WITNESSING TO SILENCE
ART AND HUMAN RIGHTS

AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE
AND DRILL HALL GALLERY
WITNESSING TO SILENCE
ART AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Edited by Caroline Turner and Nancy Sever

A Humanities Research Centre Project
**Table of contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>Nancy Sever</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists and Human Rights: Witnessing to Silence</td>
<td>Caroline Turner</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Language of Human Rights Law</td>
<td>Christine Chinkin</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA &amp; ANU DRILL HALL GALLERY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Boltanski: Transforming the subject into the object</td>
<td>Jörg Zutter</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANU DRILL HALL GALLERY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Davila: Panorama of Santiago, Chile: 1973-2003</td>
<td>Roger Benjamin</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona Foley: Silent Witness?</td>
<td>Chris Healy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Hoffie: A take on life</td>
<td>Alison Carroll</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfredo Jaar: From there to here</td>
<td>Nancy Sever</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Kentridge: A beacon against forgetting</td>
<td>Jen Webb</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalini Malani: Hamletmachine</td>
<td>Pat Hoffie</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luc Tuymans: Premonition - the silence before the storm</td>
<td>Caroline Turner</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guan Wei: Dow: Island 2002</td>
<td>David Williams</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANU SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadang Christanto: Keeper of memories</td>
<td>Christine Clark</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel Tuffery: Aesthetic Archipelagoes</td>
<td>Stephen Zagala</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CANBERRA CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nindityo Adipurnomo: From solo to mass, spiritual to social</td>
<td>Astri Wright</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago Bose: Magic, humour and cultural resistance</td>
<td>Pat Hoffie</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mella Jaarsma: Moments like this...</td>
<td>Lisa Byrne</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Mel: Touch a native</td>
<td>Margo Neale</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists' biographical details and checklist</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the objectives of the Drill Hall Gallery is to support the wider academic interests of the Australian National University, so we are pleased to be presenting *Witnessing to Silence: Art and Human Rights* in conjunction with the Humanities Research Centre’s focus on human rights in 2003.

Artists, writers and musicians have long addressed the issues of war, poverty, refugees, discrimination, ethnic intolerance and cultural clash. Artists have been a particularly active and effective group in forcing society to confront human rights issues. They have raised our consciousness about the victims of human rights violations through their artistic expression. They have articulated our horror and our anger at the perpetrators and those who acquiesce. They have used their creative powers to light the fires of decency and tolerance in the hearts of people. They have helped society with its catharsis.

The exhibition at the ANU Drill Hall Gallery is one of three different exhibitions under the common title *Witnessing to Silence: Art and Human Rights*. The other exhibitions are being shown at the ANU School of Art Gallery and the Canberra Contemporary Art Space. The three exhibitions and a performance at the National Museum of Australia are being held to coincide with the Art and Human Rights international conference convened by Dr Caroline Turner, Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University. Dr Turner has been the creative and organisational force behind the conference and its associated activities and the inspiration for and co-curator of the three exhibitions that, collectively, feature the work of fifteen artists of high international reputation selected for the effectiveness with which they analytically and incisively address a range of global human rights issues, including social justice, colonialism, displacement, racism and genocide.

The exhibition at the School of Art has been co-curated by Christine Clark of the HRC and Professor David Williams and co-ordinated by Bronwen Sandland and Lisa Andreatta of the School of Art. It features the work of the New Zealand based artist Michel Tuffery, best known as a printmaker and performance/installation artist, and the Indonesian born artist Dadang Christanto, following residencies at the School of Art. The exhibition at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space has been co-curated by its Director Lisa Byrne and Christine Clark and features the work of three regional artists: Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma from Indonesia, and the late Santiago Bose from the Philippines, all of whom will be known to Australian audiences for their commitment to human rights.

The exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery presents the work of nine artists. Juan Davila, exploring issues of colonialism in Latin America, has created a Panorama of Santiago de Chile for this exhibition. Fiona Foley addresses colonial issues in Australia in her paintings with words of a disappearing Aboriginal language. Pat Hoffie’s work addresses issues of colonialism in the Philippines and the plight of the refugee. The installation by Alfredo Jaar, the New York based Chilean artist, forensically documents the plight of Vietnamese boat people in detention in Hong Kong. The Chinese born artist Guan Wei, who now lives and works in Sydney, has produced a wry, tightly devised masterpiece, also on the theme of boat people. William Kentridge gained his international reputation for his drawings and animated films on apartheid in his native South Africa. Nalini Malani is a leading multimedia artist and social activist who lives and works in Mumbai. The Belgian figurative painter Luc Tuymans and the French artist Christian Boltanski, both amongst the leading European artists of our time, have focused on genocide. Christian Boltanski’s installation *Pourim Reserve*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, will also be on exhibition there and will cross reference his more recent work *Contacts* on loan from the artist’s gallery in Paris and included in the exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery.

I would like to thank the artists, lenders and sponsors, in particular the ANU National Institute of the Arts and the National Europe Centre, the National Gallery of Australia and the National Museum of Australia. Special thanks to Dr Caroline Turner for co-curating with me the exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery, and to my colleagues David Boon and Tony Oates.

Nancy Sever  
Director, Drill Hall Gallery
Artists and Human Rights: Witnessing to Silence

This exhibition ‘Witnessing to Silence’ and the international conference on ‘Art and Human Rights’ with which it coincides are part of a research project at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, that began in 2000 to bring together scholars in many disciplines but especially law, the humanities and the arts. In the last three years we have held a number of conferences, invited many Visiting Fellows from around the world who have informed and enriched our study, and involved many academics and artists from different backgrounds and countries. This exhibition is the product of their generosity and commitment.

George Orwell wrote in Nineteen Eighty-Four: ‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.’1 Orwell’s frightening metaphor of violence is also a prediction of a future where human rights may not exist. It is particularly discomforting to reflect that Orwell wrote these words in 1949, the year after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. It is even more disturbing to reflect that human rights are emerging fifty four years later as the most critical issue for the twenty first century. The present time is in fact one of extraordinary challenge to human rights by governments around the world and in particular to the concept of universalism in legal frameworks of rights established since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. The tragic fact is that hopes for a culturally tolerant and diverse future, a ‘vision of human dignity,’ as Christine Chinkin says in her introduction to this catalogue, remain to a great extent unfulfilled in our time.

In this context our research project to explore the interconnections between art and human rights is all the more urgent. This is particularly true since the traumatic events of the last three years – 11 September 2001 in the US, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as events in 2001 and 2002 in Australia related to refugees – could not have been predicted when we began our study. We have focused this exhibition on contemporary visual artists, although without question contemporary writers, musicians, playwrights, film makers and performing artists all reflect in their work similar human rights concerns. Our project is based on the belief that art and artists provide special insights in understanding the world. While the power of art is to mirror the failures and the aspirations of humanity, at the same time it highlights our common humanity. Power, propaganda, nationalism, competing ideologies and world views – these are all critical to understanding the context of art. There is a difference between an art of propaganda and an art concerned with great human issues, transcending time and place. Though art cannot always change the world, it can – as many artists have shown – protest greed, environmental degradation, cultural loss, poverty, gender and other discrimination, exploitation, injustice, war, racism, oppression and human rights abuses. It can be a significant factor in key areas including witnessing, response to trauma, reconciliation and cultural survival.

Truth and Reconciliation?

The powerful work related to the work of the ‘Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ in South Africa, ‘Ubu tells the truth’, by William Kentridge, from a prominent South African human rights family, was an obvious starting point for this exhibition. Kentridge reminds us not only that some artists stood against apartheid but also of the need to keep remembering what such a regime does to a society. And the forgetting applies to those outside South Africa who were silent because they saw no injustice in apartheid for many years. But Kentridge does not see himself as a ‘political artist’. He has said, ‘I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings and films are certainly spawned by and feed off the brutalized society left in its wake. I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures, and uncertain endings; an art (and a politics) in which optimism is kept in check and nihilism at bay.’2

The New Europe

Adorno declared that poetry was impossible after the Holocaust. If the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a product of the idealism born of the post Second World War, a war that had torn Europe apart and produced the Holocaust, then the loss of such idealism today is very evident, despite the leadership role being undertaken with regard to rights by the new Europe. It has been said that this is the post-postwar generation in Europe, the grandchildren of those who
perpetrated, witnessed or some cases resisted the atrocities of 1939-45. It can therefore legitimately aspire to a new Europe in a new world order characterised by the human values which their grandparents had rejected and their parents were hardly in a position to proclaim. But the problem of this generation is not the rejection of values but in many countries the loss of hope. The passionate concern with human values in the New Europe does not just reflect a resolve that the violations of human rights in the Europe of two generations ago should not recur: It also reflects a growing fear that they might.

This is especially true of the work of Christian Boltanski and Luc Tuymans. Boltanski was born in France in 1944. His Jewish doctor father had spent much of the war in hiding from the Nazis. He grew up in a France of the 1950s, a France still marked by anti-Semitism and wounded psychologically by the trauma of collaboration. We could see him also as a product of the idealistic generation of 1968 and the students’ revolutions. What Boltanski suggests in his art, which evokes a sense of loss and catastrophe and mourning despite the lack of specific allusion to specific events, is that horror, death, loss are not confined to any particular groups of individuals. He thus suggests that human beings are potentially all capable of great crimes and can only make a difference in small local ways. He has said:

...art is to do with our relation to the time in which we live. So if we want to understand society we should look at society’s artists. ...but I don’t think art has real power. It does however, have small power... but if the fascists were to take over France, say, my art’s not going to stop them. I think what’s more important for all of us is to be witnesses of what has happened...³

Luc Tuymans, also young at 43, reflects this renewed spirit of existential despair which for an artist or any individual may nonetheless be an incentive to positive action: one fails of course; what matters is how one fails. He is also an artist immensely sensitive to the historical circumstances of his own time and to a Western society compromised inevitably by the record of colonialism, nationalism, xenophobia and war, and now faced with the rise of racism and neo Fascism in Europe and of collective ‘paranoia’ in the US. Tuymans’ art explores these issues, forcing us to confront a violent heritage and some of the most fearful aspects of humanity.

The non First World

Mella Jaarsma is another example of the new Europe – a young Dutch artist who married an Indonesian artist – Nindityo Adipurnomo – and who chose to live and work in Indonesia to contribute to her adopted country’s social change through her work. Both Jaarsma and Adipurnomo are committed to respect for others. The question she poses – how to understand and respect another’s culture and way of life – extends far beyond Indonesia and could not be more relevant to today’s globalising but at the same time fracturing world where religious and different divides are threatening universal precepts of human rights. In her art and in Indonesian contemporary art, idealism still exists in spite of, or perhaps because of, great denials of human rights. There is still a faith and belief that society can be different and that artists can contribute to making a better society, as many indeed have done in the non First World. This faith is exemplified also by Philippines artist, the late Santiago Bose, who devoted his life to community and to securing indigenous identity. Bose has said:

The artist cannot but be affected by his society. It is hard to ignore the pressing needs of the nation while making art that serves the nation’s elite... We struggled to change society, which is difficult and dangerous, and we also sought to preserve communal aspects of life. I too am haunted by visions of hardship, poverty, disenfranchisement of the ‘primitive’ tribes, but between outbursts of violence and exploitation are also tenderness, selflessness and a sense of community. These will always remain unspoken and unrecognized unless we make art or music that will help to transform society. The artist takes a stand through the practice of creating art.⁴

Like Kentridge and Bose, Nalini Malani has explored issues of reconciliation, but her works are more overtly political in many ways than either, concerned with reflecting on Western as well as on local histories of violence in the Indian Subcontinent. She is particularly
concerned with feminist perspectives that reflect on the particular vulnerability of women and children in these histories of oppression. A great deal of Malani’s work is concerned with colonialism and the neo colonialism of twentieth century Western culture. Such concerns extend far beyond the local.

The US and Latin America

Alfredo Jaar’s presence here in this exhibition is of particular significance as being the only US artist. But Jaar is also Latin American, being born in Chile. Latin American artists have been in the forefront of exposing abuses of rights over the last fifty years. As a Latin American he is concerned with being an ‘outsider’ in the US where he has lived since the early 1980s. But like Malani he is also an ‘insider’ in respect to racially-motivated violence, poverty, exploitation, war and genocide: ‘Once in a while I am accused of being an outsider, and I am asked what the hell I am doing in, for example, Africa. I believe in the power of being an outsider. You see things that others on the inside do not see…I probably make mistakes in the process but I prefer to make mistakes rather than to condemn certain urgent situations to complete invisibility.’ Commenting on his work in memoriam to immigrants who have died attempting to cross the border from Mexico into the US – Jaar has said, ‘It is an unacceptable tragedy that in the 21st century people still die trying to simply cross a border between two countries.’ He has also condemned the lack of political will for action on social injustice in the US calling it too ‘privileged’ an environment.
Australia and Human Rights

Juan Davila who has lived in Australia for many years is another Latin American émigré, like Jaar from the Chile of the dictators. The passion with which both he and Jaar address issues of human rights may well reflect not only their past experiences in Latin America but the intensity of hope with which they came to their chosen countries of exile, and perhaps the extent to which those hopes have been disappointed. Australia is facing major challenges today not only with respect to reconciliation with indigenous people, but also a new crisis over refugees and the rejection of boat people. Both issues have brought historians, legal experts, activists and artists together to protest Government policy. Davila has produced a number of works about refugees and detention centres for people who come without visas (mostly today from Afghanistan and Iraq) and are forcibly detained. He has expressed disillusion not only with Government policy but also with the reaction of the art world as he sees it to artistic work about such issues. He has written ‘When I mention the word Woomera, a notorious refugee detention camp, there are several immediate reactions of note in the Australian cultural scene. The first is an assumption I am reviving the lineal pamphlet, the protest poster of activist art...’ and ‘For many of my peers, it seems easier to take refuge in the fantasy that the personal is political. There has been almost a complete silence on social issues for many years.’

Alfredo Jaar also tackled this question, quoting Jean-Luc Godard: ‘It is true you must choose between ethics and aesthetics, but it is also true that whichever one you choose, you will always find the other one at the end of the road. The definition of the human condition is in the mise-en-scène itself.’

Other Australian artists are responding to recent events in this country. Guan Wei, born in China and an artist who came to this country after Tiananmen, is now representing events in Australia not as an outsider but as someone who came himself as an immigrant after 1989 and has a right to help shape our society. His monumental work in the exhibition about people moving between countries and cultures is pertinent not only to his own life and to Australia and the refugee crisis but to such crossings in every time and place.

Cultural Crossings and Cultural Survival

Pat Hoffie’s work in this exhibition is also about refugees. In her work she challenges the idea common in Western countries that violations of rights occur somewhere else. And she raises the question, is art for self or community? Hoffie has made some eloquent statements about experiences of displacement and disjuncture and transcultural crossing and made a plea for space for hyphenated territories and ‘for time and space in the present to recognise those identities that can no longer enjoy the luxury of being fixed.’ In this catalogue she also takes up the challenge of ‘political’ art. She writes: ‘... there is a sense in which all art is political; those that claim their art is NOT political, are by deferral declaring their acceptance of the status quo.’

Fiona Foley has dealt with issues in Australia such as Aboriginal deaths in custody and returning human remains kept in museums worldwide as scientific specimens to their Indigenous communities. Some of her most moving works have to do with restoring voices to those deprived of them through colonisation and conquest. Foley has stated: ‘I have always known that I was Aboriginal because my mother brought us up to be extremely proud of our culture...’ and:

…it doesn’t matter how dysfunctional a community is or how much it has been affected by colonisation – as pretty well all Aboriginal communities have been, some quite severely – you still have strong cultural leaders, people who give hope and strength to those struggling to survive bi-culturally in Australia. This helped me realise that I had a choice too, that I could make a difference.

One of the key themes in this exhibition is cultural survival and cultural change, and this is critical in the work of many artists. Indonesian Nindityo Adipurnomo writes about a conflict of values in a rapidly changing world where cultural exchanges and crossings are to be negotiated by artists: ‘I constantly experience a terrifying confrontation of Western and Eastern values. But it is fascinating because in this confrontation the flames of tradition, change and renewal are contained.’

Papua New Guinea artist Michael Mel puts it this way:

Cultural survival is to do with a whole range of issues in relation to culture and cultural activities....
There is a lot of ‘lip-service’ on appreciating and acknowledging cultural difference but these are only made possible in the contexts of the rules of engagement that satisfy or conform to the dominant agenda.”

The contemporary art of the Pacific region has much to tell us about the role contemporary art can play in social transformation by engaging with such issues as environmental degradation, as has Michel Tuffery in his work. Pacific artists have taught us much about the continuing relevance of spirituality and tradition, especially for indigenous peoples for whom their past is their future, and about cultural survival, including within multicultural societies.

Testimony
The artists in this exhibition in a sense are all witnesses, many testifying to terrible and traumatic circumstances of human existence. Dadang Christanto, an Indonesian artist now teaching in Australia, is also a victim of his father’s murder in 1965. Yet his own suffering has given him an extreme empathy with the personal suffering of others. The response of the Australian audience in Brisbane, at the First Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1993, to a work by Christanto dedicated to those who had suffered in every time and place was to leave hundreds of flowers and notes in front of the installation to create a memorial. These notes were not about Indonesia but overwhelmingly referred to the recent death in Brisbane of a young Aboriginal dancer at the hands of the police, as well as to the war then tearing apart Bosnia.

The question of human rights is intensely personal as the work of these fifteen artists reveals. Human Rights also underlies the changes in our contemporary world, as well as defining the limits likely to be set on humanity in the coming centuries. Art can communicate across time and place and art can speak for and to our common humanity. As Christian Boltanski has noted ‘Art is always a witness, sometimes a witness to events before they actually occur…”

I would like to thank Nancy Sever who has been inspirational in preparing all aspects of this project as has Professor Christine Chinkin and the other members of the research team over three years: Dr Jen Webb, Dr Pat Hoffie, Margo Neale and Christine Clark.

1 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 1949, Part 3, chapter 3.
5 Alfredo Jaar interview with Kate Davidson 1996 in Kate Davidson and Michael Desmond, Islands: Contemporary Installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America, National Gallery of Australia, 1996, pp. 66-70; p. 70.
7 Jaar, Islands op cit. p. 69.
9 Jaar, Islands, op cit. p. 66.
10 Deep disquiet among a number of Australian artists at the events of the refugee crisis has resulted in a variety of exhibitions: See Museum of Contemporary Art’s and ANAT’s (Australian Network for Art and Technology) BORDERPANIC Reader (http://www.borderpanic.org/; Canberra Contemporary Artspace, Queue here, 2002; Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Isle of Refuge, 2003; and Artlink vol 23, no 1, 2002 on war, terrorism and refugees.
12 Communication with the author.
16 Many other artists of course could have been selected and critical issues related to art and human rights in different parts of the world and especially the Middle East, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq will be addressed in the Conference in August 2003.
17 Boltanski, op.cit., p. 37.

Dr Caroline Turner is Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University.
The Language of Human Rights Law

Christine Chinkin

This exhibition and the associated conference seek to explore the many linkages between art and international human rights by bringing together lawyers and artists for dialogue and reflection. The language of human rights law is a universal one. The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, proclaims that it is ‘a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.’ Its provisions offer a vision of human dignity and choice through the affirmation of a broad range of civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights. For example it proclaims every individual’s right to life, liberty and an adequate standard of living; to be free from genocide, torture and hunger; to equality before the law and to be free from discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language, religion; and to be free to express views, to manifest religion, to associate with others and to have access to healthcare, education and equitable conditions of work. The values of the Universal Declaration are now entrenched in a body of international treaties, the provisions of which extend the catalogue of rights and introduce some, albeit minimal, monitoring mechanisms. Through this body of international law states have adopted as a matter of international obligation standards of treatment vis-à-vis their own citizens. States have accepted the concept of individual autonomy that restricts state intervention. At the same time states have incurred positive obligations to ensure their citizens’ enjoyment of those rights. In some instances states have gone further by accepting the right of individual complaint, allowing persons claiming violations of their rights to seek recourse before an international body.

