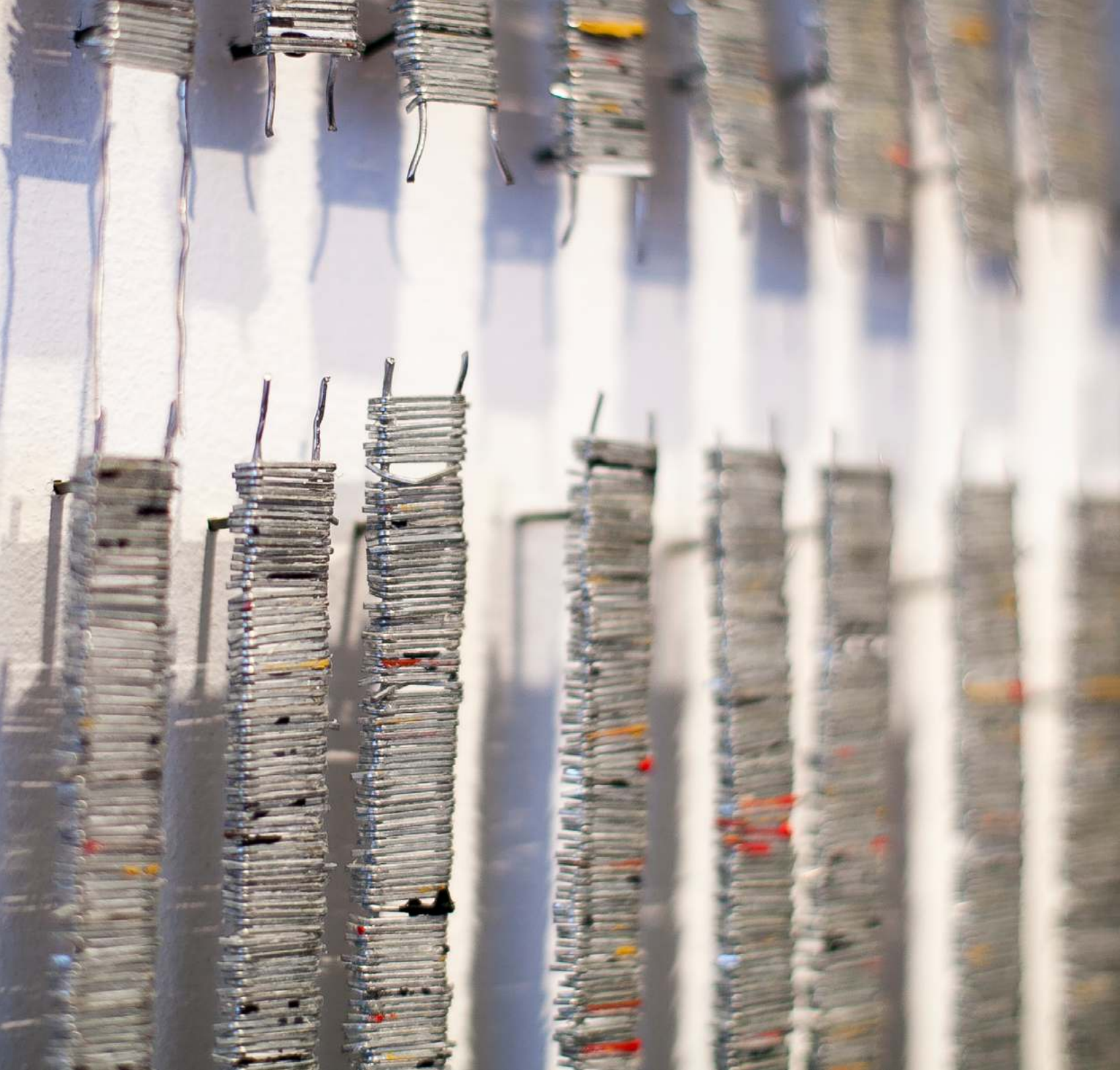


Northumbria University, Newcastle.  
Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory. UoA 32.



