

Soils

English edition



















Soils Writing

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FOREWORD

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This book reflects on the ideas and artworks that have emerged from the context of *Soils* (in the Netherlands) or *The Soils Project* (in Australia). The project has its origins in an invitation, in 2018, from Victoria Lynn at TarraWarra Museum of Art (TWMA) in Victoria, Australia to think about the location and history of the lands on which the museum was built. That question, loosely formulated at the time, has grown into a discursive research project and an exhibition that built on much of the work that Victoria and TWMA, and the Van Abbemuseum, had already carried out while seeking connections and possible relations with other parts of this planet. In 2020, we invited Struggles for Sovereignty: Land, Water, Farming, Food (SFS) as a third curatorial pillar of the project; a collective rooted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who had been exploring related questions in the Majority World since their founding. As joint organisers, we take responsibility for the artists, initiatives, activists and researchers we invite into the project, working closely with the host organisation in each locality to develop contextually specific manifestations of their praxis, while seeking support and advice from the curatorial group as a whole.

Soils asks us to think about our responsibility for non-extractive ways of working and to show particular consideration to our different collaborators and their communities’ needs. This has not always been easy in view of our different mandates, histories and realities, but learning how to care better is a crucial step in repurposing the infrastructures of culture for our times. Together with fellow travellers (artists, writers and academics), the three cultural organisations have built and will continue to build *Soils* into a cultural investigation of the roots of living well in the broadest terms.¹ This second exhibition in the Van Abbemuseum is a stop along the way and a chance to share what the journey has produced to date. In doing so, it will inevitably accumulate more ideas, opinions and meanings to be taken to another point in time and place, hopefully in Indonesia in 2025.

We would like to thank all the artists, communities, researchers, designers, makers, activists, farmers and friends who have been involved in *Soils* and made it possible. We would also like to thank colleagues in TarraWarra Museum of Art, Van Abbemuseum, and Struggles for Sovereignty’s members and extended network of friends for their dedication and good humour in following an extended project to this stage. Thanks also to the designers of this book and to everyone who has contributed to helping build a better understanding of the soils each of us lives with and the relations they seed, grow and nurture.

1. In this context we use ‘living well’ as our English translation for the more complex concept and practice of the Spanish term *buen vivir*.

A PARTIAL ACCOUNT OF *SOILS* FROM A POSITION IN AND OF THE NETHERLANDS

Charles Esche and Teresa Cos Rebollo

This short text is written by two of the individuals responsible for the Dutch contribution to *Soils*. As such, it includes all the blind spots and lack of awareness that such a position implies. The two of us were born many years apart in England and Spain and cannot speak with great confidence for the Netherlands either. In that respect, we are occupying a privileged position, certainly in the art world but more generally in the modernist social constructions that western Europe exported across the globe. This project and the exhibitions that emerge out of it are therefore personal in a profound way because they question the kind of people we are and the experiences and role models that have shaped us in our own different upbringings. They are also a way for us to look critically at the systems and nature of the modern world that was bequeathed to us by our colonising societies and learn what they chose to erase, damage and destroy. For us and for others from this territory, the struggle at the heart of *Soils* is not to see how others live but to learn how to ground ourselves back on this land—a territory that has been modernised, universalised, normalised and deterritorialised almost beyond recall. What is this place today, where so many people, from so many parts of the world now live? Can it become a place amongst other places again, with its own relations, memories and character? Or is its colonial-modernist past something that condemns this place never to understand what it is to be interconnected with Earth and to avoid harm to human and more-than-human life? These questions do not (yet) have answers, but *Soils* has been a project that has helped us to formulate them more precisely and, as a museum, to try in our small way to dress the wound that coloniality-modernity, and in its turn capitalism, cuts into the Earth and many of its inhabitants.

