

Alana Hunt: Surveilling a Crime Scene (and other examinations)

17 April – 17 May 2025

Alana Hunt is a non-Indigenous artist and writer whose work is shaped by relationships and conversations. Across multiple media—including film, video, photography, publications, and public events—she reveals the mechanisms of oppression and colonial violence disguised in everyday life and legislation. Her approach is a deeply personal and meticulously researched examination of non-Indigenous life, culture and society, that draws on her lived experiences on Gija and Miriwoong Countries in the east Kimberley region of Western Australia, where she lived for over a decade.

Hunt borrows the visual languages of Relational and Conceptual Art, and Institutional Critique traditions, with a focus on text, archives, legal documents and documentary photographs and footage, to hone in on the present. She uses information systems and hierarchies to reflect and critique bureaucratic modes of knowledge and information.

The centrepiece of this exhibition is her work *Surveilling a Crime Scene*, shot on Super 8mm film, which explores the materialisation of non-Indigenous life on Miriwoong Country in and around the town of Kununurra. By connecting historic and contemporary

footage, and exploring the enactment of failed agricultural enterprises, a dam, tourism and leisure, the work outlines how colonial power shapes contemporary life in this region.

This exhibition includes several other works that challenge viewers to recognise the ongoing nature of colonialism, such as *Nine Hundred and Sixty Seven*, where ex Rio Tinto CEO Sam Walsh AO recites the project summaries of 967 applications seeking legal permission to “destroy, damage or alter an Aboriginal site” under legislation that enabled the destruction of Juukan Gorge by his former employer.

Currently, Hunt is based on Gadigal Country in Sydney, where she works from the Clothing Store Artist Studios at Carriageworks. She is the 2024 recipient of the PICA x CAP Commission.

Surveilling a Crime Scene was supported by the Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund and Sheila Foundation’s Michela and Adrian Fini Fellowship. It premiered in a solo exhibition at the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin in October 2023. *A Very Clear Picture, In Plain Sight* and *Nine Hundred and Sixty Seven* were produced during a residency with the legal team of the Kimberley Land Council (2020-23) as part of SPACED’s Rural Utopias Program.



Nine Hundred and Sixty Seven 2020–21

digital video projection produced in PowerPoint, audio, 967 pieces of A4 paper, 2hr 41m

Courtesy of the artist

Since the Western Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act came into effect in 1972, over 3300 Section 18 applications, seeking legal permission to “destroy, damage or alter an Aboriginal site”, were processed between 1972-2021. Only around three had ever been declined.

This work chronicles the “purpose” summaries of 967 Section 18 applications processed between 2010-20 and is narrated by Sam Walsh, AO, the former CEO of Rio Tinto.

Rio Tinto was responsible for the destruction of a 46,000-year-old rockshelter in Juukan Gorge, in Puutu Kunti Kurrama Country in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, in 2020 during expansion activities of their iron ore mine. Rio Tinto had acted within the law. Widespread backlash turned the spotlight onto Western Australia’s outdated, inadequate and poorly coordinated cultural heritage legislation. The government promised reform, new legislation was rushed through Parliament but repealed after months due to a group of non-Indigenous landowners claiming the new legislation caused “stress, confusion and division”. Currently, a modified version of the 1972 Act remains, permitting destruction on essentially the same terms as it has for the past 50 years.

A Very Clear Picture 2021

Giclee print on archival matte paper (triptych)

Courtesy of the artist

These hastily scribbled notes were written by the artist on A4 sheets of scrap paper, while Sam Walsh AO, former CEO of Rio Tinto narrated over 2h 41m without pause, the 967 summaries of Section 18 applications processed between 2010-20 seeking permission to destroy, damage or alter an Aboriginal site via the WA Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972). Hunt was trying to capture a word or phrase from every summary he narrated, and thus forge a map, or a very clear picture, of colonisation today.

Collectively *Nine Hundred and Sixty Seven*, *A Very Clear Picture* and *In Plain Sight* examine the WA Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972); which is essentially a legal pathway for destruction under the guise of protection. These works examine the language employed by non-Indigenous Australia through legislation and its surrounding bureaucracy. These works were made with the guidance of the Kimberley Land Council and their legal team via a residency that was made possible via SPACED's Rural Utopias program for socially engaged art (2019-23).

Artist Acknowledgments: Profound thanks to Alex Romano, Justine Toohey, Tyronne Garstone, Antony Watson, Chris Griffiths, Anna Crane, Danie Mellor, Sally Chessell, Jasmin Stephens, Kush Badhwar, and Tanvi Mishra. And all of it, for the late Mr R. Peters and Mr A. Griffiths.

