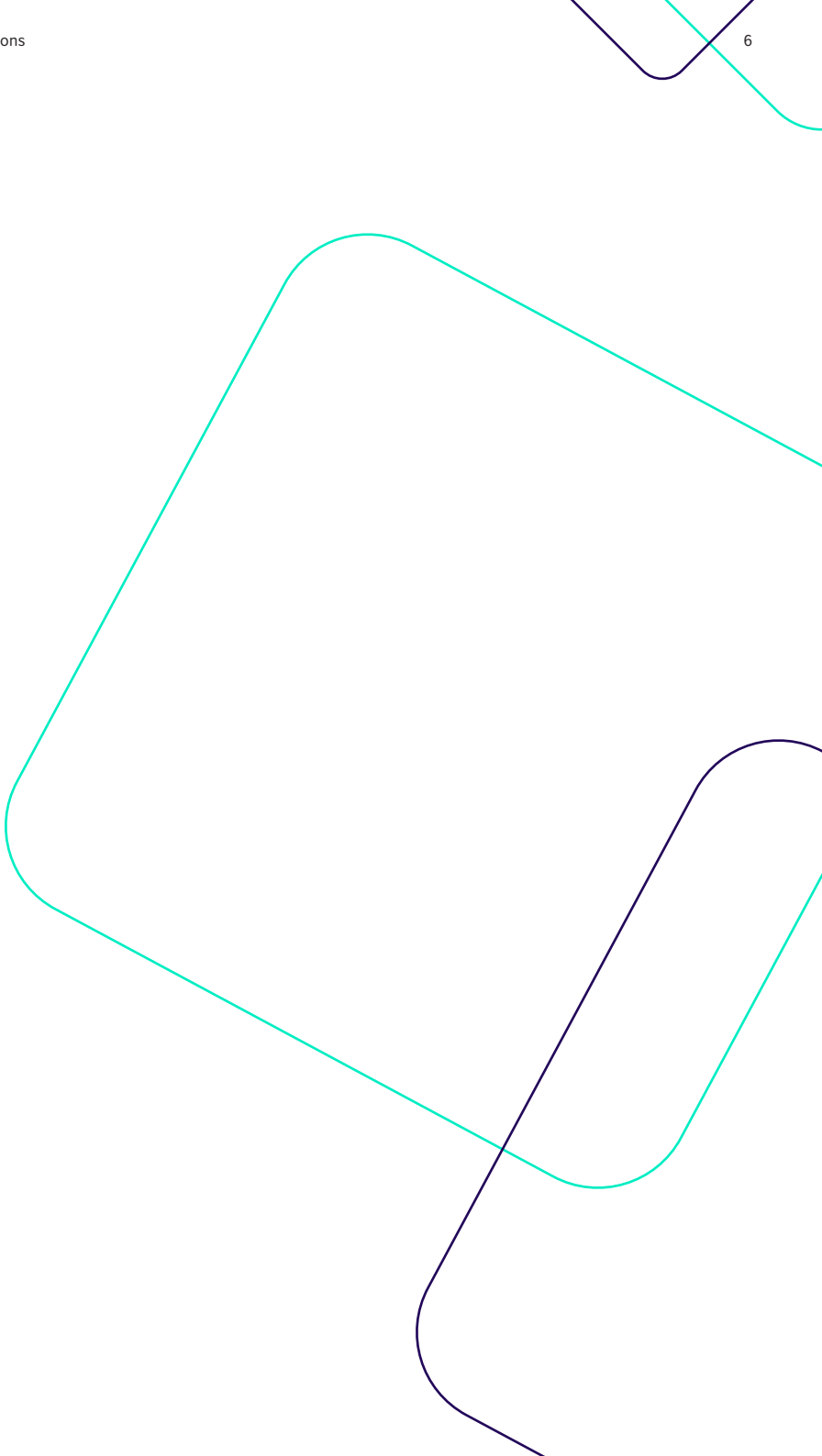
Golden Delicious/ Midnight Feast

Louise Wallace

My research relates the feminine to the landscape in a way that problematises historical readings of place and Irish cultural identity. I visit overlooked sites, specifically the gardens of Lenadoon, an emergency housing estate in West Belfast. In this way I insert a specific, marginalised space and community into painting's history. Through my field work I find surprising correlations between local garden decoration, art history and mythology.

Both *Golden Delicious (Fig. 1)* and *Midnight Feast (Fig. 2)* interrogate the conflation of the female body with the land, especially tricky art historical images of Mother Ireland. My work is playful and surreal, focusing on a bird feeder in a neighbouring garden, which looks monstrously feminine in the twilight. The garden ponds and rolling topography can sometimes look like fruit which in turn resembles body parts. The effect is deliberately humorous and disconcerting, offering an alternative viewpoint on Irish femininity.





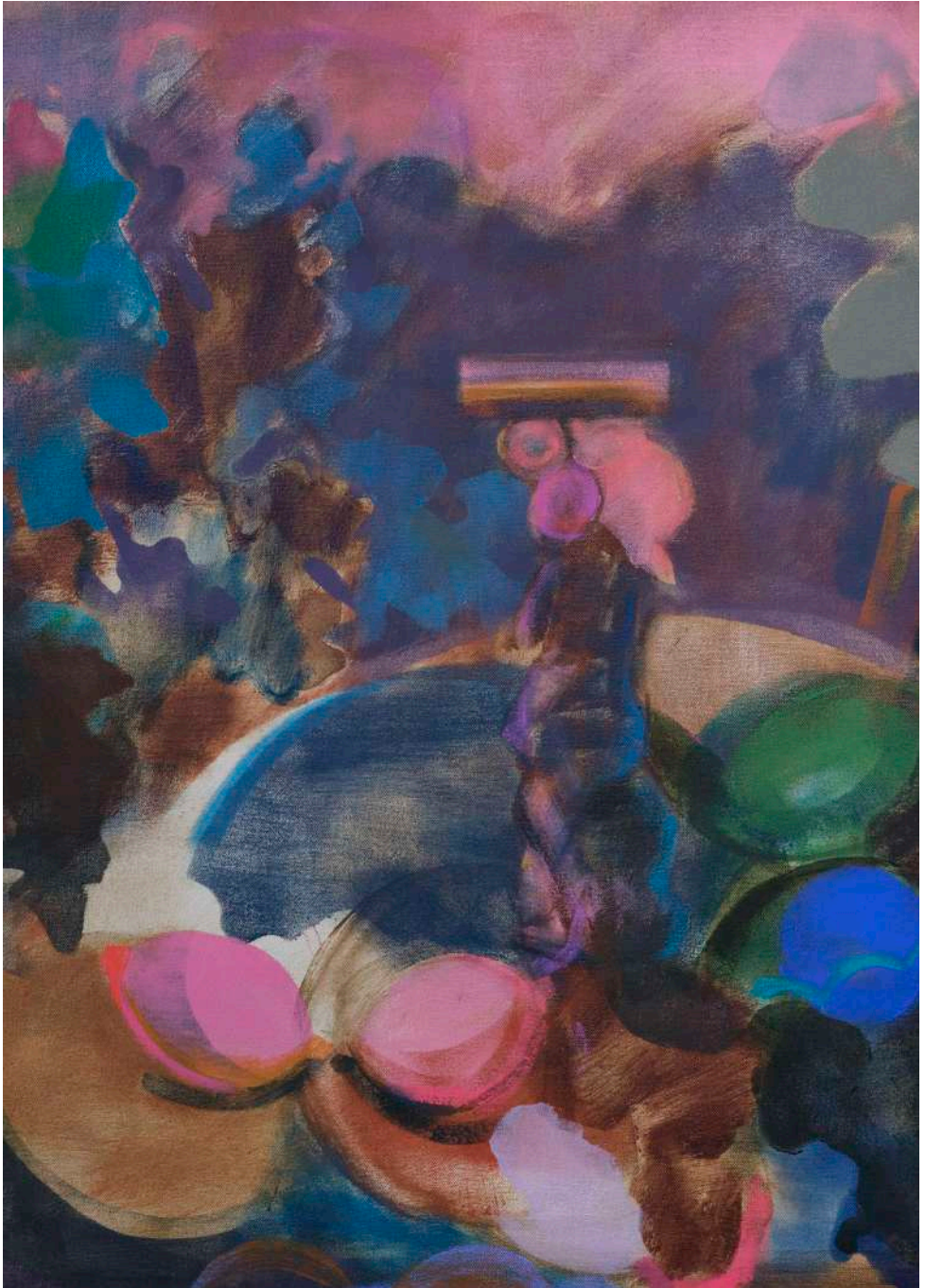


Figure 1. Louise Wallace, 'Golden Delicious', oil on canvas, 53x64cm, 2022. Image: Simon Mills (2022)

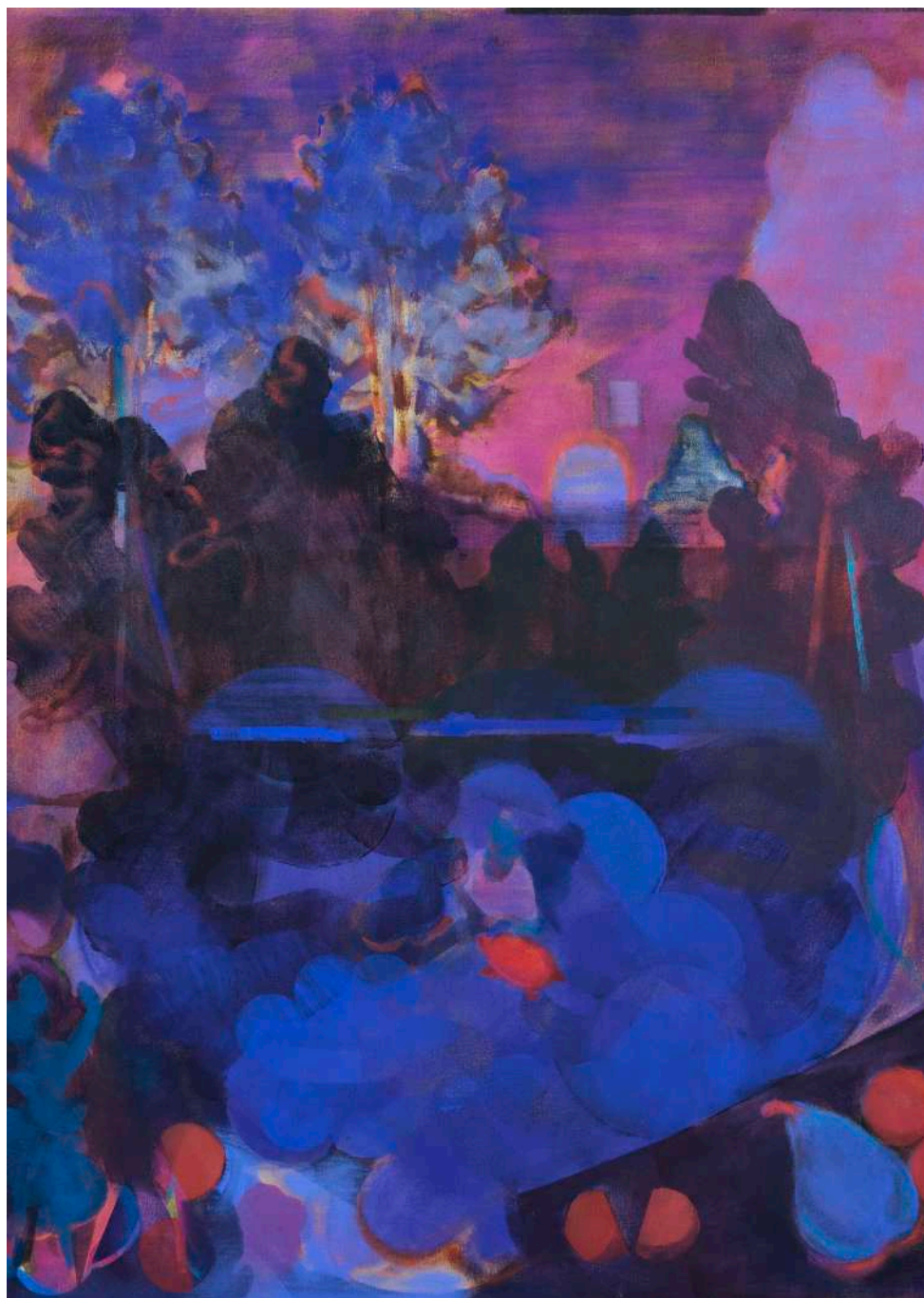


Figure 2. Louise Wallace, 'Midnight Feast', oil on canvas, 53x64cm, 2022. Image: Simon Mills (2022)

Taking Positions

Alastair MacLennan, Brian Connolly,
Dominic Thorpe and Sandra Johnston

Introduction

Performance artists from the island of Ireland have consistently made work responding to a range of situations of conflict, oppression and trauma, not least work related to The Troubles, gender based violence, and institutional abuses (Philips, 2015; Sverakova, 2001). The following article has been developed from a collective interview with journalist Sarah Travers and four key practitioners of performance art; Alastair MacLennan, Brian Connolly, Sandra Johnston and Dominic Thorpe (Connelly et al 2022). During the interview, the concept of 'difficult conversations' was considered from various perspectives of performance art practice. Interview transcripts have been taken as a starting point to continue the discussion and develop a text that further elaborates on key ideas around the role and scope of performance artists' social contributions within conflicted societies and polarised discourses.

The position of the artist, as explored here, is understood to resonate with several philosophical points of reference related to ethical responses to situations of violence. The post-enlightenment ethics of Emmanuel Levinas proposes that ethical responsibility for others is grounded in an ineluctable relationality so fundamental to existence as to be considered a 'first philosophy' (Levinas, 1996, p. 161). This perspective on ethical responsibility echoes the Buddhist thinking on relationality embraced by Alastair MacLennan and others when responding to decades of conflict and violence within Northern Ireland (MacLennan & Snoddy 1988, Watson & Hunter 2003, Johnston et al 2021). A characteristic of much performance art from Ireland has been the creation of gestures that defy the separation that can result from violent actions and attitudes. The motivation to refute violence through the potentially provocative gestures of performance art also resonates with Butler's

contention that non-violent action is 'a force or strength that is distinguished from destructive violence, one that is manifest in solidarity alliances of resistance and persistence' (Butler, 2022, p. 202). In this way, making performance art can be understood as a political stance that exceeds notions of passivity.

In order to introduce and explore the contribution of performance art to difficult conversations, this article values and centralises the experiences and perspectives of performance art practitioners. Among the issues discussed are the complexity of violence and atrocity, the inter-relational nature of performance art encounters, and the potential contribution of artists to positive societal transformation. In addition, the embodied, contextual and relational nature of performance artwork is emphasised by images from the work of MacLennan, Connolly, Johnston and Thorpe.

Addressing complexity

The layered dynamics of performance artists' gestures can be intended to both offer solidarity with those who suffer because of atrocities, at the same time as addressing the complexity of social, political and cultural contexts in which that violence and suffering is occurring. In the process, performance artworks made in response to violence and resulting traumas can present a challenge to problematically simplistic and divisive framings of what can be multi-faceted issues and situations. This section underscores how performance artists frequently work against points of resistance to formulate personal responses to violence through suggestive and exploratory gestures. As such, making artworks is understood not as an articulation of complete understanding of issues but a process in which the artist can identify, reflect upon and elaborate their own position in relation to others.



Figure 1. Sandra Johnston and Alastair MacLennan *Avert/Avow*. Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin 2022. Image: Fergus Kelly (2022).

Dominic Thorpe (DT)

I try to develop strategies that respond to and attempt to understand certain subjects and questions for myself, and then communicate that process of attempted understanding and resulting grasp of complexity to others in so far as is possible. However, the intention is not necessarily to make statements as if I have a complete understanding of the dynamics of what has happened or is happening in a certain context.

This is not to say that having a position is not important. It can be vital to take a position in terms of social justice and abuse. It is crucial to look at the suffering of victims, to stand with victims, and reject oppression and violence. But I also want to acknowledge that these are frequently complex issues. For example, there can be a vast spectrum of culpability and involvement that must be looked at. This can involve a sensitive navigation of difficult issues.

Sandra Johnston (SJ)

In some situations, it is not viable to make performance art, where the encounter is so ethically charged and the alienation so extreme that it is impossible to make anything. In those moments it is just about stillness and acknowledgement of the stalemate. It is not that you have the answers, you are in the process of forming your response and, since the nature of the response is improvised, how it unfolds in front of an audience can appear hesitant and symptomatic of the tensions existing in the moment (Figure 1).

It is important that the work is not prescriptive and remains sensitive to the fact that you are working mainly with acts of suggestion, moments of encounter, and not in the business of telling others how to live. You are often vulnerable because you are putting yourself on the line and into that sort of space of intervention where there is generally no separation, stage or barrier between you and the audience – it can be incredibly close and intimate.

Alastair MacLennan (AMaL)

You can have a core value or principle that you don't compromise, but still be very flexible and adaptable with forms it may take. The vulnerability Sandra also speaks of is very important in performance art, especially if you're doing it spontaneously on the street, which is different from acting a piece of pre-rehearsed theatre in a controlled, indoor theatre space. Performance art is 'live' and anything can happen in the 'now' moment. You embrace vulnerability as part of the work. If deemed appropriate, we can modify, alter, and adapt how forms of the work evolve.

Brian Connolly (BC)

It is about interaction and that depends on the individual and I think in most cases you don't know the reaction you are going to get. It can depend a lot on the kind of day a person has had or what is happening in their life. You have to be mindful and sensitive. I think artists do tend to be aware of those things.

Connections

Performance art routinely enables direct and unmediated encounters between artists and audience members. Artists can position themselves in relation to audience members in ways that act on and articulate what is understood to be a fundamental connectivity and interdependence that exists between people, including within contexts where conflict and divisiveness otherwise appear to dominate. The ethics of such work pivots on artists and audience members committing to spending time together in ways that may enable new questions and deeply felt connections to surface.

AMaL

Before I got involved in performance art, I became intrigued by how an 'outsider' could be an indicator of social and cultural malfunction in society and how this being could become a societal 'signal', as such. A main aspect of early rituals I developed was about holistic thinking, trying to overcome binary contradictions in how we live and split things up, trying to find ways to tap into actuality, as it is, before conceptual splits appear in our thinking.

I'd perform in public spaces and become a purposive personal manifestation of such issues (Figure 2).

There are as many different ways to make performance art as there are artists making it and each practitioner may well have a different sense of his or her responsibility to self and others within society. I feel balance is important, not either/or thinking, but 'both/and' inclusiveness, finding ways to embrace and overcome separation and difference.

One of the real problems of our time is we've split, through divisive, oppositional thinking, politically, socially, and culturally, ethics from aesthetics. If ethics and aesthetics are not integrated, art (so called) can be vacuously superficial. Early on an older student I was at college with said to me that my art suggested the fullness of emptiness. I was intrigued by this statement. A few years later I began going to Zen retreats and practising with Zen koans (problems to meditate on) such as how to realise your true nature, while artmaking. It's a way of merging art and life, so instead of art needing to be on a canvas, art's dimensions can be the time you have and the space you're in, with the responsibility of making your whole 'life' art, not as a concept, but as an ongoing, daily actuality of interfused relationships.

SJ

Quite often when travelling you would be working with organisations that have a strong activist ethos behind their projects, so you are not completely unprotected or isolated. Making work maybe in a museum one day, in a rural situation the next day, and in a shopping mall the next day. It is very eclectic, and you are continually accumulating knowledge through conversations in the street and with the other artists and the organisers. You build a sense of where you are and what is appropriate regarding concept and behaviour. And what you are bringing with you is this physical language that you are constantly evolving in your body, a kind of empathetic connection beyond the verbal. I think that most performance artists are driven by a strong desire to communicate, to find a point of interconnection and interdependency with audiences.



Figure 2. Alastair MacLennan. Target. Belfast 1977. Image: Photographer unknown.

AMaCL

I completely agree with the idea of working with, not talking at. Having travelled a lot over the years I notice that people in diverse parts of the world are not so different. Specifics of politics and daily life may vary substantially, but the core aspects of what makes us human are the same. You see 'sameness in difference' wherever you go.

DT

In terms of sharing space with audience, I have made quite a lot of work responding to institutional child sexual abuses and the cover up of this. One work, *Glass Mouth*, was in an Anglican Church in Folkstone in England in 2017 (Figure 3). Some people were in the church to pray, others were working there, and some were there for the performance. A core element involved standing in front of a small altar with a large sheet of glass and working with sandpaper to repeatedly scrape into the glass. Because the glass was being scratched, I couldn't see anybody very clearly and they couldn't see me very clearly. A priest, who indirectly questioned the validity of the work, nonetheless, came and sat with it, enabling a very potent moment of sharing between us. This work exposed a proximity to each other, that he and I both acknowledged with our presence. In many ways what motivates and charges such work is an understanding that we are all connected. You are trying to find and expose a constant and underlying interconnection and even dependency with individuals that exists prior to instances and attitudes of violence and division.

SJ

I am working a lot with young people and noticing that mental health issues and the relationship between trauma and creativity has never been more openly discussed, which is important for me as an artist who began working with trauma thirty years ago. I would see performance art as a form of self-healing. And to now be working with young people who are actively making this equation of considering their mental health and recognising their sense of estrangement and separation or fragmentation from society,

suddenly they are asking good questions about holistic living. I am impressed at their resilience and this inner reflective process that is happening, so I take a level of hope from that. But the opposite is also true in terms of aspects of distractedness and division through virtual interactions. There is a dilemma in how these polarities of exploring human connection develop.

