

# HUNTER ER ED D

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery  
Maitland Regional Art Gallery  
Newcastle Art Gallery  
The Lock-Up

2018

**Re(A)d Earth**

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

26 May – 22 July 2018

**Razzamatazz**

Maitland Regional Art Gallery

5 May – 22 July 2018

**Corpus**

Newcastle Art Gallery

26 May – 22 July 2018

**Seeing Red**

The Lock-Up

26 May – 1 July 2018

**HUNTER**  
**ED**

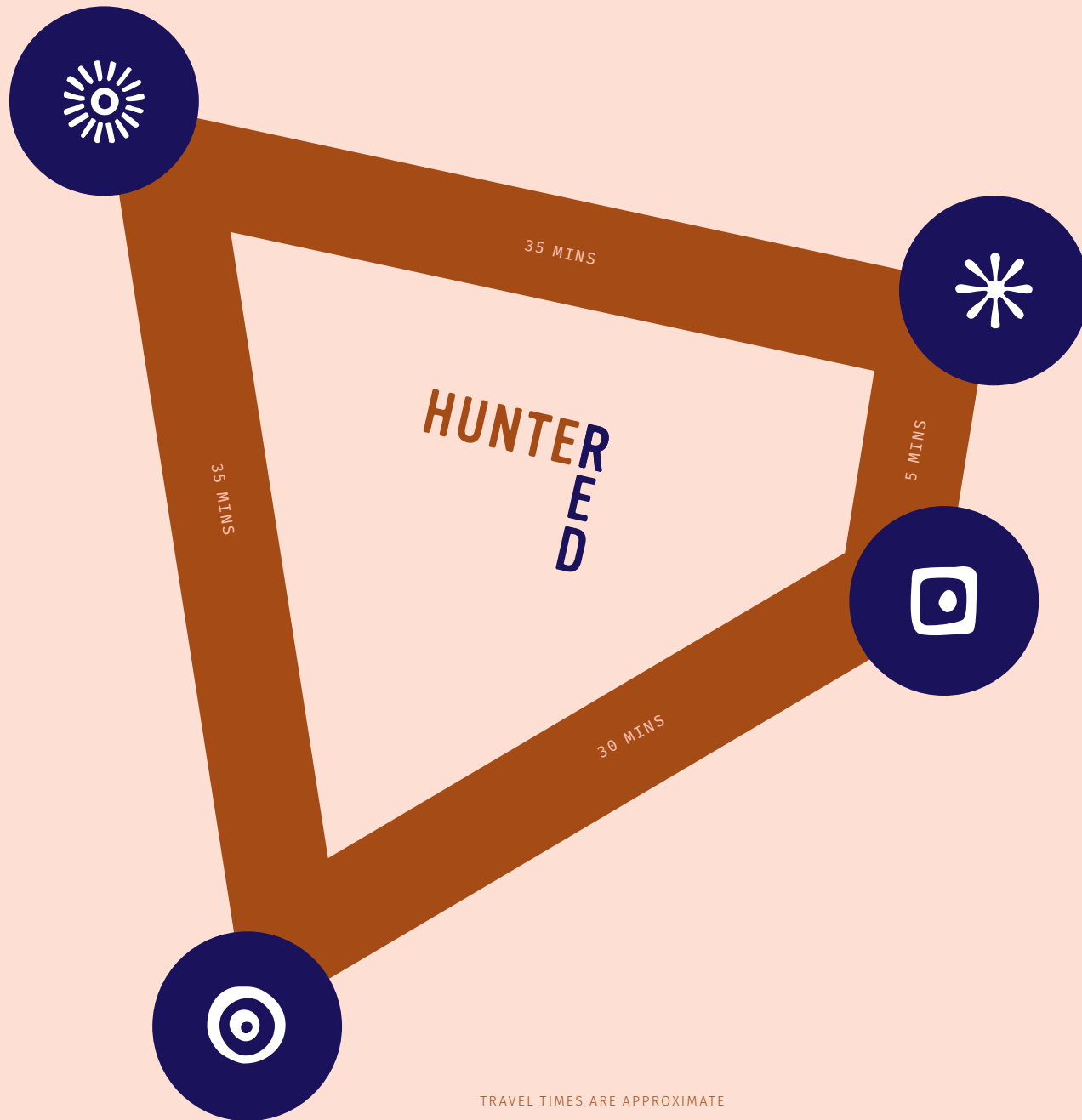
Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

Maitland Regional Art Gallery


Newcastle Art Gallery

The Lock-Up

**2018**



TRAVEL TIMES ARE APPROXIMATE

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery  
 **Re(A)d Earth**


26 May – 22 July 2018

First Street, Booragul NSW 2284

10am – 4.30pm Tuesday to Sunday

11am – 4pm selected public holidays

[artgallery.lakemac.com.au](http://artgallery.lakemac.com.au)


Maitland Regional Art Gallery  
 **Razzamatazz**

5 May – 22 July 2018

230 High Street, Maitland NSW 2320

10am – 5pm Tuesday to Sunday

[mrag.org.au](http://mrag.org.au)

Newcastle Art Gallery  
 **Corpus**


26 May – 22 July 2018

1 Laman Street, Cooks Hill NSW 2300

10am – 5pm Tuesday to Sunday

7 days during school holidays

[nag.org.au](http://nag.org.au)

The Lock-Up  
 **Seeing Red**

26 May – 1 July 2018

90 Hunter Street, Newcastle NSW 2300

10am – 4pm Wednesday to Saturday

11am – 3pm Sunday

[thelockup.org.au](http://thelockup.org.au)

## Hunter Red: the project

The *Hunter Red* suite of exhibitions represents a collaborative vision shared by Hunter-based galleries and institutions: Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up, and in the developmental stages, Newcastle Museum.

As an initiative, it has encouraged the group to examine how they cooperate, collect, create and communicate to a broader audience. Using a popular tourist drawcard – the glass of Hunter red and all its connotations – as a springboard, the project subverts commonly held misconceptions and examines the present-day motivation of the region's cultural institutions.

