

CURATING UNDER PRESSURE IN SETTLER COLONIES

Léuli Māzyār Luna'i Eshrāghi

Fa'atālofa atu i le pa'ia ma le mamalu o le aofia i lenei afiafi. I offer fa'amalama votives of gratitude and respect to the ancestors, elders, knowledges, lands and waters of the Kulin Nation on whose unceded territory I live and work as an uninvited guest. I belong to the Sā Seumanutafa clan of Apia in the Sāmoan archipelago and Najafābād village on the Pārs plateau. I do not speak on behalf of anyone; rather, I seek to honour each person's voice. I want to dedicate my paper to all the incredible Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance fighting for justice, sovereignty, land, water and human rights in this country, and to the Očeti Šakowin Oyate and supporters peacefully protecting sacred lands and waters on behalf of millions at Standing Rock.

RESEARCH

This piece draws on my PhD research into Indigenous curatorial practices, which has included extensive residencies, gatherings and visits with curators, artists and thinkers in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai'i and Canada since early 2015. I've worked on two exhibitions and a number of publicly accessible essays and polemics to try to make an impact through my work. As an artist, I continue to make and exhibit work relating to intergenerational trauma, diasporic indigeneity, and multilingual, sovereign bodies and relationships to this planet. I'll situate us before focusing specifically on difference, forms of labour, pressures and tensions for Indigenous curators working in settler-colonial contexts, and future pathways.

At the core of this work, I am committed to Indigenous sovereignties within and through lands, bodies and ceremonial-political practices, in their manifestations in key settler-colonial contexts including Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai'i, Canada, and the United States of America. This research privileges Indigenous knowledges, using the terms Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal and Native respectfully when speaking across contexts, in order to imagine and work through framing, curating, writing and discussing local and global Indigenous practices. This approach is necessary to address and counter structural Anglo-Celtic ethnocentrism in the global contemporary art sector, to then meet the aspirations of Indigenous

HISTORIES Moananui a Kiwa (Reo Māori), Vasa Loloa (Sāmoan),

artists, curators, writers and researchers on our own terms, for our own purposes.

Lul (Hakö), Na Ta (Kuanua), Solwora (Tok Pisin, Pijin, Bislama), are only a few of the names for our planet's largest ocean. A third of the Earth's surface is populated by thousands of diverse animals, birds, sea life, peoples, languages, practices and ecologies. Various referred to as Oceania, Australia, Pacific, Australasia and South Seas by invading settlers, traders, farmers, miners, stock drivers, planters and missionaries, these worlds were viewed as a sophisticated oceanscape of relationships in a sea of islands by late critical theorist Epeli Hau'ofa (1939–2009).

The European/Western dominance of art spaces and art schools around the world demonstrates the need for more active decolonisation strategies and policies to enable agency and increase presence of First Nations, people of colour, women, non-binary, queer and trans peoples. In Australia, where social and political leaders failed to bring substantial land rights treaties into being from invasion in 1788 onward, to the last time they were on the agenda in the 1980s, the postcolonial transformation of the settler colony did not occur. Within this continuing reality of the settler colony being grafted onto unceded First Nations territories, stolen through genocide and violent dispossession for the material exploitation of resources and the benefit of the European diaspora majority, things are beginning to shift.

Local and global First Nations artists, curators and writers are working hard to anchor their exhibitions, critique, collections and public programming in diverse Indigenous knowledges rather than solely within the dominant Euro-American frameworks. These efforts can easily amount to nothing within omnipresent Euro-American practices, unless and only if Indigenous curators, artists and writers command agency over their representations, discourses, finances and spaces. Settler-colonial institutions could learn humility and perspective through learning the First Nations histories and cultural practices that they do not know. Becoming part of an art political system that celebrates Indigenous presence yet disables self-determined practices and cultural change is commonplace. Despite the best efforts of institutionalised colonisation, based on the fallacies of the doctrines of Terra Nullius, White Australia and Manifest Destiny at play in Australia and the United States as elsewhere, First Nations knowledges are driven by cultural continuity and innovation, centred

RECONCILIATION AND RETURN How do we refuse Reconciliation and Recognition when Indigenous

on all living things and not solely on human beings.

presence in art museums, galleries and schools is so tenuous?