Transformative potential

This final section explores understandings and intentions regarding the transformative potential of performance art. Transformative potential is understood here to largely relate to the cumulative positive reverberations of ongoing and evolving practices, as opposed to more easily quantifiable one off actions.

AMaCL

Within institutions the term 'impact' seems to be important regarding accessing research funding. However, the cumulative effects of 'drip, drip' community work over several years may be far more beneficial than a one off 'impact' talk of conflict resolution.

DT

I think about the idea of 'usefulness' more often than 'impact'. There are social, political, and cultural moments where a certain collective notion or way of being is breached in a seismic and irreversible way, but not before some underlying slow-motion process of transformation creates the conditions for that breach. The question can be how to usefully and positively contribute to or direct that inevitable transformation.

For example, while there is no subject that is off limits, there can be less productive moments to explicitly address certain issues. This is a navigation of difficult conversations. Whether in a particular situation or moment in time you work within certain parameters or push beyond them, is an ethical consideration underpinning what you do and why. Motivation is crucial and difficult conversations have also to be thoughtful.

SJ

It is not a situation of wanting to shock people into an actuality of reckoning. Confrontation tends to entrench attitudes and opinions. It is more about enabling a different kind of meeting point.

DT

I often make work that isn't explicit in revealing what it is I am intending to address. This can, in part, be understood as a productive ambiguity that facilitates wider possibilities and audience interpretation. It can also be about the gradual unfolding and engendering of a difficult sort of sharing that can bring things into view that may otherwise be difficult to see. For example, I have made works addressing the perpetrator trauma that can exist within collective trauma experience. If perpetrators' experiences of various forms of violence are excluded, how are we to create a productive means of working through generations of atrocity and trauma and break cycles of violence?

SJ

In my early work I began to insert myself into public space – but very discretely, invisibly. There was also recognition that women at that time in Northern Irish society were largely invisible. You were either a target for specific reasons, or you were literally invisible and living under the kinds of paramilitary

surveillance that was happening in working class areas at that time. So, I started to make performance as an antidote to that sensation of worthlessness. I would say that my practice really developed out of that idea of coming forward and slowly becoming visible. I would do actions in the middle of the night, in alleyways, on roadways, in waste grounds. The tipping point was a series of killings in the early 90s when five women were murdered. One was called Margaret Wright and her body was dumped naked in a wheelie bin after she was tortured. This was directly addressed in the work *To Kill An Impulse* (1994), contextualised in a review by Robinson (1995) This turning point in my life forced a recognition of my female gendered body and what it might mean to work in the public context through gesture and precise positioning.

BC

Thinking politically, bravery is necessary in Northern Ireland, but whether we have reached that point, I doubt at the minute, because there is so much investment in keeping the polarity for the maintenance of particular parties. They need the duality and the opposition for their own right to exist and in my opinion that needs to change for things to move.



Figure 3. Dominic Thorpe. Glass Mouth. Holy Trinity Church Folkestone UK 2017. Image: Andrea Abbatangelo (2017)



Figure 4. Brian Connolly. Market Stall. Trhovisko Zilinska Market Bratislava 2016. Image: Erica Hudcovicova (2016)

AMaCL

I am very conscious that many people within polarised contexts don't go to galleries or museums. Art doesn't affect their lives directly. Many are also seduced by the banalities of social media and populist thinking. So, it's important for performers now to take their art onto the streets and into communities, to query this strategised conditioning.

BC

I was part of a project in Poznan Poland in the late 90s. They had an exhibition in the city gallery, and I was told I wasn't included in it for some reason. This provoked me to think about making work in the city in a different way. I decided to work in a marketplace, trying to sell satirical objects or ideas to people, without announcing it as a performance (Figure 4). This work has subsequently had many iterations. To give examples of the kind of activities, in many such works I have tried to sell Western power using a UK plug. I also sell centimetres at 50p a centimetre. I would actually cut the centimetre and people could have their favourite number, so you would go away with one centimetre. It is a ludicrous idea to cut up a wooden metre ruler but, in a way, it is an intriguing idea to have your own centimetre, because you need as many centimetres as you can get as far as I am concerned. I also try and sell countries of the world, relating to the question of what is of value, or second-hand teeth with a buy one get one free offer. These things were about the idea of power and structures or economy. I pretty much plant seeds. I also offer experiences. You can buy a product, or you can have an experience for free that is about seeing differently. For example, I have a member of the public seated and give them a pair of glasses which are called 'virtual reality goggles', a pair of altered glasses with one lens looking up and one lens looking down. You are simultaneously looking up at the sky and you are looking down at a book in front of you.

Your mind is seeing the two images combined. I realised that the 'Market Place' was a really important context because people are coming to find things, so they are actively really looking, they want the best deal or whatever, but they actually find an artist doing something which they don't expect. They are receptive to it, so that just sparked off a whole genre for me of practice. My role is to interact with the public with a light humorous touch, leading them through ideas that question value, power, and authority.

It is necessary to point at things and hopefully open up awareness or discussion and I think politically we are in a very dangerous time, where power is going to too few hands. Social media is aiding this. There are dangers where as a race and a species we have to be aware of the implications of the choices we make.

Conclusion

Centralising the experiences of artists reveals a shared understanding of how the exploratory and propositional gestures of performance art carry an ethos of observance, adaptability, and responsivity that emerges through a reflexive convergence with place and communities.

Complexity

Performance artworks that stand in a clear and solid rejection of violence have also been understood as suggestive propositions seeking to recognise and respond to the complexity of human conflict. Works that are staged in defiance of simplistic framings of what are often multi-layered and multi-faceted situational dynamics also illuminate the range of direct and indirect actions and divisive rhetoric that contributes significantly to the conditions of atrocity.

Connections

This is always simultaneously a test of one's own presence and proximity to others and atrocities occurring. Questions of responsibility arise for artist and audience members, as it is particularly intrinsic to live performance art for the artist to become a presence that explicitly illuminates implication in what transpires in the immediate situation.

The issue here is around accepting a level of responsibility for how the various gestures and reactions that emerge within a performance action might impact positively or negatively upon those watching and, by extension, the social situation(s) we exist within.

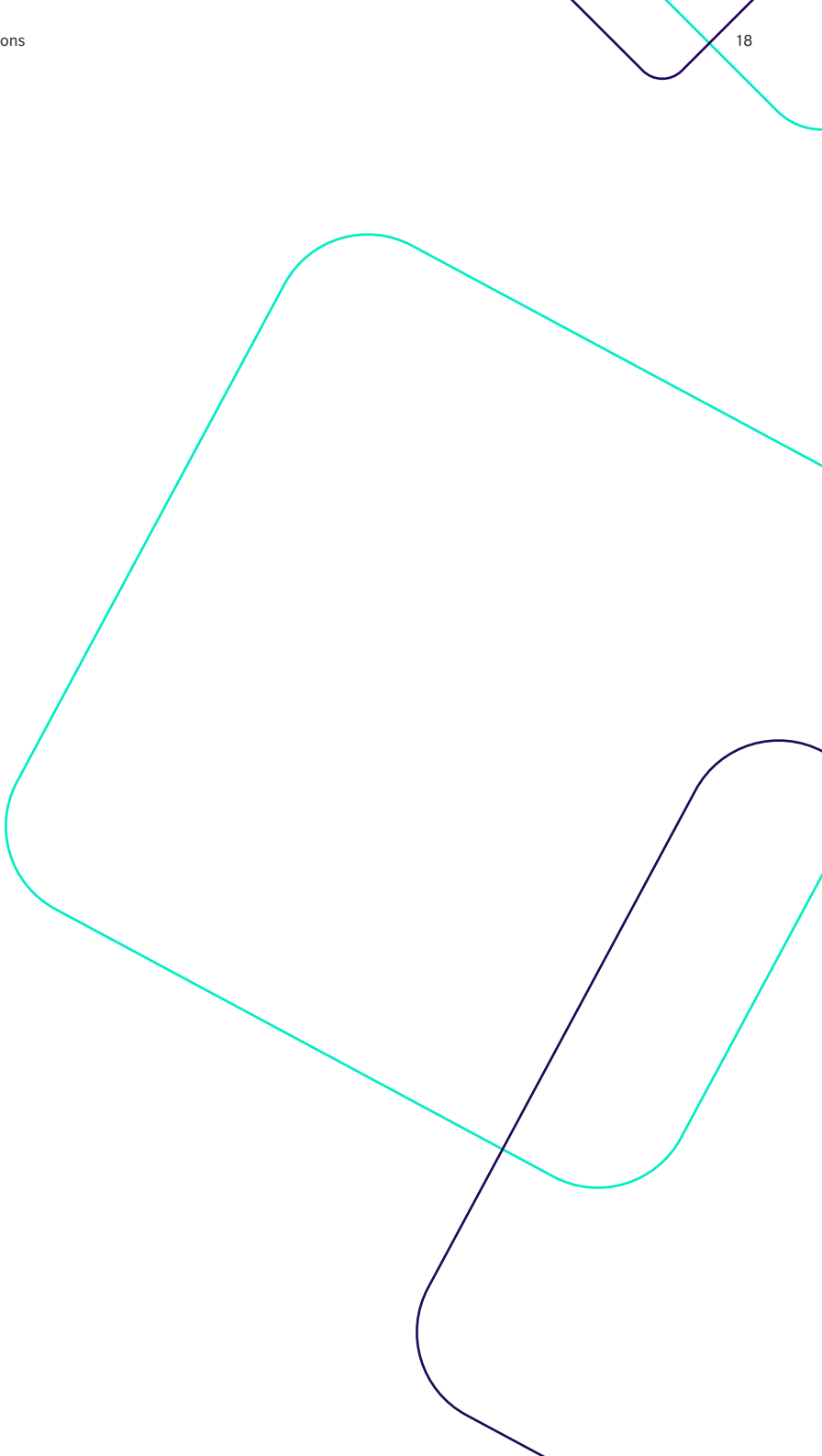
As well as the fact of being physically present within such work, the artist has also, by extension, been understood as a social presence in proximity with others within public space. Working live in this way emphasises an ethical connectivity and the impossibility of constructing any single autonomous body as a neutral, objective entity.

Transformative potential

Finally, for the artist, in certain ways the success of making work can be explored against the proposition of not actively and visibly responding to situations of oppression and division. In simple terms, doing something may at least prevent from contributing to the silences and inactions that can precipitate violence. Importantly, the transformative potential of performance art was also particularly understood to relate to the progressive impacts of repeatedly developing and sharing performance gestures. Where the persistent practice and contextualising of art can contribute to gradual positive transformations in the conditions of atrocity. By taking positions on societal issues there is potential to resist complacency in self and others, to actively learn from communities, to engage, remind, confront, and to be challenged in return.

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Mediating via Materiality: Continuing Critical Conversations around Child Sexual Abuse in Australia

Megan Deas, Kerry McCallum and Kerry Martin

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Introduction

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA) was a ground-breaking national inquiry held in Australia between 2013–2017. The RCIRCSA amplified the voices of victims and survivors and changed the discourse around one of society's most devastating, long-silenced crimes; the failure of institutions to protect children in their care. Systemic abuse was uncovered in educational, religious, sporting and state-run institutions, most prominently within the Catholic Church. Evidence emerged through the Royal Commission's 57 widely publicised public hearings, 8000 private testimonies, its seven-volume final report and the 2018 National Apology to the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions. The revelations made global media headlines and forced the communities in which these institutions operated to reckon with the legacies of abuse (McCallum and Waller, 2021). They spawned the community movements and artistic responses that are the subject of this chapter.

Our essay is based on a panel discussion at the *difficult conversations* symposium held in Canberra in March 2022. The panel brought together academics, community organisations and artists who are variously researching and responding to the Royal Commission. Here we draw on the words and images of panel members to explore two creative responses to the Commission's findings in which material objects have facilitated difficult conversations

about its revelations. Maureen Hatcher is the founder and Karen Monument is Chair of LOUD Fence, a community-driven movement based in the city of Ballarat that uses colourful ribbons tied to fences of institutions implicated by the Commission to acknowledge the trauma of victims and survivors. Megan Deas manages the Australian Research Council-funded *Breaking Silences: Media and the Child Abuse Royal Commission* project (2019–2023), which analyses the role of media, journalism and social media activism in reporting on and responding to the RCIRCSA. She is researching the role of visual activism in responses to the Child Abuse Royal Commission. Textile artist Kerry Martin uses a reparative aesthetic to encourage audiences to confront the testimony of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church by disrupting church authority and fostering ongoing conversations around painful events.

'No more silence': Community, creativity and conversation at the Ballarat LOUD Fences

On May 21st, 2015, bright colourful ribbons were tied to the front fence of the former St Alipius Boys' School site in Victoria Street, Ballarat. The ribbons were placed there by a group of Ballarat locals who were responding to the revelations from the RCIRCSA regarding allegations of historical abuse that had occurred at this Catholic institution. The organisers invited the local community to tie brightly coloured ribbons on to the fence as a show of support for those who suffered as a result of child sexual abuse there and at other



Figure 1. Close-up of ribbons tied to a church fence in Ballarat, Victoria. Image: LOUD Fence (2020).

local institutions (LOUD Fence, 2022).

LOUD Fence founder Maureen Hatcher described the process and rationale for choosing an array of coloured ribbons to break the silence around child sexual abuse in Ballarat:

We had the discussion about what color ribbons we should have because of course, there's ribbons for every cause these days and everybody was coming up with different colors for particular reasons and emotions. And in the end, we decided on an assortment of colors, any color, it didn't matter. And I called that particular fence 'LOUD Fence', and loud because there'd been too much silence (Difficult Conversations, 2022; see Figures 1 and 2)

In the weeks after the first ribbons were tied to the fence at St Alipius school, the Ballarat community heeded the LOUD Fence organiser's call, with ribbons tied to fences of other institutions. Hatcher told us that:

...what happened was any fence that had ribbons tied to it, as a show of support, became a LOUD Fence. So it was really a grassroots movement. And it took off, and I think just because it's such a simple thing to do, but it meant so much to so many people (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Scholars have analysed the work of LOUD Fence from the disciplinary perspectives of cultural heritage (Wilson & Golding, 2018; Hodges, 2019), criminology (MacDonald, 2021) and social justice (McPhillips, 2021). Wilson & Golding highlight the 'performative and dialogic facets' of the LOUD Fence campaign's activism, seeing the ribbons themselves as texts that disrupt the pre-existing cultural – and often, Catholic – heritage of the institutions targeted (2018, pp. 863–864). Kerry Martin, whose creative response to the RCIRCSA we will discuss later in this essay, draws on Dormor's (2020) work to argue that in addition to the inherent materiality of textiles, they also possess a language – they can be metaphors and metonyms, texts with political messaging, or they can translate abstract concepts into tangible form.

This chapter builds on the discussion of the unspoken dialogue between the community of Ballarat, the institutions themselves and their victims and survivors, to argue that the ribbons are also a powerful metaphor for voice due to their potential as a creative and communal project.

Megan Deas articulated the materiality of the LOUD Fence ribbons:

The ribbons themselves, before they are tied on the fence, are neutral material objects, but they allow us to make our own meanings. They carry with them, kind of a reminiscence of childhood. Not only do we have this widespread understanding of ribbons as a commemoration, or memorial remembrance, but they also spark memories of childhood. And I think that in that way, even without saying a single word, they are loud because they can confront some powerful emotional reaction in the viewer (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

This emotional reaction is a key aspect of the ribbons' effectiveness as what Hendricks, Ercan and Boswell describe as non-verbal 'aesthetic-affective forms of communication' (2020, p. 65), where such types of public, community-driven awareness-raising projects use imagery and even material objects to create connections across disparate publics. The ribbons can therefore be regarded as a form of what Wendy Kozol terms visual advocacy (2014, p. 7). They bear witness, not to the unspeakable acts of abuse disclosed by victims and survivors during the public and private hearings held by the RCIRCSA, but to the community's efforts to stand in solidarity with those affected.

In discussing the visibility of the multicoloured ribbons juxtaposed against the more sombre and solid buildings, Deas went on to speak of how the ribbons got traction and became a widely understood symbol of the places where institutional child sexual abuse occurred, saying: 'Obviously it was covered in the press. And I think part of the reason is because of the inherently photographable nature of the ribbons on the fences' (Difficult Conversations, 2022; see Figure 2).

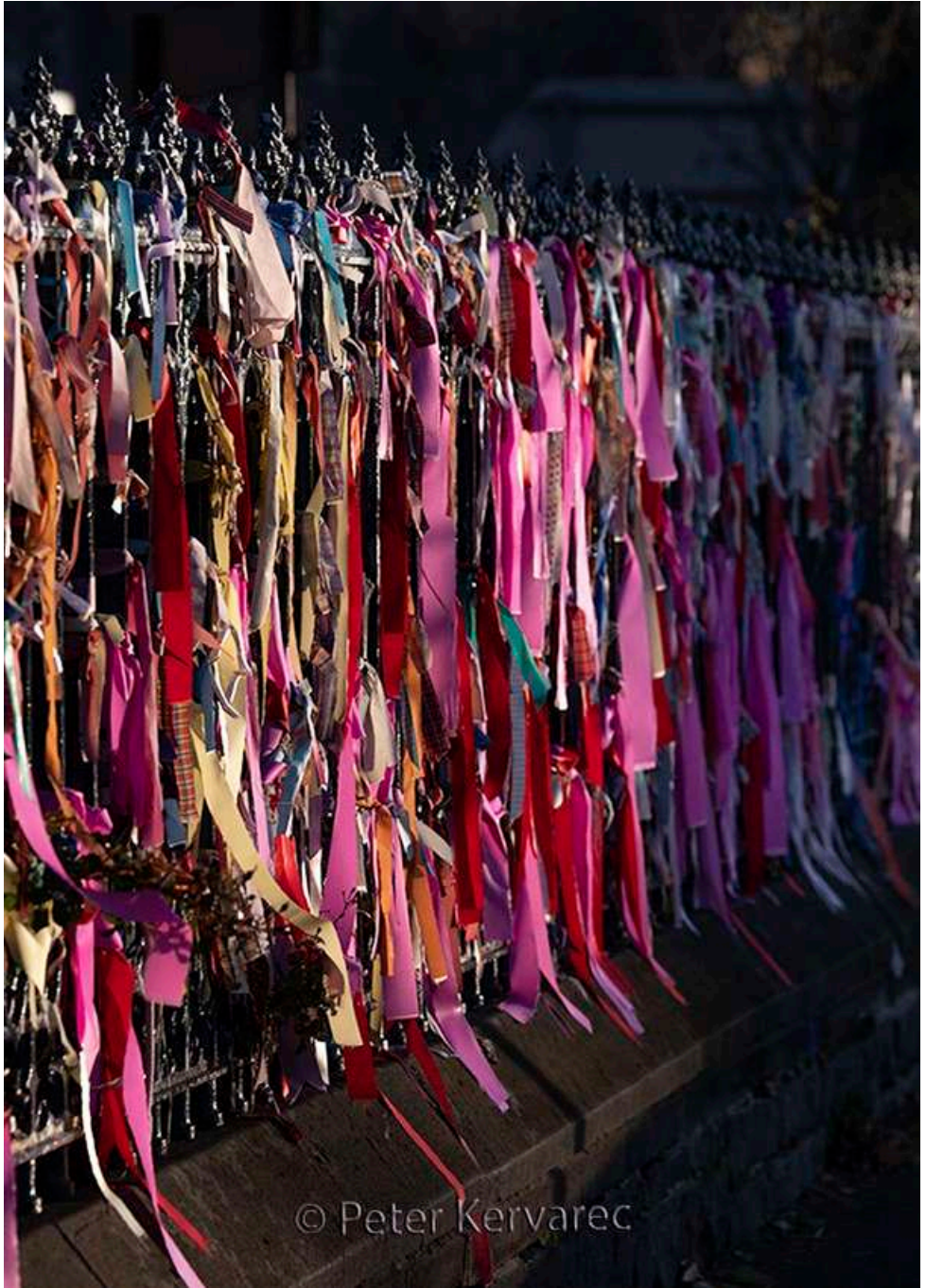


Figure 2. Ribbons tied to a metal fence in Ballarat, Victoria. Image: P. Kervarec (2020).

While the material objects themselves may function as a silent mediator between the victims and these institutions, the power of the broader campaign is its role in bringing individuals together at the sites: simply the act of volunteers tying ribbons to a fence can pique the interest of passers-by, and opens up an opportunity for them to ask questions about the ribbons. This engagement can spark a difficult conversation about what occurred in these places, and how the community might acknowledge and support victims and survivors in their midst. Karen Monument articulated the community reckoning that took place around the fences:

But the LOUD Fences themselves are where some amazing conversations and some really difficult conversations start to take place. It's also about different times when we're at the fences and not everyone agrees with us. Not everybody supports what we're doing with LOUD Fence. Some people are quite aggressive in the way that they come to the fence, and the way that they want to take on people that are there at the time (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Monument, who is now the Chair of LOUD Fence Inc, reflected on how the fences became sites for a divided community to hold, at times, painful conversations in the wake of the Royal Commission that had seen Ballarat positioned as the 'epicentre' of child sexual abuse in Australia (Marr, 2013).

