

18.06.2023

– 13.08.2023

ORGANISED BY CELINE CHEUNG, NAOMI SEGAL AND TIAN ZHANG
WITH HELP FROM KALANJAY DHIR, FEI GAO AND ALEX TANAZEFTI

In bodies of water, undercurrents move in different directions to that of the surface. Not always seen but still present, they are vital forces undetected by colonial and capitalist ways of mapping from above. Collectively, undercurrents can be feelings that move against the dominant atmosphere: a desire or tension circulating between bodies, felt in common yet not always named.

The works in *Undercurrent* critique, resist and propose alternatives to the mainstream – to oppressive institutions, infrastructures and systems. They engage in direct and oblique strategies of resistance including parody, gossip, counter-mapping and truth-telling. Grounded in agency and lived/living experience, the artists flow autonomously below, against, between and beyond.

This exhibition is attentive to not only what we are moving *against*, but also *towards*. What meanings can we uncover when we pay attention to what's below the surface? What awaits us when we diverge from the expected path? How may our submerged movements be in flow, converging and gathering speed, together?

1. Blue Mountains Shelter Artist Group Collective

In 2021 an exhibition of works aimed at raising community awareness of the growing housing insecurity and homelessness crisis in the Blue Mountains was held in Katoomba, hosted by Walanamarra Artists. In that same year, the Blue Mountains Community Land Trust was founded aimed at addressing the housing crisis from a grassroots community perspective. In May 2022, Walanamarra Artists and the Blue Mountains Community Land Trust got together to launch the Documentary *NOT JUST ANOTHER NUMBER* and host a community meeting to envision what a Community Land Trust could look like. Items in this exhibition are from this process.

Visitors are welcome to browse the membership form, information sheet and badges in the Pari Books section. If you would like to receive an e-newsletter with updates on the Blue Mountains Shelter Artist Group Collective, get in touch via bmcommunitylandtrust@gmail.com.

Artworks from left to right:

NOT JUST ANOTHER NUMBER, 2022

Sue Wildman & Giles Hamm

Single channel video, 12 min

NOT JUST ANOTHER NUMBER is a documentary about the Shelter Exhibition held in Katoomba in December, 2021. It features the artwork of local elders and members of the community with lived experiences of homelessness as well as Art Therapists who have worked closely with people impacted in this way. Through images and interviews, the film addresses housing issues the Blue Mountains community is facing as well as ideas for addressing the current crisis. The film was produced By Sue Wildman and Giles Hamm and is dedicated to the memory of Pip Smith (1971-2023).

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WITH HELP FROM KALANJAY DHIR, FEI GAO AND ALEX TANAZEFTI*The Bower, 2021*Jen McNally, Blue Mountains resident and community member
Found object sculpture

'I am 69 years old and found myself homeless when my rent was increased. I couch surfed and sometimes slept outside. I felt protected by the trees. I have made my work in honour of nature and how it sheltered me. I have just found a flat and am grateful to have a roof over my head but I have had to move out of my community which I miss very much.'

*Another Number, Another Statistic, 2021*Pip Smith, Wiradjuri artist 1971-2023
Acrylic on canvas

'My painting is about the sense of just being another number, another statistic. Just going around in circles and never being able to get stable housing. Sometimes I feel really anxious about my housing situation as I live with a chronic life-threatening illness.' Artist statement made by Pip for the Shelter exhibition in December 2021.

*Up Go The Prices, 2021*Aunty Bev Eaton, Wiradjuri Artist
Collage

As the prices go up – house sales and rents – people are forced out, often being forced far from their community.

2. Leen Rieth*Counter-narratives in institutional life, 2019–2023*

Audiovisual recording, 48:39 min

Tracks:

*Reforming vibrations, 2023, 8:02 min**The back of the house, 2020, 2:46 min**Artist/dildo, 2019–2023, 11:19 min**An institution that touches itself, 2019, 5:18 min**Organising, maintenance and artist-run initiatives, 2019–2020, 5:31 min**Enduring space, 2019, 15:43 min*

This set of recordings are autotheoretical discoveries about trans experience, arts organising, and institutional life. These contexts share similar themes of autonomy and self-determination, perception and shared realities, and affirmation and futurity.

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They describe ruptures, incongruities, and care work in these contexts for the purpose of providing counter-narratives to dominant institutional perspectives. There are six texts, which were written between 2019–2013: *The back of the house* is about healing, perceptions of gender, and maintenance; *An institution that touches itself* explores the proliferation of white-cube gallery spaces in small and large institutions; *Enduring space* is a selection of journal entries made during an endurance performance moving with sunlight; *Organising, maintenance and access in artist-run initiatives* looks at concerns and cultural change in ARIs; *Artist/dildo* speculates on how artists can be put to use; and, *Reforming vibrations* explores the need to intentionally form relationships and social scenes that nurture individuals and community.

