

AUSTRALIAN



CASULA
POWERHOUSE
ARTS CENTRE

AUSTRALIAN

DR PAULA ABOOD

MARIA FERNANDA CARDOSO

with Ross Rudesch Harley

SEAN CORDEIRO AND CLAIRE HEALY

NOLA FARMAN

with Frances Bodkin, George Fisher

and Gavin Andrews

SHAUN GLADWELL

DAVID GRIGGS

GORDON HOOKEY

PROF ANDREW JAKUBOWICZ

DANI MARTI

RAQUEL ORMELLA

PROF NIKOS PAPASTERGIADIS

DR JUAN SALAZAR

NIKE SAVVAS AND STEPHEN LITTLE

SARDAR SINJAWI

SUZANN VICTOR

SAVANHDARY VONGPOOTHORN

with Richard Johnson

GUAN WEI

Curator Nicholas Tsoutas

Associate Curator Brianna Munting

5 April – 7 September 2008

AUSTRALIAN

AUSTRALIAN FORUM SERIES

Developed and chaired by Nicholas Tsoutas

Australian Forum 1

24 May 2008 Dr Paula Abood, Prof Andrew Jakubowicz and Prof Nikos Papastergiadis

Australian Forum 2

5 July 2008 Prof Ien Ang and Dr Juan Salazar

Curating Difference

16 August 2008 Dr Thomas Berghuis, Cecelia Cmielewski, Tania Doropoulos, Lisa Havilah, Matthew Poll and Aaron Seeto

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WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this publication contains images of and other references to deceased persons.

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POWERHOUSE**

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Brianna Munting

In a world that wants change and looks for hope, is there a real possibility for social agency? Can we accept responsibility for the past and define a new future that is multiple, varied, diverse and celebrates the contributions of difference? Or will Australia persist with the grand narratives of place that are located in the metropolises outside of this country, with the ghosts of the Howard era rejecting the processes of building trust and respect.

Australian, curated by Nicholas Tsoutas, moves towards a discourse that redefines the parameters of how we construct and engage with the multiplicities of this country. It interrogates the ideological, personal and geographical relationships between people, landscape, history and home – the connections, the tensions, and the voices that create a space for transformation and question how perhaps we can start talking to one another. This project presents a shift towards understanding and privileging the spaces where cultures intersect. It moves past the problematic frameworks of multiculturalism¹ and post colonial theory, to engage with the cultural complexities of this region. It rejects the paternalistic hegemonies of singular history that create demarcations to understanding and negotiating the tensions of the heterodox and the divergent; the transience of place, and the ability of inclusivity through friction. *Australian* creates a hybridity of forms, a space from which we, as Ien Ang explains, can bracket all the complexities and enact a politics of simplicity², a decisive move towards discussions between everyone who occupies this place.

Each of the artists and writers included in *Australian* have explored in some way the porousness of cross-cultural discourses and present a reframing of the debates of cultural diversity through personal, political, aesthetic and cultural interventions. There is a challenge to sovereignty, to the enactment of democracy and social responsibility, to reinstating cultural value as an absolute human right, a humanising of migration and a move towards open and fearless dialogues.

Collaborations between Maria Fernanda Cardoso and Ross Rudesch Harley; Nola Farman, Frances Bodkin, Gavin Andrews and George Fisher; as well as the work by Gordon Hookey and Raquel Ormella reinscribe the problematics of the past, challenging the semiotic and political power invested in the inscription and creation of motifs, language and landscape, to open up a space for the redressing of Australia. The works identify and dismantle the visible systems of control to generate alternative knowledge and practices for working together across cultural differences. They are proposing to live in a shared world, a space of relations, dialogue and agency.

Maria Fernanda Cardoso's *Emu Wear* works with the iconic Australian emblem to destabilise stereotypes as she challenges the codes for nationhood - the links to land and soil - as a legitimising force and symbol of a singular heritage. She creates a global identity, one that anyone can wear, discard or revere, where life is drawn in unfamiliar landscapes and sovereign values systems become dismantled as everyone has a right to create 'home'.

What Fernanda Cardoso focuses on is the ability to create connections to land and soil and the need for being rooted to a place to create a home and a shared experience. She

is opening up an opportunity for this connection to land and providing a democratic space for a diverse national identity, a welcoming host. Her use of emu feathers draws parallels across the globe, as feathers as fashion have been consistently used in Africa, North and South America and in Asia. This globalisation of a national icon is a deliberate action that creates an ambiguity that blurs the boundaries and codes of cultural recognition. It is a refusal of stereotyping, of persistent oppositional binaries, of singular nationalistic codes and of *gemeinde*.