...that's the important part of LOUD Fence. It is about being able to have that really difficult conversation. It's about being able to have, you know, have that chat with the person who's saying 'get this down. This is terrible. This is not what we want to see. We need this out of our psyche; we need it out of our community. It's all over and done with now, it's time to move on'. And it allows us to sit or stand and have that conversation to say it's not over. It's not over for so many, and there's such a long way to go with a lot of people's healing. There's an enormous amount of trauma that sits around these sites across Ballarat

and wherever our LOUD Fences are (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Hatcher agreed that LOUD Fences could elicit pain while confronting the most powerful of institutions:

Not everybody likes us and what we do, and I think there are certainly people within our community and with communities worldwide that say it is sort of soiling their brand and they're finding it really difficult to separate their faith from their religion. And we understand that those people find it incredibly difficult when they're confronted with ribbons on the church fences, etcetera. But we have actually been trying to work with those communities (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Over the past seven years Hatcher and Monument have helped build LOUD Fence from an awareness-raising movement into an incorporated advocacy and survivor support service. Hatcher explained some of the reparative activities spawned by the LOUD Fence movement to aid community recovery:

We've had a project called Continuous Voices, which was funded by the City of Ballarat, and they brought in artists and had them complete trauma informed training, and survivors were able to choose a number of workshops that they could attend. Works of art came out of that, whether it be writing, photography, sculpture, etc, and they were displayed. That worked incredibly well because what we've realized in these seven years is that the connection is probably the key to all of this and having survivors connect has been probably the main thing that seems to work (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

This new entity, named LOUD Space, provides another physical site at which survivors can meet and connect, which is not as emotionally charged as the institutional sites where LOUD Fences have sprung up. It enables a different kind of conversation to emerge: one that does not centre on the trauma of those affected by



Figure 3. Kerry Martin, Guilty #1. Image: K. Martin (2022).

the institutional abuse. Nor does it foreground the perpetrators of this trauma, and the often-sensationalised media reports of their past sins.

‘Guilty’: The reparative aesthetic and the possibility of textiles as objects of social activism

Textile artist Kerry Martin’s doctoral research responds to the testimony of hundreds of victims and survivors subjected to child sexual abuse in Australia, focusing on the Catholic Church. Her project explores three key concepts: the reparative aesthetic – an approach to art that confronts shameful social histories while rejecting the common anti-aesthetic style of most socio-political art; the deployment and effectiveness of using beauty as a legitimate aesthetic strategy; and the ethical concerns and responsibilities of the artist-as-witness.

Martin explained the reparative aesthetic as ‘an approach to art-making that allows us to confront what Susan Best (2016) terms shameful social histories, without stirring up defensive attitudes towards inherently disturbing topics’. Best’s aim is to ‘show that

the representation of shameful issues in art can transform the affective tenor of the subject matter...and facilitate attention to the wrongful actions and disturbing events...[F]or this to happen, however, the audience needs to be engaged rather than shamed’ (Best, 2016, p. 9). Viewer engagement promotes learning and ongoing conversations, and in the context of art-based commentary, a different format for stories to continue to be told (see Figure 3).

Drawing on Dormer (2020) Martin argues that textiles have the capacity to hold people’s attention. Objects made using textiles can be two-dimensional or multi-dimensional, textured, intricate and complex, or plain and simple. There is scope for introducing detail, removing elements and incorporating a range of different materials. Most importantly, we ‘know’ the materiality of textile work, and even if the story it is telling is unfamiliar, many of its physical qualities are not. We get it. Relating her work to the LOUD Fence project she observed:

We know about cloth from the moment we’re born till the time we die. So even in a gallery setting where you can’t touch, ... when you’re looking at a textile object, you know what it feels like. You know how it



Figure 4. Kerry Martin, Wear the Weight of Their Stories (detail). Image: K. Martin (2022).

might move, you know what the weight of a garment or making of garments might feel on your body. So that's how I'm using textile. And I love the connection with the ribbons as well (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Martin's approach to her creative output is a direct response to victim and survivor testimony. She has been inspired by the courage of those who have testified in public or private, through the Royal Commission processes, journalistic documentaries and non-fiction works. For example, The ABC three-part documentary *Revelation* (2020), an exposé of priest perpetrators, contained particularly relevant and compelling survivor testimony that guided the artistic response. These exceedingly raw and powerful public releases of shame and guilt led her to ask how she might represent the Church taking on the shame – shifting it from victims and survivors and placing it where it rightfully belongs. In subverting ecclesiastical clothing, she is attempting to indicate the weight of stories that the Church needs to wear and is, in effect, reimagining the archive to create a counter-narrative from the official position (see Figure 4).

Martin reflects that textiles can be familiar, playful, universal. She says: 'the reparative aesthetic is about subtlety, and a gentle and a more hopeful approach than the normal kind of brutal political art' (Difficult Conversations, 2022; see Figure 5). But she is also reflexive about the ethical considerations of creating work such as this. Whose stories is the work telling? How can she tell these stories by amplifying the voices of victims and survivors, without reinterpreting them? By using written testimony and journalistic accounts of abuse as primary data sources, Martin is mindful that she is interrogating other people's stories.

This raises the question of an artist's moral and ethical 'right' to make work about a subject where they have no lived experience and from which they are removed, due to what Best (2016) calls the secondary witness position (i.e. someone who wasn't there or involved). By reimagining and not retelling, by

shifting shame, Martin has attempted to ensure, that in Lindroos & Möller's words, she does not make work that results in the '... dispossession of survivors' intimate stories and memories' (Lindroos and Möller, 2017, p. 44). Her artworks invite the viewer, rather than confront or challenge them, to contemplate the lived experience of an unseen other.



Figure 5. Kerry Martin, Suffer. Image: K. Martin (2022).

'A little bit magic': Materiality and the metaphor of voice

In this essay we have reflected on how the material aspect of the two approaches is so effective in sparking this difficult but necessary conversation. Considering both LOUD Fence and Kerry Martin's art, we find that materiality renders the difficult conversation tangible, making it both personal and public. Figure 6 is a powerful example of the how the ribbons have become a symbolic *and* tangible focus for the difficult conversation taking place in Ballarat. Deas asks: 'Is the ribbon or artwork a cloak, a magic shield? In what ways does it challenge or undermine Church authority?' Hatcher's response captures the essence of the question:

I always say once they're tied to a fence they take on quite different meaning. They're, I don't want to say magical, but to me they really become a little bit magic, in that they become a survivor's voice. That's what they're representing. So to see them, you know, *en masse*, means that there's lots of survivors that just need support and need the institutions to step up, really. And I think that that's where LOUD Fence is a reminder to them that more needs to be done (Difficult Conversations, 2022).

Yet despite their vibrancy, textiles are inherently fragile: Camhi notes that textiles are 'notoriously difficult to conserve' (2018). The LOUD Fence ribbons in particular are evidence of this, with Figure 7 illustrating how the ribbons, after being tied to fences, have been worn by the weather, by the sun, and by time. When this inevitable deterioration occurs, some of these weather-worn ribbons are removed from the sites with 'great reverence and care', as the text in Figure 7 indicates, and placed in dedicated spaces such as art installations or archive storage. Yet in other instances, even five years after the handing-down of the RCIRCSA's final report, recently-tied ribbons are still being cut off fences under the cover of darkness by those who do not

want to acknowledge the harm-caused to individuals and the broader community that the RCIRCSA uncovered. The community activity of removing and replacing the ribbons is representative of the town's ongoing struggle for recovery, and the ribbons remain a metaphor for both the strength and fragility of victims and survivors.

Wearing the weight of shame: Subverting authority and empowering survivors

Both projects use material objects to subvert institutional authority and empower victims and survivors by giving them a voice. Wilson and Golding note the 'significant power disparities' between the institutions targeted by the LOUD Fence campaign and their victims (2018, p. 863). The work of Martin and LOUD Fence is therefore inherently political; they are grass roots artistic responses, intended to spark conversations that foreground the voices and experiences of those who have suffered at the hands of such powerful institutions. Child sexual abuse is often difficult to think about: it is too abhorrent, it happens behind closed doors, its taboo nature means that it is often not spoken about when it does happen due to the shame that victims and survivors are made to feel. These textiles, the ribbons and the ecclesiastical vestments, are a tangible representation of this most difficult subject and powerful symbols of disruption. Monument said:

It is about restoring people's sense of self. So it is very much about what we can restore and bring back and I don't want to say repair because that's not the right word. I think restoration is a far greater word. It's a stronger word. It's about healing. It's about people getting to a place where they can sit in both the comfort and the discomfort of what happens in this space around us (Difficult Conversations, 2022).



Figure 6. Handwritten text on a ribbon tied to a fence in Ballarat, Victoria. Image: M. Hatcher (2019).

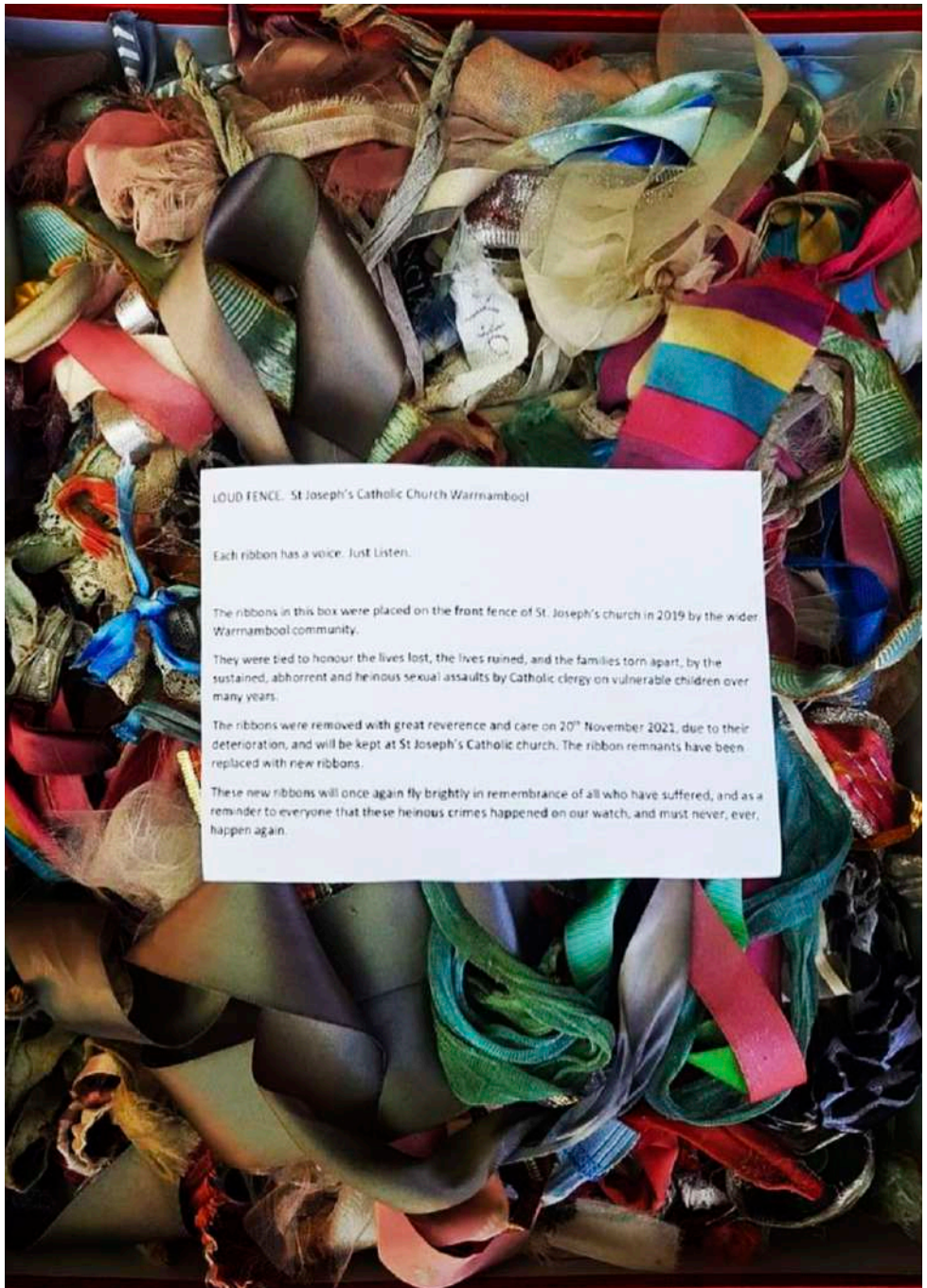


Figure 7. Ribbons removed from the front fence of St Joseph's Church Warrnambool, Victoria. Image: LOUD Fence Instagram (2022).

Similarly, the reparative aesthetic does not aim to repair what has occurred, or to make whole again. Best argues this is an impossible ask. Instead, acknowledging the futility of repair she says ‘...it incorporates the damaged’ into its outcomes (Best, 2016, p. 81). Difficult conversations are necessary to enable victims and survivors to restore their sense of self, to enable their communities to demonstrate support, to confront viewers with these uncomfortable truths and to shift public discourse. The ‘magic’ of the textiles, and the creative use of textiles in these two instances, is that they highlight how art and community can facilitate this necessary work.

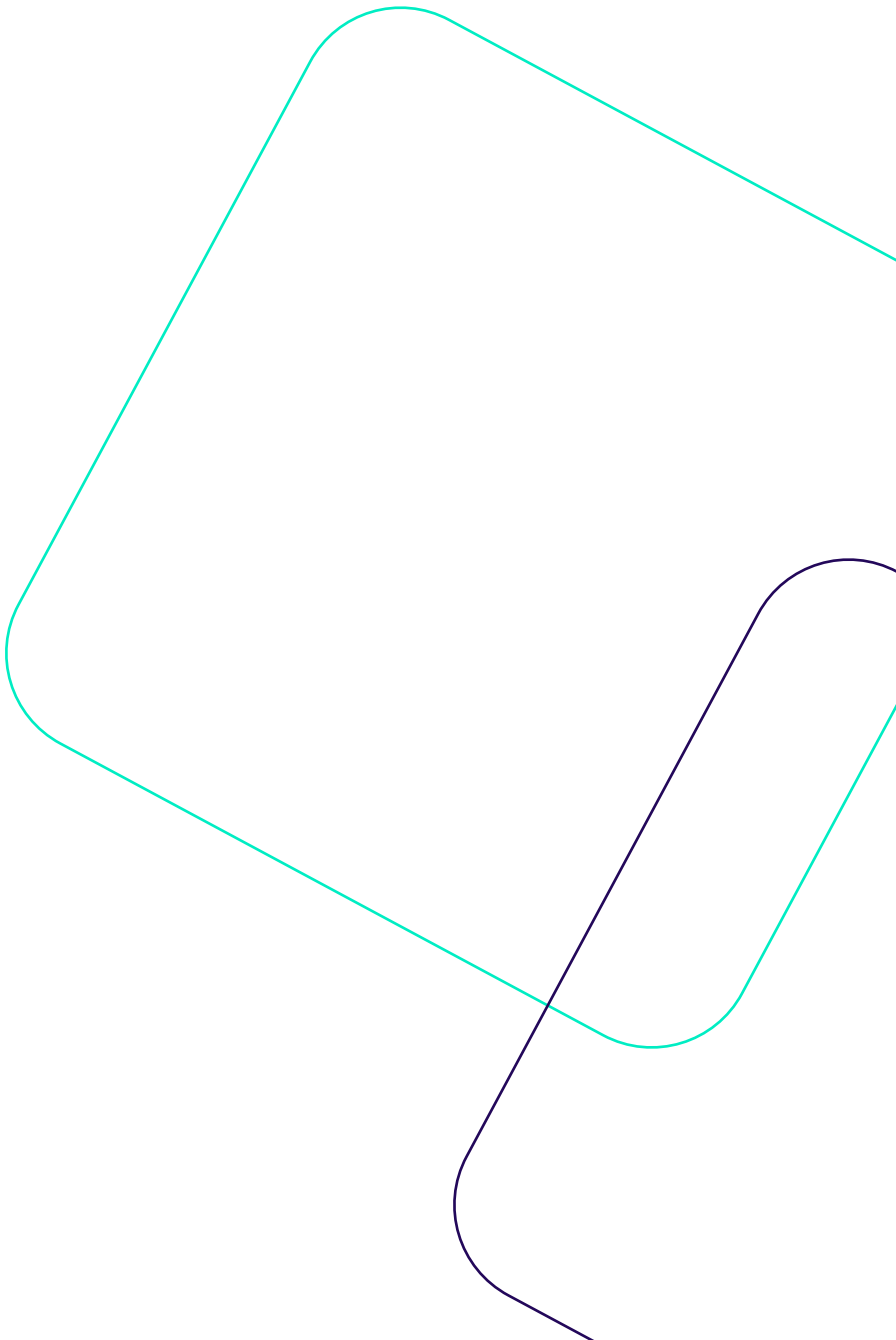
Conclusion

In our difficult conversation we explored two ongoing projects that capture the power of materiality in bringing community together to confront painful histories of institutional child sexual abuse. Both LOUD Fence and Kerry Martin identify that the fragility of the material object is at the same time its source of strength. The beauty of the material object, whether it be a simple colourful ribbon or a complex artwork, confronts the violent crime of child sexual abuse and subverts the ugliness of past silence and denial by powerful institutions.

The LOUD Fence ribbons are a powerful metaphor for voice due to their potential as both a creative and communal project. They are both symbolic of the community’s reckoning with its past, and a tangible site for ongoing conversations about recovery from trauma and community restoration. The ribbons and Martin’s artworks do not shy away from conflict but are performative. They amplify and draw attention to the issue through their creativity. In doing so they invite the viewer to bear witness to the burden of the victims and survivors and share the responsibility of collective restoration.

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Re-enactment as Conversation: Yoshiko Shimada's *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*

Vahri McKenzie and Jen Webb

'Since Plotinus', writes Joseph Tanke (2019, p. 486), 'Western art has been consecrated to beauty, and beautiful art has been understood as the achievement of good form'. But alongside this interest in beauty and form, art has been committed to politics and perspectives, equity and rights. Consequently, and particularly since the start of the modern era, artists frequently initiate or participate in 'difficult conversations'. This might manifest in the form of direct action (Turner, 2005); new ways of constituting community in difference (Smith, 2013); or through the sorts of art works and art practices that incorporate both direct and oblique critiques of political systems, entrenched privilege, and social inequities (Turner & Webb, 2016). For Jacques Rancière, such activities are necessarily both political in nature, and instances of what he terms *political dissensus*. This is very similar to the idea of difficult conversations that animates this volume because *dissensus* is not a conversation among political equals, but 'a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard' (Rancière, 2011, p. 2).

Art is a very productive domain in which to pursue such conversations. Not because it has an authorised voice – it does not, in any real way, since it is largely outside the dominant social and political paradigms (Rancière, 2004) – but because it offers a different perspective on material realities from what is commonly in the social conversation. This allows it to take up 'difficult' issues: the problem of decolonisation, for example; the place of women and social minorities; how history is remembered, and how the future is imagined.

Yoshiko Shimada, a contemporary artist who is wholly immersed in difficult conversations, has been tackling such issues in her public art for several decades. Born in 1959, she has lived, worked and studied in Tokyo, and in the USA, Germany and Denmark. She has included installation, video and performance in her art practice, and exhibited internationally, showing works that engage the silences of history and the present; the legacies of a masculinist culture on women; and the problem of unthinking patriotism or nationalism.

Much of her early work gazed squarely at Japan's participation in World War II and historical war crimes, and at her own imbrication in her culture. This is evident in her series of photo-etchings, *Past Imperfect* (1992–93), which presented confronting images of the so-called 'comfort women', sex slaves of the Japanese military, many of whom were Korean. (In this chapter, we follow the widely used convention of signaling the untruth of the term 'comfort women' with inverted commas, except when directly quoting or naming.) The triptych 'White Aprons' (1993), by contrast, offers three representations of Japanese women, appropriated from wartime photographs. They include a woman learning to shoot, a housewife cooking, and members of the Dai Nippon Kokubō Fujinkai, a women's organisation established to support the war effort. In a direct contrast to the representations of 'comfort women', Shimada also presents images of the 'patriotic mother', the 'sacred mother', dressed in the distinctive *kappōgi* (white apron) adopted as a symbolic

uniform during the war.

She has continued to produce work on, and in collaboration with, survivors of this disaster, while also directing a critical gaze at the Japanese women she saw as being complicit with the war crimes. For example, 'Look at Me, Look at You' (1995) was a hauntingly beautiful installation of two dresses. The first is a white wedding dress, referencing the modern, westernised Japanese woman. The second is a cotton kimono covering a Korean *chima-chigori* (traditional dress), referencing the military abuse of Korean women. Between the garments is a one-way mirror, hung so that the Korean side is obscured, the Japanese image reflected back onto itself.

Shimada's artworks, and her commentary in artist statements and media reportage, directly break the silences of history. She critically addresses discourses that ignore the ugly aspects of history, and/or unproblematically exonerate those in power for their responsibility for the suffering of others. As such, her interventions effectively bring history into the present, crafting a sense of time that Homi Bhabha calls the 'past-present' – where no matter how hard one scours the record of the past, it lingers there, a 'ghost or trace that inflects the present' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). The 'past-present' enables a conversation that fills out the interstices between the past and the present. In an artist statement Shimada wrote in 1993, she explains the argument of her work, and why she is still making work about something that happened decades ago: 'Why now the W.W.II? and why women? Because we have avoided thinking about this for too long' (Artasiamerica, 2015). There is a wound on culture that needs to be treated.

Her more recent work, under the title *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* (2012–), directly addresses that wound through the medium of performance, a mode that can bridge differences even before a common language is found, because because the process of embodiment archives collective memory and expresses an affective position that critiques without words (Sabiescu, 2020). Her performances draw on

and echo the *Statue of Peace* sequence of works, the first of which was proposed by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan, and erected in 2011 in Seoul. This bronze statue was commissioned in honour of the one-thousandth weekly Wednesday Demonstration, a protest in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul that has been held every Wednesday at midday since 8 January 1992 (Son, 2018, p. 147). Designed by sculptors Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung, it depicts a girl or very young woman in traditional Korean dress, seated beside an empty chair. Her hands form fists and rest in her lap; her expression is composed; and she looks strong and dignified, with 'a little bit of rage', according to Kim Seo-kyung (from an interview with the artists cited in Son, 2018, p. 150).