A diverse narrative encompassing mutual support, collection sharing, and outstanding cultural practice, *Hunter Red* takes us to the core of examining identity and belief systems to represent a region that is multifaceted and rich.

This collaborative project seeks to defy any one-dimensional view. We are *Hunter Reds*, but 'red' is also:

the **earth** on which we stand and share;  
the symbol of **celebration** and **revelry**;  
our **flesh** and **blood**; and  
our **political unrest**.

Each institution and exhibition examines a different vision of our region. It incorporates voices ignored and marginalised as well as celebrating joy and the fragility of our humanity.

The *Hunter Red* collective challenges audiences to explore all the diverse and innovative exhibitions in this project, to travel between the institutions, engage in a host of varied and exciting public programs and be astounded by the wealth of the combined Hunter collections.

*A Hunter Cultural Collective project with partners Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up.*

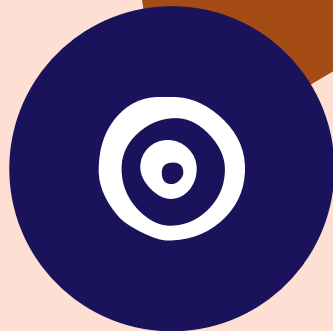


The Hunter Cultural Collective galleries are supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

Design Partner

**Headjam**

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## Re(A)d Earth

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

26 May – 22 July 2018

**Address** First Street, Booragul NSW 2284

**Telephone** 02 4921 0382

**Email** [artgallery@lakemac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@lakemac.nsw.gov.au)

**Website** [artgallery.lakemac.com.au](http://artgallery.lakemac.com.au) | Subscribe to our Newsletter

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## Foreword

**Debbie Abraham**

Gallery Director

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery

Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery is proud to be a partner in the *Hunter Red* suite of exhibitions alongside Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up. As a joint project, it has stimulated robust dialogue, encouraged skill and idea sharing across all aspects of gallery programming and enabled us to get in amongst the other partner venues' collections to enrich our arts and cultural offer and jointly boast about the wealth and diversity of public holdings in the region.

Lake Macquarie's contribution to *Hunter Red* is *Re(A)d Earth*, curated by Donna Biles-Fernando and developed in close consultation with the Aboriginal Reference Group. Through our long-term relationship with the Group and the strengths of existing cultural foundations and knowledge in the region, we have been able to present projects that celebrate many aspects of Aboriginal art and culture, and furthermore have been able to tackle difficult issues such as the Stolen Generations, mission life and the Frontier Wars.

For the *Hunter Red* project, we are exploring contemporary connection to Country as articulated through the work of Aboriginal artists from across Australia. This multidisciplinary exhibition acknowledges 'reading' of the earth as elemental for Aboriginal people through the section of works reflecting Country or Dreaming. The works exhibited display the use of an array of contemporary

and traditional techniques, imagery and conceptual frameworks, reinforcing the idea that contemporary does not have to mean a divergence from cultural practice and lore.

An integral component of our collaborative Aboriginal programming is to support skills and ideas development, the *Re(A)d Earth* project was activated by an artist camp at Glenrock, Lake Macquarie. The camp provided a unique opportunity for local and invited artists to come together with local Elders to discuss connection to Country and contemporary art practice. The connections have resulted in stunning and complex new works by Hunter-based artists Doug Archibald, Nicole Chaffey and Saretta Fielding as well as invited artist Megan Cope, whose work is activated by a sound performance by Hunter-based singer-songwriter David Leha (aka Radical Son).

Alongside new works by Hunter-based artists, *Re(A)d Earth* includes works by international and national artists Sally Gabori, Jonathan Jones, Eubena Nampitjin, Ningie Nangala, Kathleen Paddoon Napanangka, Yhonnie Scarce, Damian Smith, Freddie Timms, Wukun Wanambi, Judy Watson and many more. Works have been drawn from our collection as well as the collections of Maitland Regional Art Gallery and Newcastle Art Gallery and borrowed directly from artists and/or their gallerists.

I would like to thank our Aboriginal Reference Group for their dedication to culturally ethical visual art programming and all of the artists involved, particularly those who made new work for the project. And, of course, thanks go to the curator, Donna Biles-Fernando, who always brings her own brand of verve to a project, and to the amazing Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery team, who continue to work together towards meaningful outcomes for the community and the arts.

This is an important project for the region and I would like to acknowledge our project partners Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up as well as Newcastle Museum in the developmental stages. All have contributed with generosity and enthusiasm to the success of *Hunter Red*. Also thanks to the artists and gallerists who made loans available for the project.

I'm sure you, as our combined audience, will enjoy the exhibitions that make up the *Hunter Red* suite: *Re(A)d Earth*, *Razzamatazz*, *Corpus* and *Seeing Red*. I encourage you to visit all four venues and participate in the myriad of programs available.

## Re(A)d Earth

Donna Biles-Fernando

Project Curator, *Re(A)d Earth*

*Wayibala bunyila guying;*  
*Waa guyinggay bunyila ngani gamba,*  
*Waa gambagay bunyila nyugumba-lagi.*<sup>1</sup>

The *Re(A)d Earth* exhibition builds on a steadfast two-decade-long relationship between Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery (LMCAG) and Hunter-based Aboriginal communities. Rewarding and intense in equal measure, the collaboration has worked because of tireless efforts to maintain a dialogue that encourages mutual respect and trust. The opportunities to express the primal bond of culture and ‘canvas’ has helped to highlight political, social and economic issues to a wide audience both domestically and internationally.

The project draws from the collections of our neighbouring regional galleries – Maitland Regional Art Gallery and Newcastle Art Gallery. It also showcases specially commissioned artworks that explore our people, our culture and connection to Country: how we read the sounds, colours and textures of the earth on which we all walk.

At *Re(A)d Earth*'s core is the ability of Aboriginal artists to offer insight into their connection to Country through

both ancient and modern artistic means. The works use a plethora of techniques, materials and practices in both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ approaches by our Elders and established and emerging artists.