Fernanda Cardoso's wearable sculptures react against the imagery of the 2005 Cronulla riots, where we witnessed the Australian flag draped around adolescent shoulders like a cape - a symbol of singularity, homogenisation and rejection of difference - a denial focused on uprooting and displacement. What Fernanda Cardoso has created with her emu feathered work is a new dress; new clothes for a nation that open up the possibilities for an Australia that is a non-fixed entity, a site for negotiating possibilities of exchange, of creating a new home that is able to re-examine the oldest part of this country, the national emblem which links to environment and landscape with the newest part, the movement and migration of people. She creates a type of re-skinning of a nation, one that openly challenges the myths and constructions of national pride. It is a work that is both rooted in the soil of place yet challenges this biological connection as the only 'legitimate' identity. She provides the means for everybody to wear, occupy and be Australian.

Nola Farman's collaborative work *Flashpoint* further explores this desire to understand and create a sense of place through cross-cultural exchanges and communication. The collaborative work with the knowledge holders of the D'harawal people Frances Bodkin, Gavin Andrews and George Fisher of the Waradjuri people defines this desire to understand the multiplicities of history, language and culture. It provides a translation between people, culture and the past, generating a sense of the mnemonic that is specific to place, space and language.

Flashpoint recognises the violent and continued aftermath of colonisation and its ability to slide fluidly without resistance into and onto the social, political and natural landscape of Australia with residues of this abuse and violence remaining in the constructions of languages and landscapes.

This work is a move beyond possession, control and mediated history. *Flashpoint* inscribed the D'harawal word *Darimi* onto the landscape of the Casula Powerhouse through a healing ceremony, burning the word onto the earth and acknowledging the presence and Aboriginal history of this specific locale. It is an inscription of history, of loss and of the importance of recognising the multiplicities of meaning in landscape. It is a beginning of pluralism, a bridging of knowledge and respect that seeks to destabilise the colonial power relations and social hierarchies.

Darimi is a word that almost refuses translation; it is inclusive in its polymorphic state as it functions across meanings of language, memory, history, land and dreaming. It represents

a complexity that exists when one understands land and home without nationalistic rhetoric, as it is an understanding of being within the land. It is about the beginning, about timelessness. It cannot be possessed and this lack of possession becomes a force that can exist outside of capitalism and colonial constructs.

Flashpoint privileges and acknowledges the ability of the natural world to appropriate and re-inscribe new meaning in landscape through time and the elements. Slowly the new green shoots began to cover the burnt tattoo, emphasising the dynamic of the differing relationships between Indigenous and colonised Australia. This collaborative work rejects the singular view of land as an object for commodification managed solely through economics, as it highlights the Aboriginal stories and importance of understanding, communication and sharing knowledge. The inscription of the word *Darimi* on the landscape of the Casula Powerhouse has left a permanent a scar, a marking that invents a space for change, for recognition and also importantly a democratic space of equality and exchange.

Gordon Hookey's practice is located in the spaces of dialogues between cultures as he alludes to personal and collective experiences. His paintings and site-specific drawings incorporate dense narratives, satire and black humour to explore the invasion into Aboriginal communities and the continued aftermath of a conservative governmental policy.

The character in his works, the *Verry Verry Really Deadly Devine Sublime Bitchewmen Bhharbee Blhhaktjinn* stands against adversity, atop of Australia, in front of the tanks and flanked by kangaroo spirits. She is defiant, powerful – a contemporary superhero. Her incantation draws on popular imagery, aka Uma Thurman in *Kill Bill*, kicking the head of John Howard through a set of goal posts, as resistance is played out in this violently saturated spectacle. Hookey is proposing a new type of imagining, a new future for Aboriginal Australians. He is demanding reform, change, and acknowledging an agency that acts in direct contrast to the media images of passive welfarism and addiction that pervade and saturate our consciousness. He creates an interweaving of stories, of histories and of both fictionalised and real experiences in reclaiming spaces that provide the opportunity for change.

His language and text included in the work draws on the stereotypes of popular culture, reappropriating terms such as 'bitumen blonde' or 'jaffa'. In doing so, Hookey rejects the paternalisms of colonial discourse and refuses a reconciliation of assimilation. Hookey is presenting Australia with an opportunity, a space for dignity, for discussion and for reconciliation on equal terms, not one where you have to become white to be reconciled. It is about acknowledging the need for all Australians to take real responsibility and social agency without just playing a game of political football.

In Raquel Ormella's work *Varied, noisy* the minor bird, or Indian Myna as otherwise known, becomes a symbol of colonisation, an introduced species that is not only posing one of the worst environmental threats to Australia, but also on a global level. The work presents an exploration of systems of categorisation and the politics of language and history as functioning in a disjuncture of absence and narratives.

