

# Source Materials

2 December 2021 - 12 February 2022

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Artist Gordon Bennett (1955-2014) wrote in his 1996 text 'The Manifest Toe':

Freedom is a practice. It is a way of thinking in other ways to those we have become accustomed to. Freedom is never assured by the laws and institutions that are intended to guarantee it. To be free is to question the way power is exercised, disputing claims to domination. Such questioning involves our 'ethos', our ways of being, or becoming who we are.

Certain materials carry complex associations with homes, ancestries and identity. Against a landscape where urgent humanitarian concerns continue, specific knowledges tethered to those materials (narrated, embodied, remembered, transmitted, redeployed), have powerful significance and meaning.

Embracing rich traditions and cultural sources, this exhibition brings together the work of six artists whose philosophical approaches engage critically with their distinct political contexts.

They interlace a wide range of associations: from conceptual art and minimalism, politics, linguistics, and from knowledges and

skills considered artisanal and traditional.

Grounded in fundamental materials such as copper, iron oxide, soil, and integrating crochet, textiles and cloth, the works in *Source Materials* articulate matrices of culture throughout geologic, relative and cyclical time. The works of art purposefully draw on multilingual, dynamic registers, and affirm states of being as complex, nuanced, and connected within cultural continuums.

This exhibition is the result of a curatorial collaboration between Naomi Evans, GUAM curator, and Dr Carol McGregor, artist and Program Leader, Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art.

Artists:

Ómra Caoimhe (UK/Australia)  
Nicole Foreshow (Wiradjuri Nation, Australia), ektor garcia (Mexico/USA), D Harding (Bidjara, Ghungalu, Garingbal, Australia), Bronwyn Katz (South Africa) and Shireen Taweel (Australia)

# Ómra Caoimhe

b.1997 Worcestershire, United Kingdom

## *The sum of the parts* 2019

Hand-spun tussah silk thread and wool thread, wool cloth, wooden beads, nails, beeswax, oil, timber, loom parts and wooden spool

Courtesy of the artist

Ómra Caoimhe is an artist with British and Northern Irish heritage, currently living at Walyalup/Fremantle, Western Australia. Caoimhe's recent work has been influenced by French/Jewish philosopher Simone Weil (1909-43) and her symbolic conception of the universe as a piece of cloth in a dynamic state of 'becoming'.

Interested in the reflexivity of language and in post-minimal practice, Caoimhe's installations consider how a lexicon of materials and forms might make space for the expression of trauma. Throughout a body of work that addressed the history of her Irish Catholic family, and how adherence to a belief system also gathers specific cultural and political narratives, she has looked at cloth making and fibre arts to acknowledge and address family experience of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. There is a personal resonance here: Caoimhe's great-grandfather, Frank Smithers, was interned as a political prisoner in Northern Ireland; with Bobby Sands and others, he undertook hunger strikes in response to brutality. Family accounts recall a torn piece of cloth that while interned he once inscribed with an intimate message and religious iconography.

# Nicole Foreshew

Wiradjuri

b.1982 Sydney, Australia

## *Grounded* 2015

Photographic prints on Fujicolour Crystal Pearl Archive paper, acrylic. Commissioned for Wiradjuri Ngurambanggu, 2015.

Murray Art Museum Albury. Purchased 2016

Nicole Foreshew is an artist, writer and curator of the Wiradjuri Nation from central-western New South Wales (NSW), Australia; she currently lives on Gumbaynggirr Country, mid north coast, NSW. Her practice develops from cultural knowledge and different forms of learning where the relationship between the body and the earth is sacred. Foreshew's research into commercial mining, the relationships between artefacts held in numerous museums, and the ways in which minerals and land are valued in Aboriginal cultures, offers insight into the tensions and incompatibilities that continue on the Australian continent.

In each print of *Grounded*, Foreshew presents a select view of mining tailings left on the surface of her Country. The photographs are presented in a head-on, frontal view, as if eschewing artistic expressivity in favour of objectivity. In electing to print these images on high-quality pearlescent paper, Foreshew endows each particle of the earth with gleaming iridescence, attributing to each speck an inner power. Foreshew protects the surface with a thick layer of clear acrylic that mediates our viewing, like a reliquary protects a relic.

Foreshew has written: 'Nothing is more powerful or more ngayirr (sacred) than the relationship between the garraba, marrin (body, the human body) and dhaagun (earth, dirt, ashes, land, soil)'.

# Nicole Foreshew

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b.1982 Sydney, Australia

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Courtesy of the artist

# ektor garcia

b.1985 Red Bluff, California, United States

## *mitla* 2018

Steel frame, crocheted leather, waxed thread, brass, steel, copper, upholstery needle, vegetable fibre, glazed ceramic, crocheted plastic, t-pins

Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole, Toronto

ektor garcia is a Mexican/American artist who lives and works nomadically, mostly between Mexico and New York. He combines artisanal traditions from fine arts studio training, industrial fabrication techniques, queer culture references, and handicraft knowledges from the land of his ancestors in Michoacán and Zacatecas. His works have contended with personal and family histories through rich symbolism, including critiques of violence and the power structures that commodify relations with Mexican peoples. He considers that his works are never completed and reserves for his art the potential to transform.