The new works were developed in response to visits to local sites and discussions with Elders at an artist camp at Glenrock during January 2018. Leading Hunter-based Aboriginal artists Douglas Archibald, Nicole Chaffey and Saretta Fielding were able to share their art practice alongside internationally recognised Quandamooka artist Megan Cope. It was through these experiences that new ideas took form, the possibilities of individual art practices were extended and both collaborative and solo works were produced. Together they present a fresh, meaningful and vibrant vision of Hunter landscapes.

In *Toe Yirannalai* (2018), Douglas Archibald references the little-told story of Newcastle’s ‘Singing Cliffs’, recounted by the Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld (1826). The tale describes how the cliff rocks could be moved by the echo of the human voice and singing, as shown to him many times by the local Aboriginal people.



**Damian Smith**

*Arrellah* (still, detail) 2014  
digital video (with Kate Duhamel, duration 3:12mins)  
acrylic paint on canvas  
courtesy the artist and San Jose Museum of Art, CA, USA  
© the artist

The inspiring cliff face is explored by Archibald in a moving video with soundscape.

Saretta Fielding takes on the omnipresent Dreaming of Mount Yengo and Biamie’s Cave in *Puna Borii* (2018). The artist takes a new direction in her practice, moving away from conventional wall-based works to a ‘sculptural’ painting on the floor. The audience is offered a bird’s-eye view of place in an evocative representation of these ancient landscapes.



**Freddie Timms**  
*Bow River Country* 2006  
 chine collé etching on paper  
 49.5 x 49.0cm  
 donated by Lake Macquarie Art Gallery Society, 2013  
 Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Works on Paper Collection  
 Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery  
 © Freddie Timms/Copyright Agency, 2018



**Jonathan Jones**  
*68 Fletcher, Bondi, 20:20, 8.6.03* (detail) 2003  
 extension cords, household light bulbs, movement sensors  
 230.0 x 890.0cm  
 Gift of the Newcastle Gallery Society 2007  
 Newcastle Art Gallery Collection  
 © the artist

Nicole Chaffey's dynamic and allegorical work *The Killing Song* (2018) features a monumental drawing and fired coolamons reflecting the journey of white man's interference on Country. The appropriation of land and the violation of its spirit signifies the destruction of physical and personal nature. Chaffey drew inspiration for her installation from an inscription that she found during the artists' camp at Glenrock. The words, distilled

from a Congolese legend, describe how in destroying the environment we destroy our own nature. Recognising a striking resonance in the words and in the context of her location, Chaffey translated the legend into the language of her people to become a moving critique on the devastating impact of white man on this land.

Megan Cope's large-scale work comprises mapped sites, toponyms





**Gladly Kemarre**  
*Untitled (detail) 2012*  
lithograph on paper  
60.5 x 41.0cm  
purchased 2012, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection  
© estate of the artist licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd

and sculptural elements in the form of suspended didgeridoos connected to locally sourced rocks by instrument strings. Including components sourced with Elders and Aboriginal artists from the local area, the work is both an installation and a musical instrument. The suspended forms are arranged in a pattern to represent the artist's journey following the coastline from Kintirrabbin to Whibayganba (Redhead to Nobbys) as travelled during her time on Country.

In collaboration with Cope, singer-songwriter David Leha (aka Radical Son) has created a soundscape performance by interacting with the instrumental forms within the gallery space. This ephemeral activation will be captured on video to become a permanent companion to Cope's installation throughout the exhibition.

Choreographer and former long-term principal dancer of the San Francisco Ballet, Damian Smith also contributes to the multidisciplinary character of the exhibition. His mesmerising work *Arrellah* (2014), created at the San Jose Museum of Art CA, USA, galvanises his Aboriginal identity. Compromised by neither distance nor the contemporary world, Smith's deeply moving connection to Country is conveyed with power.

Many of the practitioners in *Re(A)d Earth* have been associated with or been a part of previous exhibitions or projects with LMCAG. Trusted rapport has been

established with these artists, including Jonathan Jones, Yhonnie Scarce and Judy Watson.

Our unique Moiety, on Country and off Country, is represented by this combination of the old and the new, established and emerging artists, Elders and the young. The project respectfully taps into the shared wisdom and understanding of multiple Aboriginal nations and exemplifies the diversity and complexity of our mutual land. Colour, movement, ritual, custom and contemporary praxis bring a freedom of expression so often denied to Aboriginal people across many avenues in Australian society.

The power evoked by Gladly Kemarre, Freddie Timms, Sally Gabori and Peggy Poulson is achieved by use of vibrant colour and powerful forms. These Elder artists forge a new path of expression with access to modern pigments and materials. Connections are brighter and deeper, an intimate cognisance of spirit only gained in eldership that is explicitly and directly connected to Country. The use of colour is not just an aesthetic choice but also a deliberate decision to portray the spirit in landscape with contemporary forms.

In juxtaposition, the barks and poles presented by younger artists both male and female gently challenges notions of 'real or traditional' Aboriginal art.



**Nicole Chaffey**

*The Killing Song* (detail) 2018  
 oxides, ink, paper, Raku-fired earthenware  
 installation dimensions variable  
 courtesy the artist  
 © the artist

Wukun Wanambi, Irenie Ngalinba and Gali Gurruwiwi use bark as a modern 'canvas' and play on the obvious non-Aboriginal view of traditional art practice and connection. Each piece has been made in recent times (most within the last decade) and represents a deliberate divergence from the vibrant works by Elders like Freddie Timms.

Aboriginal contemporary art doesn't mean a deviation from cultural practice and lore, nor does traditional art have to be stale, weathered or 'relic like', lingering between artefact and art. Aboriginal artists will continue to develop their cultural knowledge and test artistic and technical boundaries with their creations.