The Indian Myna is a brutal coloniser. It violates the native bird life and physically alters its environment, changing the vegetation by creating a homogenised environment that caters to its needs. However it is reliant on humans, enjoying cleared land and rubbish. It occupies and functions in a way that does not accept established eco-systems or native wildlife.

In *Varied, noisy* the distinctions between colonisation and migration become apparent as we see two distinct types of occupation. Colonisation imposes a will that is foreign to the locality as it gives no consideration to dialogue, equal exchange or respect. It becomes a physical uprooting and a rejection of pre-existing structures or landscape. It is a means to being homogenised and a rejection of difference, a denial of links to land and a focus on the hegemonic traditions that privilege expediency, singular impositions of sovereignty and environmental modernisation without the space or capacity for agency.

Australian has created the space for challenging the power structures invested in language, in the management of land and in the contemporary social and political environments. It identifies the necessity to create place, or home, within a country and a reclaiming of the right to do so, whether this is through links to land, to history or social agency. Yet it is also an acknowledgement of De Certeau's idea that identity is not mutually exclusive from the practices that connect it to space where "the reverberations and feedback between spatial and psychic elements can be understood as operating in a mutually transformative manner"³. *Australian* is cognisant of the multitude of lived experiences.

The connection to place through the concept and creation of home and accommodation becomes the focal point for the collaborative work *The Golden Mean* by Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy. This installation explores the issues of accommodation for Generation Y, particularly the cultural producers who are dealing with the realities of contemporary economics that efface difference. It examines the problems of social and cultural exchanges.

The Golden Mean as defined by Aristotle is the desirable middle between two extremes, of excess and deficiency. What we are witness to today, with the sub-prime mortgage crisis in America, recession across the globe and closer to home the high rate of bank repossessions in Liverpool, particularly amongst the aspiring migrant communities, is that economics divides. Whilst it appears fluid, it serves to segregate, defy and exclude. Whilst exchange may become laden with the baggage of economics, ultimately economics and capital occur regardless of culture.

As home becomes grounded in accommodation, in physical and somewhat unattainable commodities, artists themselves become caught in the gaps of global economics as the realities of losing your home traverse across borders and without restraint. *The Golden Mean* alludes to the pervasiveness of capital and economics and its ability to function with and outside of cultural production and exchange.

Yet this negotiation of the relationship between cultures, capital and exchange is also played out in the collaboration of the artists themselves in the production of new work. There is transience inherent in this work, as the domesticity of the interior curtain alludes to a

Emu Wear

Maria Fernanda Cardoso with Ross Rudesch Harley

What better way to intersect with a new land than drawing on its native natural icons, particularly if the icon in question is a national emblem. In this case, the emu has provided Maria Fernanda Cardoso with a means of communication by which to explore the depths of antipodean identity and local discourse. For Cardoso, the emu and the sum of its parts personify the artist's eagerness to understand what is Australian and what does Australia want to be. It's a discussion that draws heavily on notions of landscape and survival within the landscape. It's about camouflage, sacrifice and the intersection of defining symbols.

Emu Wear is a culmination of over five years research and exploration on the symbolism and use of the emu in the Australian landscape. The colour, texture, movement and even the sound of emu feathers, mimic the Australian outback in so many ways and the wearer, in any one of Cardoso's outfits, embodies the movement of the emu roaming or resting in this rugged environment.

Maria Fernanda Cardoso is best known for her use of preserved organic specimens to recreate patterns and structures that highlight the formalism and logic inherent in nature. Where her earlier work considered repetition and design elements, this new work differs in its embrace of abstraction. *Emu Wear* still captures a formalist structure in its netted and feathered garments, but it's also a realm of chaos where different logics intertwine. Suspended in space, without any definite shape the fabrics reveal a tension caused by nature's intervention. Paring off the 'tactileness' of natural fibres, feathers and inorganic matter, the results are highly textured, stylised forms. Supported solely by folds and feathers, these sculptural forms only take shape when they are worn by people. In an ironic twist, they require human movement to activate the feathers' movements.