To my understanding, the drive to include local and global Indigenous peoples in art spaces and art schools in Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s formed the vanguard of the Reconciliation movement, now transformed into the Constitutional Recognition movement promoted primarily by the European diaspora in power. As Métis artist and curator David Garneau has said: 'The purpose of state-designed Reconciliation is to settle settlers, to reconcile non-Indigenous [peoples] with their heinous past and to distract from their heinous present, to have settlers feel at home on stolen lands.'¹

Garneau is here speaking in reference to Canada's recent national Truth and Reconciliation Commission into Indian Residential Schools, the cultural genocide framework operated by churches and governments to wipe out Indigenous cultural practices through extreme violence and abuse. The process doesn't consider how the system functions within a colonial enterprise that continues into the present, or how significant the healing possibilities of literal Indigenous sovereignty might be: 'It assumes that reconciliation is the answer to the "Indian problem;" that First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples enjoyed a prior universal conciliation, and now just need re-conciliation. Canada is what happened to Indigenous people. Canada is the name of the colonisation in these territories. Reconciliation is colonialism rebranded.'²

The performance of direct and intergenerational pain and trauma by First Nations peoples for the consumption of settler peoples is a common thread in the dysfunctional relationships existing here as in other occupied but unceded Indigenous territories. In lieu of restoration of lands, waters, ceremonial-political practices and, importantly, First Nations governments and knowledges, settler governments in Australia and Canada have promoted shallow, feel-good politics as a way of claiming their contemporary innocence for the traumas and genocide of the past, as if a fixed colonial temporality were true. In contrast, Indigenous cultural revival and strong life practices are part of Indigenous-defined decolonisation in ceremony, language, space, and relationships between all living things.

Candice Hopkins, Steve Loft, Lee-Ann Martin and Jenny Western define sovereignty in this way:

Sovereignty, when viewed from Indigenous perspectives,

enous works by being 'cognizant of the artists' positioning as creators, interpreters, translators, and purveyors of an inherent and ancient cultural autonomy. To decolonise is to supplant racist patriarchies in favour of multicontextual dialogues, while understanding and acknowledging the place of an Indigenous sovereignty rooted in land, language, culture, and ways of knowing and being. It is a progression—one that is vast and rich and challenging—based on mutual respect and understanding, and a desire to explore the complexities of interrelationships.⁴

The return to territory, the restoration of ceremonial-political practices and Indigenous sovereignty, is all the more poignant in a Moananui a Kiwa context where Indigenous peoples have resisted and survived successive waves of violence and war if on territory. For countless other Indigenous peoples over the last 200–300 years, displacement or dislocation is a shared experience, due to nuclear or climate catastrophe, resource extraction, the Blackbirding into slavery of 62,000 South Sea Islanders on east coast plantations, pastoral or farming enterprises, and economy-, politics-or education-motivated movement. Indigenous diasporas exist within and across settler states and territories, related to, sometimes returning to, but living far from ancestral lands and waters, whose new linear boundaries were defined largely by Europeans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

EMOTIONAL LABOUR

I want to now turn to Cree and Dené artist Anne Riley's important text on Indigenous emotional labour, where dislocation, embodiment and home are complex: 'Dislocation from territory is common to most Native people; [as] it is a product of colonisation.'⁵ She describes the first moment of mutual recognition by a fellow First Nations person as the making-visible of each other in a settler-colonial environment that doesn't recognise or understand the conditions oppressing them. This mutual recognition, on the other hand, is embodied, is affective.

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Either you understand the experience (of colonisation, trauma, displacement) and are empathetic and compassionate with the person you share this with, or you

are the other who wants in on the secret, who wants to know and can only enter it through language. The secret is that it is non-linguistic. Neither is it mystical.

It is how compassion is shared with one who has experienced oppression and struggle, with one who has lived similarly. And from this place we simply relax into it, not needing to inquire more, not needing to grasp or consume the other.⁶

Riley goes on to define the mutual recognition as a home, a space of healing:

For Indigenous artists, home is not just our ancestral territory: it's how we embody our sense and experience of home wherever we travel—to residencies, shows, artist talks—and how we share them with another. These moments of recognition of home can offer solidarity, a sense of place, of grounding, and love to each other. [...] Although the concept of home is a vital thread in our stories and existence as Indigenous artists, this thread has been severed with the traumas of colonisation. The genocide of the residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and more has plagued Indigenous people. What I have been taught to articulate may not yet have a language that I know.⁷

What Riley speaks about in terms of the challenges for Indigenous artists applies to Indigenous curators and writers too.

The lack of awareness and dialogue around emotional labour is a testament to the amount of private internal work Indigenous artists have to perform to be visible in the white-dominated art world. As Indigenous people, we work overtime to be seen in our everyday lives, both by others and by ourselves. As artists, we are expected to work extra hours to earn our identity. These hours of work include developing and nurturing the radical self-love and confidence that is not taught in art school. Emotional labour is 24/7. As an Indigenous queer artist, my work is not the same as those of my white peers in the art world. Many hours must be committed to clearing the baggage of colonialism and dispossession so as to even begin making work. It is in these non-public spaces that the core work is done. Doing this—investing in the time it takes to consistently clear a path—strengthens our practice, gaining resilience

This clearing, this regaining in strength, is not a clear path for all First Nations peoples working when facing our everyday existence as Indigenous artists.⁸

ing in public art spaces and art schools informed by, and responsive to, European knowledges and aesthetics. It is learnt self-care that is pivotal to the community-responsive work undertaken by Indigenous artists, curators and writers.