A number of human rights guarantees are especially pertinent to artists. Freedom of expression and communication have been recognised by states as the essential prerequisite for all artistic activities. Accordingly, freedom of expression, as spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and developed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 19, is crucial. Freedom of expression entails the ‘freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.’ The importance of art, and artists, to their community is recognised in the Universal Declaration, article 27, through the further right of individuals ‘freely to participate in the cultural life of the community; to enjoy the arts...’ Artists have the right to protection ‘of the moral and material interests resulting from ... artistic production of which he is the author.’ Other important rights are those for the protection of artists through forming and becoming members of trade unions or other professional associations, and participatory rights, especially in ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making with respect to cultural policy.

However, as we all know only too well the boldness of the human rights vision remains unfulfilled. A cursory examination of the daily news confirms that millions of people live in grinding poverty; many others are still imprisoned and tortured for speaking out against oppressive regimes; different forms of violence are committed against women and untold numbers of civilians, notably women, the elderly and children, are subjected to horrifying atrocities in armed conflicts across the globe. The universality of human rights standards is challenged as abuses are committed in the name of religion, custom and tradition, and increasingly in this post 11 September 2001 environment, national security and the war against terror. This last reminds us that just as the language of human rights is universal so too is the language of human wrongs. In the industrialised societies of the United States, Europe and Australia there is often complacency that human rights problems are those of other countries and that our mission is to challenge abuse committed abroad. The inaccuracy of this perception is highlighted by the denial of human rights to many of the most vulnerable within our own societies, for example those seeking asylum and refugee status, immigrants and indigenous persons.

International human rights law envisages the transformation of social relations through the internalisation of a human rights culture within the particular contexts of diverse societies through the development of a mindset that rejects as unacceptable any abuse of fellow human
beings. But it is only too apparent that the language of international human rights is inadequate to ensure delivery of this message. The adoption of legal norms does not of itself denote any real change on the ground. Law must be supplemented by other strategies and lawyers must work in conjunction with others from outside their legal domain. One such domain is art: the projection of the visual image can take familiar ideas from the realm of human rights and transform their meanings in ways that speak across time and space. It is no accident that art exhibitions are not infrequently presented within the hallways of the United Nations and its specialised agencies.

Art can play an important role in the delivery of human rights in a number of distinct ways. First, art can assist in bridging the divide between the universalist principles of human rights and local situations. Adoption of international human rights standards does not require uniform behaviour across borders, for human dignity must be understood within a person’s own social and cultural context. Human rights must be made relevant to local situations through their translation into local cultures and mores. Art too is a universalist and international language. It has been described ‘as a common denominator in ethnic, cultural or religious differences, [that] brings home to everyone the sense of belonging to the human community.’ This sense of shared belonging is strengthened by globalisation whereby audiences from New York to Paris, from Sydney to Tokyo, from Manila to Buenos Aires can view the same art and visit the same websites. However, although an artist’s work may be familiar to people around the world, artists are rooted in their own localities and are shaped by local values. The depiction of local issues – including local human rights abuse – can relay universal messages and assist in the understanding of human rights violations as a matter of global concern, wherever their location. Artists can transport ‘the other’ across borders and help in understanding the different forms of human rights abuse that are endured worldwide. Second, the importance of art as an expression of an individual’s full personality is recognised in the articulation of the essential rights of the child. In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, education is given a broad meaning as encompassing the full development of the child’s personality, talents, mental and physical abilities. Thus a child has the right to participate fully in cultural and artistic life, facilitated by the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. Third, art is a tool for the free communication of ideas and information that is important for ensuring self-fulfilment and a pluralistic, tolerant society. To quote the European Court of Human Rights: ‘Those who create, perform, distribute or exhibit works of art contribute to the exchange of ideas and opinions which is essential for a democratic society.’ Fourth, art is an essential element in the preservation of the identities of peoples and their cultures. This has both historical value and contemporaneous importance by fostering the self-esteem and value of a society that may be depicted as worthless or inferior by a politically dominant group. Art also protects against revisionism, counteracts collective amnesia or denial by creating an enduring testament to suffering and a long-term memorial to that suffering. The destruction of religious and other distinctive architecture and libraries in armed conflict, or as part of cultural genocide, is testament to the importance of art to the self-determination of...
peoples, and to those who seek to destroy the group identity of distinctive peoples, for example indigenous persons and their culture. Fifth, artists have been recognised as being at the forefront of the global fight for free expression. The power of artists to confront their governments with unwelcome messages, for example through political cartoons, is shown by the not infrequent censorship of their work and arrests and detentions. Sixth, many people within the community may be unaware that the state has guaranteed their human rights, or fail to realise that human rights can mean anything for them. Art can provide an educative function, the visual image reaching those for whom written work is inaccessible or incomprehensible. The presentation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through simple illustrations in picture book form is just one example of this. The same messages can be conveyed by simple means such as through street art and pavement drawings.

These are only some instances of the many ways in which art and human rights can interact to promote the vision of the equal worth inherent in the human dignity of all persons. The work associated with this project will suggest many other ways in which art and human rights interact.

Professor Christine Chinkin is Professor of International Law at the London School of Economics.
Christian Boltanski, *Contacts*, 2002, 8 light boxes with photographs, 95 x 130 x 12 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Yvon Lambert.
Christian Boltanski: Transforming the subject into the object

Jörg Zutter

Born in Paris the French sculptor, photographer, painter and film maker Christian Boltanski has participated in many exhibitions worldwide. In 1996 he was selected for the exhibition *Islands: Contemporary Installations* at the National Gallery of Australia and for that occasion created the installation *Pourim Reserve* which was acquired by the Gallery. Boltanski began to paint in the late 1960s, however he turned away from painting and started searching for traces of his own past and the history of his family to which he was connected only through a few pictures and vague memories. He was born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother in 1944 the day Paris was liberated. In an interview published by the Israel Museum, Boltanski said: ‘I was born while my parents were divorced. In order to save my father’s life, they staged a fight and afterwards divorced officially. My mother then hid my father underneath the floor of our home for the duration of the war.’

Boltanski came to public attention in 1968 with short avant-garde performances and with the publication of a number of fictionally reconstructed notebooks and diaries in which he tried to come to terms with his childhood. In his work, Boltanski continually reinvents his own biography by mixing real and fictional documents. The artist uses his personal memories, anecdotes and hearsay to explore themes of identity and death to illustrate the uncertainty of life.

The combination in his highly personal work of real and fictional evidence of his and other people’s existence has remained central to his practice. Boltanski continuously works with the most ephemeral of materials: newspaper clippings, photographs, clothing, lightbulbs, old biscuit tins, light boxes, show cases, to examine and to mark the unforeseeable and transitory passing of life. He often reproduces photographs of people and their environment, together with physical objects, as he does in the two installations presented in the context of this exhibition, a recent work, *Contacts*, featured at the Drill Hall Gallery and *Pourim Reserve* currently on show at the National Gallery of Australia. On one hand Boltanski relies on primary structures introduced by different American and European artists of so-called minimal and conceptual art in the late 1960s, and on the other hand explores the truth of photography and its value as evidence in our civilisation and how it is often used as a means of illusion and a shield against death. In integrating photographs from school portraits, social clubs, obituaries, tabloids, etc., into his works, Boltanski notes that photography can not only summon up a particular person who may have passed away, but assist in remembering entire groups of people who died during tragic historical events like the Holocaust.

In 1986 Boltanski began to create large installations from a variety of materials and media, with lighting effects as integral components. Some of these installations consisted of tin boxes stacked as altar-like or monument-like constructions displayed together with portrait photographs on the wall or in the open spaces of the installation. Such assemblages of objects again relate to the principles of reconstructing and understanding of the past; in particular of the terrible events in European history during the Second World War.

*Contacts* consists of eight light boxes containing hundreds of photographs of reassembled documents of Boltanski’s personal archive, suggesting a landscape of the mind. The repetitive arrangements of the documents underline that they are part of his tremendous personal archive, creating a visionary, almost magic atmosphere.

Centering on the themes of identity, absence and death, Christian Boltanski has created a body of work, the formal strategies of which are never disassociated from the emotions they elicit. Through photography, Boltanski reinvests images with their most intense and troubling aspects, transforming the subject into the object.

Over the past three decades Christian Boltanski’s work has focused, in different and very convincing ways, on the notion of individual identity, on the ways in which we strive to create, maintain and question it, and the degree to which it is lost and dispersed in the midst of collective experience. Another recurrent theme in Boltanski’s recent work, as evident in *Contacts*, is archiving, documenting and our permanent obsession with recording, classifying and saving for posterity our own lives, those of others and our entire environment.
VZ: What is the starting point in your work?

CB: The idea that I always have is to employ a form as open as possible in people's subconsciousness. For example, the tin of biscuits is at one and the same time something which evokes in a precise way a funerary urn, and is equally a familiar object used by everybody. It is equally something which evokes the idea of conservation, of archives or of protection. It is not a matter here of protection in the sense of a safe or strong-box, but of a lesser kind of protection.

The desk lamp, for its part, reflects the idea of interrogation but also of concealment, or of libraries. As for the photographs, to begin with, they were always bringing back the idea of death. They are a little blurred because they are very small images, subsequently enlarged because I wanted to blur the content. It is the idea of death.

What one can say is that, by comparison with the previous series where I used biscuit tins, there is without doubt in this case a more monumental effort. It is more sculptural work. Moreover, for the first time, with some works I have not used the wall, while for others I have continued to use it.

That also varies according to the works. Thus, in the piece with the columns, it is the idea of fragility that interested me. For the piece with the columns, as it was shown at the Ghislaine Hussenot's Gallery in Paris, filled the whole space and in principle one was able to go through it. People had to walk around inside, but it was very difficult not to knock over one of the towers. And if they knocked one over, two or three would fall with it. The towers fell over every day. It was thus an illustration of the idea of equilibrium, something which can last very long and which is at the same time constantly on the point of falling over. It is also the image of human life. For a long time, I had wanted to make something on the idea of equilibrium, because if one makes a house of cards, for example, it could last forty years but at any moment it can also fall over. Whoever has one knows that it can be destroyed at any moment. The work with the columns is thus again a parable of life which can endure but which at any moment can also come to a stop. This arrangement of towers, if one owns it and takes care of it, can last for scores of years; but it just needs a heavy truck to pass by on the street and everything collapses. There is thus in this work certainly a visual and formal aspect (the aspect of a city), but there is also this idea of fragility and of the house of cards where everything can collapse.

VZ: It is also the first time that you offer the visitor the possibility of sensing the fragility of, but also of entering one of your sculptures, such as that acquired by the Kunsthalle in Hamburg and entitled Archive of Dead Swiss. This work appears as a passage without an exit. The visitor entering there can feel something that he or she would not have been able to experience in viewing some of your earlier installations.

CB: Yes, indeed. There, the objects themselves are bound to this idea of archives and collecting which I was just referring to. However, I am also thinking of something else which is to be found in almost all my works: the idea of a number of people, in the sense of a multitude.

For my part, I am fascinated by the notion of the individual and the multitude. What interests me, for example, in The Dead Swiss, is that they are all different and at the same time they are all similar. If one looks at them, they are all different and at the same time each has an individual life.

I am humanist enough in my art, although I am not so to the same degree in my life. If a politician says: “There’s going to be a war and there’ll be only 3000 killed,” that always shocks me greatly. It is not a matter of 3000 dead, but of one who loves spaghetti, a second who has a girl friend, a third who is nasty … It is always one plus one. I believe that in most of the works that I have been able to do, there is this notion of a great mass and at the same time of the individual, this relationship between the one and the multiple if you like.

I also love the Festival of All Saints with the Catholics, with this idea that everybody becomes a saint on that day, that everybody is a saint. This notion is present also in the pieces of clothing in most of my works.
The Children of Dijon, it is similarly present: these quite ordinary little Dijonais, to whom nothing special ever happened, become saints thanks to the little lamps; at least I honour them as saints. They are at the same time all similar and all different. There is always this idea of the multitude, of the very great number in the midst of which everybody is a person. It is something morally important in my practice.

JZ: As regards the boxes, which all contain a portrait cut out from the death notices of a newspaper, you say that you use them to emphasise the richness of each individual …

CB: Exactly. To keep these precious things. With the boxes, that is what I am saying in every case. But what I am saying is sometimes true, sometimes false. I always wish that there is a Swiss who isn't dead when I am making the work. That is to say – I have also cut out from the same newspaper several photographs such as for example – one of a gentleman who has been decorated. They are the same kind of portraits as those which illustrate the death notices. In principle, there is a box in each work with a photograph identical to the others, but inside there is a notice: “this one wasn’t dead on such and such a date.”

I have done this with the idea of chance. Often they are of older persons. Why isn’t this one dead? He is so like the others. Perhaps he is dead now. He can never be found, he is lost in the thousand boxes that are there. But there is one of them who isn’t dead, and who nonetheless is just like the others. As they say when someone is being shot by a firing squad: one of the soldiers doesn’t have a bullet.

JZ: With reference to the portraits of dead people used in your work, I find them very interesting because they always have characteristic poses.

CB: Yes, what fascinates me is that one chooses the photographs where they appear most at ease, happiest. I always ask myself what happened on the day these pictures were taken. They could not imagine that this would be their last portrait, that their real features would finally be forgotten and that only this photo would remain. Very often, when you try to remember someone who is dead, after some time, you replace in your head the image of the dead person by a photograph, or rather by the image of a photograph. As one has often seen their photograph, our memory recalls no more than the photographic image of the real face. It is always very difficult to remember people, to remember a living expression. The photograph tends to replace the person.

With The Swiss, it is the same thing. When I say that I am working on dead Swiss, people ask me: “Why Swiss?” Because to work on dead Indians would seem normal.

JZ: If you were speaking of mountaineers, one would understand, but the Swiss, I don’t understand why!

CB: There you are! To work on dead Swiss raises that question, “why the Swiss?” That is what interests me. The Swiss die too because they are human.

JZ: You’ve already said it many times: what you deplore above all is the death of the child in our own body, that is what everyone should deplore.

CB: Yes, a part of oneself which dies. Things are never simple in art. As with everyone, there are always several reasons that make us act. There is a reason which one must confess: the idea of vanity... There is also a more morbid reason, more unhealthy reason, which is fascination with the act of dying.

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Davila’s panorama floats blankly before the gallery visitor like a misplaced minimal sculpture: a canvas ring on wires, that only reveals its sense as one bends down and steps into its illuminated interior. Up on the central viewing platform, a continuous image is disclosed, unfurling as one swings the head to range over its hand-painted surfaces.

The panorama transports one to a place rarely seen by Australians: the pedestrian bridge across the Mapocho River in downtown Santiago, capital of Chile. From the vantage-point assumed for you by the painter, passers-by move quietly, or rest against the steel girders of the railing, peering down on the building-site below. Here bobcats excavate the concrete-lined channel of the Mapocho to install an underground freeway. At one end of the bridge, the gaily-coloured stalls of a street market can be seen; at the other, a tree-lined boulevard and beyond it, the soaring metal rim of a nineteenth-century railway station. Were it not for the distant cordillera of snow-capped Andes, one could almost be in Paris, somehow mixing the Seine at the Quai d’Orsay with excavations at the Gare St.-Lazare.

In a sense this is right, for Juan Davila has placed the viewer inside the space of art history as well as topographical illusion. The déjá vu in the panorama is that of the steel railway bridge of the Pont de l’Europe, as painted by Gustave Caillebotte and Edouard Manet in the 1870s. Caillebotte’s Parisian dandy looking out between the girders has been replaced by a beautiful Chilean youth, mercurial of profile and clad in a jacket of many coloured stripes. His is the sombre gaze of a witness to history, not the vacant curiosity of the flâneur.

In this place, three hundred years before, the Spanish settlers encountered and eliminated the indigenous Mapuches, taking their name as a souvenir. A great stone bridge, the Puente de Cal y Canto, was erected over the often-dry bed of the Mapocho. It too was thrown down, replaced in the 1880s by the modern steel structure that stands today, designed in the manner of the great French engineer who put his stamp on metropolitan modernism, Gustave Eiffel. So too was the Estacion Mapocho, visible in the distance (Santiago’s Estacion Central was actually built by Eiffel). In the stakes of far-flung colonial versions of modernity, Santiago snared a greater celebrity than the British who supervised the building of ‘marvellous Melbourne’ in the same era.

For Juan Davila the fragile modernisms of the colonial periphery – those of Chile, or Algeria, or Australia – puncture the exclusive claims made for Paris by the dominant historians of French art, the T. J. Clarks and Griselda Pollocks. For them Paris is the privileged locus of modernity and Woman is its very figure, be she a prostitute at large on the streets or an elegant bourgeoisie chaperoned by her family. In Davila’s painting of Santiago the passerby is humbler, and more likely male: a mestizo, not quite white; poorly dressed and lined with care, like the mustachioed man with a lunch-box who advances bleakly across the bridge. Today a worker in the revival project of Chilean late capitalism, one asks what rigours he knew in the disastrous period of General Pinochet’s dictatorship (begun when the long hand of American foreign policy reversed the socialist government of Salvador Allende).

Himself an emigrant refusing that political horror, Juan Davila prefers not to depict, as have other artists on the left, its direct manifestations. His couple on the bridge...
stand in as witnesses to events of which faint traces nevertheless survive. The river-wall to the right still bears the marks of an enormous mural, effaced by the military junta soon after the coup d'état of 1973. This mural, painted in the late 1960s by the radical Mural Brigade of Ramona Parra, was a two-hundred metre-long history of the Communist Party and the Chilean workers' movement. Davila would have known it as a young man. Partly uncovered by the flooding of the Mapocho during 1982, the murals were quickly covered again with grey paint. These ghostly traces, barely perceptible today, evoke the voices of the artists, writers, musicians and intellectuals who were tortured and killed during the years of the dictatorship - those whom a new generation of Chileans risk forgetting forever.

This is the first time Juan Davila has attempted to paint a panorama, a form of visual entertainment largely confined to the nineteenth century. Panoramas were giant circular canvases, usually set on the walls of purpose-built rotundas with sky-lit ceilings. Often housed in permanent buildings in London, Paris and Vienna (but also in ambitious regional capitals like Melbourne), panoramas usually offered physiognomies of great cities seen from a central vantage-point, or else the recreation of recent epochal events, such as the battles of the Napoleonic wars. 'The observer stands on a platform, and the space between this platform and the picture is covered with real objects which gradually blend into the picture itself. The picture is lighted from above ... so that no light but that reflected from the picture reaches the eye ... the staircase [and] the platform are kept nearly dark' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th edition).

It was not possible for Davila to attempt the conditions of lighting or scale that make the illusion of another place complete. But he is one of the rare painters alive with the technical skills – and the ambition – to attempt
his own panorama, cut to his memories and his own need for cultural intervention. The Canadian artist Jeff Wall has expressed his fascination with panoramas by using a wide-angle lens to photograph the restoration of the Bourbaki Panorama (in Lucerne, Switzerland). A parallel spirit of postmodern homage to a lost visual technology invests the Australian Tony Clark’s reinvention of the ‘myriorama’ (another popular 19th century visual entertainment).