In exploring his heritage, garcia has made frequent trips to Oaxaca in Mexico, researching the geometric forms in remnant pre-Columbian architecture. In *mitla* (2019) black thread is crocheted into a lace rectangle with teardrop-shaped forms that feature across the archaeological site of the title, also known as the 'place of the dead.' The spool of thread from which it is constructed is placed together with it, uncut—an indication that the work could continue to transform in the future.

# ektor garcia

b.1985 Red Bluff, California, United States

## *colgante II* 2019

Leather, timber, copper

Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole, Toronto

*colgante II* (2019) was created in Naarm/Melbourne, Australia, as ektor garcia was invited to work with facilities at the Victorian College of Arts in the lead up to the group exhibition *Dwelling Poetically: Mexico City, a case study* held in 2018 at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. After years of laborious, time intensive processes of hand-cutting of leather components for his sculptures, garcia was interested to explore the possibilities offered by laser-cutting technology.

# ektor garcia

b.1985 Red Bluff, California, United States

## *lederquilt* 2018

Leather, thread, sewing needles

Courtesy of the artist and Cooper Cole, Toronto

ektor garcia's exquisite and simultaneously unruly works extend an unconventional materiality from artisanal spheres, including crochet, leatherwork and ceramics, and from trade industries, such as copper wiring, and reinforcing steel (rebar). His forms, however, use the language of post-minimalism. From early explorations of studio pottery and skill-based traditions that are often feminised, garcia has drawn on the influence of Leonore Tawney (1907-2007) and Ruth Asawa (1926-2013).

He has also studied the aesthetics of leather club culture and continues to extrapolate on self-taught craft techniques found across various cultural terrains. Using lower case text for his name and in the titles of his work as a queering strategy, garcia often makes work that is portable and, as with knitting or crocheting, can be performed in public: just by being he unravels restrictive ideas of Latinx masculinity. As garcia explores his inclinations to work with a diversity of materials and techniques, *lederquilt* (2019) employs worn jackets and other leather items gifted to him to create a geometric quilt where the design links to a constructivist and non-objective lineage. This patchwork elicits a sense of pre-history, relationships, encounters and imagined narratives.

# ektor garcia

b.1985 Red Bluff, California, United States

Left to right:

*portal (essen)* 2018

Crocheted synthetic sinew, wood

*hombre cadena* 2019

Glazed ceramic, acrylic paint, timber

*crochet copper wire mesh* 2021

Crocheted copper

All courtesy of the artist

Construction through various chain making systems is a recurrent feature in garcia's work. Associative across histories and cultures, these symbols of violent restraint or precious links are used, for example, in the wood and earthenware sculpture *hombre cadena* (2019). Here, the outline of a human figure is drawn from chains made of fragile glazed ceramic. It leans against *portal (essen)* (2018), one of numerous crocheted 'portals' that garcia has made, and titled with the names of places that were part of their creation.

*crochet copper wire mesh* (2021) is among the sparest works to date, as garcia applies his intimate understanding of the ductile copper to form a light, double-layered work. On the surface, emblematic of transformation: is a small copper butterfly.



# D Harding

Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal  
b.1982 Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

## *Ten metres of couture silk stained with hematite* 2021

silk, beefwood (*grevillea striata*) tannin, hematite

All courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Working across various traditions, and with a particular focus on the culture of matrilineal Elders, D Harding's work participates in a cultural continuum while also referencing modernist aesthetics. While certain materials, familial narratives, and expressions of queer subjectivity have been incorporated since the earliest years of their practice, Harding's works also generate constructive conversations that are distinctly transcultural, bearing out visual genealogies sourced both from Central Queensland Aboriginal territories and post-minimalism. In their most recent work, Harding enacts a rematriation of practice, whereby their art is informed by an inheritance of matriarchal knowledge and power.

Harding's *Ten metres of couture silk stained with hematite* (2021) was first shown in their solo exhibition *There is no before* at Govett Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The exhibition title signals an important perspective on time, intentionally collapsing 'western' divisions between past, present, and future. Dyeing the bolt of silk with tannin hues from beefwood trees found on the side of a Queensland highway known as the Beef Road, along with hematite (an iron oxide), Harding applies a methodology learned through many oral accounts.

In a recent panel discussion, Harding proposed: 'Do the research, do the work, develop relationships, and the politics is always there. The politics will be there, the discourse will be there.'

# D Harding

Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal  
b.1982 Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

## *Gazing inwards at the sun 2017*

Oil, timber, petroleum jelly

All courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

The timber objects in this work are readily available: a survey peg aids in marking territory, while a garden stake supports growth.

In woodwork, various treatments are applied as a means of protection. Paint minimises weathering, while oils and waxes condition the material. Harding retrieves these wooden items from commercial sale and via aesthetic treatment and care, shifts emphasis to their being and significance.

The horizontal pencil line was drawn on the museum wall by the artist and through this act we can see how  $x$  and  $y$  coordinates are irrelevant to natural media.

