

# EXTRA! EXTRA!



Other rockies carry on. Problem: rockies earning \$20 a day hanging over cliffs in rope slings to stitch strips of polyweave together, staple ropes to rocks. Christo aware of this expense, upset when rockies pause to rest. Rockies upset that Christo upset — cliff-scaling uphill work.

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**EXTRA!EXTRA!** is published at the Art Gallery of NSW, which stands on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. We the editors and contributors to this artwork acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this Country, and we acknowledge that sovereignty to this Land was never ceded.

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From 9 November to 15 December, Lucas Ihlein and the Rizzeria Collective take over the Kaldor Studio at the Art Gallery of NSW with **EXTRA!EXTRA!** – a weekly newspaper which responds critically and playfully to Making Art Public.

Each week, editor-in-chief Lucas Ihlein and special correspondent Ian Milliss will be joined by special guest writers and artists, who will work with the Rizzeria team to print the newspaper in situ.

Visitors to the Kaldor Studio are invited to write letters to the editor – and a selection of letters will be featured in each week's edition of **EXTRA!EXTRA!**

Throughout the run of **EXTRA!EXTRA!** in the Kaldor Studio, you can also participate in a range of fun workshops and have a go at making a risographic print yourself!

#### CONTENT DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the pages of **EXTRA!EXTRA!** are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or official policies of the editors, Kaldor Public Art Projects or the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

We welcome responses to our articles, which can be submitted by writing posting a physical Letter to the Editor in the gallery space, or online at [extra-extra.press](mailto:extra-extra.press)

#### SUPPORTERS



# EXTRA CONTEXTUAL

One of our principal objectives in producing this newspaper has been to present context, hence the name **EXTRA!EXTRA!**.

But there are many different types of context.

In this issue Juundaal Strang Yettica continues her reflections on how projects can be read from an indigenous viewpoint. She sees Jonathan Jones' Project 32 *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* (2016) as a major turning point in Kaldor Public Art Projects. The ethical processes underpinning Jones' work should lead to an acceptance that all Australian cultural activity happens on Aboriginal Land. Strang Yettica hopes this will grow respect for Country and traditional protocols, and guidelines about how artists, especially land artists, should behave in relation to the Land. So do we.

In a wide-ranging survey of contemporary media coverage of *Wrapped Coast* (1969) Wendy Bacon uncovers the sad reality of the media's treatment of Aboriginal interests at the time. Some art critics welcomed *Wrapped Coast* even though the media at first treated it like a joke,

then became increasingly respectful. However, the only mentions of the traditional owners in the nearby area of La Perouse were racist and without any consideration that they might have a legitimate interest in the area.

These two KPAP projects show that there has been progress in public attitudes even if there is still a long way to go. The fact that *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* was the first Kaldor Public Art Projects commission by an Australian artist is a tribute to the way that the organisation, like all good art, has continued to learn from evolving ethical relations in contemporary society.

Malcolm Whittaker's article on the precarious nature of being an artist labouring in the art world's gig economy also captures the spirit of our times. A continuing position of this newspaper has been that the collapse of the advertising base in mainstream journalism has pushed journalists into a freelance gig economy. This new economy resembles the precarious employment structures that have always existed in the art

world. Regular employment is increasingly for the few, while the rest make do as best they can.

Malcolm reflects on the shared problems of different art ventures, from the Cementa festival in Kandos, to this newspaper, to the AGNSW. We thank KPAP for agreeing to the publication of various details about the administration of the Tino Sehgal piece that would normally be regarded as confidential. We feel that this transparency should be shown by all organisations operating in the artworld.

Ian Milliss



Ian Milliss is an artist who worked on *Wrapped Coast*.

# VISITORS FROM THE WEST

Last Tuesday students from Bourke Public School and Wilcannia Central School travelled eleven hours from inland western NSW to join us at the Kaldor Studio. Bourke and Wilcannia are both engaged in *Your Public Art Project* – an upcoming initiative by Kaldor Public Art Projects. Connecting with primary and secondary schools across NSW, the program has extended its engagement with students from Dubbo, Parkes, Western Sydney, and Sydney's inner west.

The Kaldor Public Art Projects' physical archive serves as an introductory tool for the program, enabling students to understand diverse approaches to public art-making. The gallery recently held a major program launch and student showcase event, inviting student representatives and teachers from participating schools to discuss their own art project.

Wilcannia Central School students recently worked on a temporary mural on the main street of their town. Their mural explores their cultural connection to the Baarka (Darling River), and embodies their concerns about sustainable water management.

Lleah Smith is the assistant manager in education with Kaldor Public Art Projects, and throughout the program she was responsible for facilitating learning resources and conducting workshops with school students and staff members. She describes this project as being one of the highlights of her career.

"What you see in Wilcannia and Bourke's responses have a real connection to land. And the landscape was a strong theme in their work because they're experiencing the severity of the drought."

"When I was talking to some of the students in regional towns, they were saying that they wanted to be a part of these kind of student protest marches, but they don't have that same sort of space to be able to be as politically active," Smith says.