The title of the project comes from the Palestinian writer and mathematician Munir Fasheh, who proposes four ‘soils’ as core to life on

Earth. They are *earth soil*, *cultural soil*, *communal soil* and *affection-spiritual soil*.¹ These are the soils that we must nurture in order for us and all life on the planet to be cared for and nurtured by the soils in return. We believe that art can help this nurturing by creating a sense of tangible relations that build on a quiet sense of mutual benefit and common interest. At its best, art helps people build relations with other beings without flattening the differences of identity, geography and history. When artworks address emotions and spirits, they link people to the soils in which they grew and to the uniqueness of their places. This grounding allows relations to flourish between places. Standing in a place that is not any place, and feeling part of a territory that is different from other territories, is a meaningful way to connect with the communal ecosystem that supports life on Earth. This exhibition sets out to show how those relations might be possible from points of view grounded in places that are called Wurundjeri Country, Rangan, Wallachia, Sinanché and De Peel amongst others.

A longer-term source of learning for the project has been the María Lugones Decolonial Summer School (MLDSS), founded by Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, hosted initially in Middelburg and since 2020 in the Van Abbemuseum. Some of the participants in the exhibition here have come directly to the project through the MLDSS (both in their role as faculty and participants) while the collective thinking that happens in those amazing, provocative three summer weeks has informed much of our understanding of what *Soils* can be.

Running partly in parallel with our experience of the MLDSS, was the ecosystem of documenta 15 (or Lumbung 1 as we prefer to call it). The principles of Lumbung, in which resources are shared and allocated collectively, is not easy to implement in the hierarchical, civil service structure of this museum but it has served as a defining example of what we need to do if we are to fulfil any ambition to decolonise the museum. In practical terms, it means that limited resources have been used to support communities rather than only to produce artworks and, more importantly, that we understand *Soils* as a long-term project through which personal and even institutional relations can be sustained longer than a single exhibition. In that way, it is important to see this exhibition as a halt on a journey that will go on to the Indonesian archipelago next year, but also leaves its traces in the museum collection and in ongoing projects with many of the participants around the Earth. In the words of ruangrupa, the instigators of the lumbung principle, ‘make friends not art’ has been systematically practised throughout *Soils*.

The last crucial sources for *Soils* are our close curatorial collaborators, the people at TarraWarra Museum of Art and Struggles for Sovereignty. TarraWarra Museum of Art in Australia grounded much of the early stages of the research. The museum lies close to Coranderrk, site of a large Aboriginal station that from 1863 to 1924 became the home of Wurundjeri and other Aboriginal communities who had been forcibly displaced from their Country by colonial occupiers.² In 1998, 200 acres of the original station—including the manager’s house, the only remaining building—was purchased with funding from the Indigenous Land Corporation. Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation (WEAC) was established to manage and care for Coranderrk. It was on this land, guided by two of the Directors of WEAC, Wurundjeri Custodians Uncle Dave Wandin and Brooke Wandin, that *Soils* started. Later, studying the work that

Struggles for Sovereignty do with farming and Adat/Indigenous communities in Kalimantan or Sulawesi has been formative on thinking about how to work in Eindhoven. The Indonesian collective’s practice in which solidarity networks and non-extractivist curating take precedence and inform the methodology of working with artists and communities has also been an important inspiration for our institutional frameworks.

At the same time, the trust that TarraWarra Museum of Art has built up over years with the Wurundjeri community has made artworks, discussions and understandings possible that would otherwise have never happened. We have each worked closely with the artists we each brought into the project but, more crucially, we have helped each other to learn about our respective environments, communities and methodologies. Each organisation is very different, born in different soils that are, through colonialism, also deeply entangled. As we see it from the Netherlands, we are also all learning together more about where we are from and how that shapes our work in response to the desire to decolonise our approaches. It is to all these formative experiences and relationships, but also to those that came before us that we owe gratitude and without whom this project would not have been possible. We hope that in turn we can pass on those experiences to our local publics through the artworks and documentation in this exhibition.