**Megan Cope**

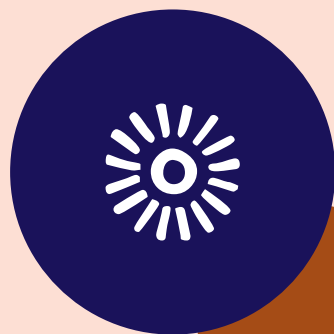
*Old Kahibah* (detail) 2018  
 parish maps, Indian ink on watercolour paper; *Old Kahibah*  
 sound extraction and abstraction; locally sourced rocks and  
 hollowed timber; violin, cello and double bass strings  
 sculptural installation dimensions variable  
 courtesy the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY +  
 Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne  
 © the artist

<sup>1</sup> Gathung translation by Nicole Chaffey (2018) of the English: *White man killed the bird; And with the bird he killed the song, And with the song he killed himself*, adapted from a legend first published in the book *The Forest People* (1961) by English anthropologist Colin Turnbull. The legend originates from the Mbuti people/pygmies of then Belgian Congo where Turnbull spent three years in the late 1930s.

HUNTER  
ED

# Razzamatazz

Maitland Regional Art Gallery  
5 May – 22 July 2018



**Address** 230 High Street, Maitland NSW 2320

**Telephone** 02 4934 9859

**Email** [artgallery@maitland.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@maitland.nsw.gov.au)

**Website** [mrag.org.au](http://mrag.org.au) | Subscribe to our Newsletter

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# Foreword

## **Brigette Uren**

Gallery Director

Maitland Regional Art Gallery

### *All the world's a stage*

– William Shakespeare

Maitland Regional Art Gallery's (MRAG) commitment to the *Hunter Red* project was always to lift the curtains on the vivacity of the Hunter Valley's art and history collections and to put a spotlight on how we as an inquisitive region of people engage with it.

In a city without a dedicated multi-arts performance venue, MRAG has attempted to fill this gap over the last few years by extending its visual arts offer to encompass dance and music; to connect visitors with the artists and their practice. Conceptually we approached this exhibition in the reverse: we began with the stage and an exploration of how the *performance* could inform the artworks selected. In this context you, the visitor, become the producer or director; the artworks, objects and culturally significant material are the performers. The stories come to life only through your participation in a symphony-like layering of experiences; not least is the opportunity to explore the Collection storeroom your way.

This exhibition highlights local identity in an international context with more than 70 artworks, referencing artists Maitland born and bred, as well as those from across the globe. I credit all the curators at the partner institutions, and Cheryl Farrell from MRAG, for bringing these intervals together in a never-before-told grand narrative.

The Gallery's raison d'être in offering this production is as much about encouraging our visitors to celebrate the drama of our respective collections, as much as it is to challenge our own preconceived ideas about our role as stewards of this Collection. For that reason, this is more than an exhibition to Maitland, this is a turning point for how we will care for, share and extend the Gallery's Collection for future generations, with many an encore to come.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Maitland Regional Art Gallery family of staff, volunteers and Members Committee acknowledge patrons Ray Wilson OAM and Patrick Corrigan AM, an extraordinary number of donors who have grown the Collection to more than 5000 artworks in the past decade alone, and to our many volunteers, who with Maitland City Council offer their continued support.



## Razzamatazz: the theatre of art in the Hunter Collections

Cheryl Farrell

Curator, *Razzamatazz*

Maitland Regional Art Gallery

*Razzamatazz* at Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) showcases the theatrically vibrant, collected artworks from our region. These artworks, when choreographed together as an exhibition, demonstrate that art can be presented to an audience just like a stage show: it can be fun, spectacular, dramatic, poetic and entertaining.

But *Razzamatazz* is more than just showing off. At MRAG, *Razzamatazz* represents the red curtain that is pulled back, as in the theatre, to create a constructed and fleeting reality which presents a temporary experience and a way of delivering artists' and performers' deeper stories, ideas and meanings.

The imagery and visual expression in this exhibition includes paintings, prints and puppets, historical projections and cinematic montage, posters and photography, nuance of sound, and theatrical narratives influenced by traditional theatre through to popular culture.

The earliest works in *Razzamatazz* are the vibrant colour woodblock prints, from the MRAG Collection, dating to mid-19th century Japan. These prints

feature Kabuki actors of the past dressed in elaborate costumes and dramatic makeup, performing in famous roles from traditional Kabuki plays. The most striking object, however, is the bound concertina book from 1891, the *Encyclopedia of Noh Plays*, one of the oldest forms of theatre that has been continuously performed since the 14th century. Within this book are fifty prints by artist Tsukioka Kōgyo (1869–1927), providing a record of classic Noh performances encompassing drama, music and dance.

A few centuries later, some of the greatest characters in theatre were created by William Shakespeare (1564–1616). Falstaff is regarded as Shakespeare's most famous comic figure, appearing in three of his plays. Famous Lake Macquarie artist William Dobell (1899–1970) painted *Falstaff – Anthony Quayle*, c.1951 after meeting the British actor Anthony Quayle during a tour of Australia with the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company. This painting from the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Collection is one of a number of portraits of Quayle as Falstaff painted by Dobell.



**Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892)**

'Kagamiyama Gonichi no Iwafuji' [Iwai Kumesaburo III] 1860  
woodblock print on paper

35.1 x 24.4cm

donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts  
Program by Anthony Renshaw, 2017

Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection



**Wendy Sharpe**

*Circus Oz* (detail) 2016

gouache and pencil on Chinese rice paper

55 x 750cm (book)

purchased by Maitland Regional Art Gallery with funds

from the Estate of Peter Elliott, 2017

Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

© the artist

Around the same time Dobell was painting Falstaff, a young teenager in Maitland named John Bell had begun adapting scripts from Disney, Orwell and Shakespeare; he then meticulously designed and illustrated miniature theatre sets on reams and reams of his father's discarded accounting machine rolls. He performed these plays for his family with a small home-built theatre maquette and these amazing scrolls, which are now held in the Newcastle Museum Collection. These productions, in which he played every character, were precursors to the actor's acclaimed adult roles with the Royal Shakespeare

Company in England, and the renowned Bell Shakespeare Company which he founded in 1990.