3. Johanna Ng

Untitled/Eastwood, 2022

Digital print, dye sublimated print on aluminium, wooden support, foam core

Dimensions variable

'Untitled' is a non-specific and common title; Eastwood is a suburb on Dharug Country, named after an Irish settler, now with a majority population of Chinese ancestry. *Untitled/Eastwood* asks questions surrounding photography's duplicitous nature. This work relies on methods of trickery and ambiguity to pilfer established ways of seeing and self-legitimise my emerging practice. I borrow museum language, present one image as two forms under two authors, and join the unrelenting current of images—duplicating through time and space, through many eyes and hands. Is the photo original or stolen? Is the work an homage or appropriation? Is the image mine or his?

4. Jasmine Greenwood

Te Lapa 2, 2023

Bamboo, twine, sea shells, 60x60cm

'Te lapa' is a Polynesian term for the light phenomenon underneath or on the surface of the ocean (water). Before colonisation and modern technology Pasifika were the greatest navigators of the world. They were able to navigate from memory by the stars, observations of birds, ocean swells, wind patterns and cloud formations. It is written they were able to close their eyes in the dead of night and use the rocks of the canoe from the waves to locate themselves. Using natural materials they created simple maps from memory out of things like bamboo, coconut leaves and sea shells. Applying this method *Te Lapa 2* is a representation of my hometown, Granville 2142.

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Glazed ceramic, 15x14cm

Soft + sweet like the strawberry - are all the Bla(c)k + Brown kids from The Area
continuously targeted + brutalised by the boys in blue.

5. Carolyn Craig

left behind in lithgow, 2020–2021

Single channel video, 4:04 min

Left Behind in Lithgow emerged from a site visit to Lithgow during the bushfires of 2019/20. As the fire enclosed the town everyone was evacuated – except the prison population, who were instead placed into lockdown – confined to their cells – and issued with entry-level P2 masks. I found this disturbing and it led me to consider how the incarcerated body is valued in society. This dismissal of the bodies of those within the perimeter of social exclusion deeply affected me – in particular in relation to my own history of detention. I imagined the enclosure of smoke (a secondary prison) restricting their breathing as a direct commentary of the lack of economic value of their bodies. As I left the site I filmed that movement (away from custody) through the windscreen of my car. This work – a dual channel video reflects a deep need to understand/overcome the social fear of moral/viral contamination from the body of the offender – still perceived as the polluted capital of the discard hand.

Who and what are the remains of capitalism and its excessive desires?

6. Bonnie Huang

Paint Me like napoleon bonaparte, 2023

Found object installation, photographic prints

This work examines the anatomy of power and glory, revealing how ambition and desire for power are historically obstructions to collectivist imaginings. Born out of my desire to see my masculinity reflected with nobility like the portraits that adorn gallery walls, I used drag as my medium to explore the idealised image. The insertion of the self into these constructed portraits of poise which reinforce colonial and capitalist ways of hierarchy do not provide a means to an end. Rather, this artwork invites critique of ego and hierarchy, prompting viewers to question where we see ourselves represented and how we want to be seen. Ultimately, it is through speculative fictions and through the continual act of assemblage and disassemblage that we can find new ways of being.

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7. Amber Hammad

The Nude Dupatta – A Performance Lecture, 2021

HD video with sound, 12:15 min

خاتون نامہ Khatoon Nama (The Book of Khatoon)

خاتون Khatoon was a legendary superhero who received her powers from the nude females of Islamic art history. While her heroic tales have existed in the oral histories of various cultures around the world for centuries, fragments and separated folio pages of a digitally illustrated manuscript depicting her chronicles called خاتون نامہ Khatoon Nama (The Book of Khatoon) was discovered a few decades ago. An extensive body of research has emerged in recent years giving a new life to this forgotten legendary hero of our feminist history. This research paper discusses two art historical images that appear on Khatoon's cape/dupatta, and it was presented at a recent online conference titled Khatoon Nama, that aimed to celebrate and bring together the diverse research around the manuscript.