This resilience engages skills and solutions often rooted in work that is mostly invisible and unknown to those comfortable in the dominant heteronormative-colonial-settler paradigm, which remains unacknowledged for economical convenience and is based in a vast expenditure of unspoken emotional labour by First Nations people and minority, migrant, and immigrant people of colour. Emotional labour is unacknowledged work shared in alliance, across intersectional territories; [she notes here] the need to centre racialised bodies, both Indigenous and those of colour, as the key workers in this form of labour.⁹

CEREMONIAL-POLITICAL PRACTICES

Keeping this mainly unrecognised emotional labour in mind, how is it possible for First Nations peoples to fulfill ceremonial-political practices in culturally unsafe, Eurocentric art spaces? There is a lack of agency and presence of Indigenous peoples and knowledges in these spaces. This is apparent when you compare employment figures and governance structures in public art spaces with aspirations for self-determination over ceremonial-political practices, such as Welcomes to Country, activation of works, healing and mourning. As sites of visual cultural experiences designed for, and reflective of the genealogy of the majority European diaspora, public art spaces can indicate whether we have reached critical mass of Indigenous presence or not. The programming of Aboriginal, Zenadh-Kes/Torres Strait Islander, and Moananui a Kiwa practices and perspectives has increased since the late 1980s in art spaces but not in art schools. Alarming also is the stagnation and decline over the last five years in the representation of First Nations staff in our public institutions.

Garneau explains the structural bias involved here: 'Exhibitions of Aboriginal art shown within a dominant culture space are always informed by the worldviews of those who manage the resources and the site/sights.'¹⁰ Not just control over resources

The colonial attitude, but also the sense of civilisational or ethnic hierarchy that perpetuates structural whiteness in unceded First Nations territories.

including its academic branch, is characterised by a drive to see, to traverse, to know, to translate (to make equivalent), to own, and to exploit. It is based on the belief that everything should be accessible, is ultimately comprehensible, and a potential commodity or resource, or at least something that can be recorded or otherwise saved.¹¹

This understanding of distinct intellectual, political, spiritual, economic and aesthetic frameworks is significant. Writing these lines in a colonial tongue patriated in settler-colonial Australia means that what I'm trying to say is already Other to myself—I lose nuances in Indigenous language-bound concepts when writing in English or other European languages. The same applies for the hierarchies of art/craft, traditional/contemporary, and art movements that are core to Euro-American art histories, in difference and opposition to Indigenous conceptions of innovating, evolving creative practice within ceremonial-political practices based on civilisational responsibilities to all living things.

The ongoing imposition of Eurocentric frameworks means that First Nations peoples, knowledges and practices are excluded, or at best, tokenised and disenfranchised within art spaces and art schools. The Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art held at the Art Gallery of South Australia, the National Indigenous Art Triennials at the National Gallery of Australia, and the Sakahàn Quinquennial at the National Gallery of Canada (Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada) in Ottawa appear significant but are momentary exceptions to the rule, evidenced by the lack of developed Indigenous art departments or major biennials and triennials with Indigenous curators in Australia and Canada. The two notable exceptions are the 2012 Biennale of Sydney: *All Our Relations* with Cree and Siksika Nations co-curator Gerald McMaster and Dutch co-curator Catherine de Zegher, and the 2014 TarraWarra Biennial: *Whisper in My Mask* curated by Bundjalung curator, Djon Mundine and Jewish Australian curator, Natalie King.

INDIGENOUS PRESENCE IN ART SPACES

Who brings dominant Euro-American curatorial practices and art histories to account in terms of multiple civilisations vying for breathing space internationally?

There are declining, low numbers of Indigenous curators in most art spaces in Canada and Australia. The cultural tourism or diplomacy card that

often played in these places by settler colonial governments centres on the marketability of Indigenous arts practices, romanticised as unknowable, or lauded as abstract artistic geniuses. Barkindji Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Nici Cumpston, curated the Tarnanthi Festival, which was sponsored by mining giant BHP Billiton and provided unparalleled exhibitions and new commissions for rural and urban Indigenous Australian artists across the entire host city. Tarnanthi included a number of critical forums, ceremonial events, and an art fair. My primary critique is that it could have been housed within the Adelaide Biennial armature for there to be ongoing connection between urban audiences and artists, curators and communities around the country. Only the 2000 Adelaide Biennial has had lead curation by an Indigenous curator: *Beyond the Pale*, curated by Brenda Croft of the Gurindji, Malngin, Mudpurra and Bilinara Nations.