Not all artworks in *Razzamatazz* have their origins in traditional theatre. Popular culture has played muse for a number of Australian artists in this exhibition including Nell, Martin Sharp, Peter Kingston, Tony Albert, Wendy Sharpe and Tracey Moffatt.

Iconic Hollywood films are the primary source for the montage films created by Tracey Moffatt and Gary Hillberg. In *Love* (2003), from the Newcastle Art Gallery Collection, Moffatt composes a highly charged representation of love

and relationships, building tension, with a sprinkle of humour, with thoughtful editing and an intensifying soundtrack. Moffatt decontextualises and reframes classic cinematic scenes to present, in a contemporary context, narratives of romance, passion and heartbreak while also exposing darker themes within these old films including subjugation and violence against women.<sup>1</sup>

Sequins, light and colour are the starlets in the MRAG Collection works by Maitland's own Nell, with her glittering *Treasure* (2003) and the seven-metre long artist book *Circus Oz* (2016) by Wendy Sharpe.



**Nell**  
*Treasure* 2003  
 mixed media  
 38cm (h) x 23cm (diameter irregular)  
 purchased by Maitland Regional Art Gallery, 2004  
 Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection  
 © the artist



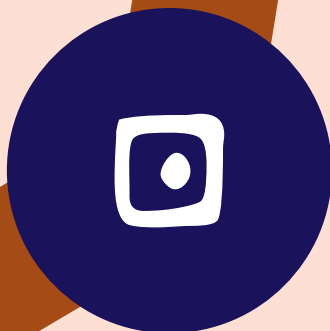
**Tracey Moffatt**  
*LOVE* 2003  
 looped Video with sound, 21 minutes  
 purchased by Newcastle Art Gallery, 2004  
 Newcastle Art Gallery Collection  
 © the artist

Travelling along this expanse of colour and movement, it is easy for the audience to conclude that Wendy Sharpe loves the circus with all its spectacle, magic and exuberance.<sup>2</sup> Sharpe created this work while immersed in rehearsals, performances and green rooms of Australia's contemporary circus troupe Circus Oz, working amongst the performers as artist-in-residence.

The sum of all these artists' works (and much, much more) is the exhibition *Razzamatazz*. So as the audience applauds, the artworks take a bow and *Razzamatazz* becomes a celebration of the razzle dazzle in red, taken from the storage racks of the collections of Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and Newcastle Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Montages: *The Full Cut* 1999–2015, exhibition room sheet, curated and developed by Artspace, Sydney, toured in partnership with Museums & Galleries of NSW.

<sup>2</sup> *Wendy Sharpe Circus*, 13 September – 8 October 2016, King Street Gallery.



## Corpus

Newcastle Art Gallery  
26 May – 22 July 2018

**Address** 1 Laman Street, Cooks Hill NSW 2300

**Telephone** 02 4974 5100

**Email** [artgallery@ncc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artgallery@ncc.nsw.gov.au)

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## Foreword

**Lauretta Morton**

Gallery Director  
Newcastle Art Gallery

The *Hunter Red* project represents a collaborative vision shared by Hunter-based cultural institutions Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up. Each institution and exhibition under the *Hunter Red* umbrella examines a different vision of our region. Newcastle Art Gallery's exhibition *Hunter Red: Corpus* is proudly part of this collection interchange and exchange.

*Corpus* celebrates and interrogates contemporary interpretations and representations of the bodily form and humanity. The works of art selected include paintings, photography, sculpture, works on paper and video works drawn from Newcastle Art Gallery's extensive collection; displayed with targeted loans from the collections of Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional Art Gallery and Newcastle Museum.

Suspended between abstraction and representation, *Corpus* explores the thematic elements of blood, life, death, reproduction and mortality. The exhibition brings together local, national and international artists, including Vernon Ah Kee, Selena Archibald, Donna Biles-Fernando, Anne Ferran, Francisco Goya, Bill Henson, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Nell, Sidney Nolan, Dani Marti, Patricia Piccinini, Prince of Wales (Mitbul), Julie Rrap, David Rosetzky and Judy Watson.

It has been a pleasure to collaborate with Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional Art Gallery and The Lock-Up on this exhibition project and I extend my sincerest gratitude to the staff for their enthusiasm and passion. I also wish to acknowledge Newcastle Museum and artists Juz Kitson and Braddon Snape for generously allowing us to borrow their collection objects and works of art for the exhibition.

The *Hunter Red* project opening weekend commences at Newcastle Art Gallery and is followed by exhibitions and programs at The Lock-Up, Maitland Regional Art Gallery and Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery. With so much on offer I encourage visitors to explore *Corpus*, *Re(A)d Earth*, *Seeing Red* and *Razzamatazz* at four exceptional cultural institutions.

## CORPUS: Abjection, Vanitas and Loss

**Sarah Johnson**

Curator, Newcastle Art Gallery

*Corpus* is defined as a collection of written texts, the entire works of a particular author or a body of writing on a particular subject. It is also an anatomical reference to a main body or mass structure.<sup>1</sup>

This exhibition interrogates the body across platforms such as painting, photography, sculpture, works on paper and video work. Over fifty works of art are unified by themes of the body represented in different and arresting ways – as controlled, out of control, stolen, the object or 'other'.

*Corpus* seeks to explore through art the multiplicity of ways and mediums that artists have represented the body over time. This can be via the temporality of the life cycle – birth, reproduction, death and via ceremony, destruction and displacement. The loss and absence of a body demonstrated through being 'stolen' and the dreadful outcomes of war, cultural dispossession and colonisation is also of key interest in the exhibition.