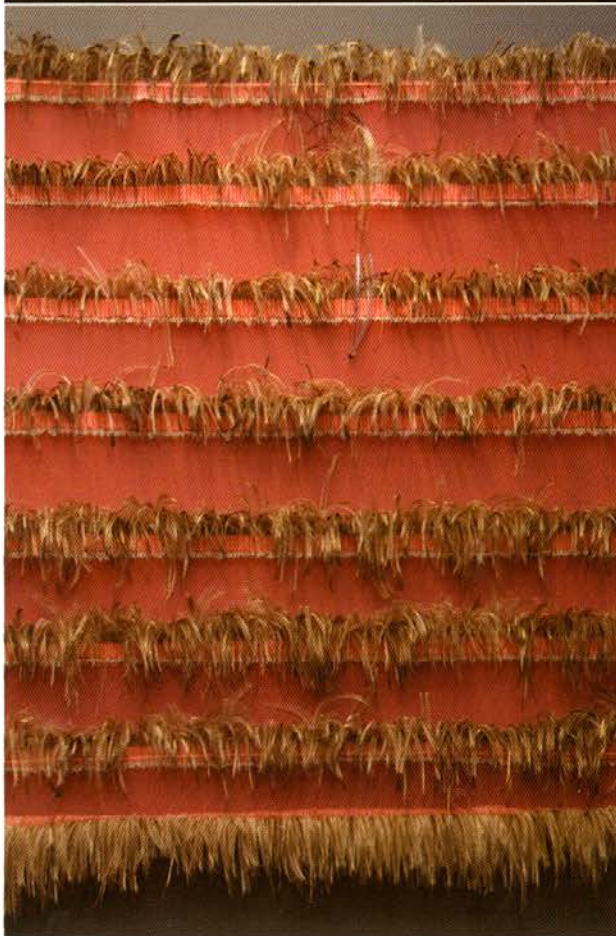
What stood out in Cardoso's research was the importance of native bird feathers in the ceremonial clothing of indigenous tribes, not only in Australia, but in New Zealand and across the South Pacific islands to South America. When she received her first set of samples, she was shocked by their dry, rough and somewhat unattractive texture – a far cry from the colourful and flamboyant feathers usually associated with exotic native birds. However, she quickly understood that she was working with essential tools for camouflage and survival and she could now shift their purpose by re-organising their structure, making the formal patterns her own, not nature's.

Her success with this new sense of control is evident in the glowing fluorescent colours of some of the outfits. Searing oranges and sulphuric yellows defy the natural realm and empower the artist to create new emu identities. In another outfit she enlivens the actual bird form, having tanned an emu, complete with skin, feathers and legs.

Cardoso's outfits and accompanying video installation and performance, produced in collaboration with artist Ross Rudesch Harley, use the emu as both material and subject matter. *Emu Wear* re-shapes our emblem through a new kind of animation, a humanisation of an Australian icon, with the purpose of challenging and re-negotiating the popular ideas of Australian identity. It's about looking at 'Australianness' from a different angle, from an outsider looking in and re-formalising what is perceived as natural.



<p>EMU are active on bright moonlit nights but don't like to cross roads by themselves</p>	<p>EMU chicks call with a shrill double whistle and can swim when they're seven days old</p>	<p>EMU when wandering roost for the night wherever they end up at dusk</p>	<p>EMU chicks hatch all fluffy and striped they're gorgeous and so very cute</p>
<p>EMU eggs have hardy thick shell of green to white layers that's brilliant for etching and carving</p>	<p>EMU are farmed all over the world for feathers, leather meat, oil and eggs</p>	<p>EMU males incubate the eggs alone for 56 days in a torpor he won't eat, drink or shit 'til they hatch</p>	<p>EMU in the wilds of Australia number up to 725,000 alongside 27 million cattle and 114 million sheep</p>
<p>EMU feathers each have two shafts and the tips of the feathers are black</p>	<p>EMU were eaten by First Fleet sailors and their oil was used to fuel lamps</p>	<p>EMU are <i>dhinawan</i> to <i>wiradjuri</i> <i>karnanganja</i> to <i>warumungu</i> <i>jebera</i> to <i>ngarinyin</i>... every mob know that fella long time</p>	<p>EMU males have a protrusible phallus for delivering sperm to the female cloaca</p>
<p>EMU males build a large nest on the ground of leaves and bark and grass and twigs</p>	<p>EMU become sexually mature around 18 months old and are ready to breed shortly after</p>	<p>EMU walk 7 kilometres per hour and run up to 48 kph with a 2.5 metre stride</p>	<p>EMU pairs roost on the ground every night 5-10 metres apart</p>
<p>EMU are large flightless birds adapted for running endemic to Australia</p>	<p>EMU are kept off WA wheat farms by fencing 1,000 kilometres long</p>	<p>EMU in summer forge coupling bonds to breed some months later in winter</p>	<p>EMU stand almost 2 metres tall and weigh up to 55 kilos</p>





Emu Wear, 2008; digital video and mixed media installation, variable dimensions