Shimada has performed her version of this work a number of times, in significant and often contested locations. In these performances, she sits silently next to an empty chair, or, depending on the site, next to the titular statue of a 'comfort woman'. The work's impact depends upon co-location with such statues – or with a viewer's knowledge of these statues – which are now proliferating across South Korea, and across the world, in communities with Korean populations, e.g., the USA, Canada, Germany, and Australia. The dissensus generated by their installation means that the statues are themselves participating in this 'difficult conversation'.

There are important distinctions between the statue Shimada is 'becoming' and the *Statue of Peace* that is her model. First, the Statue is itself, present, while Shimada's performance is of one who is becoming, and becoming *specifically* a statue of a Japanese 'comfort woman'. Jessica Nakamura's study of Shimada's *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* is attentive to the potency of the work's title, noting that the use of the present progressive verb signals its 'representational and transgenerational entanglements' (Nakamura, 2020, p. 81). The silences and silencing of the facts surrounding 'comfort women' mean that the artist cannot be a Japanese 'comfort woman': as Nakamura observes she has no living model to replicate.

Moreover, because of the narrative of Japanese women's wartime complicity – a narrative presented in much of Shimada's earlier work – her performances are necessarily ambiguous and tentative: not yet become but always becoming.

A further distinction, one that draws attention to the complicity of some Japanese women during the war (Yamamoto, 2021, p. 80), is signalled in her choice of performative elements such as costuming. This echoes her earlier works on the different experiences of Korean and Japanese women during the war, as in 'White Aprons' (1993) or 'Look at Me, Look at You' (1995). In these performances their shared status of being women is reflected in Shimada's skin and clothing being painted bronze, like the bronze statue; but their differences are reflected in the costuming: the girl in the *Statue of Peace* wears a Korean *hanbok*, while Shimada wears a Japanese kimono (Yamamoto, 2021, p. 83). Further, writing about the *Statue of Peace* (though not about Shimada's re-enactment), Elizabeth Son shows how the empty chair next to the girl develops meaning in an active way, inviting viewers to physically enter the work: 'The empty bronze chair holds memories of the "comfort women" who are no longer with us and anticipates the next person who will take a seat by the bronze girl in solidarity' (Son, 2018, p. 158). Focusing on peaceful actions, Son describes the many 'performances of care' the *Statue of Peace* elicits, such as dressing the bronze girl against cold weather and leaving her gifts (2018, pp. 147–175). Son suggests the position of the chair next to the bronze girl and facing the Embassy of Japan invokes those who gather to protest and 'invites us to become part of a chain of co-presence' (2018, p. 158).

Shimada's performances take up this invitation, attending to both the awareness-raising work that performances of solidarity can achieve, and the critical nuance required to address difficult matters. But in Nakamura's view, the empty chair in Shimada's *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* is more complex than the chair used in the *Statue of*

Peace. While that statue clearly signals solidarity with Korean 'comfort women', Shimada's performance, writes Nakamura, 'does not provoke empathy' (2020, p. 83), and her empty chair 'can cast the viewer as "comfort woman" or soldier or others complicit with the system' (Nakamura, 2020, p. 83). This seems to align with Shimada's own logic of life and of practice which she describes as 'a tool of self-examination and communication. In order to know who I am (an Asian, a Japanese, a woman), examining the recent past history of Japan and the role of women and what we have done to the people of Asia' (Artasiamerica, 2015). This suggests that her 'difficult conversations' are held with herself, as well as with the perpetrators and the enablers of violence and injustice.

The first performance of *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* took place on the footpath outside the Japanese Embassy in London in 2012 (Figure 1). The location of the performance and Shimada's pose explicitly recall Seoul's *Statue of Peace*, and, as with that work, Shimada sits beside an empty chair. Following the London performance, Shimada performed *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* in front of Japan's National Diet and the Yasukuni Shrine. For these events, photographs were taken before the authorities interrupted the performances (Nakamura, 2020, p. 86). In the Tokyo performances, Shimada wears a *kimono* and her mouth is taped shut, but the empty chair is missing. It could be that the riskiness of the performance sites made it too difficult to set up an additional chair. Yet its absence from these performances suggests Nakamura's interpretation of the chair's role in recognising Japanese complicity may be overdetermined: here we see the chair enabling diverse engagement, which accommodates expressions of condemnation as well as solidarity.

In 2018 and 2019, Shimada collaborated with Tomorrow Girls Troop, a feminist social art collective based in East Asia and on the internet (Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'English home'; see Figure 2). On the Los Angeles' site



Figure 1. Yoshiko Shimada, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*. Image: Y.Shimada (2012).



Figure 2. Tomorrow Girls Troop, *Against Forgetting*, and Yoshiko Shimada, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*. Image: Sit Weng San (2018).

of the *Peace Monument of Glendale* (an exact replica of Seoul's *Statue of Peace*), Shimada performed *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* while sitting in the bronze girl's empty chair. At the same event (18 February 2018), Tomorrow Girls Troop debuted *Against Forgetting*, which connects 'the plight of comfort women and our current reckoning with sexual harassment', with actions including reciting a statement for solidarity, handing sunflowers to the bronze girl, and hugging Shimada (Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'Against Forgetting LA'). The collaboration was repeated in Seoul at the 1385th Wednesday Demonstration (1 May 2019; Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'Against Forgetting Seoul'; see Figure 3). For this performance Shimada sat amongst a sea of seated protesters, facing the Embassy of Japan like the bronze girl, but not in her empty chair.

Tomorrow Girls Troop credit Shimada's role in their collaboration for a nuanced articulation of difficult issues. They highlight differences between the treatment of Japanese and Korean victims resulting from 'the intersection of colonialism, war time mobilisation and gender', and note Shimada's insistence that 'equating the experience of Korean "comfort" women and Japanese "comfort" women isn't right' (Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'Against Forgetting Seoul'). Further, they link this to Shimada's choice to sit 'a respectful distance

from the original statue' (Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'Against Forgetting Seoul'). Such careful deliberations in performance choices and in the accompanying messages disseminated using internet platforms enhance both the critical impact and the expressions of solidarity in *Against Forgetting*. Any sense that Tomorrow Girls Troop's work is merely amelioratory has to reckon with the unsettling aspects of their work, such as performing in strange pink rabbit masks (Tomorrow Girls Troop, n.d., 'TGT pink mask').

Beyond the collective gatherings that accompany many of the transglobal manifestations of *Statues of Peace*, Shimada's *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman* has 'transplanted a contested space surrounding the issue of "comfort women" to other places, forging multiple platforms for facilitating meaningful discussions' (Yamamoto, 2021, p. 83), and activated a new generation of socially engaged performance artists. In the months following Shimada's Seoul performance, artists around the world posted online images of themselves seated next to an empty chair, or in the empty chair provided by a *Statue of Peace*. All adopt the carefully placed hands and composed face of the bronze girl; but it is more accurate to say they adopt the stillness and solemnity of Shimada's work. Shimada produced a digital arrangement of 21 of these images, published



Figure 3. Yoshiko Shimada, *Becoming a Statue of a Japanese Comfort Woman*.
Image: Kwon Homan, Kim Sunhee

in *The Korea Times* (Bahk, 2019).

Nakamura points out that, for most audiences, Shimada's short, sometimes spontaneous performances are mediated by, and experienced through, visual documentation. Given Japanese silencing of the 'comfort women' issue, Shimada's photographic and video documents 'challenge the current archive and amend it for future generations' (Nakamura, 2020, p. 86). For scholars of performance arts, the relationship between performing bodies and their archival documentation has long been a vexed one. Philip Auslander's *Liveness* (2008), for example, problematised the status of live performance in a culture dominated by mediated culture. More recent scholarship has emphasised the mutual and reciprocal relationship between performing bodies and their related documents. Rebecca Schneider's study of re-enactment art argues that, in contrast with art-historical analyses of performance in which documents follow (and replace) ephemeral performances, performing bodies are, in fact, '*already* a matter of record' (Schneider, 2011, p. 92). Live performances contain echoes of the past that are archived in collective memory and embodiment: 'striking a pose partakes of reenactment, and reenactment defers its site in multiple directions' (Schneider, 2011, p. 161). At the same time, Schneider argues that archives are not static, but active mechanisms that perform the act of saving; archives are '*another kind of performance*' (Schneider, 2011, p. 108). Rather than letting Japanese 'comfort women' be doomed to 'cultural habituation to the logic of the archive' (Schneider, 2011, p. 98), a logic that assumes authenticity and fixed authority, Shimada amends the archive with a performance that is documented in photographs, which are re-re-enacted, photographed, and passed on again.

Shimada's re-enactments of the simple gesture – sitting silently alone or next to another woman – powerfully communicate resistance to the erasure of difficult truths. All the performances we discuss are linked in 'a chain of co-presence' (Son, 2018, p. 158)

and, we argue, those connections are significant to their cumulative impact.

The seated figure next to an empty chair, provided by the Kims' original sculpture and maintained as a variable in Shimada's re-enactments, enables one re-enactment to link to the next. The power of a re-enactment performance is seen in the way repetitions of the work transfer embodied meanings from one performance to another, critiquing without words. Documentation of these performances extend the work's reach, and invite others to participate, adopting the pose themselves and sharing that through images.

The internet culture of shared images that makes this kind of broad participation possible is powerful, and collective actions resist the losses of memory and justice for 'comfort women', sustaining the difficult conversations that are so much a part of this issue. Democratisation of this sort does not necessarily mean the actions are less politically pointed or authentic. The immersion of internet culture in our lives illustrates the fluidity between performing bodies and their related documents. It is through an image that most of us will experience the work, but these are images in dialogue with a gesture which can be readily experienced and reanimated. In viewing these images, we may spontaneously imagine how each was made by staging the simple gesture of sitting in a chair. Even as we sit here right now, we may become, for a moment, a statue of a 'comfort woman' ourselves.

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'Red Dresses'

Kathleen McCracken

My poem 'Red Dresses' responds to an installation art project called *The REDress Project* by the Métis artist Jaime Black. First exhibited at the University of Winnipeg in March 2011, Black's work demands attention to one of Canada's most distressing social crises and challenges viewers to engage with what is without question one of the nation's most difficult conversations. Focussing on the racialised and gendered nature of violent crimes against Indigenous women, *The REDress Project* raises awareness of the epidemic of missing and murdered First Nations, Inuit and Métis women across the country.

As a direct result of colonisation, historical trauma, racism, the residential school system and the sexual objectification of women, there are disproportionately high levels of domestic violence, rape and murder against Indigenous women and girls in Canada. While Indigenous women make up less than 5 per cent of the national population, they constitute 24 per cent of the women murdered in the country (Gwiazda, 2022).

In December 2015, the federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau established the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The aim of the Inquiry was to investigate the crisis and its causes, and ultimately end the high levels of violence. In 2019 a final report found that 'persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering high rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA¹ people' (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). The

report issued 231 Calls for Justice directed towards governments, institutions, social services, industries and all Canadians. This was followed in 2021 with a National Action Plan, which confirmed the government's commitment to realising the goals of the Inquiry and ending the violence.

Determined to take action, Black initially collected 500 red dresses and displayed them on hangers indoors and outdoors at the University of Winnipeg. While their emptiness represented loss and absence, the colour red evoked both violence and vitality. And as Black learned from an Indigenous friend, red is the colour spirits can see, it calls the women's spirits back to the human world to be heard by their families and communities (Gwiazda, 2022). She subsequently mounted the installation across Canada and the United States. In art galleries and universities, in town squares and legislature buildings, gatherings of red dresses haunted built and natural environments. Black's aesthetic response proved a powerful reminder of the issue of violence against Indigenous women. Whether viewers knew nothing about the violence or had experienced the loss of a loved one, the exhibition created opportunities for dialogue and for hearing the silenced voices and stories of the women.

While on an immediate level my poem makes a literary response to Black's *REDress Project*, it also engages with broader issues regarding the need for respectful intercultural dialogue. In 'Red Dresses' I have tried to address the questions – How can non-Indigenous artists be allies in creating work that is part of a decolonising project? How can we make art that acknowledges our outsider/colonizer

¹Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual.

status, yet raises the visibility of Native peoples and issues without taking space that is rightfully theirs? The speaker in the poem is positioned as a white woman visiting Jaime Black's installation. Viewing the dresses prompts her to think back to her own experience of her mother making a red dress for her when she was a girl, and provokes reflection on coloniser positioning in relation to the ongoing tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Red Dresses

On your mother's clothesline
a red dress

Sleeveless
low cut
fluted
empty

it shimmies in the zero
miles per hour
December freeze

Hung from winter-bare
birch trees, from wrought iron
railings, from lamp posts

in parklands
in museum plazas
in gallery gardens
in campus courtyards
in front yards
in back yards
on riverbanks
on roadsides
on highways of tears

from Prince Rupert to Iqaluit
from Kamloops to Winnipeg

they twist in breezes
they breathe

4000 red dresses

lace-collared, open-backed
flounced, floor-length, scoop-necked, strapless
A-line, pencil, mini, midi, first date
dresses

Each one is a girl
each one is a woman

missing, murdered, disappeared

each one is a mother, sister, cousin, daughter
auntie, wife, friend, beloved

each one is Cree, Salish, Anishinaabe
Blackfoot, Nisgaa, Innu, Métis

some were shot
some were stabbed
some were beaten
some were raped

some were walking home
some were leaving home
some were jingle dancers
some were shift workers
some had high heels
some had new jeans
some had hoop dreams
some had children waiting
some had nothing to their names
but their own names

Gloria, Helen, Belinda, Tanya
Isabella, Barbara, Amber, Tina

some were 14, some were 15
some were 20, some were almost 31

Red is lifeblood
red is female
red is the violence
happening
red is the colour
their spirits see
it calls them back
to be heard

it says *look*
it says *stop*
it says *this is not okay*

Do not intrude, do not walk away

touch the hem
 of each red dress
 let its texture return you
 to your mother's side
 her white hands fluent
 as snow geese threading
 Thanksgiving skies
 where she cuts and stitches
 washes and irons
 the red dress she is making

the one you put on
 for your sister's wedding
 your best friend's birthday
 your parents' ruby
 anniversary

those settled spaces
 their perimeters edged
 in safety

Brushing the limbs
 of wild mountain ash
 a red dress

let it say *listen*

let it say their names
 the girls, the women
 each one a story
 you are learning to understand

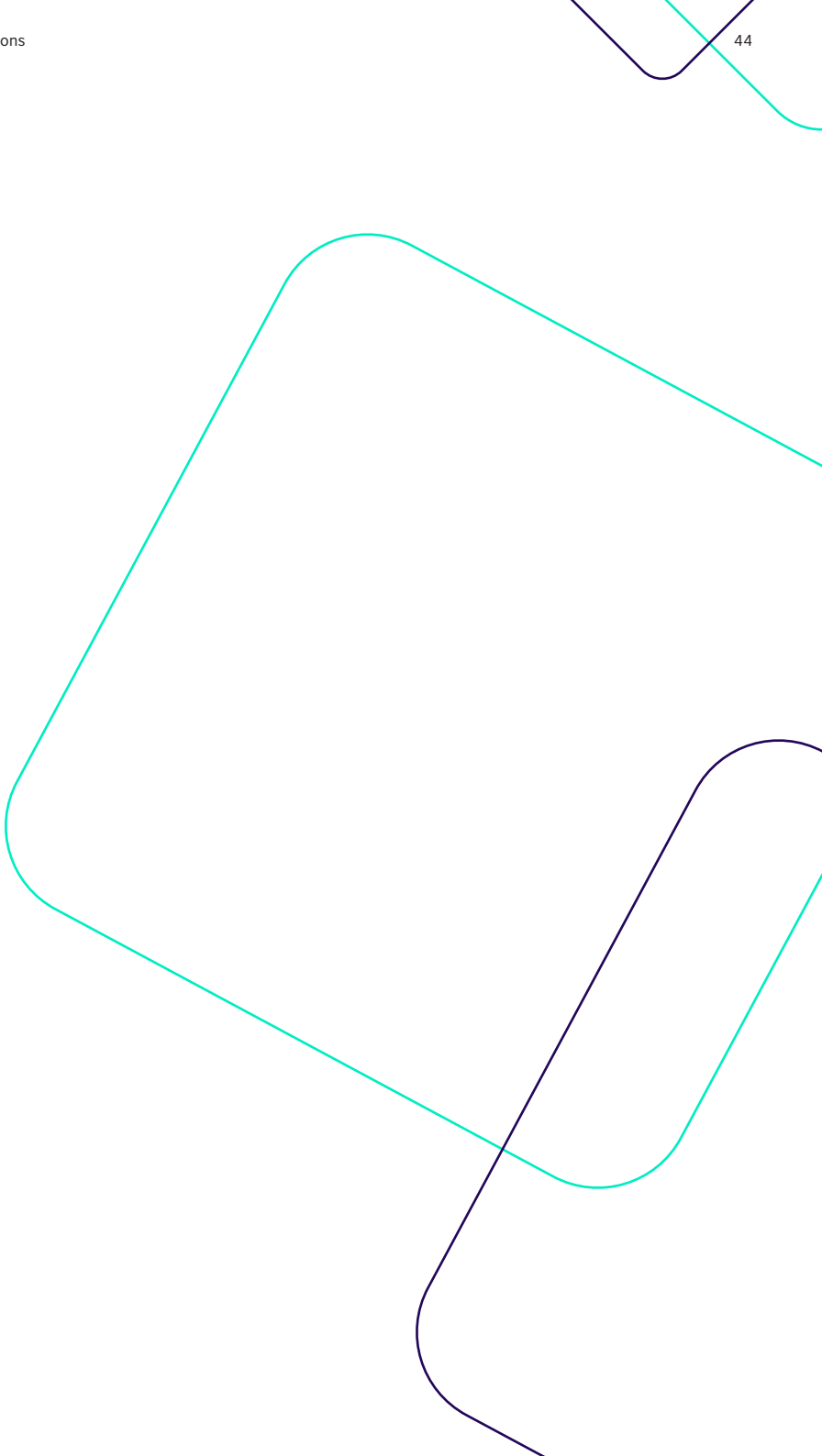
let it say *absence*
marks presence

let it say *we are here*

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Textile Language for Difficult Conversations: Reflecting on the Conflict Textiles Collection

Brandon Hamber and Roberta Bacic

Introduction

When first looking at an *arpillera*, appliqué patchwork picture textile made from scraps of material, originating in Chile during the Pinochet regime (1973–1990), it is easy to be misled by their often domestic and idyllic rural depictions. However, on closer inspection, many reveal stories of poverty and unemployment (e.g. waiting in queues for food, using soup kitchens, lack of services or water), but also brutal political violence, including murder, assault, disappearance, torture and acts of destruction (e.g. burning of homes) (see Figure 1, an *arpillera* on the theme of disappearance).

Arpilleras are also deeply personal. Images often include the clothes, photos, or fragments of material – from husbands, sons, and children who have been disappeared or killed – embedded in the pieces. Sometimes, the makers even use their hair on dolls stitched to the fabric.

The *arpillera* movement began through a network of clandestine workshops organised by *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* or Vicarate of Solidarity, affiliated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Santiago (see Agosín, 2008, Nickell, 2015 as well the work of Adams 2000, 2002, 2005, for a longer discussion on this process). This was a political movement, and so were the *arpilleras*. They are a form of subversive, predominantly women's protest art, yet shrouded in domesticity and ordinary life. Clare Hunter notes 'the most cheerful of fabrics, bright colours and pretty fabrics belying the stories of fear and desolation' (Hunter, 2019, p179). The domesticity of sewing provides 'a significant contrast to the

brutality of the repression' (Agosín, 2008, p56). The juxtaposition between the colourful materials and people, and sometimes cityscapes or countryside scenes, with political messaging and scenes of social injustice, is the hallmark of *arpilleras*. This is the essence of their power as an art form. Although the creation of dissonance between domesticity and the subject of war is not uncommon in textile work on conflict (Zeitlin



Figure 1. Cinco sitios de desaparición colectiva / Five sites of collective disappearance. Chilean *arpillera*, Irma Müller (1988). Photograph Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles. Conflict Textiles Collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=452>

Cooke, 2005), it was the 'perceived naivety' (and appealing aesthetic) of the *arpilleras* (Doolan, 2019, p1) that originally allowed their popularity to grow globally.

Arpilleras created in hidden workshops were initially allowed to be exported internationally from Chile despite the censorship of political art by the Pinochet regime (Doolan, 2019). As Adams (2000) notes, a border guard 'at the airport might at first glance assume they were innocent handicrafts' (Adams, 2002, p.46). Textiles sold abroad (although this became

more difficult over time, discussed below) were used to tell the story of repression outside the country, enhance solidarity and fund the women's activities in Chile during the dictatorship. Exhibitions outside the country took place, and groups such as Amnesty International published greeting cards and calendars featuring *arpilleras* (Hunter, 2019), all raising awareness of the repressive political context.