In this sense Davila’s panorama of Santiago is a symbolic gesture, aimed at asserting the relevance of the Chilean experience to Australians, and addressing the profound loss of home that affects the migrant. For his 2002 paintings on the current Australian refugee crisis, Davila discovered a deadpan style of painting that lacks the colourful complexity of his familiar collages of appropriated art. In them, Davila embodied the figure of the Refugee as a tall brown-haired woman, stripped naked or besmirched with mud. She stands in a desert landscape that evokes Woomera, but is based on snapshots of the harsh Chilean plains before the Andes mountains. That perspectival scenography of desolation (with its source in author snapshots) is continued in the panorama of Santiago. In writing of the migrant’s experience of a ‘wholesale loss of one's most meaningful and valued objects to which memories and deep affections are attached’, Davila has concluded ‘the subject of the Diaspora is in constant mourning that can only be resolved by utopian thought, the materialisation of the lost nation that erases the here and now of the new place.’

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1 ‘In an exhibition that attempts to address human rights issues, I use this format to surround spectators and move them within an illusion. Rather than illustrating abuses that are not visible... I propose a narrative based on the medium,’ Juan Davila, Panorama of Santiago, Chile: 1973-2003 (Artist’s Statement), June 2003.


Fiona Foley, *Ya kari - speak for*, 2001, oil on canvas, two panels, 95 x 486 cm each. Image courtesy the artist. ANU Photography.
Of course Fiona Foley is a witness! In one sense her work is all about determined efforts of remembering – bearing witness to both specific instances and pan-Aboriginal experiences of colonialism – and refusing to remain silent. I want to consider and elaborate this characterisation as relevant to what I'll call Foley’s historical art works. But I also want to take Fiona Foley’s art as an incitement to ask some different questions: What is witnessing? How have Aboriginal people been called upon to bear witness? What are the relationships between silence and witnessing? What kinds of connections can be made between witnessing, human rights and other kinds of rights: rights to knowledge, to land or perhaps even silence?

Strong examples of Fiona Foley’s historical art as bearing witness can be found in works such as the survival series (1988), various Eliza Fraser works (most produced between 1990 and 1992), Lost Badtjala, severed hair (1991), Native Blood (1994), and Land Deal (1995). In a literal sense, the very existence of her work echoes and amplifies the foundational claim of Aboriginal people in the twentieth century: ‘We have survived’.

More specifically, Foley’s work stages a palpable connection between art, Aboriginality and place. As Djon Mundine has observed, her work literally re-makes materials gathered from Fraser Island/Thoorgine/K’Gari, the land of her Badtjala people:

this raw material – [is] a form of cultural memory – from Fraser Island itself ... For Foley, this was an art practice carried out in a custodial role; a way of reclaiming the history of her people and their land.¹

What is custodial about this work is that it refuses to be silent about Aboriginality and place. I think of it this way: large numbers of Badtjala people (like many other Aboriginal people) were removed from their country by the early twentieth century. This sometimes initiated a kind of silence over country, not an absence of song (although this was sometimes the case) but new constraints as to what could be sung and when. In the face of colonisation, custodians had to come up with new strategies; they had to be secret and innovative, silent and declarative, proud painters and pious priests.

Broad and multiple processes of dispossession enabled non-Aboriginal institutions to deny and frustrate indigenous rights, particularly rights to land, and such disposessions continue to this day. Only last year, after an appeal to the High Court, Yorta Yorta people failed to win ‘native title’ rights to their lands and waters, in part, because they could not demonstrate continuous relationships to those lands adequate to the test required under the Native Title Act 1993, section 22. In the words of the trial judge ‘the tide of history [had] … washed away any real acknowledgement [by the Yorta Yorta people] of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs.’²

But as an island woman and a coastal dweller Foley knows that tides wash out and they wash in, twice every day. What tides carry out they can also carry back in, along with the unexpected things that make tidal beaches such interesting places to walk. It is precisely against banal understandings of tradition such as those of Justice Olney, that Fiona Foley is talking back. So, in Badtjala Woman (1994), a series of three black-and-white photographs, Foley takes off the garb of everyday life in contemporary Australia and puts on the markers of Aboriginality; ‘traditional’ necklaces and a woven basket carried on the head. She stands bare-breasted and adorned, flirting with both anthropological and National Geographic traditions of eroticising and primitivising black women; do the tits titillate or does the averted gaze and the claim made in the present – ‘Badtjala Woman’ – take precedence?

For my purposes here, what is important is that the voice, or the mode of address, of Foley’s work is historical. In other words, it takes the historical experience of colonisation – an historical experience shared by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people – as the terrain on which it will operate. That so many Aboriginal artists operate on this ground is un-exceptional; from Tommy McRae and Namatjira to Foley and Paddy Fordham Wainburanga and Gordon Bennett, Aboriginal artists have in content and form endlessly negotiated the transactional space of colonial histories.

A didactic but no less evocative piece of Foley’s in this mode is Lie of the Land (1997). This consists of seven
sandstone blocks, each about three metres in height, engraved on two sides with the names of objects – blankets, flour, knives, beads, scissors, tomahawks and looking glasses – which were due to Aboriginal people under the 1835 ‘treaty’ that John Batman entered into with Aboriginal people around what is now Melbourne. It is a sad and sombre piece, effectively recording on giant headstones the objects which cost so many lives.

It is also clearly a work that is in dialogue with particular non-Aboriginal histories; histories that have sought the disappearance of Aboriginal people. Again, this work bears witness to other historical realities: indigenous occupation prior to dispossession, the fiction of land deals, the deceit of a white woman ‘lost among the savages’, and, above all, continuing Badtjala traditions and relationships to land. About these matters, much of Fiona Foley’s art refuses silence.

The same could not be said about other art works by Foley. Indeed some of her work is both strangely illegible while, at the same time, purporting to offer specific and important meaning. Foley herself offers an explanation:

*My drawings are event-oriented, it may be a place where I’ve been or something that has taken place, and it could be difficult to ascertain the meaning of these symbols in my art unless you speak to me …*

In other words, the image itself operates with signs that require certain knowledge in order to be legible. This seems to me to work in the case of some of her stunningly beautiful pastels such as Catching Tuna (1992); a story attached to the painting opens up the image. And this is exactly of a piece with much Aboriginal art in the market today: event pictures of a story that is not necessarily legible until one learns to read the signs, which may be possible because there is a story attached and perhaps a key-map on the reverse.³

If Foley’s ‘historical’ works bear witness and her ‘event drawings’ encode certain cultural experiences, a third category of Foley’s work seems to implicitly evoke what in another context we might think of as secret and sacred culture. In these art works, it’s not witnessing but silence that carries real cultural force. Let’s consider one of Foley’s two works in this exhibition, *Ya kari – speak for* (2001), in this light.

The piece was originally a four-panelled work, each rectangular-shaped canvas inscribed with both a pattern and a pair of words: *Bunda-Bundagun, Baring-Baringun, Balgoni-Balonigun, Therwein-Therweingun*. Because I have asked Fiona about these terms, I know they refer to an account by A. W. Howitt, in his 1904 book, *The Native Tribes of South-Eastern Australia*, in which he describes and reproduces an image of a carved piece of wood and bee’s wax that maps marriage relationships among the ‘Kaiabara’ people who live in south-east Queensland. Howitt was setting out kinship relations that would today be described as subsection or skin relationships. The first term in the pairs refers to the male member of a particular subsection; the second to the names taken by female members of the subsection. In each case, subsection membership involved particular kinship, custodial and other cultural responsibilities and rights.

There are two aspects of Foley’s use of these terms that interest me here. The first is in relation to rights. While I have no expertise in relation to the particular subsection rights that Howitt sought to describe, one thing is entirely clear: to talk of subsection rights is to talk about an entirely other way of understanding rights than that invoked by the notion of human rights. Of course, human rights is a notion that comes to us as part of a package of entitlements sometimes thought of as due to citizens in post-Enlightenment democratic societies – the right to free speech, to freedom of information and so on. We know that these rights are not natural but their peculiarity only comes into view when other rights are asserted in their stead. That is a long-term predicament in this country: the subterranean tension between various European-derived rights and Aboriginal rights, a tension which emerges episodically but persistently in proper names – Hindmarsh Island and Eddie Mabo – and in relation to rights to land, knowledge, images, objects and culture.

Secondly, it seems to me that Foley’s naming of skin groups evokes the names of actual witnesses who cannot bear witness. This is a point I take from the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the writings of Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz. Agamben argues that witnessing and silence are not...
alternatives or opposites but terms that are inevitably intertwined. He writes:

The ‘true’ witnesses, the ‘complete witnesses’, are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness. They are those who ‘touched bottom’: the Muselmann, the drowned. The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony.\(^5\)

Colonial Australia was not Auschwitz but the skin names of witnesses who did not or could not bear witness point very precisely to a missing testimony. Let me explain this by following Agamben’s detailed commentary on Primo Levi’s story of a child of deportees:

_Hurbinek was a nobody, a child of death … He looked about three years old … He was paralysed from the waist down with atrophied legs, as thin as sticks; but his eyes, lost in the triangular and wasted face, flashed terribly alive, full of demand, assertion, of the will to break loose, to shatter the tomb of his dumbness. The speech he lacked, which no one had bothered to teach him, the need of speech charged his stare with explosive urgency._

Agamben goes on:

_Now at a certain point Hurbinek begins to repeat a word over and over again, a word that no one in the camp can understand and that Levi doubtfully transcribes as mass-klo or matisklo … despite the presence of all the languages of Europe in the camp, Hurbinek’s word remains obstinately secret._

Levi concludes:

_Hurbinek, the nameless, whose tiny forearm—even his—bore the tattoo of Auschwitz; Hurbinek died in the first days of March 1945, free but not redeemed. Nothing remains of him; he bears witness through these words of mine._

Perhaps it’s through repeating secret words from those who were witnesses that we both remember their silence and ‘bear witness to a missing testimony’. Perhaps this reminds us of another way of quietly and respectfully recalling the drowned.

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\(^2\) The Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v The State of Victoria [1998], FCA, 1606.

\(^3\) Importantly, I’d also insist that these ‘event drawings’ do not only encode particular personal experiences of the artist. I’d be equally interested in exploring the extent to which these event drawings share certain cultural features with those of her aunt, Wandi, whose remarkable drawings illustrate Wilf Reeves and Olga Miller, _The Legends of Moonie Jari_, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1964. But that is a project for another day.


\(^6\) Thanks to Hilary Ericksen for comments on the essay, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery and Andrew Baker Art Dealer for images, and Fiona Foley for talking to me about her work.
At the end of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary leader José Rizal wrote at length of the condition of the Philippines and the importance of self-awareness to gain liberty:

In order to read the destiny of a people, it is necessary to open the book of its past...Scarcely had they been attached to the Spanish crown than they had to sustain with their blood and the efforts of their sons the wars and ambitions, the conquest of the Spanish people, and in these struggles, in that terrible crisis when a people changes its form of government, its laws, usages, customs, religion and beliefs, the Philippines was depopulated, impoverished and retarded...caught in their metamorphosis without confidence in their past, without faith in their present, with no fond hope for the years to come.1

The Filipino revolution was understood by others of the region who were not so advanced in their own independence movements. There is a poignant passage in Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s novel *Awakenings*, following the issues of colonial power and looking to the example of the Philippines in overturning this in the Dutch East Indies:

The Philippines cannot be forgotten, can they? Even if they were deceived by Spain and America? It is inevitable that other conquered people will follow in their footsteps. Yes, even in the Indies. If not now, then later...2

Pat Hoffie is an unusual Australian artist in her awareness of the history, flux and disparity of cultural power in our own region, conscious, as was Pramoedya, that the conditions of near neighbours are both relevant and encumbering to us as well. She has investigated these disparities of existence through thirty years of practice, travelling the world unceasingly, seeking out experiences and understanding. Her focus has been on Asia and in the last decade on the Philippines. An outsider, she has increasingly teased the boundaries of belonging and acceptance, forever uncomfortable about her place in easeful Brisbane knowing the circumstances of her friends, family and colleagues in the archipelago. It makes for a specific tension in her work that, as she says, begs numerous questions.

She has moved from figurative painting to interleaving the hands of other people, or machines, into the process of her work, distancing and complicating her personal involvement. This distancing is at odds with the literal messages of her art: an involvement on a visceral level with the (usually) disadvantaged members of our global world; a cry for justice; a plea for understanding.

Fifteen years ago Hoffie depersonalised generic ‘other’ images, like the ‘blue/green Asian’ women of Tretiakov’s popular prints, through colour photocopying, emphasizing their being forever reproducible. The series *Hotel Paradise* of 1989-90 was, of necessity, little images made large by multiples. Her work in this exhibition is made large by the hands of others, the Galicia family in Manila. This is another form of reproduction, very powerful in its size, and more complex in its politics. Its overt subject is the ‘children overboard’ affair, when refugee children were claimed by the Australian government to have been thrown into the sea by their families, evidence of unacceptable behaviour for future citizens of the country. The claim was subsequently shown to be untrue.

Hoffie first commissioned large banners from Filipino billboard painters for the Adelaide Festival in 1994, choosing to place a nineteenth century image of an Aboriginal cricketer, overlaid with the message ‘No such thing as a level playing field’, above the Adelaide cricket oval’s main gate, with similar relevant sitings of killing wildlife at the Museum, questionable cultural exchange at the Art Gallery and hypocritical piety at the Cathedral. A later return to the 2002 Adelaide Festival included Russian Revolutionary imagery woven into mats by Filipino weavers as a critique of cultural accumulation and translated meaning.

Hoffie lives in Brisbane, a town of complicated political heritage. Known to southern Australians (increasingly wrongly) as the capital of the ‘deep North’, a city of the new rich and of little cultural depth – and where in relatively recent memory political protest was banned – she maintains a fairly lonely place amidst her fellow citizens and art community. She is notable for her stand, however, even in Australia as a whole. There are few
artists in Australia who for so long and with such unstinting commitment have continued to find creative ways to articulate their position on the world and its affairs.

For some, Hoffie’s works and art are too extreme. They want to question her bravado and her passion. But doing that cuts down what she offers – this take on life. It also quibbles in the face of injustice, worrying about words while deeds go unquestioned; seeing both sides when one is but a shadow of the other.

Pat Hoffie is a warrior-woman: feisty, funny, performative and clever. The dramatic scale and baroque gesture of The Children Overboard work, alternatively altar painting and stage set, are performative; insisting on being seen amidst meeker offerings, remaining in our mind’s eye, transformed by Hoffie’s decisions and the Galicia family’s hands into a memento mori of human despair.

An Interview, May-June 2003
Alison Carroll and Pat Hoffie

AC: What is your motivation for making the works in this exhibition?

PH: The works are part of an ongoing series entitled Fully Exploited Labour. Each of the exhibitions that are part of this series has dealt with the inequalities of labour that underpin international trade. This includes the art world, and my own role within that world. I have tended to reiterate the fact that my role is inevitably one of complicity – one where the links between production and presentation have become less visible.

In terms of this particular body of work, I wanted to produce some of those icons of very recent history that form part of the contemporary landscape of who we are as Australians. They are images that reflect back to us a particular moment.

AC: How were they made?

PH: Each of the original images was lifted from the ABC TV Four Corners programs and worked through the computer. The print-outs were sent to a family in Manila – the Galicia family – who used to paint billboards for a living. (Since I started working with them, printed billboards have taken over the hand-painted ones). They grid them up, paint them and send them back to me.

AC: How does this impact on their political motivation?

PH: Of course I could have had the images enlarged by technological means or I might have painted them myself or they could have been retained as bytes of film and re-worked. But the fact that they have been outsourced off-shore is part of the kind of global trading that makes entire communities – entire nations – leave their place of birth in search of more equitable possibilities. That is, the manufacture of the work is both the subject of the work as it is the means.

AC: Art can change people’s minds, as the Farm Security Administration photographs in the 1930s in America did. How do you see your work in this scenario?

PH: I had a surprise the other day when a curator off-handedly referred to my work as protest art. I guess I see this particular body of work as merely and openly factual. These images are reporting a particular moment in Australia. They say just as much about our values at the moment as a Streeton view of unpeopled paddocks might say about the national aspirations of the time.

My sense is that all art is political, and if you choose to say that your art has nothing to do with politics, then that’s a political position too. It means you are happy with the status quo as it is.

AC: The image of the sinking refugee boat has become an icon for a number of Australian artists – Jon Cattapan and Charles Green & Lyndell Brown for example have also used it. We Australians know and understand what it means. But I was interested in the story of how the Galicia family didn’t know about the image and turned it into an image of ‘Christ on the Sea of Galilee’, in accord with their own store of iconography. So, how much do people need to know about the image?

PH: The act of translation is always embroidered with little glitches and approximations – the Chinese whispers phenomenon. It’s often very telling and I suspect that in many instances the mistranslations are
willing ones. Perhaps it is not surprising that the images of the Siev X breaking up and the children overboard image ended up so biblical. The Philippines is saturated with Christian imagery and the very airwaves are permeated with the possibilities of apparitions, miracles and magic every day.

AC: This complexity of making has been a cause of some emotion in the art world globally – about what is seen as exploitation, versus a commercial commissioning of a tradesperson, versus collaboration. What happens in this instance?

PH: I guess it might be the middle option, and I could fool myself that there might be elements of the third option if I felt ‘honky’ enough, but in the end it can only ever be the first option because any exchange of trade or ideas or even relationships across such uneven territories cannot but end in exploitation.

Everyone who pulls a t-shirt over their heads in the morning starts feeling uncomfortable when they start getting conscious of the real costs and conditions of labour in a global economy. How do you walk that fine line between being a bleeding heart and just thinking it’s all too big to solve? This series has always mentioned the names of those who produced it, where it was done and the costs. It’s not called the Fully Exploited Labour series for nothing.

Alison Carroll is Director, Asialink Arts, Asialink, University of Melbourne.

Alfredo Jaar: From there to here.

In the last two decades Alfredo Jaar has assumed a leading position in the world of contemporary art. For more than twenty years he has been showing us how to look at events we would rather not see: genocide, poverty, economic exploitation and a litany of global injustices. In doing so he has employed an array of techniques, although he is probably best known for his photo-based installations. His work combines critical awareness with a resonating language of protest, and at the same time creates a genuine aesthetic and a way of communicating that has great beauty and impact.

Born in Chile in 1956, Jaar moved with his family to Martinique when he was seven. Ten years later he returned to Santiago, graduated in architecture and undertook extensive studies in film making.

In 1982 he moved from Chile, where he felt completely suffocated by the political situation. He chose New York because the majority of the people living there, almost three quarters, were originally émigrés from one part of the world or another and he found the émigré intellectual and cultural environment stimulating.

In 1985 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and the following year was invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale. With a body of work focusing on the widening gap between Third World countries and First World nations, Jaar’s ambitious subject matter and eloquent explorations were the first of a series of exhibitions in which he confronted a variety of human rights issues.

All intricately connected, these projects bore witness to the dynamics of oppression, exploitation and displacement on a global scale. Gold in the Morning (1986), a large, mixed media installation, dealt with the exploitation, bordering on slavery, of goldminers in Brazil. New York was introduced to Jaar’s work when he replaced all the advertising posters in a Manhattan subway with pictures of labourers swarming like ants over a massive open cut gold mine in the Brazilian jungle. Coyote! (1988) juxtaposed light box images with a trough of water to evoke the professional people smugglers along the US/Mexican border. For the renowned Magiciens de la Terre exhibition in Paris in 1989, in which 100 artists from all over the world participated, Jaar designed a labyrinthine environment in which images of a toxic waste dump in Nigeria were illuminated by a series of light boxes. Since then Jaar has created more than eighty projects, the most recent of which was presented at Documenta 11 in 2002.