At the **EXTRA!EXTRA!** headquarters, Alisa Croft from the Rizzeria invited pupils to sit at our workshop table, providing them with a sheet of black cardstock and a single lead pencil. Students drew totems or symbols that could be found in their mural, also reflective of Indigenous identity and culture. Drawing various native animals, pupils started cutting



out their individual pieces to be placed, scanned and ultimately printed for themselves to take back home. Surrounded by a rich Australian landscape, emus, eagles, yabbies, lizards and fish swarm across the pages creating a vibrant composition expressing their Aboriginality. Selecting their colours, they opted for red, green and yellow resembling deep earthy tones symbolic of the landscapes they call home.

Wilcannia Central School is located in isolation, in the Broken Hill district, with 90 per cent Aboriginal enrolment. The school itself is committed to closing the achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Wilcannia is home for many Indigenous residents, mostly from the Barkindji nation. According to the 2016 census, Wilcannia had a population of 549. The environment is border-line semi-arid to desert, consisting of landscapes adapted to flooding.

Located 800km north-west of Sydney, Bourke is the traditional country of the Ngemba people. Bourke Public School aims to provide its students with knowledge and skills to help children operate effectively as members of society now and in the future. Bourke also has a hot semi-arid climate, with a minimal amount of rainfall throughout the year. As of 2016 Bourke had a population of 1,824 people,

and the town itself represents the edge of the settled agricultural districts and the gateway to the outback that lies north and west of Bourke.

After our riso press printed 30 copies per school group, we rolled their individual prints up and invited them to take them away to share with their friends and family. They were then whisked away for a tour of the Yiribana Gallery supported by Indigenous educators from the AGNSW.

*Your Public Art Project* is still progressing, and is a continual process of questioning and reflecting.

"Each school responds to key concerns of their students and their community and are able to tailor their responses to *Your Public Art Projects*, to be most meaningful for their students and their wider community which is really special," Smith says.

*Your Public Art Projects* is taking place in 2020, and the Kaldor Public Art Projects team are currently developing relationships with schools who want to get involved.

Amber Jones



Scan here to find out more about the program.



Amber is an interdisciplinary performance artist, theatre-maker, and journalist





# ALL IS CREATED ON COUNTRY

Hello, how are you? I've been waiting for you... Come with me...

Let's step away from the hype of the boxed land-art archives for a moment. Come with me... Let's sit awhile with Jonathan Jones' *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* (2016). Here, borrow my glasses, maybe you can glimpse this moment through my eyes...

I deliberately have not spoon-fed a description of the extensive foundational processes behind Jonathan Jones' artwork here because I think that is for you to investigate and learn. I think the integrity of your engagement with his work, in this place, upon this land, today, sits with you.

When I sit with this work, the archive is memory. *Barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* is a gathering of ancient custodianship, knowledge and traceable intersecting histories. The work is woven within our social order, a non-linear place where the past, present and future meet, re-meet and will always meet. It resonates with me as a most personal and yet very public interaction with our ancestors, memory, history and

our contemporary social processes, inviting us all to meet.

To my ways of seeing, *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* reads like an invitation to engage with and be immersed within our own social archaeology, whether you're Indigenous or not. The work says, sit with it all - the ancient and the sacred of this land and its custodians - as much as sit with all the truth of colonisation here, because there is no place left to hide colonialist denial or amnesia.

When I am with this work, I see thousands of years of spiritual and cognitive social cohesion wrapped within environmental custodianship. Interrupted by invasion, not forgotten but enduring and resilient in this modern world. In Jonathan Jones' work I see remembering. I see remembering Culture and its revitalisation here and now, as much for the future as the past. Right now, we are sitting at another marker where the past, present and future are interwoven and intersecting.

*Barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* sits with me, most beautiful and confronting, magnificent and mournful... ancestral memory, history, documen-

tary and prediction, simultaneously. It sits proud on the ground with me beside it, inter-weaving the ancient and contemporary, speaking to me about Indigenous dual consciousness, fatigued but resilient, both fragile and powerful.

Now let's step back into the room of archived boxes of land-art and consider them within the context of *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)*. I see Jones' work as an invitation, maybe even a benchmark that challenges land-art makers to absorb and accept that, no matter where they create, they always create on Country.

To my way of thinking, what is required has always been required and cannot be avoided. These are demonstrations of artistic accountability and respect for the land and its traditional custodians. Without these demonstrations and markers of respect, artistic and aesthetic integrity are weakened.

So here in the big city, how can land and eco-artists acknowledge and demonstrate respect for Country? What protocols exist that they can follow? Who and what guidance or permissions could be sought to raise the integrity of artistic practice here? I realise these are not small questions but demonstrating respect for Country is no small thing. With these big questions in mind, I did some research, some reading and asked the guidance of mentors and what I have come up with is a circle.