The purpose of *arpilleras*

Everyone has three lives: a public life, a private life and a secret life" (Gabriel García Márquez, in Martin, 2010, p271)

Arpilleras, particularly during the Pinochet dictatorship, served three main purposes. Firstly, they offered a form of income to the *arpilleristas*, who had often lost their husbands and children due to enforced political disappearance or were destitute due to economic inequalities prevailing in Chile at the time. Buying *arpilleras* became a way of expressing solidarity during the Pinochet dictatorship for those impacted by repression in Chile (Adams, 2000). The process of production and sale expanded significantly, with, at times, as many as 200 *arpillera* groups across Santiago (Adams, 2002).

Secondly, working in groups while making textiles offered a form of deeply intimate emotional support (Agosín, 2008). The sewing groups became safe spaces to share problems and end the isolation of victims of political violence (Adams, 2000). This psychological support function was never wholly divorced from processes of political solidarity, and the groups offered political education and socialisation. Talks accompanied sewing to educate women about the political, social, and economic context, as well as human rights and women's rights (Adams, 2000, 2002).

Finally, *arpilleras* served as a unique political language of protest. This built not only on the specific politics of Chile at the time, but the extensive way textiles have been used across history for political reasons (Bryan-Wilson,

2017). Marjorie Agosín argues that *arpilleras* are anything but 'an innocent art' but rather 'an art denouncing' through a 'cloth of resistance' (Agosín, 2008, p.55). Likewise, others have spoken of the textiles as the production of the 'denunciatory' (Adams, 2000). In an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) museum in 2014–2015, the *arpilleras* displayed, loaned by Conflict Textiles (discussed below), were described as 'disobedient objects' (Compton, 2014; Conflict Textiles, 2014) (see Figure 2, featuring women chaining themselves to the Parliament Gates in protest).



Figure 2. Encadenamiento / Women Chained to Parliament Gates. Chilean *arpillera*, Anonymous (c1988). Photograph Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles. Conflict Textiles Collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=222>

Textiles and the narratives of conflict

Arpilleras follow a long tradition of textiles as narratives (Agosín, 2008). Bryan-Wilson (2017) outlines how textiles have been used throughout history to pacify and radicalise. There are numerous examples of how 'women's work' in textiles has been used as a form of anticolonial politics, but also in situations of war, such as Afghan war rugs and Hmong embroidered story cloths (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, Zeitlin Cooke, 2005). From a different political perspective, sewing and quilting have been used for pro-war nationalism, such as US propaganda work around World War II (Bryan-Wilson, 2017). Bryan-Wilson argues that the *arpilleras*, like

other war textiles, speak a double language; that is, the grammar of the naive (for example, using doll-like figures), and at the same time, is a demand for justice and accountability expressed in a different tone (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.148).

The political nature of *arpilleras* is evidenced by how the Pinochet regime reacted to them. Although initially *arpilleras* were exported with ease, as their stories of repression spread and their popularity grew, the Pinochet regime became 'incensed' by their existence (Hunter, 2019, p.180). Some women were followed, had their houses raided and red crosses painted on sewing workshops (Hunter, 2019). *Arpilleras* rapidly became subversive and illegal forms of speech (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.162). They were forbidden to be displayed. In newspapers at the time, *arpilleras* were referred to as anti-government propaganda and branded 'tapestries of defamation' (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.151) and 'tapestries of infamy' (Bacic, 2011; Hunter, 2019).

However, despite the repression, or arguably because of it, the *arpilleras* movement continued to expand and inspire other women. Similar textiles were created in Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. European countries have also developed similar textiles, notably in Northern Ireland, Germany, Kazakhstan, Catalonia (Figure 3), Syria (Figure 4) as well as in Africa, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria and Chad.

The most extensive global collection of *arpilleras* and conflict-related textiles is housed with Conflict Textiles curated by author Bacic. At the heart of Conflict Textiles, which began in 2008, are nearly 400 conflict textiles. The majority of these are *arpilleras* and Conflict Textiles is the primary resource on *arpilleras* internationally. The physical collection is complemented by a matching online repository, setup in 2015 and hosted by the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) at Ulster University. This fully database-driven website includes photos and documentation on each textile and relevant events, as well as its origin and where it will or has been displayed, making the collection globally accessible (see <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/>).



Figure 3. Exilio de los Republicanos cruzando los Pirineos/ Exile of the Republicans crossing the Pyrenees. Catalan arpillera, Arpilléristas Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc (2012). Photograph Roser Corbera, © Conflict Textiles. Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/sea>

The Conflict Textiles physical and digital collection not only provides space for survivors of conflict to tell their stories through textiles at exhibitions and events but also allows users to learn more about conflicts transnationally in Chile, Northern Ireland, and many other countries. Conflict Textiles is proactive in its outreach and engagement. It stimulates and motivates academics, museums, textile artists, activists and civil society organisations to become involved with *arpilleras* and use the collection for comparative research and educational purposes.



Figure 4. The word that caused the outbreak of war – 'Freedom' Syrian arpillera, Sabah Obido (2020). Photograph Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles. Conflict Textiles Collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=439>



Figure 5. Exhibition 'Textile Accounts of Conflicts' as part of their International Conference 'Accounts of the Conflict: Digitally Archiving Stories for Peacebuilding'. Hosted by INCORE (Ulster University).

Conflict Textiles has developed a large network of textile artists, activists, researchers and writers worldwide and has organised or contributed to over 250 events to date, ranging from dozens of local exhibitions, conferences (Figure 5) and maker workshops to high-profile exhibitions. Exhibitions have taken place at Ulster Museum, V&A, Tate Modern, Galerie der Volkshochschule (Freiburg), Museo de la Educación Gabriela Mistral (Santiago de Chile), Museo Nacional de las Culturas (Mexico), Oshima Hakko Museum (Japan), Memorial da América Latina (São Paulo, Brasil), Museo de Arte Popular José Hernández (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and the Gernika Museum in the Basque Country, among many others.

Permanent rotating exhibitions have also been established at Ulster University's Magee campus Library in collaboration with the Hume O'Neill Chair in 2020, and in 2021 at the Queen's University Belfast library. There are also permanent displays at Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc in Catalonia, and at the Ulster Museum as part of The Troubles and Beyond Exhibition (2018).

Reflections: The language of textiles

It is not possible, within the limited space of this article, to fully outline the breadth and depth of the Conflict Textiles process. Likewise, it is only possible to discuss some of the implications of the collection and what each exhibition or workshop has meant. Below three implications are considered; the rapid spread and comparative nature of the process of textile-making, its gendered nature, how the language of textiles has evolved and the meaning of this for the future.

The expansion of the process of textile-making

'The facts are always less than what really happened' (Nadine Gordimer 1976, in Bragg 1990, p76)

The first known textile to travel to Northern Ireland was not from Chile but Peru. The Peruvian textile, titled 'Asociación Kuyanakuy, Ayer – Hoy' was brought to Northern Ireland in 2008 by author Bacic and transported by Hamber, for an art exhibition entitled 'Art of Survival: International and Irish Quilts' (see <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fullevent1/?id=70>). The exhibition was hosted by The Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Services in the Tower Museum and eight other venues in the City of Derry. The Peruvian piece, made by displaced Indigenous women, embodied the idea of textiles as a political language. It was used as 'testimony' by a group of women to the Truth Commission in Peru.



Figure 6. Who is down the mine shaft? Bhalagwe 1984. Zimbabwean arpillera, Enyandeni Women's Textile Art Group (2019). Photograph Shari Eppel. © Conflict Textiles. Enyandeni Peace Centre collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=427>

The publicity generated by the event, and the subsequent website of the conference, invigorated interest in Chilean and other textiles, building on the experience of Bacic, a native of Chile who worked on its *Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación*. The questions of whether similar works could be

produced in Northern Ireland was raised, along with requests from various countries for workshops and sharing. New works were also made reflecting contemporary and past conflicts (Figure 6 highlighting disappearances in Zimbabwe in 1984). The remarkable part of the Conflict Textile process is how the interest in textiles grew exponentially. Collectors of textiles emerged, and donations were made to the collection.



Figure 7. La Cueca Sola / Dancing Cueca alone. Chilean arpillera, Violeta Morales (1989). Photograph Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles. Conflict Textiles Collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=414>

Conflict Textiles struggles to deal with the demand for exhibitions, events, workshops and loan requests. Displaying textiles from different contexts side-by-side is now commonplace. At the same time, considering how the textiles ‘speak’ to one another is challenging. As Young has noted, there is a risk that comparing or displaying conflicts next to each other can result in dehistoricising and homogenising different contexts. For Conflict Textiles, this often means a deeply reflective process is necessary when asked to display textiles from different countries in the same exhibition (Young cited in Nickell, 2015). How Conflict Textiles should develop into the future, and if it should continue to grow within the confines of a small team remains an open question (see <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/contact-us/> for team members).

The gendered nature of textiles

‘Each day hands make the world, fire joins steel, the linen, fabric, and cotton cloth arrive from the combat of the laundries, and a dove is born out of the light: chastity returns from the foam.’ (Neruda 2003, p.626)

The vast majority of those engaging in textile work are women. Cloth, generally, is a highly symbolic and gendered material (Nickell, 2015). Marjorie Agosín argues that the *arpilleras* were a response to a ‘usurped maternity’ and the *arpilleristas* were a sisterhood that sought to negate masculine authoritarian power, oppression, and exploitation (Agosín, 2008). Others have noted that *arpilleristas* enacted their dissent within the realm of the typically feminine domestic handicrafts (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.164).

Representations of women in *arpilleras*, unlike other representations of women in war which typically represent women as needing protection or rescuing, are typically active. Women represented in the *arpilleras* are typically actively working, involved in domestic activities, and participating in protest. This represents the realities of the time when women in the *arpillera* movement were not only involved in sewing but took part in protest activities such as hunger strikes, street protests, cultural protests (such as the Cueca Sola dance where women dance alone with photographs of their disappeared loved ones, see Figure 7) and chaining themselves to government offices (Agosín, 2008, see Figure 2). Of course, this is also a challenge, as overly masculine violence means it is difficult not to see women as vulnerable victims in some pieces.

Much research is still to be done on ‘craftivism’ in protest (Doolan, 2019), and also why the *arpilleras* and similar textile works retain public interest. Despite the passage of time and change in gender politics globally, the gendered nature and visual representations of largely masculine violence against the backdrop of colourful textiles with a domestic



Figure 8. Irene, Marta, Hilda, Patricia: Ahora y Siempre Presentes / Irene, Marta, Hilda, Patricia: Now and Always Present. Argentinian *arpillera*, Students from Escuela de Cerámica (2013). Photograph Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles. Conflict Textiles Collection: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=273>

aesthetic maintain appeal. At the same time, although the process was and is a highly gendered form of protest, ‘there is no easy or set answer to the question of how *arpilleras* function as protest – much less as feminist protest’ (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.165).

Textiles and unfolding language

‘Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man’ (Levi, 2013, p.32).

The notion of language and textiles is integrally linked. Agosin talks about *arpilleras* as a visual living language of emotion through which the dead speak, connecting the dead and the living (Agosin, 2008). The language of cloth, says Karen Nickell, gives us a way to talk about the fabric of society (Nickell, 2015). Others too use textiles to find new ‘words’ to speak about conflict. Clark has used textile making with her students as a way of better understanding social issues (Clark, 2022). Engaging in textile art ‘encourages the student to develop a new language as they process and communicate their understanding of the text and their interaction with core elements of the stories we read and discuss in class’ (Clark, 2022, p6).

However, this new language is still developing and always unfolding despite the rapid growth of the Conflict Textiles collection. As Grabska and Horst (2022) note, ‘artistic expressions offer both a commentary on the past and the present, as well as acting and projecting change for the future’.

This is particularly true in times of uncertainty (Grabska and Horst, 2022, p184). Agosin (2008) adds that the dialogues that *arpilleras* create between the creations of the women and the living and the dead is continuous. For Conflict Textiles, the experience to date is similar; that is, the dialogue the textiles provoke about difficult political contexts is an unremitting one that seems to have no specific endpoint (Figure 8, a piece entitled ‘Now and Always Present’ made by students in 2013 to remember four young female students disappeared in 1977 in Argentina). Since the Pinochet regime in Chile, different governments have followed, from the repressive to the more progressive, yet at each stage, the stories of the *arpilleras* remain, arguably evolving with the language around them changing as the context evolves.

Likewise, the language spoken by textiles has also changed in Northern Ireland. Arguably how one interprets Irene MacWilliam’s ‘Peace Quilt–Common Loss’ from 1996 continues to change as the context shifts (Figure 9). The quilt depicting the more than 3000 dead in Northern Ireland is represented by red fabric sent to MacWilliam from Northern Ireland, Japan, the USA and England. The quilt in 1996 more than likely spoke to the importance of the need to establish peace, yet in 2022, two decades after the signing of the agreement in 1998, the piece now has to tell a new story – possibly one of the ongoing legacy of the conflict and unresolved legacy, truth and justice issues of the past.



Figure 9. Peace Quilt - Common Loss. Irene MacWilliam (1996, Northern Ireland). Image: Martin Melaugh. © Conflict Textiles. Ulster Museum History Collection. More: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts2/fulltextiles1/?id=1>

Agosin (2008) talks of *arpilleras* as converting personal pain into historical pain, which adds to collective memory; ‘the *arpillera* is sent into the world, outside of the personal body of the creator, so the recipient receives and can feel history’ (Agosin, 2008, p54). At the same time, however, it is unlikely that even the creators of the artwork could fully anticipate their longevity or the contexts the works might ultimately speak to or in (e.g. Chilean *arpilleras* speaking with Northern Ireland victims of the conflict, survivors of massacres in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and Syrian refugees in the 2000s).

For the Chilean *arpilleras* their textile practice was probably at the time ‘a way of life’ as they came to terms with the conflict around them (Grabska and Horst, 2022, p187). The textiles were a consciously chosen language to tell their stories. The works essentially framed a specific political struggle at a specific moment to conscientise the makers and sensitise the wider world to the repression in Chile at the time (Adams, 2002). However, the ongoing interest of the *arpilleras* and Conflict Textiles more broadly, suggests this framing of a specific moment in history is highly malleable and transportable, and its endpoint and true social value unknown.

Conclusion

‘War textiles are both a window and mirror’
(Zeitlin Cooke, 2005, p.26).

There is a growing recognition of the new spaces art and the visual bring to fields such as transitional justice (Kurze and Lamont, 2019). However, as alluded to above, the outcome of the creative and political works during times of conflict is unknown, specifically over the long arc of history. Creative practice can open the door for processing the memories of artists and audiences, leading to social change, but it can also re-erect borders between people (Grabska and Horst, 2022). Even today, despite the truths told in the *arpilleras*, Chile is spoken about as a society where political schisms between left and right politics remain deep (Vergara, 2022). The outcome of putting political works into a public space is highly uncertain, and as such, what art can do during political strife should not be romanticised (Grabska and Horst, 2022). There is also a risk that as conflict artworks are sold, or displayed in new and different contexts, they ‘lose’ their ‘denunciatory sting’ (Adams, 2005, p.539).

Yet, despite this uncertainty, the growth of Conflict Textiles, their use in so many diverse spaces, and the ongoing voices embodied in the *arpilleras* and other conflict textile art remain alive and vocal decades after their creation. This has partly been because the ethos of Conflict Textiles has always been to open difficult conversations through the textiles rather than close them down. Although there is no doubt the textiles in the Conflict Textiles speak to real historical and contemporary injustices, their display and cataloguing do not seek one unified narrative.

Cultural domains are ideally situated to provide inclusive spaces or open thinking, argues Karen Nickell, and textiles can play a role in this provision (Nickell, 2015). Likewise, drawing on Hufstadter, others have concluded that the open-endedness of works rather than definitive narratives is the most important lesson we can learn in conflict societies

(Armstrong et al, 2019). This requires a reflexive process when displaying works in the Conflict Textiles collection. One cannot fully presuppose what each textile is saying about the past and present, or how they are read at different moments and contexts.

Through the gradual acquisition of textiles, exhibitions largely free from commentary, and the creation of online spaces, accessible to the public allowing for interaction, the textiles are hopefully given space to speak for themselves. To this end, to draw on Rancière's (2010) words, Conflict Textiles as a collection is arguably a form of 'critical art' in so far as it 'refuses to anticipate its own effects' (Ranciere, 2010, p.149). The Conflict Textiles collection and allied activities' outcomes are never immediately apparent. The process expands through relationships and personal connections, growing and finding new venues within the limits of a small team and budget, while expanding its narrative footprint continuously. As a result, although the *arpilleras* were born out of a specific political context (as were other conflict textiles) and they cannot be completely divorced from these origins, over time they have increasingly become 'irreducible to the spatio-temporal horizons of a given factual community' (Corcoran, 2010, p.2); that is, the women who first gave life to them in some cases nearly fifty years ago.

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Difficult Conversations: Dealing with the Past in Heritage Spaces in Northern Ireland

Elizabeth Crooke

Summer 2022, at the entrance to its main exhibition area, the Ulster Museum in Belfast displayed the Derry Girls blackboard, a prop from the hit Channel 4 show (Figure 1). The board was central to the scene when pupils from two schools, one Catholic and one Protestant, in 1990s Derry/Londonderry, came together to explore their similarities and their differences – only to fill the board with stereotypes about the two communities. Their fictional school trip captured the essence of the experience of young people across Northern Ireland who participated in Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and its forerunners (Smith and Robinson, 1992, 1996). For many of these young people this was their first chance to explore aspects of identity and belonging, a topic avoided for fear of widening divisions (rather than the comedic chaos shown in *Derry Girls*). Although museums were sometimes the venue for such cross-community visits, few documented The Troubles, the conflict that had dominated the region since the late 1960s and caused 3,720 deaths and 47,541 injuries in a population of approximately 1.5 million. The lack of engagement with The Troubles can be attributed to museum practice in the 1980s and 1990s: contemporary issues were rarely explored in the network of mostly social-history museums; rapid-response collecting, which today is often a museum's response to crisis, was still decades off; and museum-initiated programming/ engagement activities, based around social issues was rare (Crooke, 2001a).

The result of caution around displaying and interpreting The Troubles was a learning and heritage landscape that was detached from

the reality that individuals and families were facing daily, instead focusing on more benign subject matters, such as folklife, archaeology and fine art. This was all in the pursuit of providing 'oases of calm' – considered then to be the most appropriate response of museums (Buckley and Kenny 1994). The display of the Derry Girls blackboard in the Ulster Museum in 2022 is indicative of the shift in the Northern Ireland museum sector. This shift reflects changes in museum practice nationally and internationally towards more consideration of social and contemporary issues (Crooke, 2007; Sandell, 2002). Given this was relatively new for the Northern Ireland sector, new methods needed to be learned and practiced (Crooke, 2001b). It also marks a local willingness for museums and heritage projects to contribute to peace building strategies in the region, such as *A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2005). This increasing engagement with The Troubles has been accompanied by critical and sometimes difficult conversations about method and purpose of the museum and heritage sectors, including recognising museums (whether publicly funded or independent) as politically engaged spaces (Crooke, 2010, 2021, 2023).

When the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was signed on the 10 April 1998, the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested the 'burden of history' could begin to lift from our shoulders. The experiences of the past three decades were too raw and too important for this 'burden' to simply dissipate. An opportunity arose in the new peace process power dynamic to lay claim to the



Figure 1. Derry Girls blackboard, Displayed at the Ulster Museum. Image: E. Crooke (2020).

past three decades, to take ownership of the narrative that would be shaped when writing The Troubles story in the context of the peace process. Post the GFA, there was unfinished business in the recognition of past experiences; in this new regime, The Troubles came to dominate the memory and heritage space, to be found amongst community museums, heritage trails, engagement projects, and new forms of memorialisation (see case studies in Crooke and Maguire, 2018). The community heritage project took multiple forms: the creation of oral history archives, such as the Dúchas, established by Falls Community Council (Crooke, 2007); makeshift museums recording individual and community sacrifice at the height of The Troubles (Markham, 2018); calls to preserve prison sites (Purbrick, 2018) and opportunistic tour guides within both communities, making the most of Belfast's addition to the sites of interest for dark tourism (Mannheimer, 2022). In each of these cases heritage practices, the formation of archives and collections, and museum displays are shaped by the social and political environment and interventions within it.

In Northern Ireland the heritage initiative, with a claim on The Troubles experience, needs to be approached with caution. We all create our preferred version of the past, but when we put that on public view, selecting objects, testimony, buildings and landscapes to authenticate that version of the past, we must be aware of the consequence of making that intervention in the public or civic space. Although the interpretation of the past as heritage is never neutral (Smith, 2006), in shared public spaces that past must always be scrutinised for what it reveals about social and political purposes. Arguably, a museum or heritage project is not the exclusive remit of the community that researches, collates and presents their story. Instead, the consequence of that initiative goes far beyond the immediate locality and those most intimately involved in the project. For instance, as well as celebrating or commemorating a local experience, a community heritage initiative can exclude, entrench differences, and be

used to justify division (Crooke, 2010; Markham, 2018). Such projects occupy a particular position in relation to critique. Often the initiative of a few enthusiasts within the community, the community heritage project is not always spaces of dialogue for the exploration of alternate versions of events, either from within the community of origin or from the 'other' political or social communities. Further to that, those outside the community may either feel, or be told, they cannot critique the community initiative, because it is not their lived experience. As a result, community-heritage initiatives may escape the scrutiny that can be posed at heritage and community initiatives developed by local authorities or centrally such as by National Museums NI.

In Northern Ireland the number of community-heritage projects has grown in the 25 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, many of which make a pitch for public finance. Difficult conversations are taking place across the region as organisations, with the knowledge and financial capacity to support such community-heritage projects, invite communities to think more critically about how they remember. These conversations are addressing the methods, purpose and consequence of such projects, both within the communities and without. As all concerned have got more experienced in these sorts of offer, new methodologies have emerged both from the museums themselves and in collaboration with funders, based on co-production with communities. In this climate, organisations and facilitators are offering support to enable publicly funded projects with the aim to make a positive contribution to a shared and better future, a central tenet to the past two decades of good relations legislation.