Jaar’s work fuses the aesthetic and the ethical to focus on global human rights injustices as played out in the interaction and the widening gap between the industrialised nations and the developing world, or, as the artist terms it, between ‘here’ and ‘there’.

For Jaar, ‘here’ and ‘there’ is articulated in political terms as First World and Third World, and the space that separates those cultures and ideologies is a measure of power and influence. As the constraints of distance lessen with the emergence of economic globalisation and global information networks, Jaar’s work traces the new and shifting boundaries between the First and Third Worlds.

The boundaries between here and there have been disappearing little by little. When I read that we were dumping our garbage there, in Africa in this instance, it was the ultimate proof that there were no more boundaries between here and there. At the same time the boundaries between there and here are stronger than ever. Racial tensions are increasing, immigration laws are becoming more restrictive… So the way from there to here, from the non-West to the West, is closed, although it is an open road from here to there. We send them our garbage, our poisons. What’s next?

Jaar reinforces the idea of the gap, the space from here to there, through his installations, which use light boxes – ironically, a First World tool borrowed from advertising – to display his photographs. Drawing on his training in architecture and film making, he constructs installations in which a major part of the message is to be found in the spaces between the frames and the careful arrangements of photographs and reflective surfaces.

With our critical faculties strained by information overload in today’s first world society, Jaar wonders what role is left for art in enhancing human awareness.

The more the flow of information … the less activist we become. Action is inversely proportional to information. My role is to bring the same information...
to the public but in an entirely different context. Contextualised correctly, information should translate itself into action.  

For Jaar, Rwanda was a case in point. People looked at the images but they didn't respond with outrage and demands for political action. As the writer Roland Barthes suggested of such image saturation, this is because, as viewers, we have been dispossessed of our judgement: someone has recoiled in horror for us, reflected for us, judged for us. The photographer has left us nothing except the simple act of intellectual acquiescence. Such images do not compel us to action but to acceptance. The action has already taken place and we are not implicated.

And yet, as David Levi Strauss noted, what happened in Rwanda in 1994 was a state-sponsored act of genocide that exterminated over one million people in just one hundred days while the rest of the world looked on. It was the third biggest genocide of the 20th century after that of Jews and Gypsies by the Germans during the Second World War and that of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks in 1915-16.

In 1994 Alfredo Jaar went to Rwanda to see for himself what had happened there. The outcome was a challenging and harrowing exhibition, *Real Pictures*, first shown at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago in 1995. Sixty images were each encased in a black linen box, on the top of each of which the artist silkscreened in white a description of the photograph inside. As Holland Cotter noted in his review in *The New York Times*, the exhibition was 'in the spirit of classic tragedy, where violence takes place out of sight and is reported only in words.'

Despite image saturation and visual overload in our society, only a small percentage of exposed film ever sees the light of day, which begs the question: what about all the images we don't see? This paradox is implicit in Alfredo Jaar's installation *Fading*, which is included in this exhibition. In 1991 Jaar visited Hong Kong, at that time a major destination for Vietnamese boat people, who then languished for years in holding camps before their fate and their future were decided for them. He spent three weeks photographing and speaking with the refugees.

*Fading* consists of four open, water filled metal trays which, at first glance, resemble a piece of minimalist sculpture then, upon closer inspection, a photographer's developing trays. Three of the containers each houses a large, closely cropped image of Vietnamese boat people at sea. The fourth container holds seventeen ID-type photos of individual refugees drifting about, descending to the bottom of the tank as if fading into oblivion then floating back to the surface. *Fading* is one of several recent works in which Jaar highlights the actual process of image making in his presentation. The use of photographic apparatus, such as developing trays, alludes to the subjectivity of photography. The close cropping of prints alludes to the way that photographers continually manipulate information. The whole is a metaphor for memory and makes reference to the seemingly random manner in which some boat people were accepted for resettlement and a bright future and others were returned to the deprivation and despair from which they had so perilously fled.

Jaar's work uses photographs, light boxes and mirrors to create difficult, challenging encounters for the viewer. Photographs are heavily cropped into confronting close-ups. Images are often placed so that they cannot be viewed directly but only in reflections or from deliberately uncomfortable positions. Typically, *Fading* has been devised to guide the viewer's perspective of the installation. The artist makes the viewer lean over the boxes and look down onto the photos floating in them. Our encounter with the subject is carefully directed.

In *Fading*, we see two of the artist's chief beliefs at work: that art can stimulate awareness in ways that news reportage cannot, and that meaning can be revealed by controlling the viewer's conceptual and physical relationship to his images.

*I envy the power of film makers because they have the audience for two hours in a dark room, seated in
comfortable chairs in front of a large screen. In contemporary art we are lucky to get someone to stand in front of a work for two seconds. That is why I make my works interactive. To gain time. I force the audience to read, to move around, to get physically involved.  

The issues that Jaar addressed in Fading resonate in Australia today as the nation grapples with the moral and human rights issues surrounding the latest wave of boat peoples.

Fading has been kindly loaned for this exhibition by the National Gallery of Australia, which acquired the work in 1994. It has previously been seen in exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1992, the Hôtel des Arts in Paris and the Kunsthalle in Cologne in 1993, and the National Gallery of Australia in 1996.

Jaar has a critical and political eye combined with finely tuned sensibilities for space and the power of images. His works have an almost forensic precision. They are characterised by extreme ordering and meticulous construction. Although he addresses Third World issues, his framework is grounded in a First World aesthetic.

Jaar is constantly returning to the question of how artists approach knowledge: what the nature of knowledge is and how it can be conveyed responsibly.  

My practice tries to account for the unequal power relations between these different societies and to identify, to evaluate and to present... My dilemma as an artist is how to make art out of information that most of us would rather ignore.  

He is preoccupied with the interaction of the dominated and the dominant, his position informed by his own situation as a member of a ruling culture who has lived much of his life in Third World cities. His is a highly aesthetic voice, perceptive and compassionate.

I don’t like to be labelled a political artist. All work is political. Even when you paint flowers you are making a political statement. The label ‘political’ is used to marginalise certain artists, to describe artists critical of the system. But even when the work is not critical, it’s political. If you support the status quo or if you are indifferent you are making an equally strong political statement.  

Jaar is a deeply committed and widely experienced artist whose research, analysis and observation are suffused with knowledge and passion. His art presents us with what we are reluctant to acknowledge, and confronts us with what we would prefer not to see. His images bear witness to the fact that the world’s more compelling human rights problems, from wars to the intolerable conditions that produce refugee situations, are almost always influenced by developed industrialised nations that support repressive economic or political regimes.

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1 Interview with Lilly Wei, Art in America, July 1989, p. 155.
2 Ibid.
6 Interview with Kate Davidson in Kate Davidson and Michael Desmond, Islands. Contemporary installations from Australia, Asia, Europe and America, National Gallery of Australia, exhibition catalogue 1996, p. 66.
7 Artist’s statement, Flash Art, No. 143, November/December 1988, pp. 117.
8 Lilly Wei, op.cit.
History often seems a quarrel over whose truth is true, whose right is right. William Kentridge's work buys into this history but brings to the argument an idiosyncratic reflexive gaze, a way of seeing that is at once coolly objective and passionately engaged. There is an absurdist streak in his work, and a dense theatricality: funny in a sometimes cartoonish way that is both intelligently incisive and desperately sad, his etchings, drawings and films move from mood to mood and moment to moment as unpredictably as the cat that appears and disappears throughout his animated works. At the base of his art, it seems, is a dedicated attention to history: first, art history, as reflected in his homages to ancestors like Francisco de Goya, William Hogarth, Honoré Daumier, George Grosz, Max Beckmann and Otto Dix, but also social and political history. Especially, he turns his attention to the small local stories of individual lives (the exiled Felix Teitelbaum and the industrialist Soho Eckstein, for instance) and to the broader sweep of national history, from the colonisation of South Africa through apartheid to the post-apartheid period.

The works he makes are reservoirs of his culture, capturing moments that are outside the conventional, legitimate zones of knowledge, such as official histories, government records, or theoretical analyses. Thus his art brings to its viewers' attention a different way of looking at the world. This doesn't mean the works are necessarily 'true' in an ontological way: they're as likely to be borrowed or salvaged glimpses, metaphorised images, disconnected or half-truths, put together to make something that gestures and suggests rather than announcing a truth. Photographs are like nouns — a record of what is seen; but paintings and drawings are verbs — more to do with the act of seeing, and the artist's senses (and history, ethics and aesthetics) at the moment of making. As Kentridge has said, 'drawing is a testing of ideas; a slow-motion version of thought. ... What ends in clarity does not begin that way.'

His etchings, drawings and 'drawings for projection' (the animated films) all seem to be about this testing of ideas, but they end in great clarity. Though his works are not specifically 'about' apartheid, for me, and surely for anyone else who grew up in Johannesburg during the 1960s and 1970s, they offer the shock of recognition: the huge flat sky, the wasted city, the endless crowds, the mine flats and dumps, the rows of exhausted people waiting for the 'blacks only' buses to take them home to the townships after another day's work in white people's homes, gardens and factories, and those same glossy homes in the northern suburbs: all are images that resonate 'Johannesburg'. And though his work is not 'about' apartheid in a didactic manner, it is deeply informed by that half century of violence, and the need to respond to it. He says, 'I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings.' An art, one might say, that sneaks up on the viewer rather than shouting out its ideologies. The delicate drawings and etchings, the marks of the artist's hand across the paper, and the evocative lines; all capture the eye, and only after we are captivated by, say, the perfect heads in *Casspirs full of love* (1989), does their statement, or perhaps suggestion, become apparent: something awful is going on; things are not as they should be.

*Ubu tells the truth* (1997) is the first of his short films that directly addresses South African politics. This 'report' on the apartheid era is deeply distressing, though it begins with a kind of pratfall humour, reflecting its origins in Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. Watching the film I am both the horrified eye swivelling to stare across the picture plane, and the controlling eye/camera, the carnivalesque destroyer that controls the scene. His Pa Ubu is grotesque, clownish, and intimately invested in the regime: at once the strutting bully and the panoptic eye (the dancing camera) that teeters about on its tripod, seeing everything, recording everything, and implicated in every act of torture, every murder, every moment of brutality. The film has an angry, urgent quality, shot through with threat, from the appalling scenes of torture and murder, through the newsreel shots of security forces firing with complete indifference into groups of unarmed demonstrators, to the harshly cadenced official voice (de Klerk?) announcing off camera 'There is no other alternative for South Africa' and the megaphoned shout, 'Gevaar!' (Danger!). The coda, for me, is the sequence where the man falls, tumbling and
falling, outside the building (John Vorster Square?) from which he has been hurled, while about him are clouds of cries. He calls out too, in anguish, 'Oh, Suid Afrika!' — and his voice is the voice of a whole nation in mourning.

It hurts to watch this film, and to know what we are capable of doing and being; but it is important to face our past. Paul Ricoeur writes that history is 'one of the ways in which men "repeat" their belonging to the same humanity', and in Kentridge's tellings of history we can enter into a Conversation with the past which throws light on that shared humanity. Still, we humans are remarkably able to bury the past, to forget and thereby repeat history, denying justice (truth) to the dead and the living. We watch this happening in the film Felix in Exile: bodies litter the landscape, draped with newspapers, and then crumble into heaps of anonymous earth: their brief lives disappeared, their brief deaths unreported. Kentridge points out, 'The very term "new South Africa" has within it the idea of a painting over the old, the natural process of disremembering, the naturalisation of things new.'

But those deaths didn't just happen in the past; and nor has the past been painted over. It remains to undermine the 'disremembering, the naturalisation of things new' in the traces found in stories, in our deep memories, and even in the carriage of our bodies. Kentridge's Sleeper (1997), for instance, shows a man lying on a narrow plank, asleep but not peaceful; his posture seems awkward; and his bulky body appears to be deeply inscribed, perhaps by the marks and statements that have brought him to this place, to this state. His skin reminds me of Franz Kafka's nightmare of the writing machine that etches onto and into the body the crimes committed against the state. Like the prisoner in Kafka's Penal Colony, we carry the marks of history in our bodies, and decipher them with our wounds.

Kentridge's animated works insist on this remainder/reminder too, because he uses what he calls a 'stone-age technique' in which every shot bears the mark of the artist's hand, and the traces of each scene that went before it. Unlike conventional animation, in which every cell is clean and new, Kentridge uses the same several drawings – up to twenty or thirty for each of his films –
over and over, making tiny erasures and redrawings on the page to signal movement. And because of this technique, each drawing retains the memory, or the history, of the entire sequence that is being animated across its plane. A piece of paper flutters across a street (in *Felix in exile*), and its passing remains visible, every movement ineradicably recorded. Soho Eckstein (in *Mine*) drives his coffee plunger down through his bed, through the floor, through the mine shacks where the weary men sleep, down into the depths of the gold-soaked Witwatersrand, and every juddering movement of the plunger is recorded ineradicably. And Felix Teitelbaum, falling in love with Soho’s wife, spills fish (sperm?) from his body; they flail about, leaving the memory of their movements and passion on the page.

All this is a reminder that nothing just happens, and then disappears; it is always made to happen, made to disappear. Nietzsche once suggested that where there is meaning, we can trace the struggles, battles and violence that produced it, and in Kentridge’s works is the possibility of tracing this manufacture of meaning. Kentridge himself states, ‘I believe that in the indeterminacy of drawing, the contingent way that images arrive in the work, lies some kind of model of how we live our lives. … It is in the strangeness of the activity itself that can be detected judgement, ethics and morality.’ So we are left, leaving his work, with a sense of indeterminacy and radical contingency, but also with the assurance that the world can be seen through wakeful eyes, and the past kept in sight and in mind.

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The very title of this work seems to pose a conundrum. For what might a *Hamletmachine* be capable of producing? Surely Hamlet, that prince of vacillation, has throughout the ages offered an allegory warning of the perils of the irresolute. His inability to choose, his lack of direction, his procrastination have been held up as the (in)action that leads to inevitable chaos, decline and destruction. The idea of a machine to endlessly reproduce this inactivity is surely a cynical proposition. And the contradictory nature of this work is compounded when we consider its development: a contemporary female Indian artist borrowing from the work of a German playwright. When Heiner Müller wrote his play *Hamletmachine* in 1977, his candid portrayal of a Germany divided against itself shocked audiences. Müller’s refusal to turn from the ugly horror of everyday incidents of betrayal and hypocrisy charged the more generalised mythologies of border conflict with more psychological and visceral nuances.

In her appropriation of Müller’s play, Malani moves the focus of the grand narrative again – this time to the Hindu-Muslim conflicts of the present. She does this through unpicking certain mythologies – those that describe the axis of tension in strictly nationalistic and religious terms. In this work, as within previous work by Malani, the subject remains elusive - neither ethnically locatable nor decipherable in terms of easy association with ‘other-ness’, identity seems to fight for its indeterminacy; seems to procrastinate for more time. Here identity makes no excuses for its mutability or lack of decisiveness in terms of form or articulacy. Instead, it claims a no-man’s ground for waiting until new grounds for communication might be established.

*Hamletmachine* was produced with the Butoh dancer Harada Nobuo in an installation that uses the dancer’s body as a screen onto which the flickering images of history are temporarily tattooed. Johan Pijnappel describes *Hamletmachine* as

> four videos, three projected onto the walls and one onto a layer of salt on the floor – a reference to Gandhi’s salt march... The images spread like stains, seemingly soaking the walls; the huge projected faces are manipulated with superimpositions to acquire the transparency of watercolours."}

In Malani’s work, the pleas for reconciliation – between East and West, between the Hindu world and the Islamic world, between the First World and the Third World – are never uttered. Instead, the possibilities for first-hand, first-time conciliation are prepared. Each viewer is invited to examine and weigh the costs that must be paid by both sides if the grounds for equitable engagement are to be attempted.

In this work the value of procrastination takes on a twist – the refusal to play the game according to the rules set by those in power harbours a potential that may not yet be tainted by the same sense of doom associated with Shakespeare’s original anti-hero. Instead, Malani’s work seems to suggest that we cannot begin to embark on processes of conciliation until we have taken the time to imagine new grounds on which to come together.

Malani’s interest in the procrastinator as hero was evident in her 1999 project *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* – a video installation based on a story of the same name by Saadat Hasan Manto. In Manto’s story the inmate of a mental asylum in the Punjab refuses to accept the directions to choose sides at the time of Partition in 1947 and, instead, elects to perpetually inhabit a no man’s land of his own invention:

> There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.²

That strip of land with no name became, in the tale, the burial site for a man who refused to play the choosing game set by those in power. And if the anti-hero came from a refuge for the insane, then the world beyond was cast as the domain of true madness.

Malani’s video installation of the same name shifts the grounds again – this time to the test-sites for Indian nuclear explosions. On the floor of a dark, cave-like space twelve uniform tin trunks, the kind used by migrants and travellers on the Subcontinent, are arranged in a rectangular grid on the floor, each containing a quilt and a TV monitor whose contents flicker and blink. Across their surfaces run a gamut of screened images loosely connecting a range of issues – the effects of radiation, an interview, a child being...
born, the puffs of mushroom clouds from nuclear tests. On the left and right walls of the installation space are images of women endlessly, futilely, attempting to tie a sari. In the endless repetition of the filmed images Malani casts a kind of stasis within that cave – one where the viewer is committed to forever witnessing. To re-thinking. To re-considering the implications of certain actions.

Within this collection of filmed images one in particular seems to epitomise the role of the procrastinator: the tiny brown child that eventually squeezes out from the body of the mother, helped by the hands of other women, arrives only to remain for a moment, to hesitate and then to retreat, or seem to be sucked back in. As if it has made the decision to wait – to not enter this cacophony of confusion just yet. The image is both amusing and horrifying – the tragi-comic point where the impossibility of action becomes not absurd, but damning on those who are privileged enough to play the role of audience.

Malani’s choice of medium is always a conscious one. Her use of technology is, for her, fraught with the kinds of contradictions that bind her role as a contemporary artist to one where witness must be borne with a kind of complicity. In an interview with me she described her ambivalence about the way in which technology is received in the West. She said:

The term modernism implies an imagined utopia that would emerge after the industrial revolution. Of course we’re more aware than ever that it was never ever going to happen - that someone, somewhere else always has to pay. And in places like India, it’s possible to be even more aware of the counterfeit qualities of such claims. So the syntaxes (of modernism) as applied to US developments have very different syntaxes here...³

However, Malani’s willingness to engage with materials and subjects that are problematic is a long-established aspect of her practice. She was among the first Indian artists in Bombay to engage with installation as a more direct way of bringing the audience into contact with the materiality of the issues that were being addressed. She describes her move into installation as having emerged from her long involvement with the practical and formal concerns of painting. Her need to more directly involve the viewer as a participant led to an urge to break through beyond the frame - to include the audience as part of the work’s meaning and of its materiality.

Very soon after her first experimentations, other women artists, including Rummana Hussain and Pushpamala N, picked up the challenge. During this time an upsurge in religious fundamentalism raised particular threats to both Hindu and Muslim women; whatever the creed, fundamentalist rhetoric argued that women’s place was in the home, and so it was in a spirit of the necessity to challenge that drove Indian women artists to be among the forerunners of those who experimented with installation.