Yamatji curator and art historian Stephen Gilchrist has written about three decades of affirmation action programs to place First Nations curators in state and territory galleries and museums. Despite the settler-colonial power dynamics as a single or small group of Indigenous employees, and even more interesting in guest curatorial roles, Gilchrist believes Indigenous curators are responsible for promoting and enacting Indigenous galleries as 'spaces of Indigeneity and not only for Indigeneity.'¹² These spaces not only display Indigenous art practices, but are culturally Indigenous spaces, centred on practices in relationship to all living beings and ecologies. This is not only about art in the European sense, but fulfilling ceremonial-political practices that differ for each Indigenous people. Curator of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Victoria over six years ago, without a replacement until late 2016, Gilchrist addresses Indigenous creative resistance in ethnographic and contemporary art museums, calling for specific shifts in presentation.

He calls for the creation of new terms, or the application of existing terms, from Indigenous languages:

Foregrounding aesthetic encounters with Indigenous works of art with localised concepts can awaken people to the beauty of the world and Indigenous peoples' responsiveness to it. It would be reductive and absolutist to continue to use Western art historical terms rather than seek a new linguistic repository

that can speak to the complexities Indigenous art presents.¹³

The demographic make up of the audiences in art spaces and art schools points to the necessity of addressing non-Indigenous publics through educational exhibitions and public programming in the vast majority of sites, but this does not preclude the basis of this communication in First Nations languages, to also attract Indigenous audiences, curators and artists.

Mario A. Caro identifies that

The entry of Native scholars, curators and collectors into these institutions has reconfigured the place of Native arts within a wider contemporary arts world. It is particularly the work of innovative curators—their eloquent visual treatises affirming Native perspectives and offering new ways of seeing—that has substantially furthered the field.¹⁴

Gilchrist notes that ‘The role of the Indigenous curator is to ensure that objects are not only cared for materially, but are culturally and spiritually reconstituted.’¹⁵ He offers that ‘there are curatorial-like practices that exist within Indigenous cultures. The reverence of and care for sacred objects is but one expression.’¹⁶

LANGUAGES

What effect could exhibitions and writing in Indigenous languages have on restoring Indigenous voices to all audiences?

I’m invested in seeing whether this can really occur in the same spaces that have historically omitted and underrepresented First Nations voices and practices. Building our own spaces completely independently of existing spaces does not address colonial practices that control authenticity, it furthers this antiquated state of mind on cultural worth. As residents of settler-colonial contexts, Indigenous artists, curators and audiences can request and advocate for increased representation in exhibitions and collections, as well as for First Nations—determined spaces and practices. Some of these forms include architectural interventions such as the bark fibres that were strewn across the gallery floor in Marrnyula Mununggurr’s 2015 solo exhibition *Ganybu* at Gertrude Contemporary in Narm Melbourne, or the Elder knowled

ge-keepers who hosted visitors with story and refreshments throughout the opening hours of the major 2011 exhibition on Indigenous futures, *Close Encounters*:

The Next 500 Years, curated by Candice Hopkins, Steve Loft, Lee-Ann Martin and Jenny Western at Plug-In Institute for Contemporary Art in Winnipeg.

Sāmoan writer and curator Lana Lopesi calls for the multilingual assertion of Indigenous art practices within Indigenous knowledge paradigms in these terms:

In a way, Indigenous practice requires far more resources to receive an authentic understanding of practice. We need to produce multilingual interpretations, overcome cultural barriers and educate, as well as appreciate. What this does though is establish laborious frameworks before the audience has even laid eyes on the artwork. This experience of viewing furthers the us–them dichotomy by marginalising the work as “Indigenous Practice”; instead what these practices deserve is an equal treatment with an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and philosophies. This can happen through the decolonisation of language.¹⁷

In *Vai Niu Wai Niu Coconut Water*, I worked with gagana Sāmoa (Sāmoan language) translator Sotiaka Enari based in Warrang Sydney, and reo Māori (Māori language) translator Hēmi Kelly based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland to bring my English-language essay and promotional information texts to the local diasporic Indigenous audiences. Primary challenges to this approach were the well-meaning but monolingual English-language focussed host, Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, whose promotional material was almost entirely in English, against my wishes. The translators were encouraged to express concepts in the essay in stronger terms in both Indigenous languages as they saw fit, in the case of terms being ‘softened’ by the marketing department of the gallery.