Exhibition objects include medical items from the former Royal Newcastle Hospital (Newcastle Museum Collection) with a selection of surgical instruments



**Patricia Piccinini**

*Meditations on the continuum of vitality (complex curls) 2014*

ink and gouache on paper

56.0 x 76.0cm

purchased 2015

Newcastle Art Gallery Collection

© the artist



**Selena Archibald and Donna Biles-Fernando**

*Bounnoun kinbirug – from her, away from her* (Awabakal language) 2012

possum skin, ink

75.0 x 100.0cm

loan, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Collection

© the artists

offset by a tableau of Bex boxes. A ubiquitous headache medicine in the 1950s and 1960s, Bex, with its familiar yellow and blue packaging, was also known for its catchy advertising slogan: 'Have a cup of tea, a Bex and a good lie down'. The pop art style packaging belies the sinister aspects of its key ingredients, which proved highly addictive and contributed to many deaths from kidney disease.<sup>2</sup>

Selena Archibald and Donna Biles-Fernando's evocative and emotional work of art *Bounnoun kinbirug – from her, away from her* (2012) (Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery Collection) discusses the stolen generation. A baby-sized possum skin cloak is nestled in an acrylic coolamon; the absence of a baby alludes to the loss of a child, grief and displacement. 'The tiny cloak awaits its – yet unknown – wearer, who may grow up in the full knowledge of his or her Aboriginal identity. It also sensitively expresses the potency of family connections.'<sup>3</sup>

Genocide is represented in Goya's masterful prints depicting the horrors of the war against the French in 19th century Spain, while Patricia Piccinini's video and works on paper draw on themes of reproductive technology. Newcastle-based artist Braddon Snape exhibits new work for the first time; sculpture that embraces the symbology and loaded theme of the crucifix in art.





**Juz Kitson**

*Thousands of words exist silently in your memory* 2017

hand blown glass, merino wool, rabbit fur, polyester string, marine ply and treated pine  
200.0 x 78.0 x 60.0cm

courtesy the artist and GAGPROJECTS / Greenaway Gallery

© the artist

Artists Fiona Davies and Julie Rrap both approach the respective deaths of their fathers through different yet highly personal means. Davies' photographic still and slow-motion video *Memorial/ Time of Death* (2008) (Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection) uses a common vanitas leitmotif of flowers slowly wilting in a gentle and powerful time sequence. '...This work becomes emotionally potent as the edges become ambiguous, conveying the concept that the time of death is fluid and there is often no one particular moment in which we can determine the moment of absence.'<sup>4</sup>

Julie Rrap's eleven channel video work *Porous Bodies* (1999) (Newcastle Art Gallery Collection) was also created in response to her father's death. Through a series of eleven film modules, Rrap draws upon visceral symbols of life and death. With the inclusion of her father's objects including his false teeth and a bird eating seed from the palette of the dentures, Rrap transforms the personal

and intimate body object into one of oddity and abjection.<sup>5</sup>

Emerging contemporary artist Juz Kitson constructs unique wall pieces that also examine psychoanalytic theories of abjection and ancient traditions of animism. Using ceramics, glass, textiles and animal materials, her luscious works of art dwell on enduring themes of life, sex and death. Kitson describes these alluring wall pieces as 'soft, tender, and inviting, luscious and satisfying, warm and comforting yet possibly dangerously threatening, they are something monstrous, abnormal and obscene yet oddly beautiful... classical in symmetry and strength, and powerful without words, these sublimated "beings" exist on their own terms.'<sup>6</sup>

The overarching exhibition theme of red is loaded with symbolism and tactile metaphors and *Corpus* brings together local, national and international practitioners not previously seen together at Newcastle Art Gallery.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, viewed 22 April 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/corpus>.

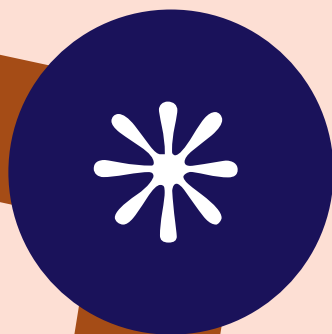
<sup>2</sup> School of Medical Sciences, University of NSW, 'Bex Powders', 2012, viewed 22 April 2018, [medsciences.med.unsw.edu.au/node/302500715](http://medsciences.med.unsw.edu.au/node/302500715).

<sup>3</sup> Selena Archibald and Donna Fernando, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, viewed 22 April 2018, <https://artgallery.lakemac.com.au/exhibitions/on-tour/selena-archibald-and-donna-fernando>.

<sup>4</sup> Cheryl Farrell, *Dark Edges of the Collection* exhibition catalogue, Maitland Regional Art Gallery, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Abjection is a term used by French psychoanalytic theorist Julie Kristeva about the fear of the body and bodily functions deemed 'inappropriate or impure'. In an art context 'Abject art is used to describe artworks which explore themes that transgress and threaten our sense of cleanliness and propriety particularly referencing the body and bodily functions', TATE Museum, Art Terms, viewed 22 April 2018, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abject-art>.

<sup>6</sup> Juz Kitson, *Shifting Manifestations*, GAG Projects/Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide, November 2017, viewed 22 April 2018, <http://gagprojects.com/index.php/artists/juz-kitson/shifting-manifestations-2017>.



## Seeing Red

The Lock-Up

26 May – 1 July 2018

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# Foreword

## **Dr Ann Hardy**

Historian, Co-ordinator, GLAMx  
Digitisation Lab & Hunter (Living)  
History Initiative

Embedded in the psyche of Newcastle and the region is a special character, a strong and passionate voice, a fighting spirit for the betterment of local and global communities. The region has been and continues to be a 'hot spot' for activism. Uprisings, riots and rebellious antics, activism for Aboriginal rights during the 1967 Referendum, campaigns for reform, some violent others peaceful, have shaped this place, the people and its politics.

The incursions by Europeans over two centuries brought social, political and environmental protests. Irish rebel convicts radically made their stamp on 'Coal River' when sent here in 1804 after a failed plot to overthrow rule and order in NSW. They worked the natural resources, the coal deposits at *Whibayganba* (Nobbys) and nearby cliffs, a perfect punishment and a kick-start to the colony's first profits. This set the scene for what followed: the burgeoning coal mining industry, the industrial actions, the strikes and early trade unionism of the 19th century. Patterns of 'seeing red' were similar to industrial regions abroad, including Newcastle's namesake in the UK. The fight for labour rights, union movements and the Trades Hall Council's commitment to a 'fair go' were politically foundational to the city's history throughout the 20th century.