Malani’s concern with the rise of a gamut of fundamentalist reactionary ‘regionalisms’ corresponds with her fears about the effects of globalism on local, regional and national communities. She responds to such concerns through works that resound with energy and intelligence, and which are able to convey something of her own sense of place and her own perspectives on life. And yet, this artist whose work conveys such a strong sense of a presence so firmly connected to a particular site wrote the following words about that series of paintings and drawings critics have defined as seminal to her artistic production, and about a place she knows so intimately: Lohar Chawl, where Malani has kept her a studio for years, and from which she produced the series Hieroglyphs. She says:

Hieroglyphs is about my street, that is, the street where my studio is located. It is one of the small streets in the area of Lohar Chawl (the market for electrical goods in Bombay). ... I am an outsider, being neither a trader, nor a pavement dweller, nor a devotee of the Hanuman Mandir... (A temple devoted to Hanuman, the Hindu god with the form of a monkey situated at one end of the street).⁴

Perhaps this sense of being an outsider has remained as one of the strongest aspects of that which drives her to understand, and to communicate that understanding to others. The fact that Malani has spent so many years living in and documenting Lohar Chawl does not override the fact that Bombay is her adopted city. Her
family's flight from Karachi at the time of Partition has remained as the lower heart-beat experience that informs so much of her production. Her own responses are still those of the refugee. She approaches both her site and her subjects as though they are a foreign land – places and people where the possibilities of brief understandings are elusive. As a result, the authority of her work resonates through the humility of her approach.

She operates as an artist who claims to not-yet-know, and her works seem to make a plea for a pause - for a cusp of space where the viewer might also enter a state of not-yet-having-made-their-mind up. As such, her art seems to yet linger in those territories between the barbed wire fences of partitions sifting through the sands of no man’s lands, and searching for the possibilities of new futures.

In the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane in 1996 in a small room the artist produced a series of images some of which were painted directly onto the wall. Titled Mutant/ Wall Drawing, the androgynous hybrids she traced onto flattened milk-cartons, or onto the walls of the little makeshift room, were in part a reaction to the ‘First World’ dumping of hazardous wastes in the Pacific that had affected an entire generation of children born as ‘jellyfish babies’. Despite the political specificity of the critical aspect of the work, somehow the noble though mutated presence of these beings seemed to occupy a dream-space that was not reduced by the particular focus of the references. They floated with a life-size presence that confronted the inhabitants of the room with a subconscious calling; simultaneously sexually powerful yet also abused, the peoples of this vestibule took on a range of identities; they appeared as:

...genetic mismatches or mediations of pan-sexual ambiguities, emblematic of those who are dispossessed and live perpetually on the fringes of life, marginalised.5

In a gesture that evoked the erasure of her installation City of Desires in 1992, Malani also arranged that this work be partially erased at the end of the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial in a performance involving two Brisbane-based artists. This emphasis on the necessity of being there - of having borne witness to the work/event as a viewer-participant - had by this stage been an important part of much of the artist’s work for some time. Her use of video, which had also become an increasingly important aspect of her installations, confirmed, rather than contradicted, this emphasis on presence. Video has been treated by this artist as a record - often the only surviving one - of a work’s existence. Ashish Rajadhyaksha describes the way in which the artist has used video as a medium that continues the tension between the viewer and the presence of the work. He writes:

What comes out is the relentlessly pro-filmic emphasis on the action which, when presented as a record, seems to lead in turn to a curious tension as the viewer is somewhere placed in between the more familiar tensions of the cinematic ‘take’ present in between two cuts, and video’s resemblance to television and therefore to a seemingly neutral, as well as timeless, record of ‘something out there’, something objectively present.6

Malani’s Hamletmachine is neither a cynical proposition nor an idealistic call for moral or ethical piety - rather, the work invents a space and time-span where witness becomes an essential first response.

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3 Nalini Malani, interview with the author, 1999.
Luc Tuymans: Premonition - ‘the silence before the storm’.

Pictures, if they are to have effect, must have tremendous intensity of silence, a filled silence or void. The observer should become motionless before the picture, freeze. A kind of picture terror. I show pictures with a direct intention. The effect they should have on the viewer resembles an assault that he or she does not experience directly, but from a distance initially. When he or she comes closer, this assault should loom again, but on a different level. Something quite unmistakable then triggers certain emotions, makes certain demands. This can only come about in a certain silence. I mean the silence before the storm.¹ Luc Tuymans

The art of Belgian Luc Tuymans is about a silence born of fear. His paintings are based on memories, both personal and collective. They are linked by the hint of something beneath or beyond the surface appearance, intentionally creating in the viewer a sense of anxiety, triggering the fear which the artist has said has absorbed his own mind since childhood.²

Regarded as one of the most important younger contemporary painters, Tuymans’ work is deeply informed by European tradition and experience, past and present. This is not surprising since Belgium has been historically the arena for great European power struggles and its capital, Brussels, is now the administrative centre of the new European Union. Tuymans’ art, while intensely personal, is thus at the same time immensely revealing of the post-postwar European generation – the generation now in their forties and fifties, free from the ideologies and guilt of two world wars but at the same time charged with responsibility for a new Europe.

Tuymans is not, however, at first sight, an obviously political artist. His paintings for the most part appear to depict the reality of ordinary objects: flowers, still life, landscapes and portraits (that are not quite portraits) and people going about everyday concerns. His mostly small canvasses draw on the traditions of Flemish realism and surrealism, although he explicitly denies the latter. There are also strong affinities with the world of photography and the paintings are often based on reproductions. The colours of the paintings are pale, washed out and the images are often incomplete or cropped in a manner reminiscent of film editing. The effect is psychologically disturbing and disorientating, hinting at an atmosphere of violence; indeed the artist has referred to the underlying structure of violence, both ‘physical and detached’, linking his work, and to his art as a ‘metaphor of violence.’³

Allusive titles such as Superstition, Rumour and Premonition for his exhibitions or for individual works such as Gas Chamber (a painting showing an empty white room with a drain in the floor) give a clue as to why his art is so unsettling. Several of the paintings with titles related to the Holocaust are based on photos from the concentration camps. Tuymans said with reference to this group of works: ‘Western culture, I think, is one of the few cultures that, in order to progress, has incorporated destruction. There is a link between annihilation, hygiene, consumerism, production and propaganda. When you think about hygiene sometimes it can be connected to ethnic cleansing… The final solution is something hidden.’⁴ Ambiguity is an essential element in Tuymans’ work: he argues that ‘when something is not painted it makes it more meaningful … There is a sort of indifference in my paintings which makes them more violent, because any objects in them are as if erased, cancelled.’⁵

Tuymans’ subject matter has focused on episodes of Flemish history, including colonialism in Africa and war time collaboration of Belgians with the Nazis, as well as issues of contemporary relevance such as child abuse. He is also concerned about the rise of neo Fascism, as exhibited by the ultrarightist and fiercely nationalist Vlaams Blok, which has risen in 15 years to be the fourth strongest party in Belgium, with the slogan ‘our people first’. All this has encouraged Belgian governments to take a lead on moral issues in the European Union, in an attempt to present their country as ‘the earth’s conscience.’⁶ It is thus significant that Tuymans was selected to represent Belgium at the 2001 Venice Biennale. The exhibition was entitled Mwana Kitoko, beautiful boy or beautiful white man, (the name given to the young King Baudouin by the Congolese). The group of works were in part a response to the allegation aired in a 1999 book by Ludo
de Witte that the Belgian government was responsible for the 1961 murder of Congo’s first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, shortly after independence.\(^7\) Tuymans’ series *Heimat* (1995) is a quite specific protest against past Fascism and contemporary neo-Fascism: he says that he has ‘tried to rebel against … this Flemish idea of a mythical, fixed identity. It is not only political but cultural as well. It is not about developing feelings of melancholy, but about a certain form of déjà vu… Nationalism is for me like a mask, unmoveable and hollow… All forms of nationalism remove the qualities of real life and create a uniformity out of individual differences.’\(^8\)

His paintings have also touched on American issues including slavery, race relations and multiculturalism. It is impossible not to link these works to the fading of the American dream for Europeans. *Heritage* (1996) was produced after the Oklahoma bombing specifically to explore ‘the fortress mentality’ resulting from ‘terrorism from within.’\(^9\) The works are of seemingly ordinary images such as baseball caps. One image shows a man apparently working at some mundane task but in actuality mixing toxic chemicals. In the show *Fortune* (2003), ‘paranoia’ is again a theme. The images are similarly innocuous, such as a storefront, with mannequins or a paintball contest, the latter image drawn from a ‘guns and ammo’ magazine, but violence is implicit: and in the words of the press release from his New York gallery, the mood and psychological atmosphere of these paintings ‘heighten the terror that lies within.’ It declares that Tuymans himself states that these are a response to 9/11 and that he sees the images of 9/11 as so powerful because they represent ‘one of the most stunning examples of collective memory to date.’\(^10\)

*Maypole* (2000) was displayed in London in the Royal Academy exhibition *Apocalypse.*\(^11\) It is one of the most interesting and largest of his recent paintings with all the elements of his style. We see a group of men, painted with barely sufficient detail to suggest that they may be wearing traditional Bavarian peasant costume, shorts or *lederhosen*, who are erecting a maypole. There is also what could be a group of men in the distance with what could be banners. The maypole is a symbol of ancient pagan custom, a symbolic festival in Germany when a large tree (and trees and forests are themselves immensely significant in the German psyche), was brought to the village and decorated with ribbons and even sausages. The figures erecting the maypole are viewed from the back. And Tuymans has spoken of the ‘fear you have when you see someone you don’t know from behind.’\(^12\)

The image may be drawn from a reproduction in the Nazi magazine *Signal.*\(^13\) Moreover, the Nazis expressly used the imagery of the maypole and May Day as part of their propaganda. Historians such as George Mosse have shown how they utilised existing festivals in creating their own mass culture.\(^14\) In 1933 they held a May Day march, a mass rally of workers and the next day replaced the existing trade unions with a Party organisation. One of the most spectacular Nazi ceremonies was held in the Lustgarten, Berlin on May Day 1936 with a speech by Hitler. As an integral part of this highly choreographed event, a large maypole was erected, decorated with swastikas and fir branches. Iain Boyd Whyte provides a fascinating account of this use of the maypole as part of Nazi propaganda in *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators.* He writes: ‘What better symbol … than the maypole, the traditional symbol throughout Northern Europe of the end of winter and of the reawakening of nature, the focus of communal games and feasts’. Such images he writes, quoting Saul Friedländer, were a significant part of the Nazis’ ‘kitsch aesthetic’: ‘On the one side are invoked the tranquil forces of moral values, while on the other side are flickering the fires of extermination.’\(^15\)

In this context, Tuymans’ painting becomes immensely sinister, inevitably linked to the Nazis’ use of mystic Teutonic and mediaeval legend, and of symbols drawn from pagan times. This was particularly true for the SS, the brotherhood of Nordic men whose masculine ethos was fortified by pagan ceremonies, devised by Himmler. This painting, of course, also shows men working together, a brotherhood specifically excluding women and suggesting the disturbing conformity frequently associated with worlds of men constructed to be exclusionist for reasons of sex, or ethnicity or ideology. Conformity and
complicity with evil on a mass scale is suggested by this painting.

In his art Tuymans escapes the trap of believing that art can be an adequate response in the face of horror. Instead of explicit horror he explores the psychological dimension of our collective memories of horror. But this is not as straightforward as merely confronting the past so that its evils may not be repeated. He states he does not take a moral stance yet, despite his claim of detachment, the content is not detached. The artist notes, in relation to the war in the former Yugoslavia, the immediate fear of people that ‘it’, meaning the wars, ideologies, ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Europe’s past, might be happening again. In so doing, he draws on disillusionment in Europe and elsewhere and the growing belief that it is now impossible to believe that ‘it’ will not happen again. He has connected this disillusionment to the failure of painting: ‘Every art has failed. How we fail is another matter.’ In this sense Tuymans’ work is an uncanny prediction of the growing paranoia and fear characterising the world at the beginning of the twenty first century and, at the same time, a chilling premonition of the future.

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3 Ibid, p. 20; p. 25.
8 Tuymans interview with Aliaga op.cit., p. 31.
13 Frank Demaegd, communication to author: ‘Describing his use of photography in the catalogue Premonitions, Kunstmuseum Bern 1997, p. 110 Luc Tuymans writes the following: “Here I used a page taken from a German propaganda magazine called ‘Signal’; During World War II this magazine was translated into Flemish, and I was able to purchase the issues covering several years from a second-hand bookseller. What fascinated me about the colour photographs was how picturesque they were. That, of course, was a result of printing technique, in which various layers are printed on top of each other…”’
14 I am grateful to Paul Pickering, Glen St J. Barclay and Harry Wise for help with the references on Nazism and their use of the image of the maypole and pagan symbols. George Mosse, The Nationalization of the Masses, Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich, New York, H.Fertig,1975.
Guan Wei, *Dow 幸 Island*, 2002, acrylic on canvas (48 panels), 317 x 913 cm installed. Image courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney.
Guan Wei first came to Australia as artist-in-residence at the University of Tasmania, School of Art, Hobart in 1989. Again sponsored by the University of Tasmania he returned in 1990. Since then he has established the major reputation anticipated in his application for permanent residency under Australia’s Distinguished Talent Scheme. 2003 is Guan Wei's fourth residency at ANU School of Art. The first was in 1991 when the School presented an exhibition of work titled ‘Wo’ De Yishu, Nesting - the Art of Idleness,’ painted in Hobart in 1990, and prepared a modest catalogue, probably the first for Guan Wei in Australia. The second residency was in the summer of 1994, when he painted his Sausage and The Great War of the Eggplant series exploring the subtleties of cultural dislocation. They were exhibited at the Drill Hall Gallery. The third residency was in 1998, when he completed Revisionary, also shown at the Drill Hall Gallery. A predominantly blue coloured work, the painting uses the Chinese scroll and perspective traditions as the basis of its composition which comprises 20 narrow vertical canvases plus side panels.

Like all visiting artists, Guan Wei’s presence has greatly enhanced the teaching and learning environment for our visual arts students. During the residencies, we have seen Guan Wei’s imagery develop from the late 1980s work created in the context of China’s underground movements in art and literature, to the confident, highly distinctive work informed by his new life in Australia, his reflective mind and wonderful sense of humour. His late 1980s Beijing grey and red acupuncture-point paintings, his Test Tube Baby (1992) images derived from literary references to Chinese folklore, the Treasure Hunt series (1995), which depicts the shortcomings of value trade-offs, Zen Garden (1999) depicting the lotus, tadpole and the Buddha’s hand, and Dow:Island, all attest to Guan Wei’s philosophy that a work of art should appeal not only to the eye, but also to the mind. Guan Wei’s diaries. His writing in Chinese records everyday activities and impressions, together with thoughts and inspirations derived from his reading and reflection on Western and Buddhist philosophy. These ideas and his imagination underpin his paintings, always in series and always concerned with the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge – questions of principle, morality, balance and harmony. These qualities and the interconnections between Guan Wei’s reading, writing and painting mark him as an artist and an intellectual. His ability to visually articulate universal themes, issues and ideas is his special gift to the visual arts.

Guan Wei’s contribution to the exhibition Witnessing to Silence is his 2002 work Dow: Island. The work pays close attention to human destiny. Environmental damage, conflict, large numbers of immigrants and refugees around the world, breaches of human rights, and religious intolerance are all issues contributing to a state of crisis and misery. Dow: Island is a very large 48-panel canvas painting. It is the largest painting Guan Wei has done to date. Each panel measures 102 x 51 cms and the total space for the work including the 7 cm space between each row and each panel, measures 320 x 921 cms. It’s unmistakably Guan Wei's work with its very flat, painted surface and narrative expressing emotion about the human condition and concerns of our time. The painting hangs in three rows with the bottom
row 40 cm above the floor. In the original installation, not replicated at the Drill Hall Gallery, one ton of sand was spread in front of the painting. About 20 objects were installed on the sand mound created by the artist, including bits of crockery, bottles, glasses, a clock and a TV set showed a continuous video of waves crashing on the imaginary beach.

Reading the painting from left to right or more appropriately west to east, *Dow: Island* takes us through a range of human emotions. The composition references antique eastern and western mediaeval maps, which are completely unreliable and inaccurate. The islands are a figment of the artist’s imagination. Set in a great sea of an infinite variety of blues, Guan Wei’s little amoebic, fragile figures are ever present on the canvas and are on a seemingly impossible journey. They inhabit the three main islands - Calamity in the west, Trepidation and Aspiration in the east. On Calamity, there is fear and in great anxiety, people appear to have taken to small boats in a desperate attempt to find a better place. Perhaps they have been spooked by the submarine lurking menacingly offshore to the west. On Trepidation the figures huddle and gesture towards the unknown and on Aspiration, as they emerge from the water and strike land, there is an anticipation of a sense of naïve optimism and hope for the future. While these islands suggest a landmass possibly large enough to sustain a new community, to the south in the lower part of the picture, is the lure of something much bigger and more promising. The Enchanted Coast, which looks vaguely like the north coast of the Australian continent, awaits discovery, settlement and a new life. However it is guarded by a group of large, aggressive looking birds. In China black birds signify bad luck and all indications are this will be an inhospitable land. Dotted around the larger islands are many smaller ones hardly big enough on which to get a toehold. In any event, they are inhabited by huge solitary birds or mythical creatures, which at a single glance leave no room for any intruder or boat landing.

Guan Wei’s Chinese heritage is there in the technique he uses to express the expanse of water. The image uses endlessly repeated lines evident in classical Chinese temple murals and architectural decorations. This water is dominating, endless and mysterious. The contrasting cloud forms refer to traditional Japanese screen painting and provide a softening counterpoint to the water. They represent a balance symbolizing hope and good luck. Meanwhile, in the precarious waters around the islands swim menacing sea monsters, which surface occasionally to take the air stirred up by the wind blowing in simultaneously from west and east. This wind is buffeting the small boats in the west near Calamity. To these fragile craft, Guan Wei’s figures cling and gesticulate as if to attract attention and the forlorn hope of rescue. Curiously the symbol of the wind, the cartoon-like face with its puffed out cheeks expelling air into the atmosphere, also suggests a positive natural energy. Four wind symbols are used as a device to balance the composition – all are blowing air gently into the picture. One is placed at the bottom left and one at the top right, complemented by two others placed equidistant in the centre row. Guan Wei developed the painting in the months leading up to the 2001 Australian federal election to include drowning figures as a protest over the Australian government’s response to asylum seekers trying to reach Australia and the exploitation of the subsequently discredited ‘children overboard’ scandal.

In writing about *Dow: Island*, Edmund Capon commented that Guan Wei, now immersed in two cultures, is a questioner of both and open to the world. He has developed a unique visual language with its simplicity and sophistication. For Guan Wei, his art is not only a vehicle for his imagination…..but equally a vehicle for the expression of real concerns and attitudes.

Professor David Williams is Director of the School of Art, National Institute of the Arts, ANU

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4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*.
Is it possible to imagine the terror and despair experienced by a human being when dragged from a home, workplace or roadside knowingly to face imminent death? Is it any easier to imagine the haunting memories of such an event, that must ceaselessly burden the victim’s family? If it were at all possible to conceive of such imaginings, consider the enormity of the horror when millions of citizens carry similar memories. These memories pertain to a self-inflicted massacre committed in a quest for absolute power where ideological retribution resulted in many thousands being killed for being Communists, supposed Communists, ethnic Chinese or others. As novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer noted from a report at the time, the victims were ‘often no more than bewildered peasants who gave the wrong answer on a dark night to blood-thirsty hooligans.’

Yes, these haunting memories must be unimaginable, but the keepers of these memories suffer a continual twisting of the knife as this was a silent slaughter: one that has left a legacy of fear so great that, nearly forty years after the event, the public remain silent and the stigma attached to that gruesome past forces the keepers to store their memories in silence.

Dadang Christanto is one of the keepers of these unimaginable memories, one who has experienced the continuing trauma of violence being visited upon his immediate family. ‘At that time I was eight years old and living in a village. I did not understand about anything. In 1965, one morning, my father was taken away in an army truck. The five of us (the children) still were sleeping. Since then I have never seen my father again.’