Lower the Gaze: Manuscript Page from خاتون نامہ Khatoon Nama #1, 2021

Audio visual installation, 5 min

Grounded in my lived experiences, and informed by intersectional feminism, I analyse and further problematize the gendered, politicised and nuanced ideas surrounding the representation, misrepresentation, veiling and unveiling of Muslim women's bodies, and our subsequent visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility. This work addresses the complexities surrounding Muslim female bodies within both the Islamophobic west as well as Islamised patriarchal cultures. Naked and veiled bodies are shown under the trope of pixelation, to disable gendered viewing of the female body - simultaneously denying satisfaction to the Orientalist viewership intent on consuming veiled Muslim bodies, as well as the wider male gaze accustomed to looking at nude female bodies in art. This work also refers to Muslim religious text that asks men to lower their gaze, before it addresses women, therefore shifting the burden of morality from female body onto the male gaze. The slowly moving animated layering of floriated images and the title of the work are appropriated from the traditions of royally commissioned Mughal manuscripts (e.g Badshahnama), aiming to subvert patriarchal structures of power.

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8. Richard Bell

Bell's Theorem, 2022

Digital video, 4:08 min

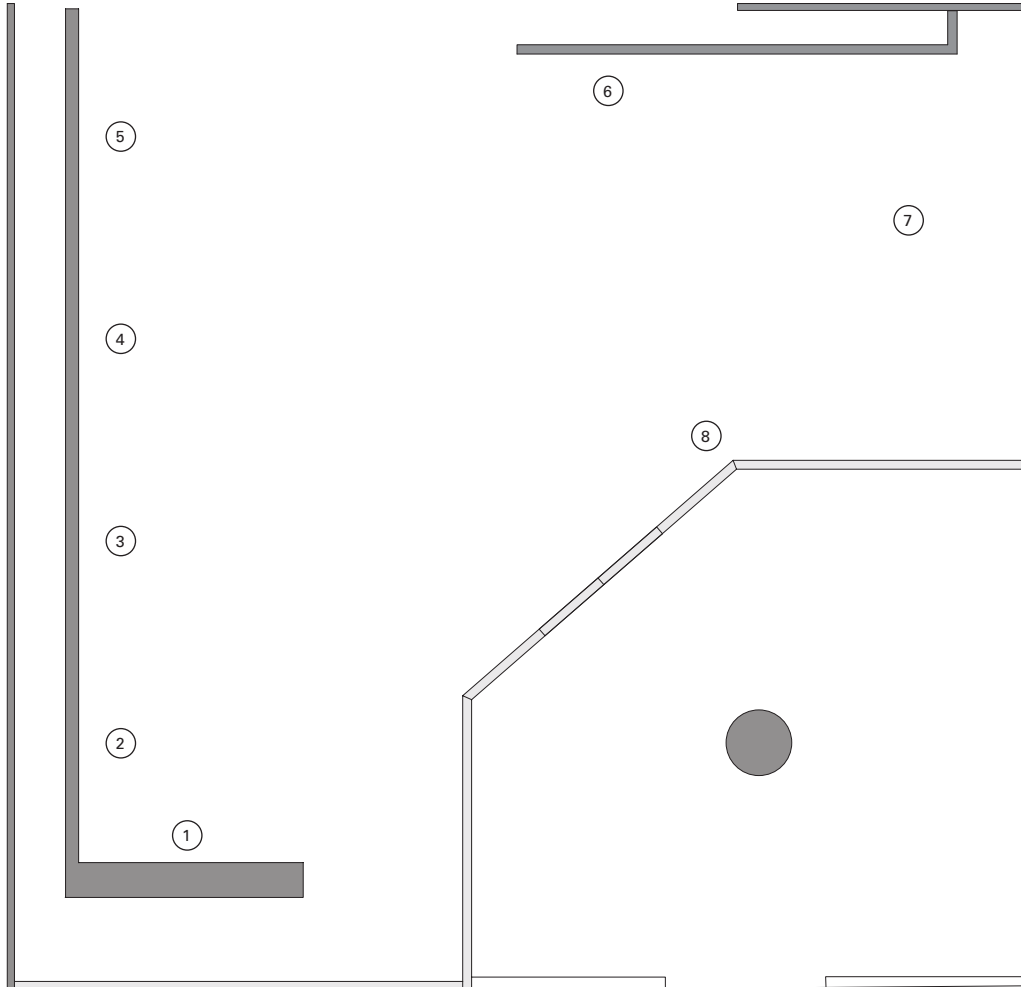
In the ruins of his childhood home, Bell reads a number of passages from his essay *Bell's Theorem* (2002). The house was bulldozed by the government when Bell was fourteen, displacing his family.

The systems perpetuating and sanctioning these and other related forms of colonial injustices are central themes in the artist's work.

The original essay *Bell's Theorem* (2002) is available at kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/bell.html

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