For us at the Van Abbemuseum, this exhibition is also grounded in the tobacco fields of central Sumatra in what was then the occupied territories of the Dutch East Indies. The museum was founded at the expense of the lives and experiences of plantation labourers there, and their exploitation was ignored and hidden for a long time. It is therefore important for *Soils* that the museum began to research and exhibit the origins of the wealth of its founder Henri van Abbe. The modernist tradition of keeping spheres of concern separated held sway over modern art museums for most of their history and such fundamental dependencies were deemed unworthy of art history. Times are changing, fortunately, and an exhibition such as *Soils* is an expression of an opening to different perspectives on the relation between artistic lineages and the causes and effects of modern art, as well as how the past shapes the present. We western Europeans are relearning through this project, or, perhaps to put it a better way, we have been tasked by current changes to unlearn what we were told about the past.

Soil as material and metaphor

Soil is a strong and resistant material. It is alive, it breathes, and it can recover. In this exhibition, soil is seen as both matter and metaphor. For some, soil is used as an artistic vehicle. For others, soil is a metaphor for the possibility of not only resistance but also the re-existence of understanding about our relations with the Earth today. Resistance to acts of colonial extraction and exploitation have been going on since the day after Columbus arrived in his ‘new world’. Since the late twentieth century, these resistances have not only grown but taken on new forms in the context of decolonial thinking. This way of approaching the past 500 years and the present neo-colonial structures of power, does not only ask for resistance to colonial violence but also for reimagining the terms of the

current capitalist world system. Decolonial thinking inspires the demand for other forms of knowledge to re-exist and challenge the racist, patriarchal dogmas of colonialism and capitalism. Decolonial thinkers stress the significance of thinking and learning back rather than speculating forward. They point out how understanding the debt owed to the ancestors is as valuable as the rights to own our histories and properties.

We live today in the wake of environmental and climate collapse, the injustice of global wealth distribution, racial hierarchies and the obvious failure of the existing model of global capitalism. Without being overconfident, the position of many of the artists and organisers in *Soils* is that these cruelties and failures of the current system no longer need to be revealed—they are as visible as the ground on which we all live. In Europe, the problem is the system's refusal to give imaginative and political space to a coherent projection of what could remove and replace the current system. Critique and opposition, while very necessary, offer little more than delay and respite from these reactionary forces. The real response is still waiting. It is one that must eventually propose a profound change in public policy and economy but to do so it first needs to touch the collective imagination and turn it towards care and valuing relations again. This is a role art can play if it chooses.

The urgent question now is therefore how to turn away from those ways of living that extract and impoverish life on Earth and create the space to project a more hopeful, livable and spiritual relationship with Earth and its living beings. This question forms the core of the curatorial work that shaped the project. Our focus in *Soils* is on moving beyond criticality towards a propositional artistic culture, one that emphasises interdependence and ways of living in relation to Earth and each other. The art we are speaking about here is not necessarily made by people who trained as or call themselves artists. There are many participants here who prefer other names or see the act of naming itself as superfluous. Nor are the materials and mediums always those sanctioned by modern art museums, although some participants play very effectively with those traditions. What we learn here is that what we, from our education and European prejudice, call artworks do not need to have that status in other systems of value and vice versa. The 'artworks' in the exhibition often occupy a space in between these definitions, negotiating with the idea of modern art while attempting to leave it behind. In this way, they can communicate values that are essential for a connected, mutually enriching life.

As western Europeans, grounded in the 'Enlightenment' and beneficiaries of its universalist logics, it is harder for us to let go of our scientific rationalism and critical thinking, even with the knowledge of its destructive consequences. As Munir Fasheh, the thinker who inspired so much of this project, tells us, his belief in mathematics was abandoned when he realised how his illiterate mother's calculations for making clothes for a woman's body had more geometric understanding than the most advanced equations contemplated at Harvard University.³

Only once human life ceases to ground itself on the abstract logic of endless growth and infinite extraction of the planet's resources, will its inhabitants find a stable, sustainable balance between all lives and spirits on Earth be possible to realise. *Soils* has been and will continue to be our way of learning how to live in relation to others in a 'world in which many worlds fit', to quote the famous Zapatistas slogan.