That circle reflects the circle of our walk together this week. Indigenous people have been

speaking respect for a long, long time. Answers to today's questions are within reach, in front of you and right beside you. The opinion I sit with today is that respect and accountability for where we are and the integrity of artistic engagement starts with self-responsibility, the artist, gallery, the agency and the art community. Responsibility is not for me to spoon-feed. Responsibility for learning sits with art-goers and land-artists alike, to be simultaneously humble and brave. Look, listen, investigate and ask the questions cross-culturally, across disciplines and generations. To my way of thinking, this would be a starting point for respectful artistic and socio-ecological engagement with our collaborative and joint responsibilities.

Until next time, I will leave these ideas with you...

**Juundaal Strang Yettica**



Juundaal Strang Yettica:  
"I don't know much about much but the learning keeps me alive!"

**IMAGES:** Kaldor Public Art Project  
32: Jonathan Jones, *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)*, Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, 17 September - 3 October 2016, © Jonathan Jones, Photo: Pedro Greig

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# LIVE ART & THE GIG ECONOMY

**“Oh, this is so contemporary”**

I am being paid thirty dollars an hour to sing and dance whilst dressed as a gallery officer from Monday to Saturday for the *Making Art Public* exhibition.

**“Oh, this is so contemporary”**

I am being paid forty dollars an hour to sing and dance on Sundays.

**“Oh, this is so contemporary”**

I am being paid two hundred and fifty dollars to write here and now for *Extra!Extra!*

**“Oh, this is so contemporary”**

I probably shouldn't be writing at all.





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Doing this singing and dancing is supposed to remain a completely ephemeral experience for gallery goers. It is supposed to leave no trace. It is the 2005 work of artist Tino Sehgal, who sold the score to John Kaldor in 2014 for Public Art Project #29. Kaldor then gifted the score to the Art Gallery of NSW, where I sing and dance the work once more. Or that is my understanding at least. I am but an “interpreter” of Sehgal's “constructed situation”, which seeks to imbue interpersonal relations into the visual art world.

However, given Sehgal's successful selling of the work within a visual art market, I wonder whether the mode of production of this constructed situation, as with the outsourcing of labour within the delegated performances of many of the Kaldor Public Art Projects (including this here newspaper), is organised to produce a problematic sense of surplus value. It is problematic because the surplus value never belongs to us as the largely unacknowledged workers of the work, or who *are* the work, and always belongs to the capitalists higher up the food chain, whether that be John Kaldor, or artists such as Tino Sehgal, Marina Abramovic (Public Art Projects #27 and #30, for which I also “performed”), Santiago Sierra (Public Art Projects #22 and #27), or even our **EXTRA!EXTRA!** editor-in-chief Lucas Ihlein.

It is often espoused that these sorts of delegated performance works offer critiques of capitalism and the labour relations therein. In the case of Sierra, the exploitation of the labour force is a deliberate strategy to create unsettling social sculptures that make these problems palpable. In the case of my labour for Sehgal, I am but a singing and dancing shift-worker, both enacting the work and acting as the work. “That looks like a fun job. How much are you getting paid to

do that?”, gallery goers often ask in between our endless routines during gallery open hours, and then offer a sympathetic look when I answer.

Whether or not our salary is commensurate is possibly contingent on how much Sehgal himself was paid for the work. Given the lack of documentation on the work, it is rather difficult to find an answer to this question. About fifty thousand dollars is the median guess from the other interpreters when I quiz them on what they reckon. Sehgal cleverly creates such speculation around his work through his anti-documentation anti-material stance. On one level, this stance does indeed privilege a live encounter with the ephemeral work as paramount, and there is nuance to the pronoun *this* being “so contemporary”. *This* refers to the immediate moment of encountering the work, in the upmost contemporary present, although a parody of contemporary art is probably the first and foremost reading for most viewers.

On another level, the stance perpetuates a self-mythologising for Sehgal and a sense of commodity fetishism for his ephemeral constructed situations, disconnected from their actual use value. What in reality is a relationship between people becomes a relationship between the situation as a “thing”, not so different from any other physical artwork in the context of commodity fetishism that produces surplus capital for the higher ups. Sehgal's achievement of this is both significant and impressive, as is the staging of the work by Kaldor, but the achievement has also become a sort of kool-aid to be sipped in awe of the artist. Could it be that in actual fact, Sehgal's desire for zero documentation of his work is strategic, because its documentation would expose a slightness to his situations - a similarity to a bit of a silly flash mob in this case, and possibly impact upon their fiscal value in the process? In any case, this mystery is harder and harder to maintain.

What is truly contemporary now is incessant documentation. In this reprise of *This is so contemporary* for *Making Art Public*, it has become nearly impossible to police gawking patrons from recording the work on their smartphones, technology that was not so readily available when the work was first presented at the Venice Biennale in 2005, and this behavior has rapidly increased since the presentation of the work at Art Gallery NSW in 2014. Viewers now regularly shun

the “interpersonal encounter” proposed, and opt instead to video these singing and dancing “officers” when they begin the act of the work in the gallery. Ironically, this perhaps makes them even more active as viewers than their mere triggering of this singing and dancing.