# BORDER CROSSINGS





Type of output:  
Exhibition and  
Performance  
(2 exhibitions, 3 solo  
and collaborative  
performances,  
1 keynote lecture & 2  
symposiums)  
*by*  
Sandra Johnston

Cover:  
*Contingent*, solo performance,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.  
*Photo credit: Brianna Speight*

Left: *Fair to Good Provenance*,  
(staples detail) installation shot.  
*Photo credit: Joseph Carr*

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# SUMMARY

*Border Crossings* extended Johnston's practice-based research investigating legacies of postcolonial trauma, specifically by focusing on the historic treatment of Aboriginal communities by Irish settlers. It was realised through public-facing dialogues, performance interactions and exhibited artefacts.

The project investigated enduring colonial legacies of Irish involvement in Australia through direct experiential engagement with the realities of a rural Aboriginal community. Johnston continued her explorations of 'contested spaces' from previous research on Irish art and culture but from the changed perspective of Irish "perpetrator" identity in the Australian context.

Johnston was invited to participate in *Border Crossings* (2016), a two-part exchange project involving three Irish and three mixed-heritage Australian artists. The research was informed by ethnographic thinking (Bird Rose 2011, Creed 2017) responding to multispecies issues of social and ecological justice and grounded through a 2-week residency at Warukurlangu Arts Centre in Yuendumu, a restricted access region of Central Australia.

Interacting directly as a volunteer within this community enabled Johnston to deepen understanding of how the symbolic and physical resources of the landscape are integrated in indigenous art. This investigation was further developed by using raw materials, collected in the Australian desert, to produce a series of sculptures exhibited in Galway. Exploring the implications of her own perpetrator identity within these contested legacies, Johnston produced two performances at SASA Gallery, Adelaide. These solo and collaborative performances presented themes of social marginalisation and complicity within a public context.

The research residency at Warukurlangu Arts Centre was enabled through support from the Helpmann Academy, British Council and Arts Council England's Artists' International Development Fund. The project culminated in three performances and one installation presented at SASA Gallery, Adelaide and Galway Arts Centre, Ireland. The research process was further disseminated through exhibition catalogue and conference presentations inc. Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.

# INTRODUCTION

*Border Crossings* took place at SASA Gallery (South Australian School of Art) in Adelaide and then was reconfigured for the Galway Arts Centre, Ireland.

For the SASA Gallery Johnston produced 1 solo 1-hour performance work entitled, *Contingent*, and an *Untitled*, 3-hour collaborative work with Irish artists Dominic Thorpe & Michelle Browne.

For the Galway Arts Centre, an installation of 4 sculptural components entitled, *Fair to Good Provenance*, and an *Untitled*, 4-hour collaborative performance with Dominic Thorpe & Michelle Browne.

Right: *Contingent*, solo performance,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

*Photo credit: Brianna Speight*



# TIMELINE

2015	2016 Feb	2016 Mar	2016 Jul
<p>Confirmation of funding: Hawke EU Centre and Helpmann Academy Funding, Australia, in addition to British Council and Arts Council England joint award - Artists' International Development Fund Grant.</p>	<p>13<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> Research phase: two-week exchange with indigenous artists at Warukurlangu Artists at Yuendumu in Central Australia.</p> <p>27<sup>th</sup> Johnston panel contributor Power, Belief and the Performative, Vernissage weekend of Magic Object, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> Johnston guest lecturer, invited by Dr Mary Knights to deliver the Artistspeak Lecture at UniSA (University South Australia).</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Exhibition Opening of <i>Border Crossings (Pt1)</i> at SASA Gallery where Johnston performed <i>Contingent</i>.</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> Johnston performed <i>Untitled</i> with Dominic Thorpe &amp; Michelle Browne, SASA Gallery, Adelaide.</p>	<p>10<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> <i>Border Crossings (pt2)</i>. Project relocates to Galway Arts Centre, Ireland. Johnston exhibited <i>Fair to Good Provenance</i>.</p> <p>14<sup>th</sup> Public round table discussion, Galway Arts Centre.</p> <p>16<sup>th</sup> <i>Untitled</i> performance work with Dominic Thorpe &amp; Michelle Browne, Galway Arts Centre, Ireland.</p>

## RESEARCH CHALLENGE

The 6 selected artists (Michelle Browne, Julie Gough, Sue Kneebone, Yhonnie Scarce, Dominic Thorpe and Johnston) were invited to investigate legacies of postcolonial trauma with regard to the historic treatment of Aboriginal communities by Irish settlers.