3. Ibid., from 06:45.

COW AND LANDSCAPE

"How we see the rural is how we want to relate to it."
—Rural School of Economics (2024)

Written by rural sociologist Inez Dekker & visual artist Wapke Feenstra on their journey through the Netherlands from autumn 2020 to spring 2024

The idea of the countryside is often a dichotomy, it is either regarded as a peripheral culture or as a beacon of peace and inspiration. The rural does not lack visibility or attention. But how we use and value the rural is determined by what we want to see and what we are able to recognise. Under the guise of progress, the 'Dutch' modernisation process was and is very influential (and destructive) on the landscape both at home and abroad. A transition focusing on good coexistence between humans and the more-than-human is necessary. How do we see a different future? How can the rural and more-than-human life be given a place within contemporary art? And how did *Cow and Landscape* come about?



Ruminating dairy cows next to De Branding Farm on Schiermonnikoog

The everyday as vision of the future

A cow in a landscape is a well-known and widely recognised image. However, agriculture is not recognised as something that arises from, and is made up of, the interactions between humans and more-than-humans. Following the introduction of machines, financial uncertainty, neoliberal laws and regulations, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation and large-scale emission of harmful substances, the current-day modern agricultural sector seems to consist merely of graphs and numbers. It is doubtful that such images will help us forge a transition towards a more 'sustainable agriculture'. That is why we work closely together with those residing in the 'cow and landscape' on a daily basis. Through oral histories and in non-linguistic ways, we document knowledge transfers. The symbiotic relationships that arise from, and give rise to the Dutch landscape, are central to this, including relationships between cows and plants, among cows, between cows and humans, and among humans. We try to create an image that goes beyond a 'universal' culture of modernisation. We show counterforces using tools that we have partial control over and that are near to the everyday, often we do not need to look far. Economics, the science of choice, shapes the everyday.

In *Take Back the Economy* (2013), Gibson-Graham et al. propose that creating a shared future starts from how we see the economy. They argue that the economy is one based on everyday acts and therefore a space we can create and redesign together. This means that the envisioned agricultural transitions can only be realised when we recognise that the economy is rooted in local cultures and (natural) environments. To imagine transitions, instead of understanding the economy as an abstract concept or something that takes place elsewhere, we should recognise that socioeconomic security and interdependencies with the more-than-human are of vital importance. These interdependencies are connected to science, culture and (local) communities (Puig de la



Cow and Landscape from Het Groene Hart printed on curtain strips and presented at Kunsthalle Bratislava, Slovakia, 2021

Bellacasa, 2019). For example, on the high, sandy soils of Brabant, livestock feed has traditionally been organised differently than on the salt marshes of Schiermonnikoog. Brabant's sandy grounds need extra fertilisation, whereas on the small island in the Waddensea, farmers let their young cattle graze on the island's salt marshes after the breeding season. The black peat soil with protein-rich grass that we find in Het Groene Hart of the Netherlands has contributed to high yielding products, creating short chains with cities such as Leiden, The Hague and Rotterdam. Up to this day, it is visible how historical entanglements grounded in the soil determine the dynamics that shape our daily economies. In *Cow and Landscape*, agricultural transitions are presented as 'grounded' in the everyday, its histories and possible futures.

We have lived here, in the Netherlands, for over two millennia in a delta with a few heaps of sand, a landscape where cows graze and, with their protein production, contribute to our prosperity (as well as the formation of a national identity) in the form of butter and cheese. This often had a top-down approach, think for instance of the reclamation of lakes in low moor areas paid for with colonial riches; the peat colonies, connecting land and social education; notice the influence of Mansholt and his European policy, or the current buyouts of farms near Natura 2000 areas. Yet, there are also a lot of daily, bottom-up knowledge and practices available. Dairy farming especially holds a great deal of knowledge about land-based work and changing perspectives on 'cow and landscape', owing to the multiple generations making up family farms.



Speckle Park cattle at Janmiekeshoeve; naturally without horns and a real meat cow

Cow and Landscape images are a cliché in the history and formation of the Dutch landscape. Look at Albert Cuyp for instance, The Hague School, as well as current commercials advertising meadow milk.