What is equally contemporary as the incessant documentation of life to be lived out later is the ever-increasing casualisation of the workforce for a gig economy, which results in a need to work multiple jobs at once. I am writing this article in the town of Kandos (mid-west NSW), where I am skiving off being so contemporary for a couple of days to work as a participating artist of the *Cementa* festival. And I am also, right at this minute, moonlighting from my *Cementa* duties to generate this content for **EXTRA!EXTRA!**

My practice as an artist is typically predicated on providing context rather than content, through a process of appropriating and repurposing social forms for the public. Examples of my works include support groups for ignorance and dog walks for deceased and departed canine friends. As per a motto I have come to adopt, “these works aren't about something but rather *are* something”, and the aboutness takes shape in the way the interpersonal relations play out in the context created.

The social form I have appropriated for the *Cementa* festival is that of the handshake. For the commission to make a work in Kandos, I am looking at what might constitute meaningful community engagement by endeavoring to shake hands with every resident of the regional town. There are echoes in the work of both Mierle Laderman Ukeles shaking hands with the New York City sanitation department, and with *Making Art Public* artist David Capra's work for the first *Cementa* festival in 2013. Ukeles' handshaking took place over an extended period of time (and was meticulously documented). Capra's handshaking was in part facilitated by a highly visible costume.

My handshaking has taken place in the everyday flow of life in the town over the course of the festival, barely registering as art. I have self-consciously used the ordinary handshake as a live art activity in an attempt to open up sincere interpersonal relations around the act. I would have preferred not have documented my undertaking of the act at all, but do not have the clout of Sehgal to stave off pressure from the likes of festival media or this here newspaper. *Cementa* did give me the

agency to produce any work I liked for the festival, in response to a weeklong residency in Kandos.

Such agency is incredibly rare. What helped me refine my approach to such an open brief was to consider what would be commensurate with the artist fee of one thousand dollars offered by the festival for the gig. Festival co-director Alex Wisser was incredibly understanding of such a position. Most of this fee consequently went back into the regional town over the course of the festival as my everyday spending. I was happy for this to be the case, in part because it felt like I was working for myself. It felt like my labour was producing surplus value for myself and the festival in relatively equal measure. I am also happy to accept that this cannot always be the case, and for this reason I agree to be paid thirty dollars an hour to interpret for Sehgal. Or am I interpreting for John Kaldor, or the Art Gallery of NSW? This confusion is a bit of a problem.

What would make me happier is greater transparency regarding all the labour relations we engage in as artists. What would make me happier still is to move from what *is* (or *was*) so contemporary, and towards what *could* or *should* be so contemporary. Let's reimagine (or *re-interpret*) ways of being together, as I believe art should. In so doing, let's strive to quantify the value of artists labour, especially those who produce intangible ephemeral experiences, whether they be singing and dancing or shaking hands or whatever else. We might not be able to obtain and articulate such a value, but we should strive to do so, and work out why and for whom we are laboring in the process. In the meantime, I need to get back to splitting my attention between the five other jobs I am working right now.

**Malcolm Whittaker**



Malcolm Whittaker keeps up with the turn of the Earth by working as an artist, writer, researcher, teacher and performer.



# JOURNALISM INTO ART (PART 3): ALIEN SUBSTANCES



Hans Haacke, *News (exhibition version)*, 1969/2008

In his third article on the convergence of art and journalism, Chris Nash examines the debate that followed the censorship of Haacke's real estate works. This debate, about the nature of what activities can legitimately be regarded as art and the relationship of art institutions to those activities, is now even more loaded than it was fifty years ago, as artists increasingly work in social and media spaces rather than physical institutional spaces.

Guggenheim Director Thomas Messer set out in detail his concerns with Haacke's work in a guest editorial for *Arts Magazine* in 1971, and made the link with journalism:

Where do we draw the line? With the revealed identities of private individuals and the clear intention to call their actions into question, and by a concomitant reduction of the work of art from its potential metaphoric level to a form of photo journalism concerned with topical statements rather than with symbolic expression. .... To the degree to which an artist deliberately pursues aims that lie beyond art, his very concentration upon ulterior ends stands in conflict with the intrinsic nature of the work as an end in itself.

**the response to a work of art  
can become an intrinsic part of  
the work's meaning**

.... The tendency within this contradiction in the work itself transferred itself from it onto the museum environment and beyond it into society at large. Eventually the choice was between the acceptance of or rejection of an alien substance that had entered the art museum organisation. .... The incident at the Guggenheim Museum is, perhaps, the most dramatic among similar conflicts but by no means an isolated one. Parallel developments have occurred in other museums and more of the same may be predicted unless there is a change of attitude among artists as well as among museums.

Messer presented himself as drawing a set of defensive lines against "an alien substance" on behalf of the museum community and "society at large", and for that reason alone, if not Haacke's prominence in the wider artistic struggles of the time, the significance of the artworks has to be considered in the broadest socio-political context.