Over the last decade Dadang’s installation and performative works have received critical recognition for their exceptional power to transcend cultures and specific references to evoke reflections on universal human suffering and communal grief. He is best known for his large-scale installations that employ multiples of the human body - entire bodies, dismembered parts, internal organs or metaphoric forms - to speak of these injustices suffered by the voiceless many. Dadang’s own silenced memories have given him a great empathy with others who have suffered, but even though his past works can be interpreted as relating to Indonesian historical events, it has only been in the last three years that he has felt the courage and strength to speak of his traumatic personal history.

I could not talk of my memories during the New Order period as this would have been the same as suicide. After I moved to Australia in 1999 and started living here for a while, I gradually realized I wasn’t stigmatized by the general public and I began to grow courageous for giving testimony about these previous events.

Dadang’s recent work responds directly to personal sufferings, to the massacres of 1965-66 and the resurgence of violence toward ethnic Chinese in the 1998 riots. The artist however reminds us that his work can have multiple readings as it illuminates specific historical wrongs, simultaneously communicating a universal humanism. ‘If I speak of victims, this [does] just not mean the members of PKI [Indonesian Communist Party] but everybody who has suffered the misfortune of systematic violence.’ Dadang eloquently succeeds in imbuing his work with multiple readings as audiences react on universal as well as intensely individual levels, with viewers often relating specific works to personal events and tragedies. He has also been able to communicate across audiences with gallery goers and rural and urban communities alike feeling deep affinities with their personal interpretations of his works. This may be attributed to the memorial-like spiritual quality ever present in Dadang’s work that offers audiences a means of healing social and personal wounds and engendering hope for the future.

Two of Dadang’s recent works, Red Rain (1999-2000) and The Pain of the Trees (2003) will be exhibited in Witnessing to Silence: Art and Human Rights at the School of Art Gallery, Australian National University. Both works speak universally of human rights injustices while specifically paying homage to the artist’s father and all the other victims who suffered under Suharto’s New Order regime. Dadang speaks of how Indonesian communities were torn apart, as families of the victims were stigmatised as enemies of the State. ‘The 1965 events have caused us to carry deep wounds in our heart and memory. The New Order covered these...
events by hiding and manipulating history.' Dadang believes it is of paramount importance to recover and reclaim this history. It is in a rejection of the New Order’s officially sanctioned version of history, coupled with national acknowledgement of the truth and a reinstatement of the process of remembering, that Dadang sees as a means to unburden Indonesian society. It is through such a process that it becomes possible to create national identity and to initiate personal and community healing. In Pramoedya’s words, ‘I think history is important. It is a house from which people go out to travel the world. If they don’t know where they came from, they won’t understand their destination.’

Red Rain is a ceiling and wall installation made up of a seemingly countless number of heads with blood in the form of red string spurting out from between each set of eyebrows. The strands of string form blankets of red rain suggestive of the indelible stains that continue to mark the pages of Indonesian history. All the drawn heads at first seem identical but closer inspection reveals outsized hands covering some of them. The hand drawings are alternately inscribed, ‘hand of Suharto’s regime’ and ‘U.S. Hand’. Another direct reference to Suharto’s New Order regime is evident in Dadang’s metaphoric use of red and black:

‘The red are wounds, the black is obscurity, the history that is obscure, the evidence that is black, there is no connection with race, nor does it blossom or contain other colours.’ These words immediately remind us of the hyperbole in the official film version of G 30 S [30 September Movement] PKI Tragedy repeatedly played every 1 October during the period of the New Order.

In Red Rain Dadang also makes reference to the discrimination and persecution ethnic Chinese have historically faced in Indonesia. Each of his multiple drawings of heads is laminated in a reference to the official identity cards Indonesian citizens carry at all times for personal identification. Here, Dadang alludes to the racial discrimination these identification cards have caused for some Indonesians of Chinese descent. The paper used for these multiple drawings is also referential: Dadang has used prayer paper, an object often associated with Chinese culture as it is customarily used in Buddhist ceremonies as an offering to ancestral spirits.

Red Rain is a graphically confronting piece but the artist’s use of commemorative prayer paper, the high ‘floating’ wall and ceiling placement, along with the stillness and solemnity of its installation, evokes an overwhelming impression of solace for the departed souls. It is as if these spirits have recently flown to the heavens, finally finding peace through an act of acknowledgment.

The Pain of the Trees is a new work the artist will make during his residency at the Canberra School of Art. Once again working with multiples, Dadang will create a series of ceramic trees as homage to the world’s killing fields. With particular reference to Java, Dadang talks of the trees grieving for what they have silently witnessed:

The trees remain tortured as they stand silently where the humans were tortured and killed. Human blood moistens their roots and they groan in pain from the victim’s agonized voices. They cruelly imprison these human lives…. I keep watch over the trees and I long to ask them questions. I beg them to tell their stories about the events which they bear witness. I don’t hear any answers, only sighs from the tears that slowly appear on the tips of their leaves. I watch over this cruel imprisonment urging them for their stories, knowing full well these memories make their leaves trickle with tears. And these tears are their only answer, tears from the pain, grief and sorrow they continue to suffer.

These thoughts illustrate the pain caused by memories, and their absence. Like many families of the victims of 1965-66, Dadang does not know where his father now lies and the imagining of these absent memories can torment far more than the truth. This massacre has been described as an ‘event without footprints.’ There has been no announcement of mass graves, but as historian Robert Cribb has observed people had to ‘think carefully’ before reporting them. Dadang Christanto realizes that he can live in silence no more and he sees these new works as part of an essential healing process for himself, his family and his community. In 2002 Dadang exhibited in Jakarta four
works relating to Indonesian historical injustices in Jakarta. He was disappointed with the public’s reaction to his exhibition’s theme, ‘because the stigma is still very strong among the general public in Indonesia, my work probably didn’t receive the reaction I was hoping for, that is for an emerging critical awareness about the history of the 65-66 period.’ Dadang will be returning to Indonesia later this year intending to initiate dialogue with family members of other 1965 victims. He is hopeful these discussions and his ongoing projects will contribute to his country’s remembering, speaking and healing and be one step closer in the slow journey of national reconciliation.

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1 It is estimated that between 100,000 and two million people were massacred in Indonesia from October 1965 to March 1966. The most common estimate of the death toll is 500,000. The Indonesian army and associated civilian militia groups wiped out a large number of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). See Robert Cribb, ‘How many deaths?’ in Ingrid Wessel & Georgia Wimhofer (eds.), Violence in Indonesia, Abera, Hamburg, 2001, p. 82.


4 Dadang Christanto, interview with the author, 1 June 2003.

5 Dadang is of Chinese descent. Anti-Chinese sentiment has been a persistent phenomenon in Indonesian history. Because of violent historical events, the anti-Chinese attacks of the 1998 riots sent exaggerated fears through the community. See John T. Sidel, ‘Riots, Church Burnings, Conspiracies: The moral economy of the Indonesian crowd in the late twentieth century’ in Ingrid Wessel & Georgia Wimhofer (eds.), op. cit., p. 47.


7 An example of this is the audience’s response to For those who have been killed… exhibited at the Queensland Art Gallery’s First Asia Pacific Triennial, in 1993. Dadang invited the audience to leave a token in memory of those who have suffered. Many people repeatedly visited the exhibition primarily to leave their personal gestures of remembrances. By the close of the exhibition the floor around the work was amassed with flowers, notes and poems, which commemorated a multitude of universal and personal sufferings.

8 Dadang Christanto, interview, op. cit., 1 June 2003.


10 The Communist Party of Indonesia was blamed for the kidnapping and murder of six generals on 30 September 1965. This event was referred to as an ‘attempted communist coup’. Following this there was a military decree for the Communist Party to be destroyed ‘root and branches’. The massacre of 1965-66 followed. Every year on 1 October during the New Order period all television stations ran the above-mentioned official film that commemorated the dark day when the generals were killed ‘that blood was red… that blood was red.’ Hendro Wiyanto, op. cit., p. 28.

11 Dadang Christanto, interview with the author, 28 May 2003

12 Dadang tells of an account from a school friend. This friend, unaware of Dadang’s personal history, would recall how each day he would go to the bank of the Brantas River to pelt the human corpses, usually decapitated, that were floating down the river. Dadang always wondered if one of these corpses could be his father.


During the day I watched banks of tropical rain roll in across the ocean on the northerly trade winds. They brought some relief from the humidity and made everything shine with postcard brilliance, before the sun turned the gloss to steam again. But by dusk the air had cleared and I followed the sound of singing down to the shore, where the locals had spread out along the rugged coastline of black volcanic rocks to see the last sunset of the millennium. Children played in the waves, teenagers swam out to perch on craggy outcrops of the reef, and the older people sat bearing witness with their feet in the shallows. They said goodbye to the past by waving branches of bright tropical flowers at the setting sun and sending tunes adrift in the light sea breezes. When the horizon turned from orange to grey they threw their tropical wreaths into the water, and I was told that it was good luck if the flowers floated.

Being an attentive anthropologist, I wrote these details down in my notebook, assuming that the ceremony had been practiced every New Year’s Eve; that it belonged to tradition and had been passed down over countless generations. I was wrong. This was the first time New Year had been celebrated in such a fashion. An organising committee had invented a custom, and the villagers put it into practice as though it was imbued with indigenous symbolism.

As we sat watching dusk disappear into the west, and waiting for the dateline to sweep across us from the east, I reflected on how often I’d made this same mistake. The distinction between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘contemporary’ is not only difficult to spot within the dynamic cultures of the Pacific archipelagoes, but it is largely meaningless to Islanders themselves. They can certainly speak about this opposition, because they have learnt it from outsiders, but, in practice, tradition is not imbued with the same values of authenticity or purity that curators and ethnographers have projected onto these societies. Instead, cultural forms are generated within the rhythmic repetitions of life’s cycles, simultaneously harnessing the weight of history and reverberating into the imaginative possibilities of the future.

I’m not saying anything particularly original here. Numerous anthropologists and cultural theorists have recently taken up the task of conceptualising the “tradition of the new” and discussing the inventive nature of oral histories. But artists tend to deal with this issue more effectively than academics because they are oriented toward participating in these fecund processes, rather than standing back to analyse them. This is an important point: if cultural innovation takes place on shifting ground, continually renegotiating its relations with the past, then there is no stable position from which an observer can map these movements across time. The challenge, then, is to intervene in these dynamics and explicate them through engagement.

I’ve often admired Michel Tuffery for precisely this reason: He explores the traditions of the Pacific region by creating contexts where they can continue to be animated in new ways. As such, he affirms the generative potential of life. Anyone who has met Tuffery can testify to how he manifests this vitality in person. Whether he’s delivering a talk in front of a lecture theatre or socialising over a shell of kava, every sentence seems to be pregnant with the possibilities of a new world. In his art practice he develops this affirmative style through the two interrelated strategies of performance and collaboration.

Tuffery is probably most widely known for his performances that revolve around kinetic sculptures. At the 1998 Pacific Wave Festival in Sydney, for example, he exhibited a collection of sea creatures that had been fashioned from aluminium fish tins and other industrial flotsam and jetsam. At the opening of this show, these pneumatically powered turtles and flame throwing fish were brought to life in a fiery performance of oceanic dancing and drumming that evoked the teachings of the Polynesian god, Tangaroa. And for the duration of the exhibition, the charred metallic critters were displayed alongside a video of the opening night, thereby engaging in the act of myth-making that so often animates and prolongs indigenous performance practices.
Most of Tuffery’s performances are developed in collaboration with groups of participants who ultimately help dramatise the art event. His commitment to these collaborative processes is underscored by his involvement in community-based workshops that are aimed at empowering people who have limited access to resources. He has specifically worked with young people and South Sea Islanders, introducing them to artistic techniques that allow them to express themselves with readily available materials. In this vein, Tuffery has taught people how to compose sculptures from debris, and make paper from plant pulp which can then be used to produce wood block prints.

Tuffery’s ecological ethic is fairly obvious in his preference for working with materials such as recyclable packaging and natural fibres, but there is also a politic of human creativity being advanced here. By giving people control over their modes of production, communities are being encouraged to engage aesthetically with the conditions of their existence. For the Art and Human Rights project, Tuffery has planned an art work titled *The Last Islands in Paradise*, which is to be produced in collaboration with students from the Canberra School of Art. The installation is being organised around the conceptual form of an archipelago, with individual students constructing objects that will be suspended in the gallery space to create a floating panorama of islands. The objects themselves will be modelled on government housing, and painted in the generic pastel colours that characterise these buildings in New Zealand communities such as Parihaka and Porirua. But while these architectural motifs might offer some sort of critique of the State and its housing policies, Tuffery’s buoyant mobile will also affirm the lyricism of a contemporary urban tradition. The persistence of human life within these modular structures will be celebrated by the inclusion of intimate icons of human habitation.

And like other Tuffery installations, *The Last Islands in Paradise* will culminate in a performance. Bustling back and forth underneath the aesthetic archipelago, the collaborative team will animate the constellation of community housing with the flow of human bodies. Scientists tell us that islands elaborate similar dynamics in their geological forms. There are two types of islands, the oceanic type which has erupted from the heart of the earth, and the continental type which has been disarticulated from a larger landmass. The first type expresses the upshot of deep origins, while the second expresses the slow drift of lateral connections. The French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, once evoked the persona of the ‘island dreamer’ as someone who dramatises this double dynamic, dreaming of ‘becoming infinitely cut off, at the end of a long drift, but also of an absolute beginning by means of a radical foundation.’

We might describe Tuffery in the same terms, as an artist whose work erupts from rich traditions while also distributing inventive potential across the surface of society.

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It was all much simpler in the late 1980s. Then Nindityo was a painter, just graduated from art school. A painter who fitted neatly into the category of contemporary Asian artists adapting select materials and styles of Euro-American invention as foreign media with which, combined with elements from their own heritage, to explore their hybrid, post-colonial identities. Nindityo had gravitated towards an abstract expressionist style to explore and express his Javanese, Indonesian, Catholic roots in the context of Suharto’s militant, capitalist-driven New Order, where art for culture’s sake was the safe realm and any (even cultural) involvement with critical political expression was not.

But Nindityo was also an impassioned student of Javanese dance. Enter the obsession with the body, not only in two-dimensional space, but from the late 1980s already beginning to move out from the surface of the wall and into space. A painter obsessed with dance (he took lessons in classical Javanese dance at the Yogyakarta kraton), Nindityo captured the forms of the body in movement on canvas or paper, with his own hands. In the late 1980s he began to incorporate three-dimensional components, carving simple lines into wooden beams which were made part of the overall compositions of painted canvases, and beginning to employ wood carvers from around his home to create this part of his work. The artist’s paintings in the early 1990s moved from abstracted figural movement to a combination of live body movements through space and the abstracted geometric patterns created by the dancers’ movements across the horizontal surface. Thus, Nindityo, in his art, was reaching further into space, and in his artistic process, was increasingly embracing social and collaborative dimensions.

In the early 1990s, when installation art began to sweep through the contemporary Indonesian art world, inspired by the first, seminal experiments and exhibitions from the mid-1970s onwards by the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (The New Art Movement) artists, many of those acclaimed the most creative of the new generation of painters, at the time in their 30s, joined in the installation fever that within a few years gripped the younger generations of Southeast Asian artists. A second development accompanied this throughout the region, particularly evident in Indonesia: the increasingly politicised messages and intentions in contemporary art, reflecting the spread of discontent with the Suharto regime and the growth in will to express reactions and analysis more openly than during the previous three decades, in society at large as well as among artists.

Nindityo and his art have travelled far, both inwardly/intellectually and outwardly/geographically, over the last decade. The intent of these forays into new modes in many ways remains oblique, engendering more questions than feelings of arrival. While the word ‘spiritual’ was central in his discourse and use of forms and symbols in the 1980s and early 1990s, by 1992, he had added the idea of action to this idea, a more pointed term than movement. The more contemplative energy of early works like Bima= Dewaruci (1988), Worship (1989), Culture of Death (1989), and For the Dancer (1990), or his colour meditations on Borobudur, or Ganesha, were being opened up to what others in the Indonesian art world and beyond were doing. Still deeply immersed in discovering and ‘owning’, on his own terms, his ancestral iconographies, Nindityo was also searching for the connection between, on the one hand, the individual, and the culture-specific, and, on the other, the transcendent, and universal. Counterbalancing his interest in the universal and spiritual in 1988 Nindityo was also focusing on himself as an individual. Then in 1992 the term ‘spiritual’ is replaced in one of his statements by ‘religion’: ‘The aesthetic is religion for art. Every effort to expand values and human meaning, in its process, becomes the basis of art. Art then becomes the world religion.’ With this shift, focus has slid away from the individual, direct, perhaps mystical communion with the divine through meditation and solitary ritual, familiar aspects of Javanese (kejawen, kebatinan) spiritual traditions, towards the human creations of social institutions, in this case, around human-divine negotiations - but from here, openness to other kinds of human institutions, and to the socially rooted and manipulated psychological processes of individuals and groups, is but a short step. To his ‘interioralised/vertical/depth’ exploration, Nindityo has more and more consciously been adding an ‘externalised/horizontal/breadth’ dimension.
Nindityo Adipurnomo, *Hiding rituals of my own hairpiece*, 1997, mixed media, 60 x 50 x 20 cm. Image courtesy the artist.
In Nindityo’s art, this shift was signaled by a departure from focusing on the human body as dancer, or as mythological figure, or as individual artist-auteur, to focusing on fragmented, de-(re-?)contextualized parts - often presented as a group, or even mass, with variations on a single theme. Deconstruction, the mode of the last two decades of the twentieth century, had entered Nindityo’s work across a bridge of a few strands of straight, black hair.

In the early 1990s, talk of Nindityo’s obsession with (Javanese) women’s traditional hairpieces (konde), worn when dressed up in the kain-kebaya started circulating. What was this all about? A fetishisation of an isolated cultural element, a highly gendered one; the artist’s obsession with his mother’s and grandmother’s generations and the enshrined image of the traditionally socialized Javanese feminine? Then the artist started collecting his own hair; there were even rumours of pubic hair. Enter the masculine component to the theme of hair, and an excessively private one, at that. And one shared by men and women.

In a 1998 catalogue Indonesian writer, Dwi Marianto provides a culturally contextualised reading of Nindityo’s work:

Nindityo’s works are complicated and parallel to the nature of high Javanese krama that is spoken in Surakarta and Yogyakarta ... as a whole, his art still feels like krama, in which one must state intentions in graceful, refined language... The real idea or intention that is to be conveyed becomes lost in the grace of the refined words of the language. Nindityo’s work is an apt representative of Javanese culture with all its strengths and weaknesses - a culture which in many ways is the heartbeat of Nindityo’s own thought and feelings.

This helps. But it must not limit the interpretation to Nindityo representing a ‘typical’ Javanese and hide his increasingly overtly exhibited hybrid make-up. While the early years of his konde obsession appeared limited to the deconstructed fragments of neo-traditional Javanese femininity, throughout the last decade the masculine comes to be represented alongside (or in intimate marriage to) the feminine. Lingga-Yoni (1992) could be seen as an early expression of this same idea, though it is a highly traditionalist piece, rooted in Nindityo’s search for his Javanese roots; the more conceptual-abstract/satirical reworking of this idea can be seen in the series of 2001 installations and photographs. We see Javanese men photographed in black and white head-and-shoulder shots, but their faces are covered with huge kondes of hair. In 1998, in the Helmet Your Art exhibition, in a series of photographic/multimedia works, Nindityo’s own face is photographed and displayed inside larger-than-life-size, open konde structures made of basketry - the artist/man, his own long hair twisted into strange, snail-shell formations, viewed within these delicate ‘prisons’, container-like wombs, and like the social structures which on all levels shape and contain the individual, till s/he begins to locate these through expanding awareness and
strategises how and why to break free of what parts of the container. War/heads, the other idea Nindityo plays with in his Canberra installation, is another aspect of the Western-colonial/post-colonial legacy in the globalisation game.

