SPAN

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FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE AND
PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL
SHIFTING THRESHOLDS: CHARTING AND CHANGING WHAT DIVIDES US

Dr Kit Messham-Muir
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN ART
SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND ART
CURTIN UNIVERSITY, PERTH

... if maps, movement, and mobility are clearly among the most obvious means for charting modernity, their contemporary restriction and blockage simultaneously also suggest another, darker and disquieting account. The very right to travel, to journey, to migrate today increasingly runs up against borders, confines, and controls of a profound ‘unfreedom’ that characterizes the modern world.¹

Iain Chambers’ words from 2008 seem prescient of recent days. Within the lifetimes of many of us, maps, movement, and mobility have changed radically. A world map from the 1970s might include a large red area called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and an East and a West Germany, dividing the territory that is now the European Union. The Berlin Wall, which prevented individual movement and ideologically divided the globe, collapsed in 1989 under the popular groundswell of democracy in Eastern Europe, which was followed by the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Around the same time, the Schengen Convention abolished Europe’s internal borders, and economic and political unity of Europe followed in 1993. Borders dissolved and maps were redrawn to the refrain of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy.

Yet, utopian visions of the porous borders of a post-nation-state world evaporated following the historic watershed of 11 September 2001. The ‘War on Terror’ propagated disproportionate fears in the west and destabilised the Middle East. In 2011, the Arab Spring first appeared as an echo of 1989 Eastern Europe. But the failed rebellion in Syria,

in confluence with the power vacuum in the north of Iraq, led to the rise of ISIS, who by 2014 controlled swaths of both countries and displaced millions of refugees to Europe in 2015, coinciding with political violence in European cities, such as Paris, Nice and Brussels. In Australia, successive governments honed their methods to ‘Stop The Boats’, dehumanising the vulnerable and displaced, interning them inhumanely and indefinitely, without scrutiny and accountability. And last year, very real economic and political uncertainty generated a fervour of fear amongst Angry White Men, emboldening xenophobia and racism, and manifesting in Brexit and President Trump. We live in extraordinary times: an age of ultra-right backlash against globalisation, the institutionalising of the politics of bumper stickers, deportations, and walled borders.

Against this vertiginous rush, SPAN takes a moment to contemplate maps, movement, and mobility, and to interrogate the physical, emotional, psychological and political thresholds that divide territories and us as individuals, exploring the potential routes and points of connection that span borders. SPAN’s frame is international, but its point of view is located right here, on the West Coast of Australia. The exhibition’s curator, Ric Spencer, conceives of SPAN as an exploration of the in-betweens of spaces, the crossings and blockages, from a local perspective: “we’re always in this position of feeling caught between being here and being there.” Each of the five artists in SPAN – Susanna Castleden, Olga Cironis, Tanya Lee, Clyde McGill and Andrew Sunley Smith – originate elsewhere, outside the metropolitan spread of Fremantle and Perth. In different ways, each has direct experience of life lived outside of Australia, and each is now settled here. And each of these five artists works with ideas of crossing and resisting borders of one kind or another.

Susanna Castleden’s practice considers the ways in which we come to know the world through forms of mapping; that is, literally through maps, but also the ways in which we psychologically impose our perceptions of distance and location onto real space and actual place. Castleden’s prints are actually frottage works, rubbings taken from distant places or places of transit. Passenger jets are the usual medium of travelling long distances, and the top of the wing’s aerofoil is the area that bears the weight of the plane and its passengers. As a rubbing, Castleden’s image of a wing has a direct one-to-one indexical relationship with an actual wing in an aircraft bone yard in Arizona, physically linking this image with somewhere distant and a machine that no longer exists.

Andrew Sunley Smith both references and directly uses machines and forms that burn finite resources, continually consuming fossil fuels, drawing on the forms of radiators, engines and accelerators to construct iconographies of exhausted forms. Other works by Sunley Smith incorporate processes where movement is essential, where an object is transformed by being dragged along a road from the back
of a moving vehicle. Movement is inherently tied to expiration of resources, and Sunley Smith's works (conceived in Scotland, Canada and Australia) often draw our attention to its ultimate unsustainability through the sources of energy most commonly available today. Sunley Smith has actually lived off-grid for two years, attempting to find broader contexts for art and an alternative space disconnected from the totalising reach of modernity and its accompanying supremacies.