Through the project residency, Johnston sought to gain first-hand knowledge of the political realities of indigenous artist communities and an insight into their contemporary creative practices. *Border Crossings* addressed the 'trauma of place' in Antipodean culture through open dialogues in the project's exchange process, and then, through exploring the possibilities of public discursive forums in Adelaide and Galway, sought to explore cross-cultural connection within dispersed and distinct forms of traumatic belonging.

Right: *Contingent*, solo performance,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

*Photo credit: Brianna Speight*



# CONTEXT

The research residency was located in Yuendumu, a non-permit region of Central Australia. Entry was enabled by the Helpmann Academy program which connects European artists with remote indigenous communities for bilateral exchanges in creative practice and knowledge transfer. Johnston was selected for this opportunity based on long-term research interests into 'contested spaces.' Research in Yuendumu was conducted in a sensitive, respectful manner working on a daily basis to support and understand through close observation and dialogue the methods and meanings of indigenous artist's artworks.

The main influence on the production of Johnston's art was the work of painter Judy Napangardi Watson, an indigenous senior artist within the Yuendumu community. Johnston assisted Napangardi Watson daily as she painted and observed the raw fluidity of her movements, which related to her own method of performance improvisation involving the repetition of disciplined, connective tasks.



Above: *Contingent*, solo performance,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

*Photo credit: Brianna Speight*



The research was also informed by Deborah Bird Rose and Barbara Creed's scholarly explorations of the ethical issues of social and ecological justice facing indigenous communities. *Border Crossings* was innovative in making a contribution to this area of enquiry because its exchange methodology, involving Irish and Aboriginal/Irish heritage artists, enabled the production and processing of expressions of vulnerability, grief and guilt arising from the charged histories being explored.

Johnston's work also contributed to the methods by which performance artists address colonial memory, particularly within the Australian context (Mike Parr, Jill Orr, Rebecca Cunningham). Her work in *Border Crossings* foregrounded the embrace of an ethics of artistic dialogue and vulnerability in collaboration with indigenous artist Destiny Deacon allowing both participants to explore personal experiences of sectarianism.



Right: *Contingent*, solo performance,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.

*Photo credit: Brianna Speight*



*Contingent*, solo performance, SASA  
Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.  
Photo credit: Brianna Speight



*Contingent*, solo performance, SASA  
Gallery, Adelaide, Australia.  
Photo credit: Brianna Speight

# METHODS

The Warlukurlangu residency inspired three performance artworks, each of which explored the intertwining of visual codes in indigenous paintings with the stark actualities of the desert environment and the profound kinship between humans and animals therein. The experiences afforded by the residency were then explored further through interactions with the 3 Australian artists Gough, Kneebone and Scarce, in both Adelaide and Galway, who provided rich and challenging perspectives drawing forward urban Aboriginal viewpoints.



Right: *Untitled*,  
collaborative performance with  
Dominic Thorpe & Michelle Browne,  
SASA Gallery, Adelaide.  
*Photo credit: Sue Kneebone*



Above: *Untitled*,  
4-hour collaborative performance with  
Dominic Thorpe & Michelle Browne,  
Galway Arts Centre, Ireland.  
*Photo credit: Joseph Carr*

The two SASA performances worked with the symbols of fire and honey bee, especially significant to the Walpiri community, whereas the Galway collaborative performance explored ideas about the invasive colonial impact of Irish settlers on the nomadic cultures that were systematically oppressed. The residency also provided raw materials derived from daily desert walks for sculptures exhibited in Galway (one created from thousands of bent, paint covered staples removed from the backs of Aboriginal artist's paintings during the cataloguing process). The sculptures became the installation, *Fair to Good Provenance*, where elements such as ochre, which has spiritual connotations for indigenous artists, was hand blown onto the gallery wall signalling its qualities as both specific symbolic colour and animate matter.