I expressed my positioning and reading of each work in the exhibition, in the English-language essay text, through specific concepts based in Moananui a Kiwa cultures: iTaukei Viti, Māori, Tolai, Hakō, Toaripi, Tongan, Sāmoan, Yuri, and South Sea Islander. This directly draws on the work achieved by Inuk curator and art historian Heather Iglooliorte in *Decolonize Me (Décolonisez-Moi)* at the Ottawa Art Gallery (Galerie d’art d’Ottawa).

where the artists’ texts on their work were given authorial space, translated into their ancestral language if desired, as well as the two official languages. These

were three texts on the works and politics present within the project, by Igloliorte, Steve Loft (Kanien'kéhaka) and Brenda Croft (Gurindji, Malngin, Mudpurra and Bilinara).

Lopesi argues that beyond developing new models of representation or interpretation, the expression of protest, sexual and spiritual difference, and diverse local and global Indigenous experiences, through writing and exhibitions are significant outcomes. The practices of contemporary Indigenous curators

have become a mode of cultural activism, not necessarily by breaking new ground but by exploring the social practices of our Indigenous communities. Of course, there are many ways to make art in the world and there are thousands of different art histories, yet the dominant lexicon of art seems to fit only one of these interpretations. Indigenous cultures have been exhibiting, curating and making for thousands of years. Today, in a multicultural society with engrained notions of class and race hierarchies, the underlying question is how we maintain the integrity and multiplicity of all art.¹⁸

Lopesi's view of curatorial projects being relevant and important for the wider art world is a sign of the globalised interconnectedness of the contemporary, and yet its emphasis on complex locality that exists today.

In *Ua numi le fau*, developed for the Next Wave Festival 2016 at Gertrude Contemporary in May 2016, I placed six Indigenous and two non-Indigenous artists together—Dale Harding, Yuki Kihara, Carlos Motta, Frédéric Nauczyciel, Atong Atem, Mandy Nicholson, Megan Cope and Uncle Robbie Thorpe—to consider what kinds of histories have reached us in the present, and which futures are being constructed in our sexual, spiritual and political relationships to each other, to our bodies, and to our ecologies. The exhibition and catalogue were presented in English, the language of the majority settler-colonial diaspora, with paragraphs in Woi Wurrung, the language of the Wurundjeri of northern Kulin Nation territory up into the Birrarung valley, Kogui from northern Colombia, and Spanish.

The deployment of these linguistic and cultural frameworks is part of constructing sovereign Indigenous display territories in contested public spaces

where no First Nations governments, laws or treaties are respected or have been negotiated in Australia. (Though there are currently treaty negotiations in the

state of Victoria with First Nations here.) I am seeking to place the framing of the works through my perspective as an Indigenous Sāmoan curator and artist living in occupied but unceded Kulin Nation territory, and to bring the lived politics of various communities together, both textually and visually, activating different understandings of sexuality, spirituality and ecology, for now and for the future.

SOVEREIGN DISPLAY

Returning to questions of sovereignty, let's think about the importance of material, spiritual and intellectual presence in countering settler-colonial practices. Kanien'kéhaka curator and educator Ryan Rice has seen:

Indigenous artists use their visual voice to address misinterpretations of the past and present by deconstructing as well as disseminating narratives of identity, nationhood, displacement, and co-existence. Integrity, survival, and the continuity of cultures are significant reasons for Native art to exist within a modern environment. The presence of Native artists in a mainstream art establishment challenges conditions of omission and creates a place for Native people and their nations to be received and recognised.¹⁹

Rice also identifies that

Even though there seems to be an increasingly fluid perception and acceptance of contemporary art as wide-ranging, the dominant institutions of art (including academia) have been criticised for regulating what is designated as (contemporary) art within their walls amid the constraints of the hierarchical Western art discourse. The shift toward inclusion of "others" has been uneven and problematic because art institutions evaluate works by their standards of cultural authenticity to fit within parameters based upon their predisposition toward history (Western canon).²⁰

He continues:

By occupying space within the "white" walls of the institution, Native artists must negotiate a place for the viewer to accept and recognise "other" histories, not only in relation to the past, but also in the present and future. The strategy of becoming

recognised and accepted can only be accomplished through an aesthetic and political autonomy that will challenge narrowly predetermined ideas of representation.²¹

How might Indigenous artists, curators and writers enact sovereignty in ways that are culturally resonant? The key lies perhaps in the practice of refusal.

Primary sites of resistance, then, are not the occasional open battles between the minoritised, oppressed, or colonised and the dominant culture, but the perpetual, active refusal of complete engagement: to speak with one's own in one's own way; to refuse translation and full explanations; to create trade goods that imitate core culture without violating it; to not be a Native informant.²²

Making sure that the work I produce, the research that I undertake, and the mentors that I learn from, are committed spaces of relationships on First Nations terms and modes of being is not a choice, it is a sovereign practice of refusal.