The title of Tanya Lee's video works, Curtilage, refers to the area immediately surrounding a dwelling that is part of the overall property, but actually functions more as an interstitial space, a buffer zone between discrete private spaces. In each of the brief vignettes, neighbours transgress these suburban boundaries to engage each other in the intimate routines of brushing hair, cleaning teeth and eating. It might provoke us to think, how might I feel having my teeth brushed by my next-door neighbour? What kinds of thresholds would that cross? Like Sunley Smith and Castleden, Lee is interested in what we imagine to be beyond borders and boundaries, and the potential meaning of violating those physical and social limits. What is fascinating in Lee's work is its emphasis on micropolitical borders. When conflict occurs between neighbours it often involves the area of the curtilage – noise bleeding over, fences deviating from legal boundaries, shared sewers, easements, and rights of way. Borders and boundaries organise individuals and police behaviour, they include some and exclude others, acting more as a gap than a line; so, they are inevitably politically charged.

 Debates around policing Australia's national borders feature heavily throughout the nation's relatively short post-settlement history, back to the initial invasion, the Lambing Flats Riots, the White Australia Policy, multiculturalism and Australia's present refusal of asylum seekers arriving by boat. The latest episode in this chequered history is the focus on Clyde McGill's work, which he sees as fundamentally a social justice issue. His paintings focus on a story of a displaced family attempting to seek asylum prior to detention by the Australian government. In McGill's work in SPAN, performance and sound installation combine with fifteen paintings to form a narrative about a family's journey across borders, seeking refuge. The audience participates alongside McGill, joining him in the telling of the narrative through speech and song, and playing wires that are strung across the space. Amongst this context of Australia's national borders and the national narratives that have dehumanised asylum seekers, such as the 2001 'Children Overboard' affair, McGill inserts smaller, individualised, humanised narratives.

Olga Cironis' work in SPAN is almost an antidote to the erosion inevitable from mobility and travel. Cironis weaves together locks of hair from literally thousands of people, mapping the places from which people come on a map of the world. As Cironis says, it "proves that we are truly a global village." Each lock has been given willingly to the artist and, woven together in a growing ribbon of hair, each individual tress reads as a line in a continuously scrolling story – dark black, red, green, blue, grey, blonde – all different types and different voices. Working against the grain of negative and abject associations with hair, Cironis' work is restorative, an amalgamation of memories and intimacy.

Across each of these works, and in very different ways, process is a vital aspect of the work. Each bears the marks, and sometimes scars, of the methods that created it. Each carries its own signs of commuting from one state of being to another, which resonates with their own particular concerns with crossing boundaries. As well as standing on their own, McGill's painted raw canvases act as a backdrop to his narrative performances – they become part of that performance. Castleden's rubbings bear the holes of rivets and the scuffs ancillary to the central process of frottage. The extended implements in Lee's videos shudder and shake from the necessary length they need. Movement through space and across boundaries burns and depletes as Sunley Smith manifestly asserts. And, for Cironis, the process of weaving together locks of hair combines genetic material from throughout the world into a gestalt that nevertheless maintains its heterogeneity – one, but not the same.

The processes of movement over distances are often novel and unpredictable, and travel has long associations with discovery, at personal and global levels. It both invigorates and depletes. In each of their ways, the processes of the five artists in SPAN demonstrate a sympathy for movement, an understanding of its positive and negative consequences, and for the allowances and blockages along the way. Each finds a way of mapping movement by figuring places, and the spaces in between them, as psychological and emotional as much as they are physical and geographical. As those maps from the 1970s show us, places and the borders between them are never settled and continue to change. And as we perhaps enter another, darker and disquieting account of the world's maps and borders, it is perhaps useful to remember that everything changes, movement is in the nature of the ways we relate to the world, and walls will always fall.

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1 Iain Chambers, Mediterranean Crossings, (Durham NC: Duke University, 2008) 3.
3 Tanya Lee, Interview with Kit Messham-Muir, Dianella, WA, Australia, 20 October 2016.
5 Olga Cironis, personal correspondence, 8 December 2016.
**ANDREW SUNLEY SMITH**

A new series of sculpted forms, films, objects and drawings created to highlight increasing anxieties concerning our relentless and aggressive consumption of fossil fuels.