Above right:  
*Fair to Good Provenance*, installation shots.  
*Photo credit: Tom Flanagan*

Right:  
*Fair to Good Provenance*,  
(staples detail) installation shot  
*Photo credit: Joseph Carr*



*Border Crossings* provided a significant fora for debating the kinds of physical, psychological and ethical ‘permissions’ present in encounters within marginalised communities. Johnston asked how it could be possible to respond as a researcher to such situations without becoming implicated and culpable in processes of cultural appropriation. The project’s fora for debate were therefore a crucial part of the research method, allowing Johnston to contribute responses both from an outsider’s perspective but also to offer relevant perspectives on art, cultural mediation and trauma from the Northern Irish context.



Right: *Fair to Good Provenance*,  
installation shots.

*Photo credit: Tom Flanagan*

# DISSEMINATION

An Exhibition catalogue was produced by SASA Gallery with an additional insert added in Galway.

*Border Crossings* was part of the Adelaide Festival of the Arts Vernissage Program and the Adelaide Fringe Festival and received an Award for: Best Visual Art and Design Exhibition.

Johnston was speaker on panel discussion: *Power, Belief and the Performative* which took place during the 'Vernissage weekend' of Magic Object, the 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.

Guest speaker at Artistspeak Lecture at UniSA, for AAD postgraduate seminar program (supported by the Helpmann Academy).

Profiled on "Away!" the ABC Radio National Indigenous Art & Culture Program on Saturday 12th March, interviewed by reporter Annie Hastwell.

The exhibition and performances at SASA Gallery were critically well received and reviewed for ARTLINK by Melinda Rankin.

Galway Arts Centre, *Border Crossings* was disseminated as an Exhibition, public talk and collaborative performance, all part of the Galway Fringe Festival.

Below: *Fair to Good Provenance*, installation shots.

Photo credit: Tom Flanagan





**Host:**

The SASA Gallery (South Australian School of Art Gallery)  
Adelaide, Australia Warukurlangu Arts Centre, Yuendumu,  
Australia.

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/bordercrossings>

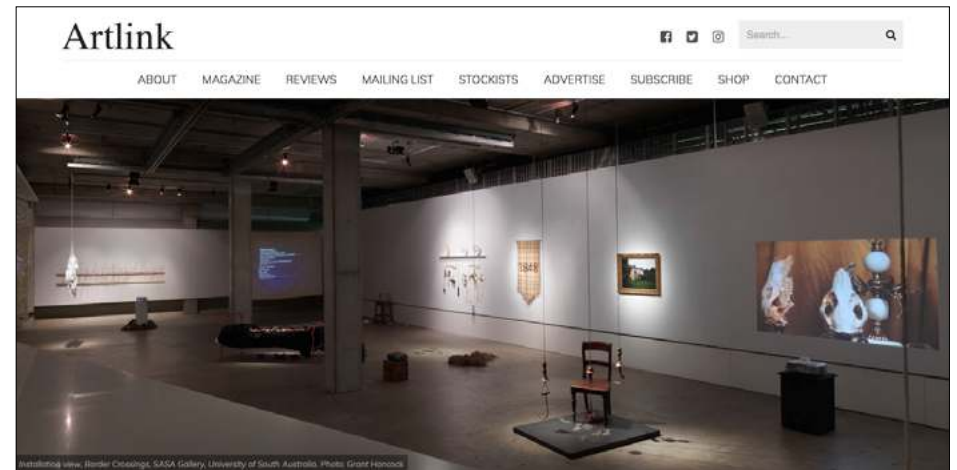
**Press:**

Artlink Magazine

<https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4448/border-crossings-28ireland-australia29/>

ABC Radio National

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/memory-and-forgetting:-border-crossings/7234514>



Above: Artlink (screenshot)



Above: Awaye (screenshot)

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Jill Orr artworks, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, 2002, and  
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hawke European Union Centre and the Helpmann Academy.

Arts Council England and British Council.

The Irish Government, the South Australian and Australian governments through Culture Ireland, Arts SA, and the Australia Council of the Arts.

SASA Gallery (South Australian School of Art).

Magic Object, the 2016 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.

Galway Arts Centre & Galway International Arts Festival.

