

A RIVER AND A VOICE SHOUTING ABOVE IT

This exhibition was conceived, constructed and presented on the sovereign lands of the Arrernte people. It was made using materials extracted from other sovereign lands on this continent, lands forcibly obscured by the tangle of settler-capitalist industry. I would like to acknowledge that I am an uninvited guest on the Countries that span this continent, in particular on Arrernte Country, where I have the immeasurable privilege to live, learn, work and relate. I'd like to pay my respects to all First Nations people.

I'd also like to acknowledge our current moment, this moment of Black Lives Matter marches and wider awakenings to the possibilities of abolition. Just as material lineages are obscured and fractured, so too are lineages of knowledge. Conceptions of liberation and resistance and the languages that enable a shared horizon of possibility are founded on the *lived* resistance to, and embodied refusal of, the oppressive structures that govern our experiences of living. I'm indebted to all the communities that, in this way, have disrupted the status quo, troubled accepted norms and lead and are leading the movements by which those oppressive structures will be dismantled.

A Note

There's an anecdote going around at the moment about a European biologist who is working on a vaccine for Coronavirus. Asked why it was taking so long they replied 'You give the footballer 1 million euros per

month and a biological researcher 1,800 euros per month, and you are now looking for a Coronavirus treatment. Go ask Cristiano Ronaldo to get you a cure.' The quote's proliferation is easy to understand. It's a pithy reminder of the fundamental discord in how value is disseminated. It's also entirely fabricated.

There's another pithy quote of questionable accuracy attributed to Winston Churchill. Allegedly when asked to cut funding to the arts during World War II he replied, 'Then what are we fighting for?' I imagine the arts that Churchill was fighting for were undoubtedly those that depicted the colonial project in its favourite colours. It's hard to believe he was sensitive to the microscopic cultural production happening constantly, hidden behind the spectacle statements of the canon, the kind of cultural production that refuses the terms set by capitalism, that seeks a line of flight, that is given away for free.

I think it is important to remember that however much COVID19 might provide undeniable evidence of capitalism's inherent brutality and inequity, however much it might encourage governments to affect quasi-socialist measures, however much it might demand acts of global solidarity, the ideological bedrock of capitalism is calcifying. Think of prominent ways in which artists and artwork are valued, prolificness, usefulness, political acuity are all rewarded. But these are often not measurements of refusal, but of capital. Proliferation is a form of accumulation, and accumulation is a desire driven by the same impulse that detains value firmly under the terms set by economics.

As many people have been saying lately, Ben Eltham and Benjamin Law among them, to *properly* value an artists' labour, to properly value cultural production of any kind, is a choice, and one that reflects a refusal to bow to the general wisdom offered by colonial-capitalist thought. To properly value artistic labour undermines the governing principles that gird the dominant social-political landscape across Australia and further afield, it has the capacity to allow value structures to diversify and to reconfigure the world *in relation*.

It's important to acknowledge that you are the beneficiary of the quiet labour of infinite acts of cultural production and that you, yourself, are contributing too. As Bernadette Mayer would say, *give everybody everything*.

A River and a Voice Shouting Above It

When I was making the work for *A River and a Voice Shouting Above It* I was dealing with a certain set of assumptions about the world, the ways people relate to it and the methods by which I could prod those relations. I thought perhaps I could concoct an exhibition that considered how particular interrelations are formed and in what ways we maintain them. Then Coronavirus erupted and did all the heavy lifting for me. The mechanisms that underpin our relation to one another, to labour and leisure, to *value*, seemed to have been detonated or at least illuminated by the glow of a neighbouring detonation.

So now I'm faced with the peculiar task of presenting an exhibition conceived and constructed in a world whose terms felt distinctly different from the one we find ourselves in now. When I began making the show I

was thinking a lot about this cartoon I saw when I was very young. There were all these animals huddled on an island beach trying to make a plan. A tsunami surged towards them and the scene kept cutting between the curling water and the panicked wildlife. Then it cut to the tsunami's crest and perched atop it as though it were a branch were two vultures. And the vultures talked about all kinds of things, unaware of what they were sitting on. I can't remember what happened next. I think the animals on the beach got out ok and the vultures flapped off, looking for something different. I watched the vultures and realised birds couldn't sit on a wave like that. It felt like the first time I recognised that representations weren't always faithful to the world as I understood it.