A Very Clear Picture: A collection of work, words and sources (Vol i and ii) 2023

Bound folders, A4 paper

Courtesy of the artist

This collection of words, work and sources took shape during Alana Hunt's residency with the legal team of the Kimberley Land Council examining Western Australia's Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972) as part of SPACED's Rural Utopias program.

These volumes contain Alana's writing on her process, documentation of work produced, and material sourced via Freedom of Information applications alongside other material available on the WA government's website in 2021 but removed once the legislation came under public scrutiny sometime between 2021-23.

This is at once an art work, an archive and a subversion of the way power holds information. Three editions have been produced. One sits in the Kimberley Land Council's archive. The others continue to circulate through exhibitions, libraries, legal chambers and the like.

In Plain Sight 2023

Text debossed by hand on 67 pieces of A4 paper, 72 colour photographs, pins, and vinyl

Courtesy of the artist

Sourced via Freedom of Information applications, *In Plain Sight* presents every word—arranged in alphabetical order and debossed into the paper by hand—from a completed Section 18 application form that sought to damage an Aboriginal site in northern WA in order to “build a residence and access to residence”. This application was approved by the Minister.

Developed during a residency with the legal team of the Kimberley Land Council, this is one part in a suite of works that examine the language used by non-Indigenous Australia in legislation and bureaucracy—as Hunt says, this is language that appears clean on paper but wreaks havoc in the world.

Under the Western Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972, Section 18 allows landowners to seek Ministerial consent for activities that might cause destruction, damage or alterations to an Aboriginal site, requiring a landowner to give notice to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Committee (ACHC), and the Minister must make a decision within 28 days of receiving the Committee's recommendation.

Surveilling a Crime Scene 2023

Super 8mm film transferred to digital file: 21:58 minutes, colour, sound, 4:3

Courtesy of the artist

Direction, script, camera, editing, narration: Alana Hunt

Sound: Anna John

Voice recording: David Akerman

Colour correction: Peter Hatzipavlis

Supported by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund and Sheila Foundation's Michela and Adrian Fini Fellowship

Shot on Super 8mm film and drawing on a decade of living in the region, in this work Hunt explores the materialisation of non-Indigenous life in and around the town of Kununurra, on Miriwoong Country in the Kimberley region, Western Australia.

This region was developed by members of some of Australia's most prominent settler families; the Forrest family from the 1870s, and the Durack family from the 1880s though the town of Kununurra was not established until 1961. Following this, pastoral and agricultural enterprises led to the destruction of a mountain to create a dam, flooding Miriwoong Country with a body of water more than twenty times the size of Sydney Harbour.

Surveilling a Crime Scene is a compelling portrait of how colonial power underlies every aspect of daily life in the town of Kununurra. And by extension, Australia. It was awarded Best Documentary Short Film at the Sharjah Film Platform 7, and has screened as part of Revelation Perth International Film Festival, Antenna Documentary Film Festival, Dharamshala International Film Festival and the Kununurra Picture Gardens, in addition to numerous exhibition contexts.

Artist Acknowledgments: Special thanks to Chris Griffiths, Kush Badhwar, Sanjay Kak, Khaled Sabsabi, Sally Chessel and Helen Grace.

Guarded 2021-24

35 mm film photography printed on archival Canson Platine Rag, mounted on Dibond (triptych)

Courtesy of the artist

This triptych is from a larger suite of photographs taken of the abandoned mine site on Gija Country that belongs to Mabel Juli and her late brother Mr R. Peters. It was through the illegal destruction of this site that the artist first encountered the impacts of the WA Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972).

Hunt explains:

Granite miners had cut through Gija Country, WA, without hesitation. Flattening the land to build their camp and take granite. But due to what could be described as an extraordinary rarity, the mining operations were not allowed to continue. They fled swiftly - leaving a mess and that strange sense of reckless entitlement and fear that characterise the settler-colonist.

There were pieces of Country that had been sliced through like a piece of cheese. And the camp sat like a ghost town - desecrated Country now occupied by heavy tractors and generators, dongas and beds, beer and blankets, mini bar-fridges and vitamins. All abandoned.

At the edge of the miner's camp was this Bauhinia tree - Goonji in Gija - guarded by a fence. It embodies the absurd compartmentalisation of the settler-colonist's world view.

A Delicate Balancing Act 2020-23

35 mm film photography printed on archival Canson Platine Rag (framed) edition of 5 + AP

Courtesy of the artist

A Delicate Balancing Act is a collection of 12 images taken at the base of the dam wall at Lake Argyle on Miriwoong Country, an area where tourists flock to in buses, caravans and boats.