Created partly whilst living off-grid (Canada/Australia) and articulated via direct experiences of cultural shifts (UK) occurring within an increasingly totalitarian political climate, primary architectural constructs and engine references form the basis of these totemic sentinels to our current cultural and ecological breakdown unfolding on an international scale.

Andrew Sunley Smith lives and works in Fremantle. His work has been included in Glasgow International, Scotland and shown at the MCA Sydney, Glasgow CCA, Kunsthalle Mainz, Germany, Brandts Kunsthallen, Odense, Denmark and PICA Perth. His work is held in the national collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, MCA Sydney Australia and the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

*Carbon Supremacy* was produced with the assistance of FAC’s Artist in Residence program. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

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**TANYA LEE**

Curtilage, an urban planning term used to describe spaces between buildings, implies shared and overlapping borders which are often spaces for political tension.

The passageways between suburban real estate are no exception. Glimpses of neighbours visible over and through curtilages reveal routines which become intimate despite social distances. The performances in *Curtilage* involve real neighbours in seemingly absurd actions and put forward an authenticity to these tensions.

Tanya Lee is based in Perth. Her work is multidisciplinary, looking at everyday tasks to create humorous, absurd and even futile narratives that subvert the protocols and politics of social environments. In 2016 Tanya was selected as a finalist for the John Stringer Prize and also participated in SITUATE Arts Lab in Hobart. Projects in Perth have included Proximity Festival 2014 and her first solo exhibition *Personal Space*, at Fremantle Arts Centre in 2013.

*Curtilage* was originally commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art for NEW:16.

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Curated by Ric Spencer
Curator, Fremantle Arts Centre
This journey, a story of the forcibly displaced, a family of many, a family like many, having one last supper with their relations, setting off in the imperative search for a safe place to live – trading in an unforgiving market place where hope and charity are not the currency.

*Dolorosa* integrates audience and artist in an installation of paintings, text and sound to tell the story of loss of home in today’s world. It is a retold by each audience as the story repeats in real time.

Clyde McGill lives and works in Fremantle. He is a multidisciplinary artist working across performance, print, drawing, sound, video, and text. Clyde’s interests include cultural and social divisions, place and belonging. He is a Fulbright Scholar in Art and his work is held in the National Gallery of Australia and other significant collections.

*Dolorosa* was produced with the assistance of FAC’s Artist in Residence program.

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**SUSANNA CASTLEDEEN**

*1:1 Airplane Wing* and *1:1 Gangway* are part of a series of works that consider moments of stillness within our mobile world.

Created using a labour intensive process of rubbing – or frottage – these works require a time-based connection with objects that are usually in motion or are only encountered through mobility. The frottage is made on maps as a way of reflecting the geographical and cartographic relationships of travel whilst referencing the sites in which the work was made – an aircraft boneyard in the Mojave Desert and the Passenger Terminal at the Fremantle Port.

Susanna Castleden is based in Fremantle. She is an artist and academic in the School of Design and Art at Curtin University. Susanna’s work is held in major national collections, and recent awards include the Linden Prize, Burnie Print Prize, and the Bankwest Art Prize.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.
As an artist Olga Cironis has been working with human hair for over 3 decades.

*Mountain of Words* is her most recent art project. Begun in 2015, it is a touring project that will take three years to realize, involving people from around the globe. Olga is a multidisciplinary artist examining notions of belonging and identity in today’s cultural globalization. Exploring the murky undertones of history and memory, and often engaging viewers to become part of her work, Olga’s work is layered with research, recorded and collected stories, and questions the gendered and social norms that permeate socially accepted actions.

Olga Cironis is based in Perth. She has completed her Masters in Visual Arts/Sculpture and Installation at SCA, University of Sydney in 1996 and is a recipient of numerous art awards and grants. Olga’s work is held in public and private art collections across Australia and internationally.

*Mountain of Words* was produced with the assistance of FAC’s Artist in Residence program and residencies across WA. Special thanks to Sue Greig for technical support in weaving and loom preparation.