Global links have always been present. Radical stories etched in the region's very fabric and in the landscape. Layered histories of unrest, disagreement, disputes and strikes repeated over many decades.

One of the first community environmental actions in Australia was a protest to save Nobbys headland in the 1850s. Authorities wanted the headland levelled, and chambers were made to place explosives to flatten Nobbys. However, the community successfully petitioned to save it from complete destruction. A significant site for Awabakal and Worimi peoples, *Whibayganba* (Nobbys) has been beloved by many throughout its history. It symbolises the old and the new, and has a beauty that hides the dramatic changes to the harbour environment and the destruction up river. Today the place continues as an active place of protest and environmental activism at a time when fierce debate about sustainable energy and health of the planet rages.

Novocastrians have a long tradition of fighting back. They have a special character, a strength not often seen in other metropolitan areas – a pride in shaping the lives of people and the place they live.

# Seeing Red

Madeleine K Snow

Project Curator, *Seeing Red*

*I see red, I see red, I see red...*

The song lyric by Split Enz songwriter Tim Finn from 1978 represents anger and passion. The *Seeing Red* exhibition of contemporary art and social history at The Lock-Up takes protest and the region's activist history as its cue. It includes works by Maggie Hensel-Brown, Dale Collier, Dean Cross, David Griggs, Doug Heslop, Raquel Ormella, Baden Pailthorpe, Mike Parr, Peter Speight, Tina Havelock Stevens, Mumu Mike Williams, and the remnants of a national protest by activist David Burgess.

What drives protest? When the photographs of torture from Abu Ghraib were published around the world, there was a public outcry. The images were a call to arms for artists such as Fernando Botero and Richard Serra. David Griggs used the hooded man connected to electricity cables as emblematic, his posed arms outstretched, conjuring a Christian martyr. The image was indicative of human rights abuses. Each of the artists in the *Seeing Red* exhibition explores protest in a range of media and contexts. The artworks address issues such as human rights, social justice, Indigenous rights,

environmentalism, socialism and feminism.

Raquel Ormella works across art and activism. She stitches protest slogans on banners and uniforms, conflating an image of power and control with a sign of protest. Maggie Hensel-Brown wrenches the much maligned craft of needlework into heroic dimensions with images that seduce and belie their innocent material. Her lacework is driven by a feminist narrative; the personal is political. Dale Collier uses installation and video to comment on oppressed perspectives and histories of protest and violence, while Doug Heslop utilises the visual language of protest. His work restages a protest as performance art, questioning the politics of power and control versus chaos and anarchy, informed by activist artists from the 60s and 70s including the Situationists and Fluxus.

In a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* real estate section, the commentator suggested we 'follow the artists', claiming that artists were the vanguard forging new frontiers (and in this context finding cheaper real estate)! This idea, although not new in art history, signals artists' capacity to



**Doug Heslop**

*Apathy Bores Me* 2015

performance installation for *Art Bender* at The Lock-Up, May 2015

courtesy the artist

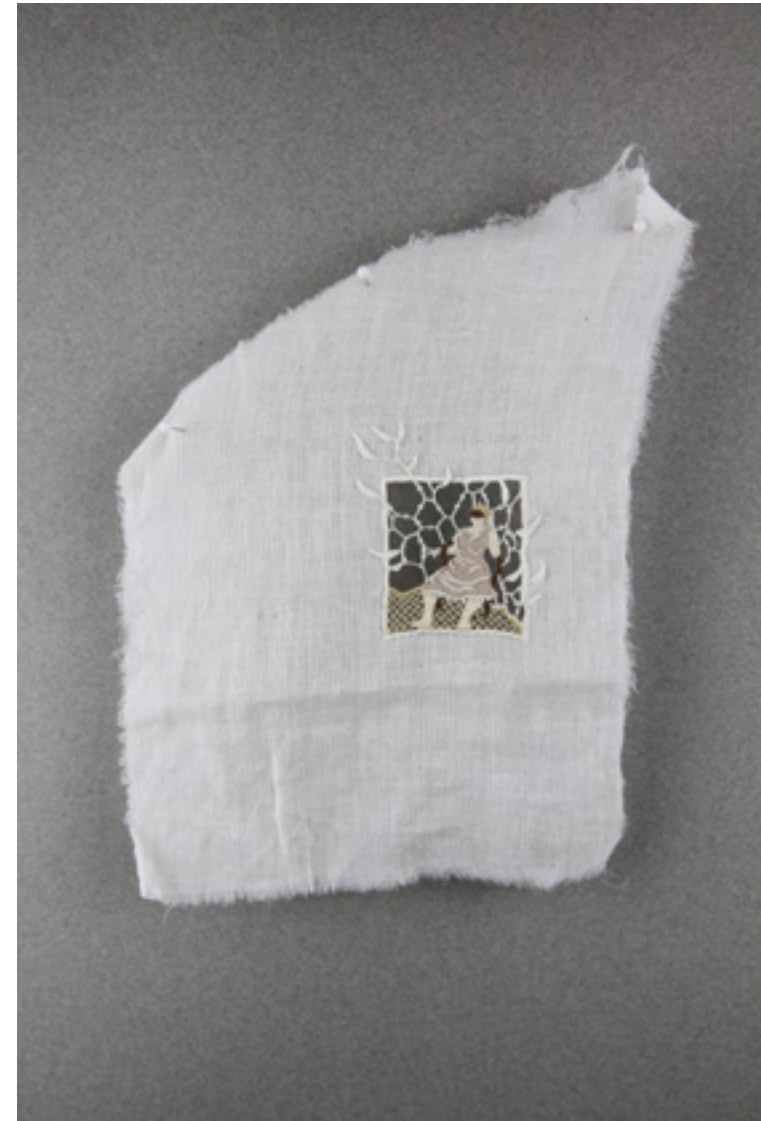
photograph Andrew Styan



**Mumu Mike Williams**

*Postbag Painting* 2017  
 synthetic polymer paint on canvas mail bag, wood,  
 kangaroo tendon, resin  
 120 x 141cm  
 courtesy the artist and blackartprojects  
 © the artist

observe, to raise dissent, to question, to call for change. For many, being an artist is synonymous with being an activist. High profile artists such as China's Ai Weiwei or Australia's Richard Bell make art as protest. So does Mike Parr. Parr has worked in the realms of performance art, conceptual art, printmaking and sculpture since the 1970s. In his work *I am sick of art* from 1977 he vomits each of the three primary colours.<sup>2</sup> The work is arguably performance art about art – 'l'art pour l'art.'<sup>3</sup> In 2002 when he performed *Close the Concentration Camps*, the rationale had shifted. Parr's work bore witness to the psychological trauma of asylum seekers cast as illegal immigrants. He re-enacted the voiceless refugees sewing