Garneau promotes non-colonial practices centred in sovereign Indigenous display territories. 'If art galleries and other display spaces are to be potential sites of conciliation, they should not meet the dominant culture viewer halfway in their space in their way; the non-Aboriginal viewer who seeks conciliation ought to enter Aboriginal sovereign display territories as guests.'²³ What does being a guest entail? 'Knowing that an Aboriginal sovereign display territory is permanent and includes visual and tactile objects that are activated by embodied knowledge (their makers and others talking about them) would encourage a slow unfolding of truths.'²⁴ Being autonomous from the settler-colonial gaze and interlocutor is part of signaling to non-Indigenous spectators that intellectual activity is 'occurring without their knowledge; that is, in their absence and based on Native epistemologies. [... These] irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality are gatherings, ceremony, Cree-only discussions, kitchen-table conversations, email exchanges, etc. in which Blackfootness, Métisness, Indianness, Aboriginality, and/or Indigeneity is performed apart from a Settler audience.'²⁵ This intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, economic and political sovereignty provides the imperative for both process and result: developing collectively and individually determined ways forward on Indigenous terms, for Indigenous worlds

Not only within and in relation to the Western gallery system, but also on land, are projects taking place at an urgent present. #callresponse includes five local commissions by Indigenous women artists whose territories are located across the Canadian settler state that will later be represented in a touring exhibition at grunt gallery led by Métis curator Tarah Hogue with participating artists Maria Hupfield (Wasauksing First Nation) and Tania Willard (Secwepemc Nation).²⁶ Willard's ongoing Bush Gallery includes the exhibition of land-based works, as does the Gapan Gallery at the annual Garma Festival in Yolŋu territories of northern Australia. Particularly inspiring are the fibrework practices honoured within collective Motu Taim (formerly Pacific Women's Weaving Circle) in Narrm Melbourne, the safe space (club nights and talks) for and by queer, trans and non-binary people of colour created by Alterity Collective, the development platform (exhibitions, screenings, talks) for and by contemporary African artists pushed by Still Nomads collective, and the political and cultural activism at the core of the multi-city Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance, who resist Australian settler colonialism and promote futures of sovereign wellbeing in multiple formats.

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INCREASING PRESENCE

How do major and independent art galleries and art schools address civilisational gaps in knowledges and presences of and determined by First Nations/Indigenous peoples?

Art spaces and art schools in Australia are Eurocentric, reflecting the genealogy of the settler majority; there have been insufficient moves towards creating and developing adequate representation of aesthetics, knowledges, practices and urgencies of Indigenous peoples of Moananui a Kiwa and Asia. Yorta Yorta curator and writer Kimberley Moulton identifies institutional structures as holding back change:

The problem is that Indigenous people are missing from positions within the major institutions and regional galleries, and they are the primary facilitators of this dialogue. [...] The number of Indigenous people in leadership roles within the industry is completely inadequate and this contributes to what is often absent—our voice.²⁷

As key stakeholders and cultural producers, local and

Global First Nations communities are pivotal to exhibition and discursive projects around Indigenous art practices being able to mean anything more than more

readily available understandings through European frameworks.

Wardandi curator Clotilde Bullen, incoming Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Collection and Exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, believes that Australian art institutions need genuine succession planning before we can see Indigenous agency embedded in their values, structure and programming. She states that 'Still, central to the tradition of Indigenous succession planning is the idea that ownership of knowledge is privileged, and that the ownership brings responsibility and an innate degree of advocacy that is required for cultural continuity.'²⁸ Cultural continuity in this capacity not only pertains to a platform for First Nations economic, political and cultural life, but also to the ceremonial political fulfilment of responsibilities to all living things. First Nations artists, curators, and writers echo Stephen Gilchrist in being the rightful authors of their representations: 'Not content with being disenfranchised from their own material culture, Indigenous people[s] have made their way into art museums and galleries, taking symbolic and actual possession of the objects themselves and the social practices that accompany them.'²⁹ Vestiges of empire, the Eurocentrism of museums and galleries lies in the very DNA of these institutions. To address these conventions, and instigate inclusive, diverse ways of being and knowing within them, will require holistic reimagining of what we want and need from public spaces of cultural display.

FIRST NATIONS FUTURES

What would a First Nations Futures program look like, in creating space and capacity for Indigenous succession in curatorial and critical practices?