Difficult conversations in Northern Ireland's museum sector

For this contribution on 'difficult conversations' I have spoken to two individuals in Northern Ireland, both of whom have been involved in

supporting communities who are navigating contested histories associated with their local community. Both were selected for the insights they could bring to this conversation. Dr Paul Mullan, as Director of the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Northern Ireland, has been central to discussions on funding community projects in the region that have focussed on memory and identity work. Dr Collette Brownlee, Education Services Officer Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, in Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, has had years of experience of working with community groups to address identity issues.

In museum and heritage settings, the community project can be presented as being part of a regeneration or inclusion project, bringing individuals together to share interest in community histories. Such projects have been enabled by decades of peace-related funding from the Special European Union Programme Body (SEUPB) as well as interventions from regeneration/social development funds such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF, now the National Lottery Heritage Fund). In the remainder of this contribution, I document the character of the difficult conversations these individuals have had with community groups seeking support for their heritage-based projects. A new dynamic arises when the key person who can enable the community project to proceed (a funder, a museum council worker, or a community outreach officer) requires community members to ask themselves challenging questions about the purpose, value and potential impact of a heritage project. This dynamic encourages the community group to work in new ways, address their histories differently, and sometimes to engage with other perspectives on their past. For the funder or heritage practitioner, that conversation may be difficult because they do not wish to alienate the community groups and would rather encourage such dialogue. For the community groups themselves, they are brought on a journey that can be challenging, both for them personally and for other community stakeholders they need to bring with them. In

the most successful of cases the facilitator is also a learner, understanding better community priorities and changing their own practice to become one of sharing authority.

Since 1994, the Heritage Fund has invested £260 million in Northern Ireland on a range of regeneration and community projects (National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2022). Initially the funder was wary of projects that focussed on community identity, for fear such projects were politically motivated (Mullan, 2018). Nevertheless, confidence grew with notable successes. One such was the HLF-funded Diamond War Memorial project, led by a community-based peace building organisation, Holywell Trust in Derry/Londonderry. As a monument to those who died serving British Army regiments, it was rejected by nationalist communities. With the revelation that as many Catholic names as Protestant were on the memorial, the monument was transformed into a site for both communities. Paul Mullan reflects that complicating a narrative might seem counter-intuitive, but instead ‘thoughtful and informed complication can be seen as desirable’ (Mullan, 2018, p. 38). The Diamond War Memorial Project, and others like it during the Decade of Centenaries (a period of 10 years marking significant historical events in Irish history) challenged master narratives that have simplified historical understanding, exposing them to more plural interpretations.

This journey to recognising the plurality of history is difficult when established versions of history are key to a sense of identity and belonging. Paul Mullan recognises the difficulty of coming to terms with such revisions and trusting the motivations of those espousing research methods that can reveal alternative perspectives on the past. Whether within communities, or initiated by a funder, Mullan reminds us that ‘no discussions are neutral’ and project facilitators need to be upfront about the potential for challenge later on in a project’s lifespan. The method is one of ‘getting agreement from the start’, that everyone involved is willing to ‘push the binaries, because that’s the only way we really

start to properly explore' (Mullan, interview 17 October 2022). This method, he suggests, is essential to a democratic society, adding that embracing diversity and plurality 'isn't about trying to convince everybody to think the same way as you think. It's about embracing the fact that there is difference, and recognising that we won't always be able to agree' (Mullan, interview 17 October 2022).

In Northern Ireland, there is no room for complacency. Despite the examples of heritage practice that focuses on plurality and diversity, still new projects arise that can be seen in terms of, what Mullan describes as, pure propaganda, offering a politically motivated version of events that would cause division both within and between communities. In such cases, a project can take a 'fascinating Irish story' and turn it into a 'purely political project' (Mullan, interview 17 October 2022). The stakes are higher when public money is being used to fund new community heritage projects, because of the suggestion of endorsement. In such instances, 'difficult conversations' can only succeed if they are held between communities and trusted facilitators.

According to Mullan, the facilitator provides 'expert challenge' to enable groups to 'evolve their thinking and bring in other critique'. Mullan suggests by fostering an 'agonistic space', of constructive critique and dialogue, projects can 'evolve a narrative that satisfies a community' and 'speaks more outwardly to other people, coming across more honestly and not propagandist'. For Mullan this is an example of 'thoughtful democracy', which is a place where 'you can have conversations about difficult issues' (Mullan, interview 17 October 2022).

Shared authority at Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum

In her 29 year career Collette Brownlee has seen an evolution of museum practice to one that is more willing to critique museum purpose and operation, enabling the space to

be better suited to outreach and engagement work. For her, engaging in 'difficult conversations' within the workplace has enabled the museum service to think in new ways about audience participation in the museum, making it increasingly relevant. She suggests 'a museum cannot sit in isolation from what is going on outside', and it must address the historical themes that are critical to society, no matter how difficult that might be (Brownlee, interview 21 October 2022).

Lisburn Museum is located in a largely Protestant/Unionist City Council, and when Brownlee suggested the museum host a project considering 1916 Easter Rising, an event associated with the nationalist communities, her senior managers were initially hesitant. The new project built upon the engagement methods of a 'World War One and Us' (2015), which located family stories associated with the Great War. Using that approach 'The Rising and Us' (2016) revealed Lisburn's connections to the republican rising in Dublin. Brownlee described the project as 'risk taking work' and, despite the team's experience of other projects, at outset 'everybody was very fearful'. By adopting a shared authority approach, the participants and the museum explored the most challenging aspects, finding a way of displaying the event that encouraged inclusivity. At Lisburn shared authority was based around an engagement agreement, which allowed each contributor to explore and manage expectations. This built trust between the museum and participants, giving each confidence in the project method, purpose and potential outcomes.

This approach has enabled the museum to explore 'hard histories', including 'histories no one spoke about' (Brownlee, interview 21 October 2022). An opportunity for this came in 2020 when Lisburn Museum opened an online exhibition on the centenary of the 'Swanzy Riots', an event in the city's history that was not well known despite the scale of the events. The riots can be placed in the context of the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921), which included targeting of the Royal Irish

Constabulary by the Irish Republican Army. The assassination of District Inspector Swanzy in Lisburn in August 1920 triggered days of burning, looting and riots that forced Catholic residents of Lisburn to flee. This was a topic that had been pushed aside from local memory 'as not a very pleasant phase in the town's history' (Brownlee, interview 21 October 2022). Brownlee had not anticipated how the exhibition would resonate with colleagues who had witnessed riots and displacement during the recent Northern Ireland Troubles. The process of engaging with that led to 'difficult conversations' amongst staff, because we are still 'dealing with the aftermath' of the partition of Ireland in 1921 as well as the recent Troubles (Brownlee, interview 21 October 2022).

For the team at Lisburn Museum, engaging with challenging periods in local history is about ensuring the museum service is always relevant. By drawing attention to formative times, including moments in history that are not talked about because of perceived difficulties, the museum is having impact on its communities. Brownlee is convinced this is the service's ethical responsibility 'that has to be at our core, we have to tell all stories and we have to be there for everybody' (Brownlee, focus group contribution, 28 April 2021).

It's the method that matters

In Northern Ireland we are aware of the subject matters likely to lead to 'difficult conversations', and that underpinned the silences referred to in the opening of this paper. The initiatives explored in this paper are undoing the earlier practice of The Troubles not being considered in museums and heritage spaces. Further to that, innovative projects across Northern Ireland are interrogating the 'two traditions' model of belonging in the region, which was reflected in the Derry Girls blackboard. For instance, the exhibition *Diverse Perspectives on a Global Conflict: Migrant Voices and Living Legacies of World War One*, co-produced by researchers at Ulster University with North West Migrants Forum (McDermott, 2018), recognised

narratives of the First World War and its legacies beyond that associated with nationalist and unionist communities.

Co-produced panels brought in perspectives from places such as Poland, Guyana, the Ivory Coast, China and Cameroon. Thinking about new ways to represent identity and place is found in the research undertaken by Doctoral candidate Kris Reid (Ulster University), who is drawing on LGBTQ+ histories that can be told at our heritage properties and museum sites in Northern Ireland. Increasingly, such work is demonstrating the value of complicating the narrative.

In order to make these new projects work, it is not just a matter of addressing new topics in our museums, it is the qualities of those conversations had within the museum and between the museum and stakeholders. It's not necessarily what we are talking about, it's how we are talking about it. This is a concern about the *quality* of the conversation, that can bring us beyond the subject matter itself and reveal more fundamental attitudes within societies. Very often the most difficult conversation is the one that needs to take place early in the process, seeking agreement about method. Those are methods that include how we explore, when and with whom we critique, and the processes of listening and responding. An effective methodology asks about the inclusion of alternate perspectives and how they might be applied in relation to individual and community perspectives. The method explores how those contributions will be used and acknowledges that at times the conversations will be challenging and uncomfortable. Key to the success of such projects is feeling safe as individuals share their stories – confident about how their experiences will be received by those listening and how they will be used within and beyond a project.

Repeatedly at museum sector conferences and events, I hear the statement that we must be 'comfortable with being uncomfortable', when sharing experiences and points of view that challenge. These methodologies of using difficult conversations in a constructive matter

can only be achieved through confidence built via trust, which takes time to forge. Furthermore, these difficult conversations, and the need to build confidence, works in multiple ways – it is not just between a facilitator (funder or museum) and the community, it is also difficult conversations within the sector, including those who fund/support it, museums as not neutral spaces, and addressing the purpose, value and impact of museums and heritage.

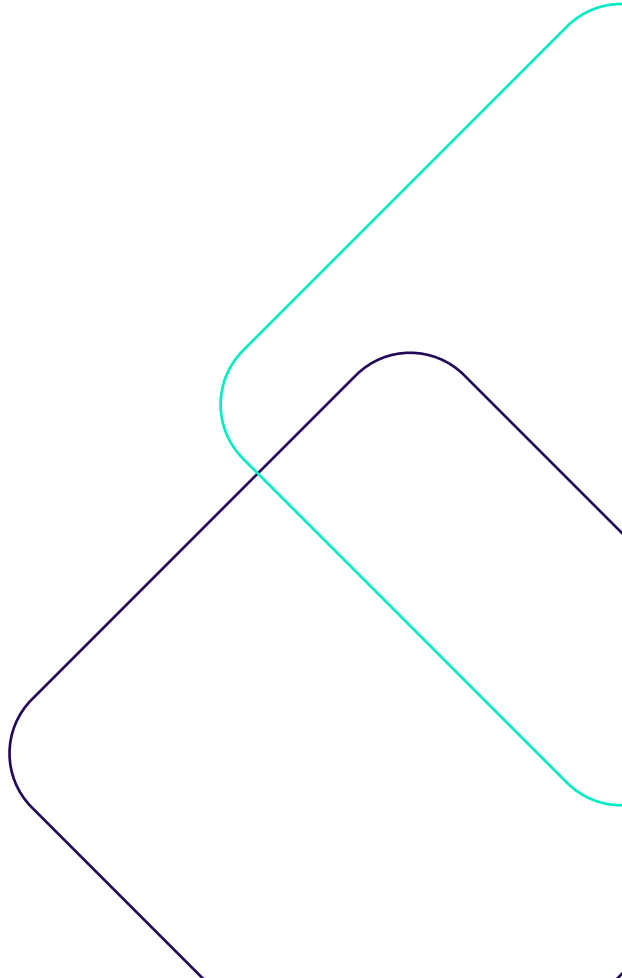
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On the edge of urban renewal

Katie Hayne



Figure 1. Katie Hayne, *On the edge of urban renewal*, (2017–2021). [Oil on reclaimed cupboard doors, 146 x 146 cm each]. Image: K. Hayne (2022).

These works are part of a creative research project documenting a contested urban renewal project in Canberra (Hayne, 2022). For three years I regularly visited a group of public housing estates as the residents were being displaced and the buildings demolished. I was an outsider to the housing community and sought to gain an insight into the complexities of gentrification in the context of lower socio-economic housing. Similar to Lynne Manzo's affordable housing research, I found that the residents expressed a desire to escape the stigma of public housing and at the same time a reluctance to leave and lose their attachments to place and social connections (Manzo, 2014, p. 402). In these works I have painted on cupboard doors salvaged from the demolition sites to communicate these conflicting emotions. The phrases are gleaned from my conversations with the residents, as well as from graffiti that appeared on the buildings and slogans used by property developers. The 1960s cupboard doors act as a nostalgic reference to the past whilst also symbolising the liminal position of myself, an artist/observer, and of the residents being dislocated from their homes – encapsulating the tensions between our real and ideal experiences of place.

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¹The spelling of 'Ngunawal' is taken from graffiti at the housing sites and the artist acknowledges some Aboriginal groups prefer the spelling to be 'Ngunnawal'.

Complex Care: Storying Country and Place with Creativity and Respect

Ashley Harrison, Bethaney Turner,
Wendy Somerville and Steve Brown

Australia was and continues to be an invaded continent. Story by story, its history is being reframed to respect the truths of First Nations people on whose Country (or territory) the nation is built.

In this chapter, we suggest that this transition requires attentiveness to the connectedness of humans and place. Humans are place-makers and places make humans. A place is imbued with meaning, produced in a space that is moved through, resided or built on, extracted from, mapped, named, thought about and remembered (Madden, 2010, p. 37). Though such processes are varied, and sometimes contested, relationships to Country and place are formed. In this chapter, our interest in the complexity of care is enlivened through stories of relationships between First Nations Australians and their Country and stories of connections between non-Indigenous Australians and place.

Storying is an act of creativity that can be a mode of thinking, means of shaping the world, and a way of forging collective action (Bawaka Country, 2015; Chao & Enari, 2021; de Santolo, 2019; Haraway, 2018; Van Dooren & Rose, 2016). The joint composition provided below allows us to attend to how care underpins creative endeavours that blur temporal boundaries, thus enabling experiences of active remembering (the past in the present) and active imagining (the present in the future). Through a storying approach, it is possible to bring diverse perspectives, materials, histories and values into respectful dialogue (Van Dooren & Rose, 2016; Walter, 2014). But this requires care-full and respect-full attentiveness to the places and

positionalities from which stories emerge. As researchers at the University of Canberra, we were brought together to participate in the *difficult conversations* symposium in March 2022 (Difficult Conversations, 2022). Each of our stories respond to research projects and personal experiences/interests. In this chapter our stories are woven into a narrative framework to draw out complex and multi-layered connections to Country and place.

The thread that weaves together our stories is the central theme of 'care'. Enacting care requires time, patience, trust and respect. We use care to mean the provision of what is necessary for the welfare, maintenance and protection of someone or something; and to look after and provide for the needs of that someone or something. While this meaning may be read as straightforward, the act of caring is, as we allude to in the chapter title, complex. Caring requires attentiveness to cultural, environmental and political contexts. It necessitates vigilance in the ways care is performed in relation to and by other humans, non-humans and places. As Puig de la Bellacasa notes, 'humans are not the only ones caring for the Earth and its beings – we are *in* relations of mutual care' (2010, p. 164). The stories we tell in this chapter speak to the contemporary complexities of care in ways that respond to the dispossession and marginalisation of First Nations Australians and 'caring for Country' (a complex notion related both to personal and group belonging and to maintaining and looking after the ecological and spiritual wellbeing of the land and of oneself).



Figure 1. On Cullunghutti looking across to the Cambewarra Range. Image: I. Somerville (2017).

The following accounts are grounded in our reflections on and feelings concerning care, Country and place. In each of the four stories, drawing on our disparate, eastern Australian research projects, non-human species are intimately entangled. Some are plants (lantana, blackberries, tussock grass and lavender), while others are animals (rabbit, fish, cattle, snakes, kangaroos and cockatoos). While it may not be immediately evident in our stories, we see an equity between the human, non-human and more-than-human (including spirits, creation ancestors, divinities) in the way that Country and places are made and experienced. Relationality also plays a key role in the place stories we tell. Relationality underpins First Nations ways of being, knowing and doing (Tynan, 2021). As with any stories, ours are layered. The layers themselves are not static but composed and recomposed through varied entangled multispecies relations that emerge across time and place.

Entangled care: Wendy's story

I am a Koori, a First Nations Australian woman from the South Coast of New South Wales. I am of Jerrinja Country, and my story comes from there. Bethaney, who you will meet in the next story, and I were co-investigators in a project experimenting with ways we might 'meet a mountain'. The mountain is on Jerrinja Country, a place of my ancestors and where my mother's family has always lived. The mountain is Cullunghutti (Figure 1), called Coolangatta by the coloniser who took the mountain.

Cullunghutti is sacred to South Coast people. It is the place where people were buried and is the jumping off point for the spirits of people to ascend into the skies to become ancestors. Kooris believe that everything in Country is related to everything else in Country; that there is connection of spirits and waters, people and rocks, skies, and ancestors, in fact all the entities in Country. In the research we met the mountain through walking on it, talking about it, being driven on it, listening, photographing and storying with it. Walking on

the mountain, I felt a connection to the deep past and all the things to be met there including the hated, pretty lantana entangled in native grasses and bushes.

We met many entanglements on the mountain; some are multi-layered and multi-metaphored. Entanglements that have always been, and some newer that are more nebulous. The enwrapping by lantana of other growing entities is growled at by local Koori people, Parks and Wildlife Rangers and owners of plots of Cullunghutti. They point to the nuisance of this introduced species; it should be treated harshly, pulled out, burnt, poisoned and controlled (Somerville, 2022). Unmentioned is that the lantana flower is made to attract flying things through which life is spread, calling to mind Ingold's concept of 'beings which, in their activity, participate in weaving the textures of the land' (2008, p. 1797).

The lantana travelled from Central and South America (Head & Muir, 2004) and was planted because colonial gardeners were attracted to the coloured flowers they produced. It is now classified as an invasive species. Lesley Head and Pat Muir (2004) describe conceptualisations of plant species' nativeness as belonging, and invasiveness as the way plant species interact with other species. Kate Wright argues that 'colonisation was a multispecies invasion' in which introduced entities altered First Nations Australian people's lands (2018, p. 83). Cronk and Fuller (cited in Head & Muir, 2004, p. 211) explain that lantana is not an invader of natural places, but of habitats that have been disrupted.

The entanglement of colonial and colonised is evident across, around and from the mountain. Division and separation are clearly visible in the way the mountain is known and acted on. Cullunghutti supports activities of wealth accumulation and extraction from the land which speaks to the imperatives of the colonising project. Each area is bounded by fence lines as if the mountain is many different entities exclusive of the whole. The delicate lantana is fierce as he pushes through barriers to claim an invader's space.

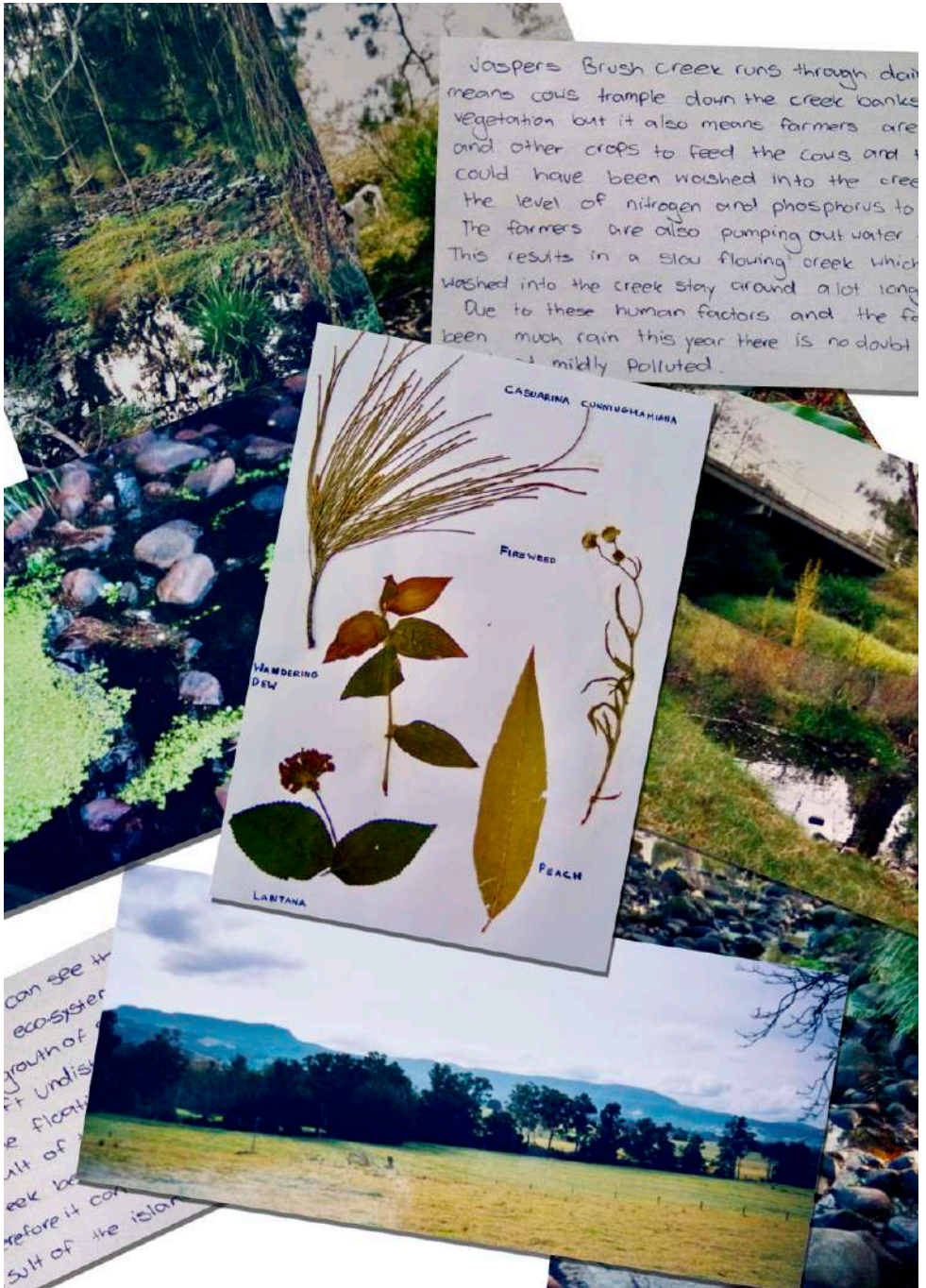


Figure 2. Recomposing Care. Image: B. Turner (2022).