That is why we want to look the cow in the eye. We want to get close to her and hear stories about her. In 2020, we started going on field trips to different dairy farms in the country. There, we were told the history of cow families, we saw how the cows of today live, and how powerful economic forces keep remaking the cow's body (see Federici, 2020, for her thesis on the body under capitalism). The relationship between

humans and cows was always at the heart of it. Questions that help us learn to understand and read the various worlds and relationships with them are: “What is your favorite cow?”, “What does the cow of the future look like?” and “Which landscape does that cow occupy?”



On a study trip to the exhibition *In the Light of Cuyp* at the Dordrechts Museum – autumn 2021

In Dutch, the word ‘landscape’ can also mean the view of the land; a genre of art and a term for land ready to be shaped by humans (Feenstra and Feenstra, 2012). Landscape exists for the cow, the tourist, the philosopher, the investors, the black-tailed godwit; it is cow feed and, yes, sometimes it is a scary place. That is why the term ‘landscape’ lends itself perfectly to the countless associations and expectations evoked by the current agricultural transition. The landscape is irrevocably the ‘object’ of our gaze and a good starting point to question the ethics of central and peripheral culture. Because who will shape the landscape? Who will live in it? Perspectives on the ‘good life,’ both human and non-human, coalesce in the cultural evolution of the landscape (genre).

Images of the ‘good life’

It is unknown how the Dutch landscape, the cow and the cow’s place in today’s rural life will change in the short and long term. We do argue, however, that how this transition is handled, is the result of how the ‘good life’ is seen now and in the future. The images that are and will be created form the basis of the transition. The way cows and their surrounding landscape in the Netherlands will change, is intricately related to family stories, national economy and new insights in biodiversity. There are multiple perspectives, but it is clear that something needs to change now. Bringing together farmers, consumers, ecologists and rural inhabitants, this project adopts visual resources as part of an active search for dilemmas and hopeful future visions for *Cow and Landscape*.

In *Cow and Landscape*, we explore what a vision of the future could look like based on the ‘good life’. Neither a concept nor a practice, a ‘good life’ is an understanding of an image based on various interrelated ideas, feelings, sounds, smells and thoughts. Unlike concepts such as



Plein Air Cow Drawing at Gennep Hoeve, Eindhoven

‘development’ or ‘wealth’, a ‘good life’ is not institutionalised or measurable. Rather, it is like a moving image that is shaped by different contexts, economic structures, cultures, beings and embodied meanings.

Both on an individual and societal scale, these kinds of images reveal themselves in the everyday. A ‘good life’ can highlight diversity and the irrationality of related embodied meanings, and shows us the emergence of great versatility. As a result, we are able to recognise spaces for alternative development narratives (Escobar, 2018). Furthermore, enclosing existing ‘good life’ spaces outside of structurally dominant spaces, helps us strive to decolonise dominant and destructive practices (Gibson-Graham, 2008). There are no ready-made solutions and central visions. Together, the polyphonic and the pluriverse will determine the future of the Dutch cow and its landscape as a series of imaginaries and ways of living. And will thereby truly shape ‘good life’.



In 2023, Rijksmuseum Twenthe presented *De Melkbrouwerij*, *De Melktapperij* and *Erfgoed Bossem*

So, the search for the ‘good life’ in *Cow and Landscape* brings us to other images, possibilities and realities—which in practice often already exist. Accessible knowledge acquisition like drawing, walking, taking photos, foraging and milking, are key to this. Because non-linguistic knowledge gives shape to rural areas, their cultures and economy. So, to move beyond a modernistic world, other things need to be recognised through

the highlighting of local, embodied, and everyday knowledges. Our meetings with farms and naturalists in Brabant, on Schiermonnikoog, in Salland and in Twente were essential for us to be able to learn from ‘cow and landscape’ in all their forms.

Last summer, we also began collaborations with Brabant-based farms including the Genneper Hoeve in Eindhoven, De Hofstad in Son en Breugel, Kasteelboerderij Waalre, Janmiekeshoeve in Mariahout and Op Den Hoek in De Mortel. These meetings have opened up rural worlds and possibilities. In *Cow and Landscape*, we have tried to create space for exchange for teachings and learning from these kinds of realities through walks in the fields, by organising plein-air sessions with drawing groups, scanning family archives and filming cows that are being milked. Many of these non-linguistic learning experiences find their way into exhibitions, temporary interventions in the landscape, as well as this publication. We often focus on non-traditional forms of rural knowledge exchange, and representational spaces like exhibitions are only one of many ways to open this up a broader audience.