In his many installations on the theme of the konde, Nindityo has employed more people with specific skills to help him realise the forms he dreamed up. Not only wood carvers living around his home in Yogyakarta but also stone carvers and basket-weavers are commissioned (and, in a post-economic crash Indonesia, paid — no small matter in itself). Konde appeared in stone, wood, drawings and photographs. In the same way that hair is a collective phenomenon, Nindityo’s concerns have become more evidently plural than a decade ago. Last year, the mass symbol/body-element of hair was connected with that of feet. In the 2002 exhibition, Beyond the Modesty, gallery visitors of all ages and genders were invited to step on the konde, like stepping stones in a maze-like journey across the floor.

In 2003, Nindityo is looking to a new material to create his new installation, to be created for the exhibition in Canberra, this time one not appropriated by New Order Javanationalist rhetoric. Suharto is gone, and apparently, for now, so is Nindityo’s play with gender and Java-specific icons. Perhaps living in this post-September 11th world blew him beyond cultural specificities, to larger if not pan-human perspectives. An item of western style clothing, socks were introduced to Indonesia in the wake of colonialism. An item of clothing that signals class and group membership as clearly as many others, and the presence or absence of which is read variously by different groups.

Nindityo’s art is not merely ‘installation art’ in the static, gallery-space sense the term often implies. It often combines elements of installation, performance, and audience interaction, and the way the artist speaks or writes about it, it begins with the conception of the idea, the collaborative development of further ideas, the collective work preparing the spatial expression of it, the various subjective appreciations and reinterpretations (additive creations) of it, and the documentation of it:

In institutionalised art I sense ‘competition’ is getting increasingly tough. It is from this very point that the awareness of skill takes shape. Skill is not developed for the sake of competition but, more importantly, for survival. It is now the time to elaborate the definition of ‘globalisation’ so that it does not only signify ‘competition’. If ‘global’ is only taken to mean ‘competition’, then we are lower than animals.7

Individual rights are human rights; group rights are human rights. A multitude of individual people’s used socks covers two missile-shapes, one located symbolically in Indonesian military space, the other in Australian, each pointing at the other. The socks are envisioned as a united message from regular citizens of both nations. What are they saying? What messages are they birthing in you? And you, and you, and you? What actions do they signify and perhaps inspire?

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1 The history, analysis and interpretation of the Euro-American traditions of performance, body and installation art (and their derivations and crossovers) is in its early phases, as testified to by every writer approaching the subject in the last two decades. While curators and art historians writing about contemporary Asian installation/performance art for the most part exhibit an ‘allergy’ towards its ancestral roots and contemporary inspirations in indigenous community ritual, this history should not be eschewed where appropriate. The fear of ‘orientalising’ is naturally with us who write about Asian art (or any art of any other), yet self-censorship or lack of allergenic awareness leads to the very kinds of orientalising silences we attempt to critique.


3 For reproductions of these, see Wright, op.cit., pp. 103-5.

4 Artist’s statement from 1992 installations at the Japanese Cultural Centre, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 7.

5 Tightly wrapped batik sarong and fancy, lacey or silky, tightly tailored long sleeved blouse.

6 Catalogue accompanying the exhibition of Mella Jaarsma’s and Nindityo Adipurnomo’s work entitled Kopi-Susu (Coffee with Milk), at the Erasmus Huis, Jakarta, 1998, p. 5.

7 From Nindityo Adipurnomo, ‘Compilation of Ideas,’ personal writing sent as email to author in May 2003.
Santiago Bose, Ayos Ba (Is it Alright), 2000, mixed media on canvas, 63 x 100 cm. Collection: John Batten, Courtesy John Batten Gallery, Hong Kong
Santiago Bose: Magic, humour and cultural resistance. 

Pat Hoffie

Santiago grew up amidst the conflicts and contradictions of two cultures. As a child at night he would cocoon himself in his blankets with his transistor radio, listening to Radio America being beamed from the top of the next ridge of the Cordillera massif, from Camp John Hay, where American servicemen took their R and R from the lowland heat.

Beyond the pollution of traffic and the too-rapid growth of industrialisation Baguio is still a city of pine forests and flowers where mists swirl and earthquakes rumble and threaten. The Baguio markets are abundant with local produce - with fruit and vegetables, fish and meat and honey and flowers. And in between and beyond the stalls wander the amulet sellers and the fortune-tellers and faith healers for which this city has become renowned.

Popular local parlance describes its own process of colonisation by Spain and then America as tantamount to spending 400 years in a monastery followed by 100 years in Hollywood. The Filipinos treat their ongoing colonisation by a globalised economy equally lightly - the one-liners on T-shirts may be the most cryptic in the world. And the most self-mocking. Yet the processes of colonisation have failed to erode what Santiago would frequently describe as the ‘hidden histories’ that erupt where you least expected - just like the tremors and eruptions of the earth’s crust that are felt right across that scatter of islands. Santi would search across these islands for traces of forms and rituals and traditions that surround the anting-anting - the magic amulets that are employed by all Filipinos to ward off evil and to seek better ends. Remnants from a pre-Christian past, these amulets and traditions survived being outlawed by the Jesuits, went underground, and reappeared in new guises, as hybrid half-breeds all the better equipped to deal with the savagery of civilisation.

Later in his life Santi would describe himself as ‘a born-again pagan’ - as someone who was committed to the resurrection of the past as a way of showing how and where Filipino culture had survived intact. Metamorphosed, but idiosyncratic and intact. Anting-anting can still be found throughout the Philippines. In the heart of Manila, outside in the chaos of streets and lanes that surround Quiapo Church where the much venerated Black Madonna is kept, there amidst the clusters of women selling magic potions, herbs and amulets, little red wax votive candles in the shape of men and women can be purchased to be lit in the church. These particularly Filipino effigies are among the plethora of evidence that bears witness to the particularly Filipino flavour of the Catholicism that is practiced there. Santiago’s interest in magic was both academic and personal - his own considerable talents as an amateur magician were no doubt spawned during his boyhood days in Baguio, where his uncle supported a local sect headed by a leader unambiguously self-titled ‘Maestro’. He would recall how the magic symbols of the sect, the precision of their rituals, the attention given to the way certain objects were used, all had a particular seduction that was intensified by a certain furtiveness that surrounded their practices.

He remembered also that the secrecy surrounding the activities of the cult and the services they offered was a means of warding off the critical disclaimers of many other members of the community in a small city that was striving to shrug off certain vestiges of local life in its efforts to modernise. At the time, even as a child, he was aware that such practices were looked down on by many educated or Christianised people as evidence of the residue of a pre-Hispanic past. What he didn’t know then was that such cults were common among lower class Filipinos; that they were a means by which communities had reinstated local values and beliefs into imposed codes. As a mature artist Santi frequently made reference to these cults in his installations and paintings, using them as examples of Filipino resistance to processes of religious imperialism.

And yet the American air-waves had their own appeal, and he was filled with a curiosity about the US despite his growing sense of irony of the gulf that separated the two cultures. In the late 1950s, when Santi was growing up, Camp John Hay was a sprawling, manicured country resort featuring state of the art cabins, a golf course, restaurant, R and R facilities and.... a pet cemetery. Santi took an irreverent joy in strolling among the crumbling tombstones of the cemetery long after the
base had closed. The tombstones featured all the worst excesses of Disney recreated in highly coloured concrete by artisans who misinterpreted them according to local tendencies. They marked the sites of deceased coveted pooches in a town renowned for dog-eating. Such ironies provided another rich vein in Santi’s art and life - a deliciously irreverent humour. This humour was also a means of keeping the worst horrors of an unequal world at bay. And it was one that helped him keep the influences of the long years he later spent in New York in perspective. During this time his critical responses to the vast gulf that separated the First World from the Third World were refined and developed. To Santi’s way of thinking, it was so painful it had to be funny. He lived his world torn between two pulls - his love for a country that he also described as exhibiting a ‘parochial narrow mindedness’ and the lure of a centre that seemed less appealing, less rewarding, the closer you got to knowing it.

On his first trip to the US in 1980 he had been given a book called America’s in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan, one of the first union organisers for the agricultural workers in California and Hawaii in the 1920s. The book described the plight of first wave Filipino immigrants to the US, and at the time it provided him with an introduction for understanding the experiences of displacement which later forged the subject matter for many of his paintings.

The deepest influences on his work came from his experiences of folk art practices in his own country. Santi’s first professional exhibition opening in Manila in 1972 coincided with the announcement of martial law. After that exhibition he was listed among those artists and intellectuals who were blacklisted by the Marcos government, and who were therefore banned from leaving the country. As a consequence his plans to study overseas were thwarted. Instead, he decided to use the time for another kind of research, and began to plan a number of trips that would take him across the Philippines to a range of regions where he could study the local output from communities. According to Santi, it was during this time that he first came to the realisation that many of the crafts practices and expressions that had grown from responses to local fiestas and celebrations were the Filipino art forms most deeply rooted in a sense of a particular place. Because they had grown from the needs of individuals and communities to make sense of their relationship to that place, they resonated with an urgency that had withstood and even transformed the influences of colonisation.

These travels reinforced his growing conviction about the necessity of continuing a tradition of contemporary art that was meaningful to Filipino audiences. He had long been skeptical about the commonly held conviction among so many aspiring modernists that Philippine artists were merely second rate copyists of western ideas, and some of the forms and expressions he came across during these travels presented him with possible vehicles from which to challenge such assumptions. These included not only local forms and traditions but also indigenous materials that were inexpensive and offered new possibilities for expression. However, after martial law Santi’s curiosity about other people and places continued, and the self-invented Cultural Drifter travelled widely and returned to Baguio throughout his career. No matter where he was, part of his mind and a good percentage of his phone bill would be spent on connecting with his community in Baguio, where his political convictions about a range of issues - the environment, the plight of indigenous people and the value of the visual arts to local communities - continued to motivate a large part of his practice.

His commitment to such values was instrumental in the foundation of the Baguio Arts Guild. For many years he led the BAG as its president and chief mentor, and in those roles did everything including launching international arts festivals. Santi’s commitment to local communities was central to the international span and focus of his art. He lived his life from feast to famine, from international ‘gigs’ and residencies supported by wealthy international galleries and events, to organising soup kitchens for earthquake victims, to mobilising support for local tree-planting ceremonies. This span provided the spine of his career as an artist - one whose whole life was devoted to his belief that art, magic and humour were the best ingredients to ensure cultural survival in communities downtrodden by the excesses of a global economy.
The works in this exhibition bear traces of these convictions. *Diary of a Cultural Drifter* is an assemblage salvaged from the institutional garbage dump on the campus at the University of the Southern Cross, Lismore, where he worked as artist in residence for four months in 1994. This work reflects Santi’s fascination with the Aboriginal cultures of Australia, and also belies some of the contradictions that are spawned in the wake of cultural crossovers. Although some critics may protest that Santi’s ventures into understanding such issues in a country that was partly adopted by him were ill informed, Santi welcomed such irregularities with an infectious irreverence. The success of other freeloaders and invaders, such as the cane toad, he would argue, was undeniable despite the horror that such introduced species seemed to attract.

The other work was completed after a period of almost three months we spent together in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2000. The cheap carpet frames a tourist icon of another kind: a Vietnamese trishaw driver pulling a passenger. Although the original is an historical image, similar images of colonialism can still be seen every day in the streets of Hanoi. They form an aspect of the tourist trade: the marketing of an essence of elsewhere, of otherness, of a place that lies outside the friction of social, cultural and political upheaval. Yet Santi overlays this image, of tourist icon from one notion of elsewhere coagulated on top of another notion of elsewhere (the Persian rug) with yet another layer of signs and symbols - ones that refuse to fit, ones that warn of other, more dire outcomes. The figures weave in and out, and ultimately the viewer is led into a world that seems infected by impossible spaces and hallucinogenic possibilities.

And those hallucinogenic possibilities too were part of Santi’s resistance. For in the end he found the inequalities and injustices of the global value systems to be more and more of an effort to bridge. The everyday realities for artists making art in the Third World - the poor nutrition, inadequate health systems, over-priced medication - make it all that much more difficult. And these are things that should be borne in mind when viewing art production from elsewhere. No matter how white those gallery walls may seem, no matter how seamlessly they may seem to hold all the assembled work together in accord, their sites of production say everything about the meaning of the work. For in the end, there is no such thing as a level playing field. Never was. Never will be. And art that bears witness to this should be held all the more valuable.

The extent to which Santiago Bose’s art has influenced the development of contemporary art in the Philippines has yet to be fully fathomed. His introduction of indigenous materials, his mining of Filipino iconography, his re-writing of Filipino history, his commitment to indigenous forms and practices, his bringing together of new media - such as performance, video and installation - with older forms such as rituals, festival paraphernalia and altarpieces - have made a rich and deep contribution to contemporary art practice not only in the Philippines but also abroad. And along with art practice there is the legacy of his writings, his presence, his long years of commitment to communities in his home town of Baguio and to other elsewheres where he set down roots. Santi’s work wove past histories into the present, and then on into probable and improbable futures. In the face of what often looked like insurmountable odds, he always continued to make art that breathed with the potential for new imaginings.

*Santiago Bose passed away on 3 December 2002 in Baguio City.*

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Mella Jaarsma: Moments like this...

Mella Jaarsma is no witness to silence. Dutch-born with a now strong Indonesian cadence, Jaarsma uses the ambivalence of her coalesced Indonesian/Dutch identity as the foundation for a poignant conceptual and artistic investigation of contemporary Indonesian identity politics. Without reducing this knowledge to a mere recording, her approach to reading Indonesian culture, as a full time resident since 1984, comes from situating oneself in the real activity of the society. Jaarsma’s experiences stem from a practical relation to contemporary Indonesian culture. With a preoccupied, active presence in the racial politics of Indonesia, Jaarsma is familiar with that which imposes most on racial identification. With its urgencies, its things to be done, said and made, she along with many contemporary Indonesian artists, formulates a contingent, artistic, motivated social commentary. This commentary locates alternative actions and realities for and within contemporary Indonesian society:

By choosing to live within a totally different culture, after having grown up in the Netherlands, I became more aware of the values and norms of my own cultural background. This process made me conscious of differences between cultures and also taught me how to identify these differences. What we consider to be reality comes to us by means of contrasts in experiences. My work focuses on ideas about our own existence in a certain place in a particular world.¹

Jaarsma’s articulation of racial politics specifically involves unique artistic endeavours that speak both to the culturally inculcated and to those less familiar with the reality of a multi-ethnic Indonesia. Whilst Jaarsma makes no grand claims to a generalist indigenous cultural experience, the politic itself does have some shared challenges for any multi-ethnic community. This affords her artistic activities an immediacy beyond their obvious context. It is the ability of works such as Hi inlander (Hello Native) (1998-99), shown at the Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery, in 1999 to raise questions like: ‘What does it mean to walk around in another’s skin, to see through their eyes, to make food with their own hands? To eat their food and to become therefore, like them? and more acutely what does it feel like to live in another’s body? And does a different body make a different person?’ As Julie Ewington suggests, such questions locate a broad and a specific type of negotiation of social location and importantly the language and activity of difference in a multi-racial society.²

This type of social questioning came to the forefront in post-Suharto Indonesia. With a new-found freedom of expression, artists like Jaarsma found themselves in the middle of an economic and political crisis and began to redefine their positions. Jaarsma’s position as a Dutch born Indonesian resident acknowledges her ‘existence on a certain spot in this world. The paintings, photographs, installations and performances made during the last years basically are meant to invite people to consider where they are placed. On one side every person has to deal with very personal experiences which come to us by our family background, given possibilities and choices. On the other side, experiences are made by general circumstances (culturally, politically and socially).’³

In identifying key cultural codes and practices fundamental to all societies such as cooking, eating, and dress, Jaarsma infiltrates the everyday life and encounters of people. Utilising familiar yet culturally loaded activities such as these she temporarily destabilises the established modes of behaviour in street performances that mesh differing ethnic references in performative interventions. Events such as cooking frog legs in the streets of Yogyakarta by seven foreign people, defy certain cultural traditions in order to open up discussions about racism. For Muslims, any meat not halal (clean) is taboo. Frog legs are Chinese food and therefore not strictly speaking allowed with the Muslim diet. In this performance Jaarsma has different people, with differing customs, cooking foods that they are not allowed to consume. This active presence in the world of racial relations is informed by her own multi-racial family. Jaarsma confronts the negotiation of a hybrid family life within a society that has an imposing traditional background and, as she states, a rather new capitalist consumer culture and political tension. It is her specific experience of Indonesia that informs what is at heart a considered humanist comparative analysis of cultural experiences.

Lisa Byrne
Jaarsma's mode of social inquiry through performance is contrived for very specific ends. Choosing fluid, almost totally ephemeral styles of interventionist engagement with her audience, be it in the public realm or that of a gallery environment, little beyond the costumes or a video record remains after the act. It is the dynamic raised in the direct experience of these performances that motivates the greatest sense of personage, place and reality for the audience. Arguably, it is their short-lived, yet piqued intervention in established social mores that affords their motivating efficacy. Jaarsma recounts an experience with an Aboriginal model at the 1999 Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane where, upon meeting her model Rodney, a Dutch conversation ensued. It came about that Rodney was from the Stolen Generation of indigenous children and was given to a Dutch immigrant family and upon their return to live in the Netherlands a little while later, they took him with them. As Jaarsma remarks, 'Isn't it a moment of exchange like this that I had made the artwork for?'

In SARA-swati I and II, made not long after the racial riots of 1998, Jaarsma drew on the warrior princess Saraswati from the Mahabarata story and combined this with a purposeful linguistic double entendre SARA, the abbreviation used in Indonesian language meaning Suku - Agama- Ras (Tribe - Religion - Race). In this performance Jaarsma dresses her subject in a veil made of dried banana tree-trunk. The veil is made so that different parts of the body are shown, these are her common expressive tools, eyes, hands, feet. Protruding from the banana tree-trunk veil are pointing fingers. These fingers despite the Indonesian cultural taboo of pointing at someone, (something Jaarsma is very aware of), directly implicate the audience in a compelling exchange of identity politics. With this action the artist steadfastly disavows any neutralised viewing of the veiled subject. Negating any potential as a spectacle, the viewer is the watched, inasmuch as the entire audience is drawn into participating in the performance.

Whether one describes Jaarsma's veils worn by her performers as skins, cloaks, or hijab (a Muslim girl's veil) their covering of the bodily surface is a clever vehicle of social inscription. These cloaks worn by performers first and foremost add to the complexity of identity rather than attempting to strip away at identity in the fraught pursuit of some essential inner subjectivity or originary status. Jaarsma rather astutely steers clear of this trap. Instead she revisits and remakes these cloaks for different performances in different places with different audiences. In using social behaviour as a point of subversion through their very traditional, enculturated or engendered contexts, Jaarsma's skins point to the specificity of different cultural experiences. This was keenly evident in two works Show me the Truth (1997) and SARA-Swati I and II. In the former work Jaarsma had her audience step into footprints of another person in a main street of Yogyakarta, rather than wear another’s cloak/skin as is the case with the latter.

Everyone who confronts my work is coming at it from different backgrounds and cultures, dealing with highly personal sets of taboos and therefore experiencing the work in different ways. I want my work to relate to these specific audiences, dealing with some of their specific taboos. This takes great sensitivity, and I try to find ways to open up dialogue.