My research into the fundamental differences between Indigenous art practices and histories of Moananui a Kiwa and European art histories of the same region identifies why contestation of this status quo is so important for local and international Indigenous peoples and for the health of diverse ecologies. Indigenous artistic and curatorial practices are part of ceremonial-political responsibilities that view action in the world as restorative in a context of climate apocalypse, environmental and socio-cultural decline and economic disarray. It's not that Indigenous knowledges hold all the answers to a world in flames, but certainly the European knowledges and practices centred on capitalism and settler colonialism that brought us to this point of crisis have

been expended of their worth. Indigenous curatorial practice is not only a negotiation of displays of Indigenous-produced works in European-dominated spaces,

but also the radical and innovative forms, material and spiritual, that resistance to forced inclusion in European-derived art histories and politics take. Resistance to, or refusal of, Euro-American practices taking primacy in exhibitions of, and writing on, First Nations art practices offers the most room for change and innovation, on terms and in spaces defined by Indigenous peoples.

INDIGENOUS PRESENCE IN ART SCHOOLS

What forms can succession planning, mentorship and structural change in art galleries and art schools take?

This is part of institutional critique on the restrictions on, and impacts of, Indigenous agency through programming, curriculum, cultural or budgetary autonomy in these contexts. Does the Museum of Contemporary Art's commitment to the rights of Indigenous peoples in its publicly accessible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy mean that it will encourage and finance further curatorial, collections management, and public programs positions?³⁰ Will other art spaces and art schools follow suit?

A national strategy for First Nations Futures should focus on a few core pillars: sovereignty, cluster hiring and historical redress. Particularly echoing some of the more visionary employment practice in North America, cluster hiring of Indigenous peoples and people of colour provides an opportunity to remake organisations and spaces, centred on these peoples, knowledges and practices, and radiating outwards. There are audiences and possibilities that are new to these organisations but are here unengaged. International exchange with peers across Moananui a Kiwa and North America is also key to mutual growth. I envisage Assistant Curator, Curator, Curatorial Fellow, Collection Carer, Indigenous Engagement and Research roles being created in independent and artist-run spaces (such as Institute of Modern Art, Artspace, Gertrude Contemporary, Blak Dot Gallery, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, KickArts, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art), as well as a large-scale expansion and development of First Nations art departments of around ten-fifteen staff in large institutions (such as Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australian

Centre for Contemporary Art, Monash University Museum of Art, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Griffith University Art Gallery, University of Queensland Art Museum,

and Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts). This should be led by the core public funders as a priority, and the reallocation of funding internally, to address the severe lack of opportunities and peoples represented and contributing to our cultural landscape. This is part of redressing historical bias and Anglo-Celtic ethnocentrism. Any First Nations Futures strategy would seek to diversify and grow the programming, staffing, audiences and governance representation of local and global Indigenous peoples, rather than seeking a minimum of population parity.

On the question of an increase in First Nations-identified roles being successful and useful, Birri Gubba curator Bruce McLean responded:

There are all sorts of opportunities to improve the health of the Indigenous art sector. There should be space for more people to rise, to go beyond or alongside a base-level curator position. Those pathways need to develop throughout the industry. The ownership of Indigenous art by Indigenous people is important as a question across the board. That's what I'd really like to see develop and antagonise a bit. I enjoy curating but I don't enjoy the idea that there is no Indigenous curatorial manager in the institution. There is no pathway for people to do more things, unless they step completely outside Indigenous art to work through Australian, International or Asian art, and go through that direction into a higher level within a public institution in Australia.³¹

Moulton responded:

Across the museum and gallery sector we need to look at why non-Indigenous people are hired over Indigenous people who have the qualifications as well as the cultural knowledge and authority. [...] More understanding is needed in institutions to support a serious commitment to Indigenous employment and development pathways. I believe there should only be Indigenous people in curatorial and collection management positions in Aboriginal cultural heritage and contemporary art, although I also strongly believe in collaboration with non-Indigenous peers on exhibition and collection

In our art schools, there is a marked regression in teaching, research and education equipping graduates in First Nations knowledges, aesthetics, politics, and ceremonial-political practices. I call on the main art schools of this country, many in a time of soul-searching and funding crisis, to reassess their continued exclusion of Indigenous peoples and people of colour. Specialised programs of study, research and practice should be created in key institutions to lead in the development of capacity in specific regions. You can imagine a time when these spaces are reimagined and reborn as First Nations places of learning that welcome settlers and other migrants on Indigenous terms. You can imagine a time when Indigeneity, sovereignty, healing, ceremony, ecology, nuclear/climate catastrophe, race, blakness, whiteness, gender, sexuality, fluidity, ability, decolonisation, justice, safety and health are core to an education in visual cultural production.

Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson has called on settlers to see their participation in these processes of supporting Indigenous sovereignty beyond symbolic gestures or friendship. Settlers have intergenerational responsibilities in historical redress, and in lending resources (both individual and institutional) to enable change.³³

As McLean has said, when I asked him about what a First Nations-determined public cultural space would look and feel like:

It's hard to imagine a space that is led by Indigenous people, that gives peoples the freedom to present what they want. It could also be a challenging and exciting space because you are a lot more accountable to community. A public Indigenous agency, distinct from community cultural trusts that have public funding such as Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute and Koorie Heritage Trust, would have to answer to government. Ideally, it would be a collections-based institution as well. It is something that has frightened the hell out of the existing collections-based institutions here including QAGOMA. There was a proposal for one to be built at Kurilpa Point, as part of the big twenty-year redevelopment of Southbank. There was a lot of backlash from some of the institutions because they felt that they were already "covering" Indigenous art. But

Moulton responded in this way: underlying that was a fear of what would happen to their collections, and whether Indigenous collections would be pulled out.³⁴

I think it would be a space where our cultural material is kept and shared, where contemporary visual art, dance, music and writing comes together, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people manage and have creative control over the space. It would be where collaborations and cultural exchanges on plants and ecologies can happen across our Nations in Australia, and also with our Indigenous brothers and sister across the world in sharing culture, and where long-term loans of cultural material from places like the British Museum, Musée du quai Branly, Oxford and Cambridge can be seen, giving communities access through workshops and learning spaces. It could be a positive space of culture, creative expression and agency.³⁵

I believe that fulfilling the promise of sustained engagement means so much more to Indigenous communities including my own than a successful one-off exhibition every few years or yet another symposium with overpriced entry. Non-European art worlds, and non-European women, queer and non-binary artists especially³⁶ do not yet enjoy just critical attention or representation in Australia's art schools and art spaces. It bears reminding that there are currently no First Nations curators, public programmers or collection managers employed at our state's largest institution, the National Gallery of Victoria, including Aunty Sana Balai's recent departure after thirteen years of curatorial advocacy work as the only Lul region curator, without an active succession plan in motion either.³⁷ The first Aboriginal curator in six years starts there in late November 2016. Alone culturally amongst three-hundred employees. Sāmoan artist and curator Rosanna Raymond sees our future as an opportunity: 'We can't push the hands of time back but we can empower people through ensuring that all histories are told and have equal mana (presence and power).'³⁸

Ma le agaga fa'afetai ia outou uma i leni fonu.

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NOTES ON THE PRESENTATION OF 'CURATING UNDER PRESSURE IN SETTLER COLONIES' BY LÉULI ESHRĀGHI

Sarah Werkmeister

It was a warm spring day in Melbourne as a small crowd of people settled in to listen to Léuli Eshrāghi's lecture, 'Curating Under Pressure in Settler Colonies.' The talk was held on the grounds of the freshly renovated and recently relocated Blak Dot Gallery (five years old in 2016), which is an exhibition space dedicated to showing works from world Indigenous cultures located on the unceded land of the Kulin Nation—specifically, in the suburb of Brunswick in Melbourne.

Director of Blak Dot, Kimba Thompson, has created a space that allows Indigenous agency to manifest. Inside the gallery was the exhibition, *Ōpōtiki—New Zealand's First Drone-Friendly Town* by Māori artist, Sarah Hudson (Ngāti Awa), which looked at small and almost inconspicuous strategies of resistance in the face of a recent decision by the Ōpōtiki District Council to allow drones to survey the area. The artist mixed Māori knowledges with contemporary tactical camouflage to evade these drones, and then created photographic and video portraits of residents in disguise, which were shown in the gallery. Quiet and outspoken at once. By contrast, Eshrāghi falls in the latter camp, being known for his activism and advocacy in Australia and abroad for the rights of self-representation for First Nations peoples, and for drawing attention to ongoing colonial-imperial attitudes in settler-colonial states within art galleries and art educational institutions.

We seated ourselves outside of the gallery space, in the shade of a gazebo and on mats from Vanuatu and Sāmoa that Eshrāghi had brought with him. This setting itself evaded the cold institutionalism that Eshrāghi wants to overturn. At a normal Western institutional talk, you would be seated in a row of seats in front of a screen and/or a microphoned speaker. The result: one authorial voice privileged over the multiple present in the room. Here, the talk took place in the round; the audience sat in conversation with the speaker, himself allowing for the dialogue he was initiating to flow more naturally through the audience. In this configuration, the purposes of knowledge giving and sharing arrived through conversation, through emotion, through body, through being grounded on this unceded Kulin Nation land. Within a generous hour, Eshrāghi created

dialogue around the history of non-inclusion of First Nations peoples in art-institutional spaces, and the effect that this exclusion has on the agency of Indigenous