Contested care: Bethaney's story

I ground my short story in the dairy farm of my maternal grandparents. This is the Country of Wendy's mother and, therefore, Wendy's Country and it too was disturbed; cleared of people and vegetation to make way for my ancestors to farm here.

At the edge of the farm runs Jaspers Creek, meandering its way out to Broughton Creek before flowing into the Shoalhaven River and onward to the Tasman Sea. These waterways move under the watch of Cullunghutti, the mountain that enlivens Wendy's story. I follow her lead here in turning to the issues of boundaries, biota and belonging and the possibilities that emerge from imagining better futures with, not in spite of, tense entanglements.

The Creek may mark the property's boundary, but this liminal space dominates my connection to this place (Figure 2). Cattle trampling on its moist edges cause enough disturbance to invite blackberries and lantana to take root. Lantana can be toxic to stock and blackberries restrict access to pasture. While the sites' former rainforest vegetation has been mostly eradicated, these invasive weeds make a mockery of persistent efforts to eradicate them. Two soaring cabbage tree palms on the creek flats remind us of what was here before; standing sentinel over a forever changed landscape.

Family desires to create distance from snakes, cockatoos and tussock grass also permeate my memories of this place. The greatest number of snakes I have ever seen were limp, hung in a row over a barbed-wire boundary fence. While their heads were a bloody pulp, luminous red bellies and black scales glistened in the sun. Growing-up I was told stories of cockatoos being shot from the farmhouse veranda to keep them from raiding the vegetable patch. Battles were constantly waged against the pervasive tussock grass; useless as a food source for cattle, it was laboriously dug out and burnt. Protection of family livelihoods translated into the removal of all that was deemed a threat.

But these contested forms of care – made possible as a result of the 'multispecies invasion' (Wright, 2018, p. 83) of this Country – nourished my family over generations. This care nourished farm animals, not only as commodities, but in loving ways that far exceeded their commercial value. The soil in the kitchen garden was shown ongoing care and attention. 'Plenty of shit', was my grandfather's mantra for growing its fertility. He spent hours collecting dried cow pats from the paddock before chipping and soaking them to produce a nutrient rich slurry that nourished a rich soil microbiome.

Gardens and farms are created through the marking of boundaries and practices of exclusion; that which doesn't belong is removed so that the lives and liveliness of others can be nurtured. How can we remake relations with people, land and our multispecies companions in the wake of such violence? Perhaps when 'plenty of shit' is composted with other ways of doing, being and knowing across time there are opportunities to recompose and reimagine more ethical and just futures.

Bluey: Ashley's story

Our Country, as I grew up to understand it, is located along the far South Coast of New South Wales. Along the coast are places that our family has strong connections to by past or present occupation. One such place can be found along the Moruya River, down by the aerodrome (or 'airport' as it is called today).

The history of the Moruya aerodrome is a story for another day. My Nan would tell me stories of events that took place pre-colonisation and food that could be gathered there, it was the site of an Aboriginal reserve in the 1800s, once a place where our family had a homestead (now demolished), and now it is an area in which a regional airport operates (my Pop and Great-Grandfather cleared the land for it). The site is not usual for an airport; it is a place of beauty on the mouth of a river-activated by the abundance of nature, blue skies, sandy shores, and greenery.



Figure 3. Bluey takes flight. Image: A. Harrison (2022).

In the 1990s, an Uncle (now gone) was one member of the Aboriginal community who set up camp here and protested the sprawl of development with the airport. Down by the river it is still undeveloped; it remains a campsite. We often went down to the area to watch the sea from the nearby break wall (my Pop and his family before were fishermen), we swam in the rock pool, or we visited the campground.

One memory of this campground, that I believe to be true, centres around the invader – the rabbit; his name was Bluey and he was once my pet. I recall his colour well; he was shiny like a raven – blue-black. Now I understand, we abandoned Bluey. But at four or five that is not how I remember it. Sometime, in the 1990s we took Bluey to live with my Uncle who was camped down by the airport and whose beard was also shiny and black just like Bluey's fur. I am not sure why, or who I went with, but I recall Bluey in a cardboard box as we passed him on. Here is where the story becomes patchy. What happened to Bluey? Did he live in the tent with my Uncle?

At the time, I had a book about Br'er Rabbit who managed to find himself entangled with a 'Tar Baby'. It was illustrated and I loved the story. Br'er Rabbit getting angrier and angrier that he was being ignored by the 'Tar Baby' who kicked, punched and headbutted him and got stuck more and more – the 'Tar Baby' was sticky and wore a hat. Yet, it was 'Br'er Rabbits' way of getting out of this bind that stuck with me; he tricked the 'Br'er' Fox' (who had planned to trap him all along) into throwing him in some 'brambles' (his natural habitat) so that he could escape. This was the story my mind at the time applied to Bluey's fate. As beside the campground and along the banks of the river, blackberry bushes and nettles were growing and he was in his element. I imagined Bluey had found a home here (Figure 3). It seemed he did. And sometime later, we saw the usually brown rabbits that populated the aerodrome with patches of blue-black fur.

Lavender love: Steve's story

On my property, Gozinta, yearly temperatures range from -8 to 44 degrees Celsius. And, as the property and I settle into a third straight La Niña weather event, it's been wet, wet, wet. Consequently, the ground has been saturated for months on end. These are not the well-drained soil conditions that lavender desires.

I love lavender. It's a tough plant. So tough, even the local kangaroos and wallabies won't eat it unless there are few other options – as was the case during the catastrophically hot summer of 2019–2020 in eastern Australia (El Niño on steroids). Despite the extreme heat, smoke and fires of that summer and, supported by occasional watering, my much-loved drought and heat tolerant Lake Condah Mission lavender survived. I was impressed.

But now (mid-spring 2022) the Lake Condah Mission lavender is, for the most part, dead (Figure 4). The once thriving bushes have turned grey, the foliage has dried, and the stems have become rigid. Minus eight-degree winter nights and sodden soils have done that.

Lake Condah Mission lavender is not the name of a species of lavender (the genus *Lavandula*, in the mint family, comprises about 30 species). Rather, I use the name to refer to the Aboriginal mission from which I collected it. Lake Condah Mission, which operated between 1867 and 1918, is located on Gunditjmarra Country in the southwestern part of the State of Victoria, Australia. Despite government efforts to destroy the mission in the 1950s (an effort to integrate Gunditjmarra survivors into the general community), the place has special meaning to the Gunditjmarra – a place entangled in family histories, meeting place, administrative centre and symbol of political struggle. In 1987, the mission site was 'returned' to Gunditjmarra Traditional Owners.

In 1999, I was involved with the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for Lake Condah Mission (Context Pty Ltd, 2000).



Figure 4. Lavender. Image: S. Brown (2022).

During one of many visits to this remarkable landscape, and with the agreement of one of the Elder Aunties, I collected three tiny snippets of lavender. The scraggly plant from which I collected the pieces, located near the bluestone ruins of one of the Mission-period houses, was one of few survivors. I placed the cuttings in my pocket, with little expectation they would survive.

But they did! On my return to Melbourne, I potted the stems into separate pots. After some six months, I gave to two colleagues, Chris and Kristal, one potted lavender plant each. Then mine died (neglect), as did Kristal's. Chris's thrived and she took new cuttings from her plant which she later returned to the Gunditjmarra and the mission. In 2016, I obtained cuttings from Chris' plants and grew them on my rural property, Gozinta. Here, they thrived until the winter of 2022.

The Lake Condah lavender on my property has not completely died, and some plants will survive. They're tough. I care deeply about these plants, their story, and the ways they elicit in me powerful emotions, both positive and negative. The ancestors of these plants were there when Australian Aboriginal people were incarcerated and remain in the place where Gunditjmarra now assert their presence, power and custodianship. Lake Condah Mission, a place where government tore down homes and dynamited the church, is now part of a UNESCO World Heritage listed property. I love lavender.

Storying as Action

Together, our stories express conflicting values and feelings around the theme of care. Each story references care in ways that stretch beyond the time and places described. Our storying has allowed accounts of ongoing invasion – by settler colonists and non-indigenous species – to be brought into view. The stories express a love for and a deep sense of attachment to places – Cullunghutti, Moruya aerodrome, a dairy farm and Gozinta. The stories entangle feelings for Country and place with emotional responses to multispecies

invasion. Lantana and lavender, rabbits and cattle are accommodated in our narratives. Some species are loved, some loathed; sometimes loved and loathed at the same time.

Thus, these stories are generative and tell of a multispecies invasion, through which the theme of care emerges. At times, care can be enacted in complex and unexpected ways. Certain practices of care and belonging have been privileged while others have been displaced, marginalised, excluded or even massacred. Through storying, we layer and reframe to bring into being a more ethical and just future that recognises the privilege, violence and trauma of the places and species we connect to. Drawing on the work of Turner and Somerville (2020), each personal story speaks to a layered, multi-material, temporally stretched process of remaking and reconfiguration that offers a productive metaphor and practice for creative, multi-modal storytelling in and of place.

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Speaking of Violence on Women's Country

Paul Collis and Jen Crawford

The town of Bourke, in far north-western New South Wales, is unceded Barkindji Country, and home to 27 other language groups. Bourke became a centre for Western pastoral and agricultural industry following white colonial settlement in the 1830s. By the late 20th century, the once-booming wool industry had been superseded by cotton, with cotton one face of a cut-throat industry of water harvesting and trade. From early in the colonial period, traditional and totemic trees in this area, as elsewhere in Australia, were massacred, and ceremonial sites destroyed, in an effort to rid the land of evidence of Aboriginal ownership and Aboriginal ways. Human massacres also took place, usually unprosecuted and often still unacknowledged (Ryan et al 2017–2022). Legal fiction abounds. The white poet Henry Lawson, who lived in Bourke for some time, famously wrote that ‘if you know Bourke, you know Australia’ (Barnes 2017, p. 35), but much of Aboriginal experience remains unseen and unremembered by white settler Australia.

Barkindji Country is a place of Women's Dreaming, which means Women's Law – the law of matriarchy, which both women and men help to carry out. Barkindji Country is the resting place of Mungo Lady, who was cremated some 42,000 years ago, to emerge again in 1968 (Roberts, Russell & Bird 2018). Country holds the bones and stories of ancestors, and at times returns them to us.

We wrote the poem ‘Woman's Country’ during and after a recent research visit to Bourke, in a rare period of flood. Much of the previous 25 years (particularly 1997–2009 and 2017–2019 (Bureau of Meteorology, 2022)) had been marked by dire and ongoing drought, exacerbated by industrial water theft and overuse, alongside climate change. Among the

consequences are great strain and grief for Aboriginal communities as they see their rivers, here the Barka (the Darling), emptying, threatening the continuity of life, culture and Dreaming. When asked ‘What is a river?’ in our research discussions, traditional owner Wayne Knight answered, ‘That river is our spiritual lifeblood’ (Knight 2022). We heard that when the river was empty, Barkindji children, drawing on their own knowledge of Country, asked ‘Where does the Rainbow Serpent sleep now?’

Although the return of a flood period replenishes Country, the exploitation of water continues, and the children's question continues to haunt Barkindji people's visions of the future. It is estimated that 20–30% of the current floodwaters are being diverted to industrial dams, often well beyond legal quotas (Davies 2022). This water will never reach deep into Country to replenish trees, billabongs and rivers ahead of the next drought.

Bourke – on the edge of the desert – could be a hard place to live for those who came to take it, because of heat, water, weather and distance from Sydney, and because of colonial determination to rewrite the laws of Country. Racist violence and oppression has been a feature of white presence in the town since colonisation. Women's Law continues, but is continually threatened, too. Where cultural continuity is repressed and broken, more violence floods in. Although anecdotally we are told that the town has one of the highest police-citizen ratios in Australia (town or district-level data is not made publicly available), methamphetamine (‘ice’), alcohol and other drugs are readily available. Often it appears they are easier to access than services and resources to support individuals, and to support the maintenance of cultural ways that protect and guide. Regardless, these

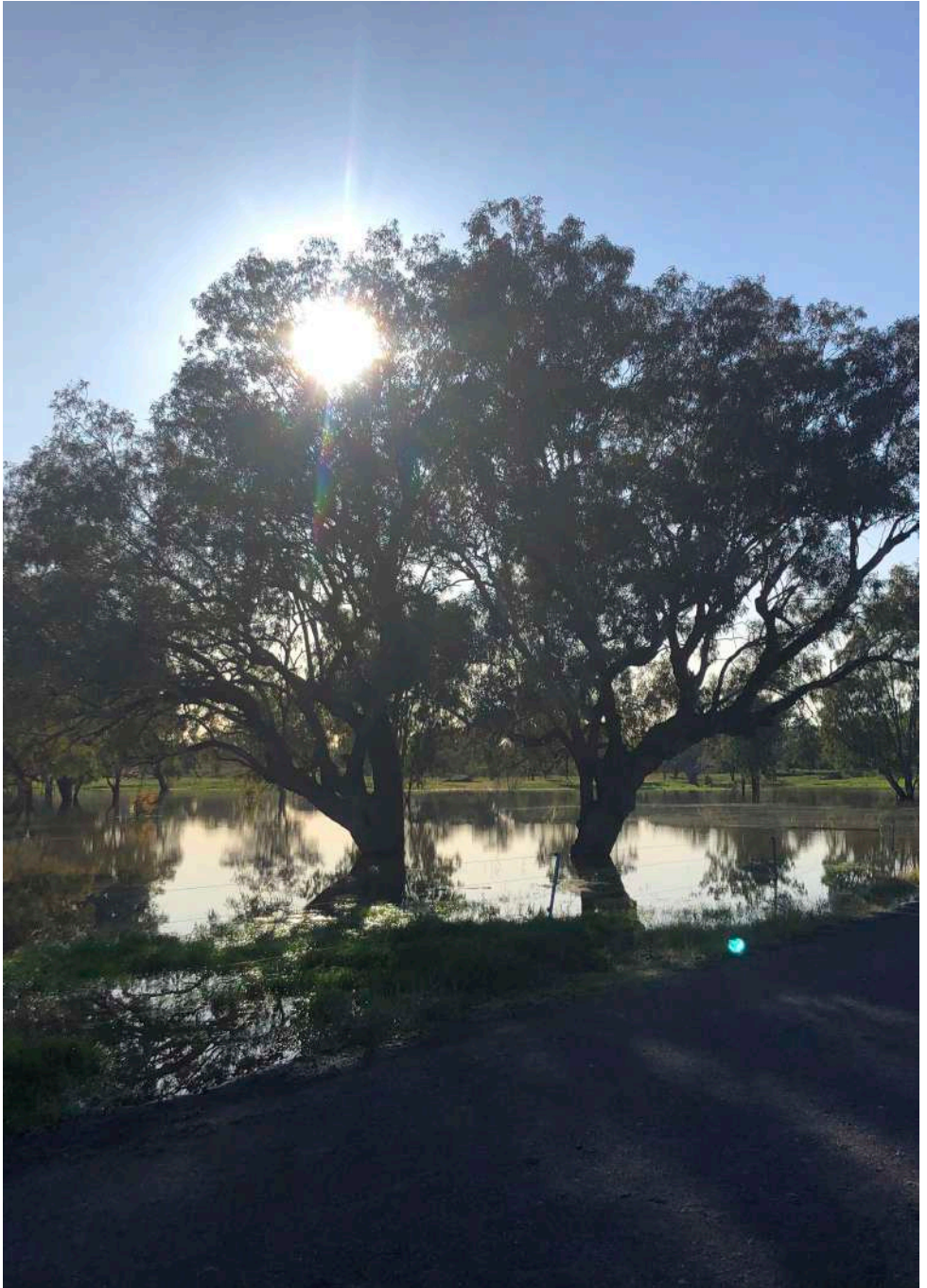


Figure 1. Floodwaters at North Bourke. Women's country, river overflowing. Image: J. Crawford (2022).

cultural ways continue, due to the efforts of all who carry them forward.

The intensities we experience in Barkindji Country are alive in our relationship to one another and to Country itself. Some of these take voice in this poem.

Woman's Country

W: Voice as a woman

M: Voice as a man

V: Voices

Also speaking are Whiteness, Blackness, Country, the Law

M in Bourke,
writing
still on the road,
out on the track
windin back on ghost wind
touchin spirits

glimpses of family
the living and others who have passed
flash shadows
bloodstains on cemented paths

black earth country beneath my feet
lookin at Barka

shadow places everywhere
dark places where love found life
shadow places where life found death.
things fade.

I walk where the old man walked
on ceremonial ground
dancin up dust
from day to night

•

near the courthouse,
trade
echoes float easy on night breeze
you're still on my mind

woman's law, this place
girls rush across
flashing eyes long enough

ask the unspeakable question.
like little ghosts
they disappear into shadows.

morning brings tired old voices
Barka grows wilder
stretching herself with new life.
Aunt takes to talk of night things
of being sung to the charm
of a clever man

•

W you be a pedestrian light,

green: walk now
walk quick
don't run

signalling
from the door of the chemist
your face as calm as a mother's
I cross

blood pilot
calls behind me
wings out at full stretch

•

V whisper
Mooda-Gutta

•

W young men fly the streets
blood pilots with cut faces
turn me female
turn me glue-footed
back on myself

•

V I cross the road when I see them coming
I check both sides of the street before I get
out of the car
I get back in the car when I get that feeling
I lock the doors; wind up the windows

W although
six kinds of bird are singing their songs
and the breeze is gentle in the red river
gums

- that run long fingers through the water's
flow
and the sunlight's strong
on the stricken and on me
-
- V red-tailed black cockatoos cry welcome
- women's country
river overflowing
-
- W departure halls fill up with mobilized
soldiers
and we go too, me and these men,
my friends, traveling companions,
into the mouth of our violence
carried on through each checkpoint
weaving back all the while
-
- suck the milk, they call
to each other
on the verandah, on the street
in the studio, in dreams
suck the milk!
suck the milk, they call to the sunset
to the inundated trees
- & each
approaches the milk, enters the milk
laps, & sucks, &
breathes in the air
sweetness of night flowers
all of music, all philosophy
-
- M I was born to woman's country woman's
dreaming woman's law
creation stories.
women's country.
- embraced in women's dreaming
we are held, raised up
take our women's name, our mother's
name,
not our father's.
aunties, too, become mothers to us.
it's all a woman's embrace –
- plants, animals, water,
life.
all woman's country
and woman's dreaming.
-
- V rain comes, the ground is soaked
floodwater rises
earth slips
not all the bones are in the right place
-
- whisper
Mooda-Gutta
-
- W I'll be country
you be country too
- I'm in the milk and the milk's in me
-
- night comes earlier and earlier
- there he is
by the bowling club gate
reeling in place, rolling a smoke
bung eye, bleeding cheek
will I slip past unseen
ghost on black ice
a chill
-
- M some dance some night kardatchi man
from out of town plucks one hair from her
head. 'If I want you, you'll come.'
- W where else would she go but the police?
trust held out in her hand. dragonfly. 'can
you help me. he said he'd sing me.' where
would she have gone, but for the police?
rows of the silenced. rows of protectors
cut down. to the police: 'listen: he took
my hair.'
-

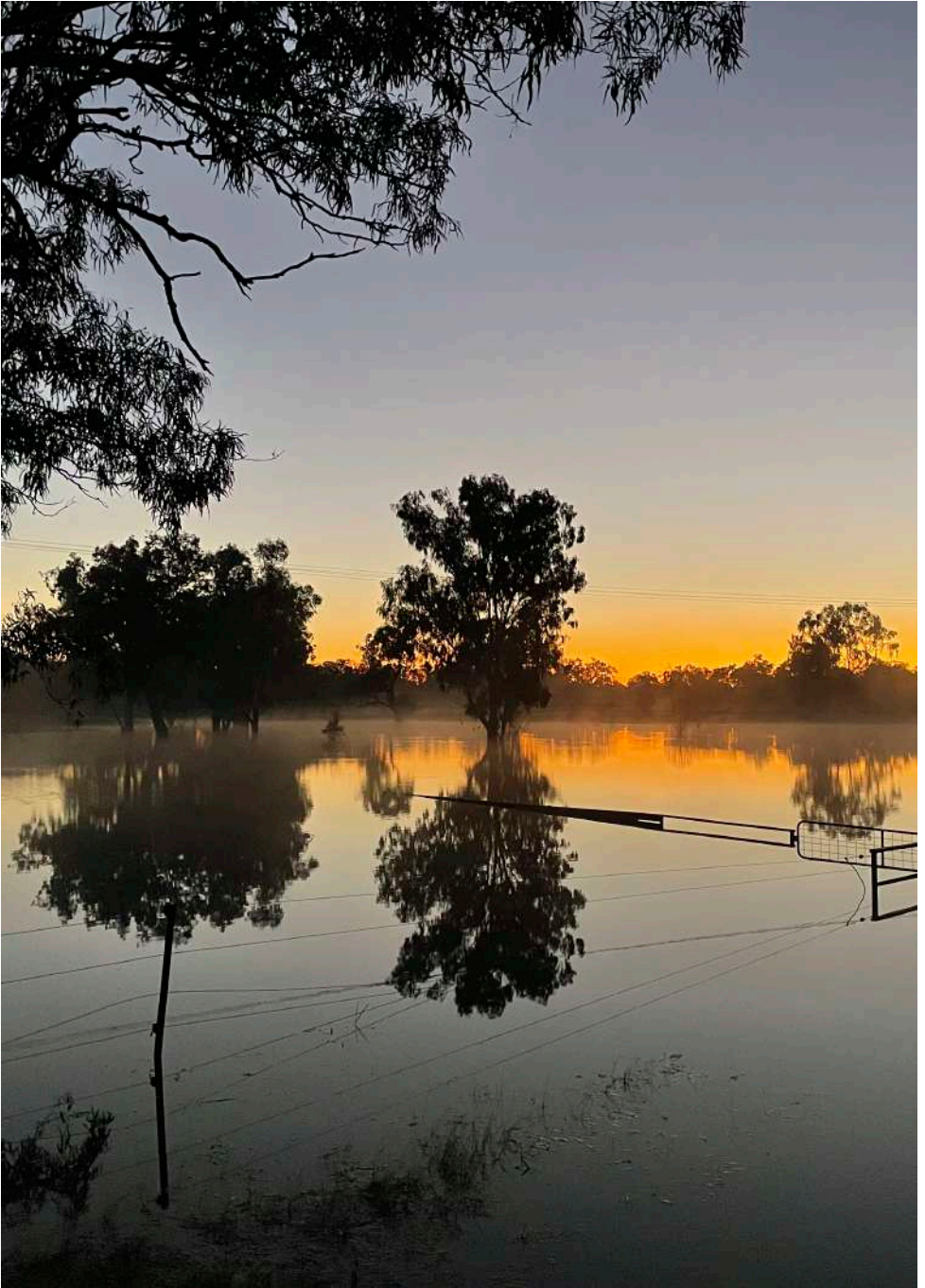


Figure 1. Floodwaters at North Bourke. Country is a full belly. Image: P. Magee (2022).