Hunt says:

The images embody the underlying entitlement, violence and fragility of this apparent engineering feat that tourists marvel at. Here is a delicate balancing act birthed through the destruction of a mountain that holds a body of water more than twenty times the size of Sydney Harbour. This pile of stones has stood for a little over fifty years. But what is that in the scale of deep time? Someday the wall will fall.

All the violence within: Conversations and Correspondence 2022

Medium: digital print, full colour, hard cover, 147pp / \$112

Plus photocopied bootleg edition, 2025 / \$24

Courtesy of the artist

The exchanges that unfold within this book were spurred by photographs from works that Alana Hunt exhibited in The National 2021—*All the violence within and In the national interest* (2019-21). While not always discussed directly the images are, in each case, a common point of departure—forging paths to destinations at once specific and expansive with people who form part of a relational and creative constellation for the artist—family, friends, colleagues:

- *Trespassing with David Newry and Chris Griffiths*
- *Relations with Narelle Jubelin and Diana Wood Conroy*
- *Gluttony with Mona Bhan*
- *Impossibilities with Jazz Money*
- *Tensions with Kush Badhwar*
- *Wit with Ross Gibson*

“Collectively, we speak through agendas of development and colonisation and leisure, coursing through our lives and the places we hold dear. We speak of viruses and airports and tourism, of altered ecosystems and large dams and jinns and police. We speak of gold mines and gravel pits and missed communications, of interminable fallacies and important impossibilities. We speak of simple joys and the beauty of perseverance, of forensic accountability and the value of imagination. In the midst of all these threads and signalled with most urgency, is a persistent consideration of ourselves on this Country.” Alana Hunt

Surveilling a Crime Scene 2023

offset print in black ink, soft cover, 186pp / \$36

Courtesy of the artist

Like a flip-book of sorts, the moments held in this small book are collated from *Surveilling a Crime Scene*, a film that examines the materialisation of non-indigenous life on Miriwoong Country. These threads forge a tapestry that recognises colonisation not as history but as a continuous and present violence, one that is deceptively ordinary.

The book features an essay by novelist and critic Fiona Kelly McGregor.

Paper txt msgs from Kashmir 2009-11 (bootleg 2025)

bootleg photocopy, soft cover, 177pp / \$24

Courtesy of the artist

Paper txt msgs from Kashmir began in December 2009 as a kind of tongue-in-cheek response to the Indian government's ban on all pre-paid mobile phone services in Kashmir on the basis of 'security'. Virtually overnight hundreds of thousands of mobile phone users – people conducting business, college students, families, distanced lovers were left without means of telecommunication. The monitoring, blocking and banning of phone services is just one of the many ways in which India intervenes into, disrupts and desecrates the rhythms of daily life in Kashmir.

Through the distribution of an “alternative communicative tool” dejected pre-paid subscribers were invited to write a “paper-txt-msg”, to anyone real or imagined, about anything they would like to write in a txt msg but were suddenly unable to do so.

The publication contains a collection of writing from Kashmir by Suvaaid Yaseen, Majid Maqbool, Zooni Tickoo, Iram Razzaq, Rahim Seab, Gowhar Fazili, Uzma Falak and Tanveer Ahmed.

*A Very Clear Picture (A4 photocopy,
edition of 967, supplied 460-479/967)
2022*

photocopy on A4 paper, 21cm x 29.7 cm / \$9.67

Courtesy of the artist

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Cups of nun chai

published by Yaarbhal Books, New Delhi, 2020 (reprinted 2021, forthcoming third edition 2025) \$45

Courtesy of the artist

Cups of nun chai (2010-ongoing) records the sharing of one hundred and eighteen cups of nun chai, and just as many conversations. Each cup was a part of a growing memorial for one hundred and eighteen people killed in the protests that shook the Kashmir valley during the summer of 2010. In these exchanges the political unfolds through a profoundly personal experience, and events, places and sentiments that are often obscured from view are given breathing space.

Spanning the spheres of contemporary art, literature, social-science and journalism, *Cups of nun chai* is a poignant act of memorialisation—a means of remembering, reading and reminding. Adroit, and shot through with an extraordinary, even stubborn, compassion, it reflects on Kashmir, but also on nation-making and colonisation, and on power and violence. The histories, political force and grief behind this work emerge gradually, but with great sensitivity. And eventually with an unexpected degree of ferocity.

967 x Northbridge Plaza 2023

Digital video 1m34s, colour, sound, 16:9

Courtesy of the artist

Nine Hundred and Sixty Seven was played on the screen at Perth's Northbridge Plaza, daily throughout November 2023.