Images of Brabant farming life



Every Wednesday, Meike Schots helped milk the cows, but that is no longer necessary: De Hofstad has a milking robot now



According to Miriam Jansen, this Lakenvelder is the best cow at Kasteelboerderij Waalre



All the milk is turned into cheese at Genneper Hoeve, and just before the start of calving season, there is some rest, says farmer Mirjam Matze



In drier weather, these trees are planted on agricultural land, because agroforestry is the future at Janmiekeshoeve



In front of the new greenhouse barn, Farmer Willem Verkuijlen talks about the benefits of home-grown livestock feed

The rural as imagination: reflections by Inez

For me, the rural has always been a way to connect different perspectives, disciplines and politics that help me to imagine different forms of the ‘good life’. Growing up on the rural-urban island of Voorne-Putten, in the southwest of the Netherlands, I learned that there is not one clear-cut way to explain the rural. I also experienced that there were many different lives being led on this island: a polder landscape consisting mainly of intensive arable farming with lush dunes and the large-scale petrochemical industrial estates Europoort and Maasvlakte on the edges. It is a landscape made up of many different imaginations. My interest in imagination started here, and probably even more with my parents’ involvement in the 1980s and 1990s Rotterdam art scene. Although I decided to go to Wageningen to learn more about agriculture and rural communities, my interest in art never disappeared. That’s why, after my Master’s in International Development Studies, I started working first as an intern and later as a researcher and maker in Myvillages. As such, *Cow and Landscape* gradually came into being from Wapke’s personal history and interest in cows and landscape. It started from the idea that we saw that visions, images, daily practices of (cow and human) bodies, were not really part of the general narrative striving for an agricultural transition. Although these are of course—subconsciously—at the heart of these kinds of developments, they were not recognised or viewed as such. Wapke and I delved into critical pedagogical methods and used visual frames of reference to explore the stereotypical image of cows and landscapes and to centralise non-linguistic learning. Furthermore, by creating connections, sometimes even just in our minds (for example through the so-called ‘free your inner cow’ methodology), we tried to find different images of ‘cow and landscape’. We learned for instance that the influential history of agriculture in the Netherlands was key in shaping its colonial project as well as Dutch modernisation processes (Van der Woud, 2021). We also saw how farmers, like Rick and Arjuna Huis in ‘t Veld from De Melkbrouwerij, and initiatives like Land van Ons, experimented with gaining access to land in different ways. Wapke and I went on our first field trip to Schiermonnikoog. Here, we meet the residents, the municipality and visit three farms. We are able to milk cows and we go on a tour with a guide born and raised on the island. Two more visits to the island follow, during which we meet more farmers, taste the Van Schier cheese, go out with the forest ranger and delve into the personal photo archives of new and old farmers. In Brabant, Wapke and I, together with Kathrin Böhm and the Van Abbemuseum, spend four days getting to know the city of Eindhoven, the museum and their (former) rural connections. And we visit two dairy farms in the Eindhoven area. Later, Wapke returned several times, visiting various farms, learning more about Brabant. Furthermore, in 2022, Wapke focused on *Cow and Landscape* as part of the manifestation *Terra Libera: Who Does the Land Belong To?* at Rijksmuseum Twenthe.

As well as meeting Dutch farmers, we have become part of many other networks, for instance through the International Degrowth Conference 2021, Boerengroep Foundation, the University of Amsterdam’s Rural Imaginations research group, the rural women’s association Vrouwen van

Nu, the Cultural Geography Chair Group at Wageningen University and the transdisciplinary research program CropMix.