For Witnessing to Silence at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, as part of the ANU Humanities Research Centre project 'Art and Human Rights', Jaarsma will make three new video performances and three new costumes whilst in residence. These new works will feature hunting, killing, feeding and healing. The first is a military costume worn by a performer made from camouflage fabric and seaweed; the second a feeding costume made from dried inkfish and squids, and the third a healing costume, made of traditional medicines such as dried seahorse, seadragons, with plant materials. The bottom of each costume will hang into a wok and a soup will be cooked and served at the opening to the audience and the people wearing the costume.

The Indonesian measure of Mella Jaarsma's artistic activity over the last several years is a fertile basis for her interest in contemporary identity politics. What she so expertly conveys is the need for people to actively consider the world that surrounds them, for a phenomenological reality that incorporates racial tolerance, and encourages the value of diversity.
Jaarsma attempts this social endeavour through the experiences of her immediate surroundings and presents this by way of invested performative acts that shorten the distance between the audience and the artwork. Fully aware that art cannot change the world, Jaarsma teases her participants into potentially conflicting acts that implicate them in altering their reality, even if it is just for a moment in time.

Lisa Byrne is Director, Canberra Contemporary Art Space.


5 Importantly, as Julie Ewington points out in ‘The problem of location’, op. cit., the word ‘footprints’ is accurately stated as Pribumi. This literally means son of the soil, therefore indigenous person. The word was used during the riots of May 1998 in Indonesian cities to protect houses and shops from attack by the mobs, often as part of the phrase Muslim pribumi asli - ie Islamic, indigenous, original. Jaarsma states that conflicts arising from SARA appear frequently in the current affairs of Indonesia.

6 Mella Jaarsma in Moral Pointers, op. cit., p. 10-11.
Michael Mel and Anna Mel, *Ples Namei (Our Place)*, performance, 1996, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
Image courtesy the artist and David Williams
In my language, there is no native.¹

Michael Mel and wife Anna Mel invited the audience at the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane to ‘touch a native’. Plumed and painted in full exotic regalia by the members of the audience, they stood enticingly behind a large wooden frame while Michael spruiked:

Come ladies and gentlemen to the world of the native. Located here for all to see. Framed and Captured... you can construct your own native ... you don’t have to look through the glass; walk through the frame, break down the barriers. But ladies and gentlemen we should allow the natives to perform for us. We want to see them play for us. We like that don’t we? ²

Those who took up the challenge, who dressed, oiled, and stroked the black bodies, stimulated an uncomfortable tabloid of conflicting emotions amongst those gathered - all in the name of good fun, mind you.

Confronting performances involving high levels of audience participation with compelling and illuminating messages about how the West constructs a fixed image of the Pacific native, are the Mels’ signature style. Constructing these cross-cultural encounters with performing natives is a disarmingly entertaining practice, but also a parody that inverts the conventional exchanges between the ‘West’ and the ‘rest’, because it constitutes an act of counter-colonialism by making visible the processes by which ‘the native’ is constructed in moments of colonisation. It is both a process critical to cultural survival, and a process central to the Mels’ cultural tradition: performance has always been a major conduit for culture in the Mt. Hagen area of western PNG where Michael grew up, in contrast ‘to the hewn and woven images which perform the same function elsewhere.’³

Well, what is really happening behind this simple but powerful performance by the Mels? Firstly they are making it clear that there is no native without a coloniser - the idea of ‘native’ is a construction that can only happen in relation to a colonising gaze, a gaze which from the native’s perspective is of the ‘other’, and from the coloniser, a gaze upon the other. Mel implicates the audience by enticing them to literally play out this conceptual construction, in a seemingly innocent and good humoured act of dress-ups. Their black bodies are objectified, de-humanised and exoticised at the hands of the participant observers for the pleasure and convenience of the dominant ‘other’. Playthings without culture! And yet, playthings only because as active agents, they have set up this scenario, and invited this engagement. So, as Michael observes, he is examining the processes ‘of subconscious racism, in an effort to bring to the surface in the participants through performance the realities of their constructions of natives/black/difference.’⁴ However, he suggests, these deconstructions can only be ‘realised’ by participants who are beguiled into accepting and believing in the existence of such people, places and practices.

The complicity of the audience in this scenario is integral to the act of reclamation of identity by the performers. In this respect, Michael’s performance is a manifestation of the refusal to be colonised, while appearing to ‘play the game’. Michel de Certeau writes that, ‘...a way of using imposed systems constitutes resistance to an order constructed by others and whilst dominated subjects may recognise the ubiquity of forces of power, they need not accord them legitimacy: instead the rules can be deployed tactically in a ‘non-compliant compliance.’⁵ Such strategies of accommodation and resistance enable indigenous agency to survive from the site of the white. By returning the gaze, Michael is metaphorically taking back the power. But he is also offering liberation to both the audience and himself, the coloniser and the colonised. With the glass removed from the frame of the picture the flow through is made easier (physically at least); then the challenge begins. Responses are individualised as each willing participant battles his or her own demons in dressing/undressing or stroking the native. For the Mels it is a case of employing self-liberating strategies through interrogating the processes that define them as ‘other’ and ‘lesser’ in a splendid theatre of cultural transaction.

These self-liberating strategies employed by those once held captive to the anthropological gaze are seen in the performance work of many indigenous artists...
throughout the Pacific and Australia. The performance installation *All stock must go!* by the Brisbane-based Campfire collective in 1996 used the highly symbolic cattle truck as a metaphor for dislocation, and deployed the tactics of the dominant order to dismantle hierarchies and challenge codes of entry into the art world. Like Michael Mel’s performances it too relied on participating audiences who interacted with a mob of blackfellas selling art to them from the back of a truck. John Pule from Aotearoa/New Zealand similarly, in his popular skit *Dusky Maidens*, teases the audience by becoming their projected attitudes to the exotic native female, drawing out what Michael Mel refers to as their ‘subconscious racism’.

Ceremonial sites for traditional performance are integral to the power of the event. As a contemporary artist with a PhD in drama and performance from Flinders University, and a person deeply embedded in traditional PNG practices, the significance of a museum site does not escape Michael Mel. It’s ‘necessary to consider the world view within which the space is rendered significant.’ Staging this event in a museum deepens the plot, exposing the role museums have played in the threat to cultural survival. He reacts to the traditional museum practice of entombing the native as a fixed, western construct, an artefact or relic - as both self-justification for the march of progress and as a trophy. Michael’s work refers to the display of objects of material culture like dismembered bodies estranged from their cultural origins or like dioramas of the native eking out a primitive existence or engaging in bloodthirsty war. In this context the performance at a museum functions as a Right-of-Reply, an oppositional dialogue in museological practices. In a telling ethnographic reversal, the observed becomes the observer, the voyeur the subject. The passive becomes the active and the glass case becomes a mirror.

However, staging the event at this particular site, the National Museum of Australia, at this particular time in history is an even richer minefield, in more than one sense of the word. Embroiled as it is in the national ‘culture wars’ as the media describes it, because of the way the Museum does cultural business in the First Australians’ Gallery, it resonates with the way Michael does business. The Museum is also engaging in reclamation and cultural survival by correcting erasures and misunderstandings of the past and by allowing the people whose culture is being represented to speak for themselves. Audience participation, too, is inclusive and educative. Michael’s message fits this paradigm, because it is magnified not only through a right of reply but also through a chorus of multiple voices.

For Michael another great threat to cultural survival is globalisation. He sees a world ‘severed by an agenda of homogenisation through globalisation’, a world where ‘…the hedonistic palpitations of uniformity, containment and consumption…’ can swamp indigeneity. He uses his performance like a double-edged sword to act out the ‘dumbed down native’, on one hand giving the consumer what he wants, expects and is titillated by, and on the other exploiting the camouflage in a process of accommodation and resistance. His method of telling is the message, and through humour, inversion and irony he unpacks the cultural baggage bequeathed by the coloniser.

Michel Foucault draws a distinction between the modern museum and the ‘mode of the festival.’ The work of the museum, he suggests, is concerned with the accumulation of time, with collecting and classifying objects rather than with their meaning in their original context. Without providing viewers with the cultural values surrounding the exhibited objects they can easily be viewed as ‘decontextualised traces of history’. The ‘mode of the festival’, by contrast, is not to accumulate time but merely to pass through time. ‘Festivals are of the moment; museums are outside the moment.’ In this scenario the objects that live through Michael’s performances at the museum provide the original function and meaning. Their makers and users invest them with cultural value that reaches back to original sites and traditions and includes the new site in a dynamic story that has no end. It is in this vein that the National Museum staged its adventurous ‘Tracking Kultja’ festival in its opening year (2001) and received ceremonial apparel from Indigenous Australians who performed.
Without such performances to animate the objects they can become meaningless shells with assigned labels that read like forensic statistics - time, place, birth, death and vital statistics – tagged like body bags. Michael has difficulty with labels that denote some sort of structural relationship between the idea of an indigenous culture and its material. He resists the concept that the object 'is a manifestation of that ideal' or that feathers, beads and bilums can denote Papua New Guineanness. In this way objects, people and their identity become conflated. Michael argues that objects are experiences and that the performance is an embodied experience; one cannot exist without the other. Identity is therefore not a thing, but an experiential process which can be sensed or intensely felt in the intersection between the person and the object, where the object is allowed to permeate the person. In performance '...it is not about me giving meaning to the object (whatever that may be) but more about my sense of meaning (and being) with and through the object.' Museums and other collectors of indigenous material culture mostly miss the point, and while many may acknowledge cultural difference these, as Michael notes, 'are only acknowledged in the context of the rules of engagement that satisfy or conform to the dominant agenda and are treated in linear time.'

By taking ownership of terms like native, wog and blackfella, the ‘other’ becomes empowered. Wearing these once derogatory terms with pride is a potent and subversive weapon in the armoury of black humour critical to identity in the race for cultural survival.

Note: This paper was written prior to the development of the performance for the conference. It was read and approved by Michael Mel.

Margo Neale is Director of the Museum’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, National Museum of Australia.

1 Michael Mel on video, Millennium Shift, Ian Lang Production, The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 1996.
2 Michael Mel, 'Encountering Ples Name', Art Monthly, July 1999, No. 121, pp.17-20 [Also some words from the video cited above].
3 Richard Cornish on Michael and Anna Mel, in Caroline Turner and Rhana Devenport (eds.) The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, 1996, p.117.
4 Personal correspondence with author, 5 June 2003.
6 Artist’s statement for the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, 1996.
9 The substance of this paragraph was provided by Dr Jen Webb in an ARC Linkage application with the NMA, the HRC and Asia-Link entitled ‘The Other Within’ Visual culture through Indigenous, tribal, minority, subaltern and multicultural displays in the Asia-Pacific museums today.

Michael Mel and Anna Mel, Ples Name (Our Place), performance, 1996, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. Image Courtesy the artist and David Williams.
Artists’ Biographical Details and Exhibition Checklist


Indonesian Missile I & II, 2003
Socks
Collection: the artist

Christian Boltanski was born in France 1944 and presently lives and works in Paris. With no formal art training, he began painting as a teenager and has since exhibited very widely internationally. Boltanski has been collected by museums throughout the world and has been exhibited in such renowned exhibitions as Documenta (1972, 1986), the Venice Biennale (1993, 1996), and at the Carnegie International at the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh (1991). Since the late 1960s his work has often taken the form of photographic and filmic installations that explore the themes of memory, identity, absence, death and loss. Boltanski lectures in painting at the Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts in Paris.

Contacts, 2002
Eight light boxes with photographs
95 x 130 x 12 cm
Courtesy Galerie Yvon Lambert

Pourim Reserve, 1989
Eight gelatin silver photographs, eight lamps, eight biscuit tins, white linen
300 x 360 variable
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Santiago Bose who was born in Baguio City, Philippines in 1949, was an artist with a deep commitment to Philippine indigenous values and to raising an awareness of local Philippine cultural concerns. After studying at the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines between 1967 and 1972, Bose continued his studies in the United States at the West 17th Print Workshop in New York. Following this he returned to Baguio in 1986 and began his explorations into the effects of colonialism on the Philippine national identity. In particular, Bose focused on the resilience of indigenous cultures such as those he experienced in his home region of the Cordilleras. He was a founder of the Baguio Arts Guild and was for many years its President. He also took a number of residencies in Australia and overseas. Santiago Bose passed away on 3 December 2002.

Diary of a Cultural Drifter, 1994
42 separate steel panels, mixed media
each panel 38 x 30 x 2 cms.
Collection: John Batten, Hong Kong.

Ayos Ba? (Is it Alright?), 2000
Mixed media on canvas,
63 x 100 cms
Collection: John Batten, Hong Kong.

Hanoi, 2000
Mixed media on carpet
190 x 234 cms
Collection: Bose Family, Manila, Philippines

Dadang Christanto was born in 1957 in Tegal, Central Java, Indonesia, and is a graduate of Indonesia Institute of Arts (ISI), Yogyakarta. A leading Indonesian artist, he has lectured at the School of Art and Design, University of the Northern Territory, Australia since 1999. Christanto’s art practice has been concerned with exploring social and political issues in Indonesia and the world, incorporating a range of media such as painting, drawing, performance, sculpture and installation. He has exhibited widely in major international biennals and triennials including in Australia, Brazil, Cuba, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the US and Indonesia. His work is held in major public collections in Australia, Japan and Germany.

Hujan Merah (Red Rain), 1999 - 2000
Installation: Prayer paper, red twine, plastic
Collection: the artist

Kepedihan pohon-pohon (The Pain of the Tree), 2003
Installation: ceramic, bronze wire, paper & ash
Collection: the artist

Juan Davila was born 1946 in Santiago, Chile. He moved to Australia in 1974 and now lives and works in Melbourne. He is represented in all State and National Art Museums in Australia and in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Museo Extremeno e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporaneo, Spain. Davila is an editor for the Art and Criticism Monograph Series (Melbourne), and a Member of the Committee of Revista de Critica Cultural in Santiago, Chile. Davila’s wide education includes studies undertaken at the Law School of the University of Chile (1965-69), and the Fine Arts School of the University of Chile (1970-72). In the last three decades he has exhibited in 48 solo exhibitions and more than a hundred group exhibitions. He continues to explore the role of art in social and political contexts, passionately advocating the need for art to address and debate issues of social and political significance.

Oil on canvas
105 x 1500 cm (4.7 m diameter)
Courtesy the artist and Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art

Fiona Foley has been exhibiting since 1984. Based in Brisbane, she is recognised for her art internationally, particularly for her attention to contemporary indigenous life and culture in Australia. Foley is represented in all major public collections in Australia. A graduate of Sydney College of the Arts, she originally worked in prints and forms of collage that she later developed into the larger sculptural installations for which she is renowned. Foley is a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney. Throughout many of her past works, Foley has explored the themes of history, memory and politics.

In the meantime, 1998
Charcoal on paper
15 panels
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery
The Children Overboard, 2002  
Acrylic paint on fabric  
Collection: the artist

Woomera, 2003  
Acrylic paint on fabric  
Collection: the artist

Alfredo Jaar was born in Santiago, Chile, 1956 and undertook studies in film and architecture there before leaving for New York in 1982. He has been living in New York since then and has exhibited his work in prominent international exhibitions such as the Venice, Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, Istanbul and Gwangju Biennials as well as in Documenta. Since the 1980s Jaar’s work has been principally in the form of installations which combine elements of photography, architecture and theatre, and often feature graphic documentary images that are both seductive and unsettling. These works explore the complex relationships between developed and developing nations, and art and politics, often highlighting the ironies and injustices which characterize those relationships in the name of profit.

Fading, 1991  
Installation comprising 4 metal trays and 19 direct positive colour photographs  
4 trays 120 x 120 x 13 cm  
3 photographs 101 x 101 cm  
16 photographs 16 x 16 cm  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Nalini Malani was born in 1946, Karachi. She lives and works in Bombay (Mumbai), India. Trained as a painter, Malani received her education in the Fine Arts from Sir Jamshedjee Jeebhoy School of Art, Bombay, India and in Paris through a French Government scholarship. Malani has become known for her politically motivated works which combine traditional imagery with new technology. Her work has been shown in major exhibitions in India, Japan, Australia, England, Cuba and South Africa and she is represented in national museum collections worldwide. Most recently, Malani has participated in such landmark international exhibitions as Century City (Tate Modern, 2000) and Unpacking Europe (Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 2001). Her work will also be shown this year at the Istanbul Biennale and the House of World Culture exhibition in Berlin.

Hamletmachine, 1999-2000  
Installation of four DVD projections, salt, mirror and sound  
Collection of the artist
Michael Mel was born in 1959. He is from the Mogei tribe of the Hagen area in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Graduating in 1996 with a PhD from Flinders University in South Australia, Dr Mel is currently Senior Lecturer and Head of Expressive Arts and Religious Education Department at the University of Goroka, PNG, lecturing in art education and Melanesian cultural studies. As a performance artist, curator, and writer his focus is on the contemporary art of Papua New Guinea, dealing with issues of cultural survival and education through art. He was the curator for the Papua New Guinean component for the Noumea Biennale 2000 at the Centre Jean-Marie Tjibaou, co-selector for the Papua New Guinean component to the Pacific Festival of Arts 2000 in Noumea, and selector for Papua New Guinea for the Shrines for the Next Millennium as part of the Olympic Arts Festival 2000. Dr Mel presented the performance/installation piece Ples Namel (Our Place) at the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane in 1996.

Michel Tuffery was born in 1966 in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand and currently also lives and works there. An artist of Samoan, Tahitian and Palagi (European) descent, Tuffery has been awarded several national and international art prizes, public commissions and residencies. Since gaining his Diploma of Fine Arts at Otago Polytechnic (NZ), and pursuing further Fine Arts study at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Tuffery has held numerous exhibitions and performances throughout the Pacific and his work is in public collections throughout New Zealand and internationally for example the National Gallery of Australia. His work was shown in the First and Third Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions.

Luc Tuymans was born in Mortsel, Belgium, 1958 and lives and works in Antwerp. While strongly influenced by other media, such as film and photography, painting has been his key medium of artistic expression. His art education includes study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de la Cambre, Brussels (1979-80), Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, Antwerp (1980-82) and Vrije Universiteit, Brussels (1982-86). Tuymans' works have been shown all over the world including in Venice, Lyon and Sydney Biennales as well as in major shows in Tokyo, New York and at Documenta in Kassel. He will be the subject of a major exhibition at the Tate Modern in London in 2004.

Guan Wei was born in Beijing in 1957 and graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at Beijing Capital University in 1986. He has lived in Australia since 1984, currently living in Sydney. He has had a variety of residencies in Australia and overseas and had his work acquired by major institutions. His work, which draws on contrasts between Australia and China, has been included in numerous important contemporary exhibitions including The Rose Crossing 1999-2000, Lines of Descent 2000-2001, the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial 1999, Australian Perspecta 1995, Silent Energy at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, Mao Goes Pop at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and New Art from China, Hong Kong Arts Centre and TZ Gallery, Taipei, all in 1993. Guan Wei was awarded The Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2002. In 2003 he will be in an exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.

**Michael Mel, Il lam Nai? Kundulul molga Pombraal? (Who is this person? White or Black?), National Museum of Australia, 10 August 2003**

**Michel Tuffery**

**Luc Tuymans**

**Guan Wei**

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**Dow: Island, 2002**
Acrylic on canvas
48 panels, 317 x 913 cm installed
Courtesy Sherman Gallery, Sydney

**Maypole, 2000**
Oil on canvas
234 x 118 cm
Collection of James and Jacqui Erskine
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