**Maggie Hensel-Brown**

*Self-portrait thinking exhausted thoughts about power, rage and despair (detail)* 2018  
 silk, cotton  
 100 x 1500cm  
 courtesy the artist  
 © the artist





**Tina Havelock Stevens**  
*BREAKWATER* (still) 2018  
 video  
 courtesy the artist  
 © the artist

their lips together to try to force the media and the Australian public to take notice, giving their protest longevity.

In the same way that advertising uses slogans and propaganda, artists hijack mass communication to convey messages of disruption and protest. Dean Cross, a First Nations transdisciplinary artist, appropriates images and language to comment on racism and Australian cultural life.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, Midnight Oil staged a protest before an international audience at the Sydney Olympics while performing 'Beds are Burning', their politically charged song about land rights. Writ large on their unsanctioned outfits were the words 'Sorry'. Likewise, in 2003 David Burgess managed to scale

the sails of the Sydney Opera House wearing his Dunlop Volleys to write the slogan 'No War' in red – a clear message that mirrored protests nationwide. Detractors saw it as an act of vandalism; others supported his action, including architect of the Sydney Opera House, Jørn Utzon, who later sent him a letter of endorsement.

The Yirrkala bark petitions presented to the Australian government in 1963 are acknowledged today as the beginnings of the land rights movement. The bark designs depicted the imagery of the Yolngu people with text in Gumatj and English languages; artworks connected to Country in the hands of politicians conveying a commanding message of protest. Indigenous artist Mumu Mike Williams continues this tradition. He declares, 'I was there at the land rights meeting at Itjinbiri (in 1981) when they signed the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act*.<sup>5</sup> In the spirit of activism he creates powerful images using found objects and Australia Post mailbags emblazoned with prohibitive warnings. His new messages acknowledge the irony of appropriating Australian government property in the face of more than two hundred years of cultural dispossession.

Baden Pailthorpe's video *Cadence III* (2013) depicts two opposing military forces, the Taliban and US soldiers. Conceivably this is Pailthorpe's riff on the famous slogan from the 1960s 'Make love not war'. The two simulated

soldiers from opposing sides create a kaleidoscopic dance of camouflage; their similarities becoming more obvious than their differences. A pacifist's fantasy or a meditation on resistance? Peter Speight's sculpture *War God* is part totem part fighter. Its stance is a gesture of defiance.

Tina Havelock Stevens channels the spirit of protest in her anarchic post-punk drumming on the site of the first environmental protest in Newcastle. She says, 'Drumming is historically a meditative device and it also whips people into frenzies. It can make people want to fight.'<sup>6</sup>

The Hunter Region is the context for *Seeing Red*. From the early trade union and grassroots labour movements, to women's liberation, to environmental movements and Indigenous rights, the Hunter has been at the forefront of activist movements. The Newcastle Local History Library has supplied images of protest such as May Day, marches against the Vietnam War, anti-nuclear rallies and protests at BHP. The Wilderness Society has shared its photographic collection of protests locally and nationally. Works have been borrowed from the Newcastle Art Gallery Collection and new work has been created for the exhibition. From this foundation, *Seeing Red* explores the visual language of protest, resistance and activism, and the idea that protest comes in many forms.



#### Baden Pailthorpe

*Cadence III* (still) 2013

HD digital video, colour, sound, 4:00 minutes

edition AP2

Newcastle Art Gallery Collection

purchased with the assistance of Newcastle Art Gallery

Society and Newcastle Art Gallery Guides 2015

© the artist, courtesy Sullivan + Strumpf

<sup>1</sup> Farrelly, E, 'Follow the artist for relief from Sydney's congestion and housing crisis', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 2018, viewed 4 April 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/follow-the-artists-for-relief-from-sydney-s-congestion-and-housing-crisis-20180322-p4z5sl.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Collection reference and full title from the series *The Emetics (Primary Vomit): I am Sick of Art [Red, Yellow and Blue]* (1977) by Mike Parr, courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery Melbourne and Sydney, date viewed 23 April 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/art-and-anxiety-works-of-artist-mike-parr-20110825-1jbu.html>.

<sup>3</sup> A phrase translated in English as 'Art for art sake' by the 19th century French critic Theophile Gautier.

<sup>4</sup> Dean Cross, viewed 23 April 2018, <https://www.deancross.com/about>.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, MM, *Kunpu Titutjara Always Strong* exhibition catalogue, August 2017, viewed 3 April 2018, [http://www.blackartprojects.com.au/mumu\\_mike\\_williams\\_2017.html](http://www.blackartprojects.com.au/mumu_mike_williams_2017.html).

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Tina Havelock Stevens, viewed 18 April 2018, <http://www.screen.nsw.gov.au/news/interview-with-tina-havelock-stevens-screen-video-art>.

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**Caution/s**

Members of Aboriginal communities are respectfully advised that a number of people mentioned in the texts in the preceding pages have passed away. Where there are spelling variations for Aboriginal words, either the most commonly used versions have been included or the preferred spelling supplied by the individual artists or communities.

A Hunter Cultural Collective project with partners  
Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, Maitland Regional  
Art Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery and The Lock-Up