M hunger
 sly things happen on the sly
 there is violence in threatening breaths,
 and young men with blood faces
 screaming into the night

hungry, craving... nothing is not enough,
 everything is never enough,
 everywhere the hunger,
 and the law can go and hide like the slimy
 dog it is
 it's never there when you need it, anyway.
 hide and slide, you dogs,
 catch and kill your own out here,
 the weak ones are targets and desired, the
 naive
 try look tough, even while you're pissin in
 your boots,
 walk straight, walk fast, don't turn back to
 fight–
 blood everywhere

•

I've touched that tree,
 where she was.
 tears run with Barka
 they are not different gamoo

woman's law, this place
 filled and overflows on
 woman's dreaming.
 country is a full belly
 humming with life

•

W little bug bangs the drum
 crawls in me
 can't get out
 I'm reading my phone
 on the floodplain at night
 in the joyous proliferation

•

V bang my head
 bang a way in

•

W standing at the door of the dark hospital
 ringing the bell

me and these men, my friends

I'll be a jumping bean and you be two
 chairs

I'll be the dark and you be the eyes
 I'll be here when you hold my arm

but the bug will die in here
 whole body kicking
 against the drum

I'll be an orifice
 I'll be a cell

•

V I'll be here
 dragonfly
 floodplain in flood
 one drop of rain
 alive

•

stories, whispery voice
 Mooda-Gutta!
 warning sign, stampede horse.
 Mooda-Gutta!
 waterspout ... sounds like petrol on fire –
 don't cross there! Mooda-Gutta
 don't say it

Notes:

Barka: Barkindji name for the Darling River on Barkindji Country. Barka means 'my darling'.

Gamoo: water.

Kardatchi man is one term Barkindji people use for a cleverfulla, clever man or dthingagulla.

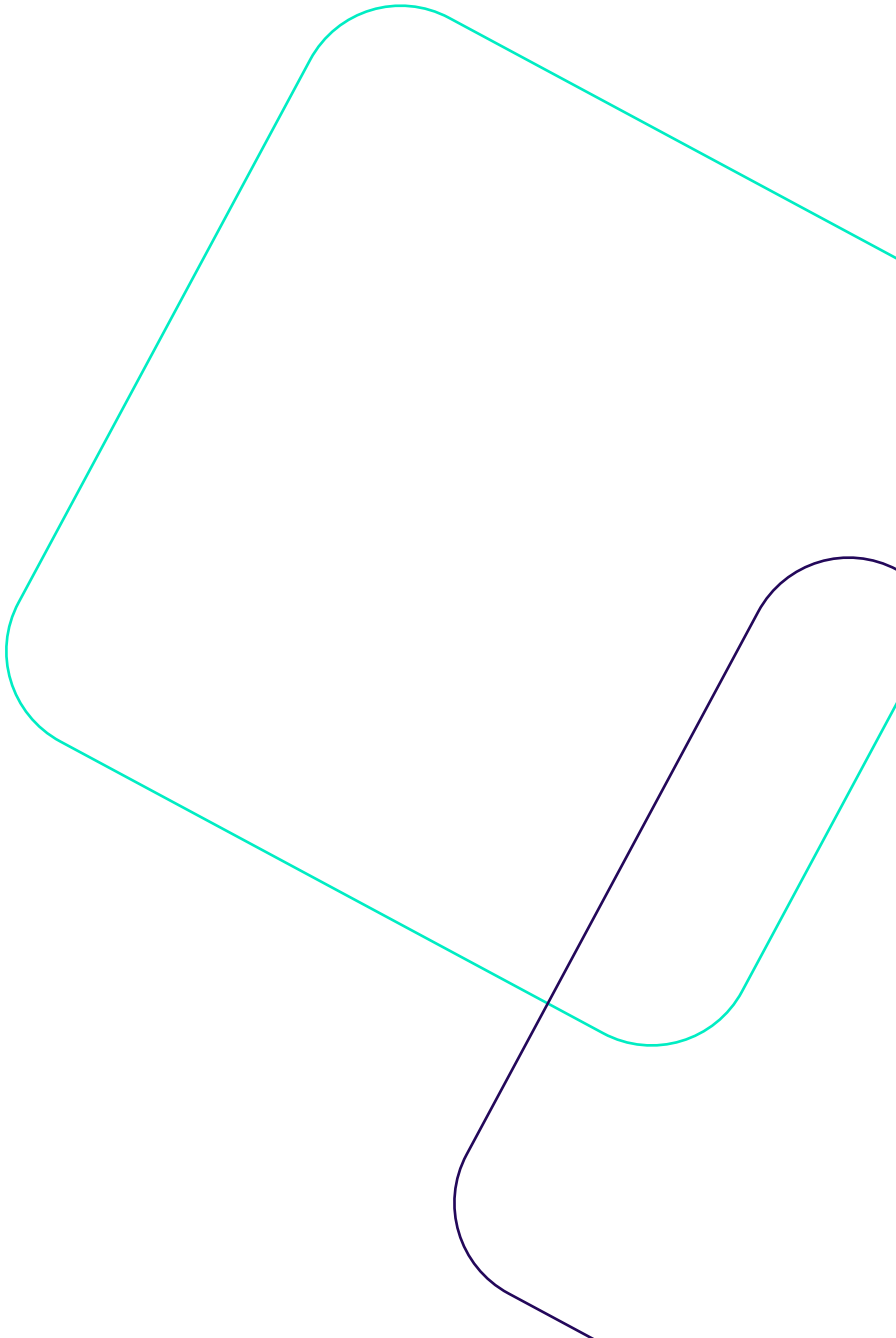
About Mooda-Gutta (or Mundaguddah), Kunya artist Brian Smith writes the following:

I've heard it described as a serpent, sometimes even heard it connected to the rainbow serpent story, and it's definitely got connections up in Kunya country, where my family came from. But all the rivers around here, the Warrego, the Paroo, they all have clans and people that belong here and they are all represented in Bourke, and they all have a story about the Mundaguddah. It may have different stories associated, but when you say that one word, it always means the same thing, 'stay out of the water'.

Those stories are important to our mob, and they kept us alive. In the simplest way, don't be near a dangerous place, like the river, without supervision. The sculpture [Andrew Hull's sculpture of Mundaguddah] has a gaping maw-like mouth and thousands of teeth like a cod, it could swallow you whole. (Smith, 2022)

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Contributors

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Roberta Bacic is a Chilean human rights advocate and researcher. Since 2007, as curator of the international Conflict Textiles collection, she has curated over 200 international exhibitions of *arpilleras* and associated events in museums, universities, art galleries, embassies and community spaces worldwide.

Steve Brown

Dr Steve Brown is a Senior Research Fellow on the Australian Research Council funded Everyday Heritage project at the University of Canberra and a special advisor with GML Heritage. He is an archaeologist and heritage scholar/practitioner who works in the fields of cultural landscapes, World Heritage, naturecultures, critical heritage studies, place-attachment, and Australian heritage management. He is the lead editor of the Routledge Handbook of Cultural Landscape Practice (2023). Steve lives on a 60-hectare property which he manages for conservation and love. His academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/steve-brown-2>

Paul Collis

Dr Paul Collis is a Barkindji man. He was born in Bourke, in far north/west New South Wales. His early life was informed by Barkindji and Kunya and Murawarri, and Wongamara and Nyempra story tellers and artists, who taught him Aboriginal Culture and Law. Paul earned his Doctorate at University of Canberra in 2015, for a study of Barkindji identity with a specific focus on masculinity. His first novel, *Dancing Home* won the 2017 David Unaipon Award, and the 2019 ACT Book of the year Award. Paul's first poetry collection, *Nightmares Run Like Mercury*, was published

by Recent Works Press in 2021. Paul works as Director, Indigenous Engagement, in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra.

Brian Connolly

Brian Connolly employs a range of artistic processes, including performance art, installation, public sculpture, collaborative and relational projects. In the 1990's he developed a genre of performance art he called 'Installation'. He has created performance artworks & exhibited in diverse contexts throughout Europe, North America and Asia. He has initiated international projects and events, and has been involved with artist run organizations such as Bbeyond, The Sculptors Society of Ireland, Visual Artists Ireland, Flaxart etc. He established the Belfast International Festival of Performance Art (BIFPA) in 2013. He taught in Sculpture/Fine Art in The Belfast School of Art between 1995–2022.

Jen Crawford

Associate Professor Jen Crawford was born in Patea, New Zealand, and spent her early years in New Zealand and the Philippines. Her critical work focuses on the poetics of place, ecological imagination and on cross-cultural engagements in various literary contexts. She is the author of eight poetry books and chapbooks, including *Koel* (Cordite Books, 2016) and *Lichen Loves Stone* (Tinfish Press, 2016). In 2020, she and Paul Collis co-edited *The Story Ground Anthology*, an outcome of the Commonwealth of Australia grant, 'Story Ground: Using Oral and Written Story Practices to Engage Indigenous Community Members with University.' At the University of Canberra, Jen holds the role of Associate Dean, Education – Strategic Development. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/jen-crawford>

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Elizabeth Crooke

Elizabeth Crooke is Professor of Heritage and Museum Studies at Ulster University where she is Course Director of the campus-based and distance learning MA programmes in museum and heritage studies. She was Principal Investigator on the UK Research and Innovation funded project Museums, Crisis and Covid-19: Vitality and Vulnerabilities (2019–2022). Her research and publications explore museum purposes, values and impact, both historically and present day. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/persons/elizabeth-crooke>

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Dr Megan Deas is Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Canberra. She is the project manager for the Breaking Silences project. Her research interests focus on visual culture and visual communication, particularly the role press photographs play in shaping public opinion on issues of national interest.

Ursula K Frederick

Dr Ursula K Frederick is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, University of Canberra. She is an artist and interdisciplinary scholar who works across the fields of archaeology, art and heritage, and is particularly interested in exploring themes of value-creation, place-making and the everyday. Ursula's creative practice is focussed around photomedia, video and print and she involves a commitment to experimentation, collaboration and quiet critical thinking. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/ursula-frederick-2>

Kate Ewart-Biggs

Kate Ewart-Biggs OBE is the Deputy Chief Executive of the British Council. Throughout her career, including work in Africa, Europe and Western Asia, she has supported the

British Council's purpose – to build connections, understanding and trust between the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. Prior to being named Deputy Chief Executive, Kate was Director Global Network – responsible for managing strategic relationships with Whitehall partners and giving British Council staff overseas a strong support network at home. Before joining the British Council, she worked for organisations improving life for street children around the world.

Ashley Harrison

Ashley Harrison is a Walbunja woman from the Far South Coast of New South Wales. Currently, she is a PhD candidate on the Australian Research Council funded project 'Heritage of the Air: How Aviation Transformed Australia' and a lecturer in Indigenous Studies/Cultural Heritage at the University of Canberra. Her research focus engages with the visibility of First Nations people and perspectives in stories about Australia's aviation heritage. She is working on repurposing heritage collections and archives to reframe aviation as an arena of cross-cultural encounter. Her academic profile and publications can be found here <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/ashley-harrison>

Brandon Hamber

Professor Brandon Hamber is John Hume and Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace based at the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) and the Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University. He is an Associate of Conflict Textiles. He is an Honorary Professor of the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. He has consulted to a range of community groups, policy initiatives and government bodies in Northern Ireland and South Africa as well as peace and reconciliation initiatives internationally. His academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/staff/b-hamber>.

Katie Hayne

Katie Hayne is a Canberra-based artist and a research officer at the University of Canberra. She has recently completed a Master of Philosophy in painting and her work is held in private and public collections. In her latest projects she has been exploring ways to document the urban fabric of Canberra through painting and installation.

Tracy Ireland

Tracy Ireland is Professor of Cultural Heritage, Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra and President of Australia ICOMOS (International Council for Monuments and Sites). Tracy is known internationally for her research on heritage practice and the relationships between archaeology, conservation and heritage in the postcolonial world. She is currently Lead Chief Investigator for two Australian Research Council funded Linkage Projects: Heritage of the Air, and Everyday Heritage. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/tracy-ireland>

Sandra Johnston

Dr Sandra Johnston has been an internationally active artist since 1992 in the field of site-responsive enquiry into 'contested spaces' working predominantly through performance art and video/audio installations. Johnston has held several teaching and research posts including: AHRC Research Fellowship at Ulster University, Belfast (2002–2005), the Ré Soupault Guest Professor at the Bauhaus University, Weimar (2007), Course leader on the BxNU MFA at Northumbria University, Newcastle (2012–2021). Currently, she lectures at Ulster University in the Fine Art Department. Additionally, she has been committed long-term to exploring collaborative processes of improvisation alongside engaging with the development of creative networks. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/staff/s-johnston>

Justin Magee

Professor Justin Magee is Research Director for Belfast School of Art (Since 2017), leading their REF2021 submission where 100% of their Research Impact and their Research Environment were judged to be World Leading or Internationally Excellent. Previously he was the Interim Associate Dean for Research & Impact (2021–2022) for the Faculty of Arts Humanities & Social Sciences. He is Principal Investigator for Ulster's AHRC funded Impact Accelerator Account and his design research has been graded outstanding by Innovate UK (2017, 2020) receiving national recognition from the THE Leadership Management Awards (2018) and Innovate KTP Awards for Knowledge Exchange. His academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/staff/jdm-magee>

Kerry Martin

Kerry Martin is a visual artist currently undertaking a creative practice PhD at the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research. Her practice is motivated by a reparative aesthetic, an approach to art making that is designed to hold the viewer's attention on the difficult subjects she explores. She typically examines questions relating to social injustice; her PhD research examines the issue of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. She is interested in how beauty, text, the repetition of mark making, and the multiplicity of display can be a powerful form of bearing witness.

Kerry McCallum

Professor Kerry McCallum is Director of the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. Her research specialises in the relationships between changing media and Australian social policy. She is the co-author of 'The Dynamics of News and Indigenous Policy in Australia' (Intellect, 2017), and is currently lead investigator on the ARC-funded project 'Breaking Silences: Media and the Child Abuse Royal Commission'. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/kerry-mccallum>

Kathleen McCracken

Canadian poet Dr Kathleen McCracken is the author of eight collections of poetry including *Blue Light*, *Bay and College*, shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Poetry, and a bilingual English/Portuguese edition entitled *Double Self Portrait with Mirror: New and Selected Poems*. She was a finalist for the WB Yeats Society of New York Poetry Competition, the Montreal International Prize for Poetry, The Walrus Poetry Prize, and the CBC Poetry Prize. In 2019 she won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing. From 1992–2022 Kathleen was Lecturer in Creative Writing and Contemporary Literature at Ulster University.

Vahri McKenzie

Dr Vahri McKenzie is an artist, educator and scholar whose artistic work develops concepts for participation and collaboration as a model of, and practice for, ways of being together in a complex world. Her work as a scholar focuses on valuing and evaluating creative practices with methodologies that position artistic contributions as new knowledge. This chapter was written while Vahri was Research Fellow in the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research. She is currently Senior Lecturer and Course Coordinator, BA (Arts and Cultural Management), Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University.

Alastair MacLennan

Alastair MacLennan was born in Scotland and has lived and worked in Belfast since 1975. His work has had a significant influence on performance art nationally and internationally. Performing in diverse contexts, his works convey political, social and cultural conditions. In 1997 MacLennan represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale. He has work in several private and public collections. MacLennan is Emeritus Professor of Fine Art, from Ulster University, an Honorary Fellow of Dartington College of Art and an Honorary Associate of the National Review of Live Art Glasgow. He is also a member of Black Market International.

Paddy Nixon

Professor Paddy Nixon is Vice Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra. A technologist and computer scientist, Professor Nixon was previously the Vice-Chancellor of Ulster University in Northern Ireland. He is deeply committed to the civic obligations of a university and recognises the critical and unique role the University of Canberra plays in the ACT. Professor Nixon believes that modern universities need meaningful engagement with their students, their staff, industry partners and the community to deliver consistent and compelling impact. His academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/paddy-nixon>

Paul Seawright

Professor Paul Seawright OBE is professor of photography and the Deputy Vice Chancellor at Ulster University. His photographic work is exhibited globally, including The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Tate, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, International Centre of Photography New York, Arts Councils of Ireland, England and N.Ireland, UK Government Collection and the Museum of Contemporary Art Rome. He was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum for his work in Afghanistan (2002), represented Wales at the Venice Biennale of Art (2003), won the IMMA/Glen Dimplex Prize (1997) and shortlisted for The Zurich Portrait Prize 2020. He is represented by the Kerlin Gallery Dublin. His academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/staff/p-seawright>

Wendy Somerville

Wendy Somerville is a Jerrinja person. Her Country is on the South Coast of New South Wales. This is where her mother's family have always lived. She lectures in First Nations Australian studies and Cultural Heritage studies at the University of Canberra. As a current recipient of a Donald Horne fellowship, she is studying the Aboriginal Arts and Artefacts collection held by the Faculty of Arts and Design. Wendy uses this the collection in teaching the unit 'Culture: Voicing the living archive'.

Dominic Thorpe

Dr Dominic Thorpe is an Irish artist who works primarily through performance art, while also working in drawing, video, photography, installation, contextual, collaborative and relational based processes. His work often addresses current and historical human rights violations. In 2022 he completed a PhD at Ulster University exploring perpetrator trauma and performance art from Ireland. Thorpe has shown and performed work extensively in Ireland and internationally. He has also frequently engaged with inclusion and education-based projects. He has work in a number of public collections in Ireland, including the collection of the Arts Council of Ireland.

Bethaney Turner

Dr Bethaney Turner is an Associate Professor in the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research and a founding member of the University's interdisciplinary Future of Food network. Her research engages with the multispecies relationships among people, place and the environment in order to explore how to best support the resilience and capacity of communities to generate more sustainable futures. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/bethaney-turner>

Louise Wallace

Dr Louise Wallace is a painter, writer and educator. She was shortlisted for the BEEP Painting Prize (2022) and longlisted for the prestigious John Moore's Painting Prize (2020). She has exhibited her work internationally including SoHo20 New York, Siemens Art Space Beijing, Sotheby's London, RUA Red Dublin, Fenderesky gallery Belfast, with a forthcoming solo show at The MAC, Belfast (2023). She co-curated and exhibited in 'Penumbra', an important survey of contemporary Irish female painting at the F.E. McWilliam Gallery (2020). She has published in the Journal of Contemporary Painting (2018) and was invited speaker on contemporary female painting practice at IMMA, Dublin (2018). Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/staff/l-wallace>

Jen Webb

Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and Dean of Graduate Research. Recent publications include *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts* (with Caroline Turner; Manchester UP, 2016), *Gender and the Creative Labour Market* (with S Brook, Palgrave, 2022); and poetry volumes *Watching the World* (with Paul Hetherington; Blemish Books, 2015), *Sentences from the Archive and Moving Targets* (Recent Work Press, 2016 & 2018) and, with Shé Hawke, *Flight Mode* (2020). She writes prose poetry, and researches the relationship between art and society, creativity and collaboration, and creative practice and its contexts. Her academic profile and publications can be found here: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/persons/jen-webb>





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