For his part, Haacke's response to Messer's action and arguments was plain and simple: the cancellation constituted an unacceptable act of censorship of an artist's work. The subsequent development of his thinking and art made clear, however, that he well understood the profound insight that Messer had gifted to him – the response to a work of art can become an intrinsic part of the work's meaning, and therefore artwork that addresses social systems might consider what future responses might be and how they might be anticipated, incorporated and contribute to the meaning of the work. The interplay between the present and the past and future is a constant factor in journalism, and after the Guggenheim experience Haacke frequently incorporated it into his art.

At the time it was the sacked curator Edward Fry who most cogently articulated the significance of Haacke's work. He set out his analysis in the essay he had written for the cancelled exhibition catalogue, which was subsequently published in Germany in 1972 and forty years later in the US in 2011. He was in no doubt about the significance of Haacke's practice: "As a consequence of his efforts he, like every significant artist, has extended the limits of art and has forced the re-examination of both previous art and art theory." In a perception that relates strongly not only to the fact/news value nexus in journalism, but also all attempts at empirical investigation in the natural sciences, Fry argued that the key to Haacke's approach lay in his attempt to reveal through empirical evidence the invisible relations of force that produce the material and social world:

"In his search for the means to demonstrate the *invisible but fundamental* relations which underlie the nature of the world Haacke appears as far more a representational artist than many painters who, returning to traditional craft techniques and academic motifs, merely repeat old retinal habits of external representation."

Haacke shared with fellow artists in the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) the radical critique of the role of art, artists and art institutions in modern societies:

"Coming at the end of a modern tradition in which art was relegated to a privileged but specialized and often highly esoteric social function, the approach to reality offered by Haacke

acts not only as a severe critique of previous modern art, but also serves to eliminate arbitrary boundaries within our culture between art, science and society. Haacke's way of representing the world offers an alternative to subjective limits as well, for he has consistently moved toward the elimination of ego as a guide to the apprehension of reality."

The elimination of "arbitrary boundaries within our culture between art, science and society" occurs through the shift of the art/reality relationship away from symbolic representation to direct alignment. This was the rupture through which Haacke brought artistic practice into alignment with truth-seeking disciplines in the humanities and sciences (both physical and social) and with journalism. Empirical evidence or acts that are reported and incorporated into scientific research and into journalists' reports remain facts in the world, even when they might have been produced as a result of the science or journalism itself, for example a laboratory experiment or an answer to a journalist's question, a photo opportunity or a press release.

"As an artist, he is perhaps even more subversive than Duchamp, for Haacke so treats his own ready-mades that they remain systems representing themselves and therefore cannot be assimilated to art. Thus he violates the mythic function, to which art has long been assigned, of acting as a buffer between man (sic) and the nature of reality. His work instead presents a direct challenge, not only to the fatal but convenient bourgeois separation of art from life, but also to the related view that art functions as a symbolic transformation and interpretation of experience. Haacke's world is rigorously materialist, not symbolic, but his materialist view is of such large dimensions and possesses a logic and truthfulness of such clarity that it reaches the level of an almost transcendental moral force: rather than setting limits to consciousness, he offers a new freedom.

The complete and fundamental incompatibility between Messer's and Fry's views of art is stark. In 1997, art historian Alexander Alberro's observed that the consecutive censorship of

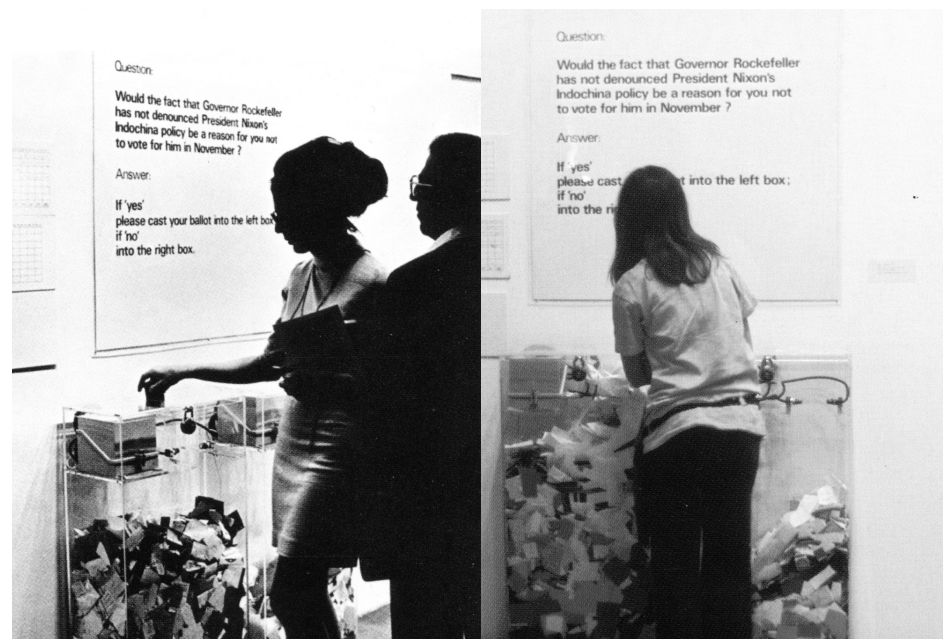
Buren and Haacke by the Guggenheim marked a victory for the forces of reaction in North American art institutions and the onset of "the new cultural conservatism". But for other parts of the art world, including private galleries in New York and major international and European institutions, that was not the case, and Haacke continued to receive prestigious invitations and to mount challenging exhibitions. *Shapolsky* was exhibited in Milan the following January, and then in Rochester in upstate New York and a number of other galleries before inclusion in the Venice Biennale of 1978. Goldman trod a similar exhibition path. For Haacke, the actions by the Guggenheim and other institutions gave these social artworks a continuing life and systemic status comparable to the ongoing physical systems of the wind and water works. It was a major beachhead to secure in the exploration of art's relationship to social reality. The link between art and journalism reveals how we understand journalism in relation to social reality, and as a knowledge-producing practice.