# D Harding

Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal  
b.1982 Moranbah, Queensland, Australia

Floor, left to right:

## *Beautiful truth* 2017

Cast iron fence fittings, silicon

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

## *I know who I am* 2017

Cast iron fence fittings, silicon

Collection of Belle Charter and Daniel Boyd, Sydney

## *Know that I see you for what you really are* 2017

Cast iron fence fittings, silicon

The Bowerman Collection, Brisbane

In the mid-2010s, Harding's research into implements relating to their family history, both protective and useful, led to their making hardwood *nulla nulla* (parrying clubs) cast in black and translucent silicone. These *nulla nullas* were components in the installation *Body of Objects* (2016-17), later expanded for *documenta14* in 2017. The floor-based sculptures in *Source Materials* also feature silicone rubber artefacts, which slump and succumb to gravity over blunted cast iron spear shapes used widely for fencing property; Harding sourced these from an 1840s western New South Wales homestead.

# Bronwyn Katz

b.1993 Kimberley, South Africa

## *kx (ii)* 2019

Wire, string

Scheryn Art Collection, Cape Town

Bronwyn Katz is descended from Griekwa, southeast Asian and amaXhosa heritage on her maternal line and from her father, Griekwa, Batswana and Korana heritage. She lives in Cape Town. Katz's art incorporates sculpture, installation, video and performance with which she engages the concept of land as a repository of memory. Using found materials and the language of abstraction, Katz's approach is driven by formal concerns, while conceptually her artworks refer to the political context of their making, embodying subtle acts of resistance that draw attention to the social constructions and boundaries within those spaces.

In the sculpture *kx (ii)* (2019), Katz also uses material drawn from the earth in the form of processed metal wire, the strands billowing like a wall of rain within the museum, while at each end a small loop suspends a single white thread running the entire length of the work. Influenced by her research into the work of South African activist and linguist Benjamin Kats, who called for the preservation and use of endangered languages, Katz names the work *kx (ii)* for a vocal fricative transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet, a feature shared between several languages. It requires the wetness of the throat, but since it is a component of language rather than a word, the title is untranslatable. As Katz approaches art as a knowledge-making technique, *kx (ii)* invites an awareness that some knowledge is not, and perhaps is not meant to be, accessible to everyone.

# Bronwyn Katz

b.1993 Kimberley, South Africa

## *Wees gegroet* 2016

Single channel video, 16:9, colour, sound  
11:25 mins

Courtesy of the artist and blank projects, Cape Town

*Wees gegroet* (2016) was made in response to the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest movement that began on 9 March 2015, as well as to student protests against sexual violence towards women. Centring her figure as a Black womxn in the 'to-camera' performance, Katz combines various signifiers of protest and resistance. With her body she addresses the cardinal points of the compass, enacting clapping gestures, and making the Zulu sign *izwe* or 'land'. This non-verbal sign is a potent protest symbol in South Africa for its similarity with the broadly understood gesture of a handgun, thereby collapsing the sign for land with that of violence. Katz also recites the Roman Catholic prayer 'Wees gegroet' ('Hail Mary') in her mother tongue of Afrikaans, signalling the strength of prayer that her mother and grandmother called on in their form of resistance. Katz turns the last line of the prayer into a refrain, which accentuates her consideration of mortality. The lines translate to 'In the hour of our death, in the hour of our death.'

Wanting the support of her ancestors during her performance, Katz brought soil into the studio from near Kimberley where she was born, a region also known for massive open-cut mining operations. Katz recently wrote:

There are places that have previously felt important to me because they are the places where most of my known ancestors lived and were buried, but now understanding that I have ancestors as old as time, no specific place holds more importance than another ... the soil from here remembers the soil from there.

# Shireen Taweel

b.1990 Bankstown, New South Wales, Australia

## *tracing transcendence* 2018

Two channel video, 16:9, colour, silent  
10 mins

Courtesy of the artist

Bringing together complex aesthetics from her family's Lebanese Australian culture, Islamic faith and minimalist installation, Shireen Taweel has developed an oeuvre in which coppersmithing sits alongside explorations into sound, language, and architecture. As Taweel explains, 'Through a progressive application of the collected artisan techniques and a manipulation of the acts of making [my] works lead to possibilities of crosscultural discourse, opening dialogues of shared histories and fluid community identities.'

Taweel's two-channel silent video *tracing transcendence* (2018) takes slow aerial pans across the vast expanses of Arabana country beyond Marree, in South Australia. The soaring perspective offered by the camera performs a going beyond the ordinary, or a transcending, as referred to in the title; it never descends to touch the earth, where the significance of the site is complex. Maree is the place where the first known mosque was built in Australia by cameleers (referred to as 'Ghans'), as a locus for their spiritual practice in the years when they developed what is now known as the Birdsville Track. Built with vernacular materials including local timber, mud and corrugated iron, the roof was fashioned with date palm leaves grown in the region. While these evidentiary markers are not visible in the video, its gaze traces sand drifts, abstracted landforms and textures. In choosing prayerful silence, Taweel makes space for perceptual shifts, disorientations, and connections between spiritualities and places considered sacred across this Country, with an attitude of the utmost reverence.