I had also been thinking about an exercise a friend of mine was asked to perform by their doctor: *Point to your past and then to your future*. I became really fixated on that exercise and started asking different people to respond to that direction, *point to your past and then to your future*. I gathered a number of volunteers together (all amateur actors it turned out) and filmed them one by one pointing to their past and then to their future. Invariably, they first pointed behind them and then pointed in front of them. There was one volunteer in particular whose movement I found mesmerising. They were thoughtful, performed with a drawn out flourish. I watched the footage of them over and over again.

I was thinking about cavernous foyers with marble floors and greenhouses and waiting rooms with artworks and certificates on the wall, spaces that incubate in one way or another. I was thinking that images tend to be viewed as alienated from their material composites, that it's difficult to be attendant to the resources needed to squirt cyan ink onto the page, or the minerals mined for the computer battery that powered the editing process. I was thinking about the colour green and I was thinking about superposition. I was thinking about a quote by the Hungarian writer László Krasznahorkai from his devastatingly beautiful novel *Sátántangó*: *I've long understood there is zero difference between me and a bug, or a bug and a river, or a river and a voice shouting above it. [...] It's nothing but a network of dependency under enormous fluctuating pressures*. I was thinking that the quote carries a hue of nihilism, except that dependency is precisely the thing, that the task might not be in knowing the facts of a certain configuration, but what that configuration is dependent on presently, what it might demand of us *now*.

Acknowledgements

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney reckon we should go into incalculable debt to one another. Debt is social, credit is anti-social. This is important when thinking about solo exhibitions, which are never really solo at all, but unavoidably collaborative, indebted, at the very least, to the 'network of dependency' that nurtured them. I'm obviously indebted to all the people that helped me build the exhibition, gave their time, their expertise, their physical labour. I'm also indebted to things and people that I haven't shared physical proximity or reciprocal relationships with; writers, other artists, activists, musicians, filmmakers. Astrid Lorange includes a list of different people on the blurb of her latest poetry collection (*Labour and Other Poems*) and notes 'The three poems that comprise this book are in debt to these thinkers and should be read as marginal notes to their ideas.' Perhaps it's a clumsy approach, but until we dissolve the misnomer of the

solo enterprise I think it's a healthy thing to do. The list of names also stands as a generous resource to those who encounter it. So here's a list of people, necessarily incomplete, who this exhibition is indebted to. *A River and a Voice Shouting Above It* stands as a marginal note to their ideas, labour and love.

Thank you to Sam Sargent for your dexterity, labour and enthusiasm for the project. He taught me how to tile and constructed the corflute room the tiles are housed in. To Nelson Armstrong for much the same thing, patiently researching and animating the movie presented in this exhibition. To Fia Fiell aka Carolyn Schofield for agreeing to perform alongside this exhibition without really any understanding of my practice (we had to postpone her performance due to COVID19 but she will visit and perform next year. Her music is incredible). To Central Tiling for your interest in this project and your advice on how best to realise it. To Petria Jobson, Lauren Ravi, Nelson Armstrong (again) and Julian Green at Chapman and Bailey, Alice Springs, for teaching me how to frame and then doing much of the framing for me, and for being a supportive, joyous group to work alongside (though of course I think of you as friends before colleagues). To Georgie Mattingley for kindly painting the gallery walls. To Vito Lucarelli for their beautiful sounds on opening night. To Ender Başkan for your generous readership and devoted comradeship. To Lukas Penney for your design advice and for always enacting your values. To Sophie Moorhouse Morris for your ideas, care and genuine curiosity. To Dilân too, for good measure. To Zoya Godoroja-Priekarts for your seemingly boundless passion for Watch This Space and arts practices across Australia and for tolerating my barrage of emails and requests with grace and diligence. The work you've done for WTS ARI is utterly remarkable, we're grateful to be in incalculable debt to you. To Mimi Catterns, Charlie Freedman, the WTS board and curatorial board, the WTS studio artists, for your critical support and role in forming this community. To NT Regional Arts Fund. To my parents, Michael and Lesley, for everything, of course. To Jethro Curtin, for your perennial good spirit and for offering a blueprint for living by doing things more kindly than most. To Beth Sometimes for your deep, abiding sensitivity to the world, for sharing that with me and for your love.

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The list goes on and on and on and on