**Chris Nash**

*This is an edited extract from What is Journalism? The Art and Politics of a Rupture published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. For further information contact [chris@chrisnash.com.au](mailto:chris@chrisnash.com.au)*

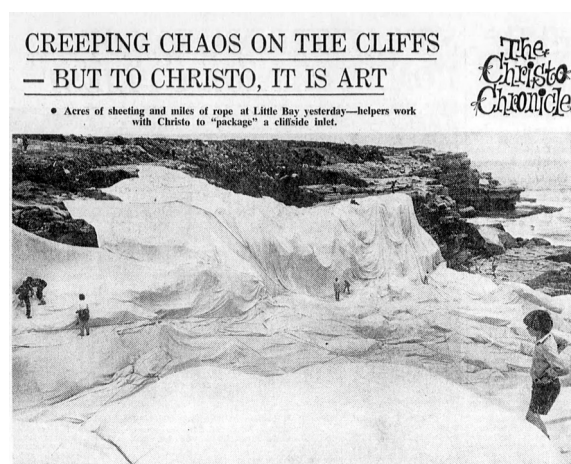


Chris Nash was Professor of Journalism at Monash University, and previously Director of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism at UTS.



Hans Haacke, *MoMA Poll*, 1970





# TELLING THE WRAPPED COAST STORY

A massive groundbreaking work that engaged huge audiences both in Sydney and internationally. An art process that took effect not in a studio or gallery but outside on the land, and then disappeared. Decades later, this is how art historians and critics have described Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped Coast*.

Rebecca Coates, Director of the Shepparton Art Museum, argues in *The rise of the private art foundation: John Kaldor Art Projects 1969-2012* that *Wrapped Coast* was a key cultural moment. The significance of the awe-inspiring work that briefly covered the Little Bay coastline lies partly in its relationship to the public. In this sense, the realisation and aftermath of the project can be seen as part of the work itself.

The journalism around *Wrapped Coast* is evidence of some of the public response to the work. It's also a glimpse into the specific time and place in which it was produced.

As John Kaldor himself recalled in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) in 1990, it took months to secure the site, after the Liberal government refused access to government land. Prince Henry hospital agreed to provide access to several kilometres of coastline.

Kaldor issued a press statement in June 1969. In a letter to Christo, Kaldor explained that a lot of the early coverage had ridiculed the project. It's a "wonderful opportunity for stupid uninformed columnists and commentators to make stupid comments" but the serious critics "have been very strongly in your favour," he wrote.

After Christo and Jeanne-Claude arrived in Sydney, there was almost daily media coverage. *The Australian Women's Weekly* did a double-page spread and even *Life* magazine sent an international critic to cover the project. There were also cartoons.

The sexist and conservative journalist Ron Saw, who wrote a regular column in Murdoch's Daily Mirror, admitted knowing "absolutely nothing about art". He not only ridiculed the project but also the Little Bay community which he suggested "could do with a bit of packaging". "Stray fisherman, lazing nurses and an occasional sad leper - wrap them all in string". This is highly offensive to the whole community, including the Aboriginal community who have occupied the area for many thousands of years. (There was a "male lazaret" at Little Bay that is now regarded as a significant site of oppression of the Aboriginal community.)

The Reverend Roger Bush railed against the project on radio and is reported to have suggested those sponsoring *Wrapped Coast* should be boycotted. Reflecting deeper social rifts, these hostile attitudes probably helped make the project even more exciting to young people.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* took the project most seriously by assigning reporter J.A.C. Dunn to produce "Christo's Chronicle." Dunn was not an art reporter, and although initially sceptical was eventually captivated by the sheer physical scale, the level of cooperation from hundreds of students and workers. He was later described by an American colleague as never taking notes and having perfect recall, which

probably means his accounts should be treated with some caution.

Together his stories provided an account of the obstacles and risks faced by Christo and his hundreds of paid and unpaid helpers, as well as the mounting excitement at the site. One volunteer fell down a rock face. Christo dislocated his shoulder. A "southerly buster" blew the fabric off the cliff leaving the fate of the project briefly in doubt. Slivers of rock flew off the rock face while the fabric was being hammered on. One is left wondering whether the whole project could even have happened in today's much more safety conscious society.

There is one story that reveals Dunn's more arrogant side. Not long after Christo and Jeanne-Claude arrived, he visited their apartment. Describing Jeanne-Claude as a "pretty wife" and Christo as having a body "built like a fence rail" and hair like a "mop in the throes of electrocution", Dunn peppered them with questions about the purpose of their art. In response, Christo is "inarticulate, gazing into the distance" and "shrugging an eloquently uninformative shrug". Displaying breathtaking insensitivity, Dunn is frustrated by Bulgarian born Christo's "embarrassingly mangled words," communication "made more difficult because he held his hand over his mouth." He dismisses Christo's explanations as "intellectually barren bones" and suggests that he is making "handsome" money out of the project, which appears on the evidence to have been unfair.

Showing more insight, Dunn ends by conceding that "wrapping attracts interest in what is concealed" and that the energy scoffers and sceptics expend "betrays their preoccupation with their target". This he sees as an "invisible arrow" in Christo's quiver and accepts that Christo believes that what he does is just as validly art as painting. In another story, he went up in a helicopter to capture the enormity of the wrapped coast with tiny figures scurrying across the massive billowing fabric, headlining it, "The Alps on a surf-washed Australian Pacific Shore".

The ABC's Brian Adams made a video which is available for watching in the Kaldor exhibition. This visual record conveys more information about what it was like at the time than 50 year old print records can ever do.

Back then even the tabloid press treated art criticism more seriously. The critics also wrote for art magazines and were often art practitioners or curators themselves.

Art curator, historian and *Sunday Telegraph* critic Daniel Thomas was very supportive of *Wrapped Coast*. The Melbourne Herald sent its art critic Alan McCulloch to Sydney. McCulloch reported that "every taxi-driver knows the way to Little Bay and the roads from the city are packed with tourists". 250,000 people visited *Wrapped Coast*.

However, not everyone in the art world embraced the project. McCulloch also later reported in *Art International* that painter Albert Tucker "accepted the role as defender of the national innocence from attacks by 'the paranoiac out-riders of the extremist international fashions'".

But of all the critics, it was the SMH critic Donald Brook who embraced the concept of the work. He began: "A tempting way of taking Christo's work is to think of it not as an object but as the incidental product of action; to think of it as a gigantic ephemeral happening, with public participation on a scale that outstrips even the theatrical." Brook, who died last year at age 91, was an educator, critic, philosopher and sculptor who saw it as his duty to reform "contemporary attitudes and practices in the visual arts that seemed abominable." He wanted to break the "nexus between [market] value and practice". He despised the idea that the history of painting was the only intellectual discipline suitable for artists. However, his approach to art criticism put some establishment noses out of joint and in 1972, he was sacked by the SMH. Posters appeared calling for his reinstatement.

Journalists look for angles and points of conflict. During the 1960s, support for nature conservation was growing rapidly in Sydney as remnants of bush were threatened by roads and housing estates. Some conservationists were worried that the massive fabric cover could damage plant and animal life, particularly fairy penguins. Eventually several "experts" examined the site and said they were satisfied that no wildlife would be damaged. I was therefore surprised to read in an article written by John Kaldor for the SMH in 1990 about "fairy penguins who stole bits of the fabric to line their nest. Instead of being endangered, as the environmentalists had feared, they were seen to thrive in their new, more comfortably sheltered surroundings."

As an older female journalist viewing the coverage of *Wrapped Coast* from the present, the representation of women and their absence from the art scene strikes me in a way it may not have done at the time. The feminist art movement was a strong part of Sydney's second wave of feminism, and was only stirring in 1969. It would blossom in the next few years and was part of the experience of a whole generation of radical women. There had always been women artists but they struggled to get exhibition space and were mostly ignored by art historians. In the case of *Wrapped Coast*, the artist, the collector, the project manager, the critics, the filmmakers, the voice overs and most of the reporters were men. The gendered nature of the media representation and its project was typical of media at that time, but an awareness was growing. At the beginning of the project, Christo helper artist and co-editor of *Extra!Extra!* Ian Milliss remembers student volunteers - described by The Australian as "long hairs and hippies" - being divided into two groups. Women were given giant needles and the men ramjet guns to put the massive, specially manufactured pieces of fibre together and attach them to the rocks. But after looking at the video and photos today, I think the gender roles may have broken down during the process.

Sexist is the only word to describe the coverage of Jeanne-Claude. She was described as "cute and charming". Her role was defined as supporting her husband. Later, in 1994, Christo recognised Jeanne-Claude as an equal author; it

was well known that she organised the sales and financial aspects of the projects but he explained that her creative role in developing their concepts, which could take decades to realise, had not been recognised.

Jeanne-Claude's death in 2009 was well covered by the international press. Obituaries are a form of journalism that can bring the benefit of hindsight to narratives. It was only when reading the *Wall Street Journal* while researching this story that I learned that in 1968, the year before they came to Sydney, Jeanne Claude was wrapping a fountain and a mediaeval town in Italy at the same time Christo was wrapping an art museum in Switzerland. There was no mention of this in the SMH of 1969. But you can see glimpses of recognition of her important role in their mutual creative vision in the 1969 record, despite her positioning as a "pretty wife". George Gurney, the Smithsonian's deputy chief curator was quoted as saying, "She couldn't draw, but she collaborated aesthetically on every other decision. It was always a joint endeavor."

All of which goes to illustrate yet again that journalism's "first draft of history" only tells a bit of the story which may be distorted or misleading. No journalists seems to have thought to ask the Aboriginal community at La Perouse what they thought about the covering of their land. Like history and art, journalism needs to be read in the context of its time. A future work of journalism can provide a more accurate and fuller record of events, which in turn leads to new understandings and stories.

Like art and history, the field of journalism is diverse and constantly contested and changing. In researching this story, I've only touched the surface of the available record, let alone interviewed those who were present. John Kaldor's plan to bring two extraordinary outsiders into Sydney was successful in attracting huge media and public attention. The record shows that Kaldor, Christo, Jean-Claude and hundreds of helpers put huge effort in accomplishing their vision. But the project also needs to be seen in a broader international and local context in which artists, students and educators were actively striving to reshape an arts scene that was controlled by an establishment comfortable considering art as objects in galleries with a potential market value.

Wendy Bacon



Wendy Bacon has been an urban activist and journalist since 1969. She is a non practising lawyer & was previously the Professor of Journalism at the University of Technology Sydney.



Scan here to read the full article.



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## FROM THE EXTRA! EXTRA! LETTER BOX 25/11/19

### CLIMATE CHANGE ART

Hi there

I flicked through your issues in the Art Gallery of NSW, and I was very impressed by what you were doing, especially in regards to land art ["Trees in Coffins", 19 Nov 2019].

I'd love to see an article on the impending Climate Change Crisis and how it affects the art of this society. I think it'd be a very interesting read.

Thanks,

Vi.

Thanks for your letter, Vi.

Have a look at the article "Filtering Disinformation" by Wendy Bacon and Chris Nash in Edition 2 of **EXTRA!EXTRA!** - that piece discusses the ethical role of journalism in reporting on climate change over recent decades. In my own experience as an artist and a university teacher, artists are increasingly engaged with the problem of the climate crisis. The big question is how to respond in a meaningful way to an issue of such an enormous scale. My own personal favourite artists in this field are the Harrison Studio in California - look them up!

Lucas

### THE VALUE OF CREATIVITY

Dear Editor

Please investigate why creativity isn't as valued as much as how much money you earn, and its impact on childrens' mentality and social habits.

Thank You

Anonymous

I agree that this is a big issue. Our society does indeed seem to place a disproportionately small value on human labour which involves creativity. The income that artists receive is one part of this. In "Live Art and the Gig Economy" published in Edition 3 of **EXTRA!EXTRA!** Malcolm Whittaker reflects on this problem.

Lucas

### BECOMING AN ARTIST

Dearest Editor

How does one chase the role of an artist when there are limited positions?

Yours truly

A small scared Highschooler,

Zara Mambralu

Dearest Zara

Great question. By "chase the role" I presume you are asking: how does one become an artist? Well, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that there are unlimited positions for the role of artist in society! As long as you decide to be an artist, you can be one. You don't need to go for a job interview or anything like that. The bad news is that the gigs available to be an "Artist" (with a capital A) in Proper Art Galleries are indeed limited. To get those, you generally need to belong to a fairly select social club called "The Art World". These days, the best way to get club membership is to go to university and study art, and then hang around in the foyer of The Art World until someone sneaks you in. A route that is less tedious is to gather together a gang of cronies and form your own DIY artist run initiative - that way you can have fun right now and you don't have to kow-tow to the powerbrokers and gatekeepers. But hey, look, your letter is in **EXTRA!EXTRA!**, so you're already an exhibiting artist in the Art Gallery of NSW! Mum will be proud.

Lucas

Dear Editor 23 Nov 19

Why is it that art is something you have to be 'good at', or something you need to 'understand' to enjoy? This is drummed into us from an early age in Australia.

Why ???

Philippa W.

Hi Editor

Great exhibition!

5 stars!

Do you know if Christo & Kaldor Projects consulted with Indigenous Owners of the Coastline when that work was planned? Would love to hear!

? contemporary art?

if it is not aesthetically pleasing and the meaning isn't clearly apparent, can it be considered art?



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We welcome responses to the articles in our newspaper.

Post a letter in our letterbox at the Art Gallery of NSW, or online at [www.extra-extra.press/](http://www.extra-extra.press/)