The many new connections, people and more-than-humans we met on our trips have helped us form the images, visualisations, definitions and designs of *Cow and Landscape*. It has become clear that a vision for the future of *Cow and Landscape* consists of a multitude of images of the ‘good life’. We learned that the rural can serve as a foundation for transformative ways of living and doing. Within *Soils, Cow and Landscape* is one of many quests for a Dutch imagination of coexistence that is fruitful for both humans and more-than-humans.

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I CALL OUT TO YOU

Zena Cumpston

Our Barkandji¹ way of saying hello is to say ‘ngayi’. This is not literally a ‘hello’, but more a way of *calling out* to someone. It is pertinent that our way of greeting and acknowledging cannot directly translate because now, in the terrible times we bear witness to together, we must not just connect through inane social conventions, we *must call out to each other*.

My world revolves around my love of plants, which, if you visit my work as part of *Soils* at Van Abbemuseum, will be obvious. I am in love with plants because they bring people into a relationship with Country, and when we are properly in relation, we begin to care more. We get excited as we learn, and we perhaps start looking at the world around us in a more connected way. When people learn of the deep knowledge embedded in indigenous plants, I see them open themselves to a pathway towards meaningfully respecting and understanding my people, and importantly, better understanding their responsibility to look after the place they call home.

Plants have been the foundation of our ability to thrive and to survive as the oldest living culture on Earth. We have ingeniously utilised them over many millennia to provide around 80% of our diets.² We have learnt to utilise plants, sometimes taking them through multiple distinct and highly scientific processes that can change them from highly poisonous and deadly to highly nutritious and life-giving. For many years I have researched, written and spoken about Indigenous plant use. At the end of 2022 I learnt to make linocuts, a strong art form in my Barkandji community. We have always been known for carving. For tens of thousands of years we have carved our knowledge of Country and our stories into rock. Today we are well-known as carvers still, but now more often with wood, emu eggs and linocut. Within a few weeks of joyous and prolific making I created my first series *ngarta kiira (to return to Country)*.

Traditional Aboriginal Food, Fibre and Healing Plants of Victoria (Melbourne: Koorie Heritage Trust, 1992).

1. Beth Gott and Nelly Zola, *Koorie Plants, Koorie People: Traditional Aboriginal Food, Fibre and Healing Plants of Victoria* (Melbourne: Koorie Heritage Trust, 1992).

2. To understand more about my Barkandji people and Country see

Art-making is an exciting new way for me to explore my research, to map my learning, to share my understanding of and love for my plant kin. The many years I have spent reading, researching and speaking with my Elders and my community have gifted me with more stories than I will perhaps ever have time to tell within this new visual adventure. I utilise many symbols and unique pairings to convey plant knowledge in this series, and many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people will see aspects within it that are perhaps invisible to those outside. Within this series I also speak to the symbiotic relationships between people, plants and animals on my Barkandji country.³

Our cultures as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are incredibly diverse. Before our homelands were invaded by the colonisers we had more than 350 distinct languages and many, many more dialects. Just as our languages are diverse, so too are our knowledges, our Laws, our landscapes and our cultural practices. Whilst we shared and co-operated with other groups (intermarrying, trading, coming together to share culture, language, technologies and resources) this exchange was always undertaken by following strict codes of behaviour that particularly honoured the rights of those whose lands were being visited. The colonisers continuously failed to recognise our diversity—as those who wish to overtake, negate, erase, suppress and eradicate always do as one homogenous group and, sadly, this misconception continues today, working to reduce, redact, and obscure through stereotype. Homogenising effects a watering-down of our individual rights to our cultural landscapes and our complexity, unique identities and inheritance.⁴ It hides the power and the truth of what we have to offer in the effective care and management of Country.

And here I must add complexity to our shared understanding of our cultural diversity as the First Peoples of 'Australia', for we also have many shared beliefs and understandings, perhaps the most important of which is our understanding of Country. We don't talk much of 'soils' across our cultures. Instead we speak of 'Country' and our shared conceptualisation of Country is important to understand, because it is how we collectively envisage much of the cultural, political, spiritual and physical aspects of what many may call 'soils';

"But to Indigenous people, Country is so much more than the land, seas and waters. It encompasses all living things and all aspects of the environment, as well as the knowledge, cultural practices and responsibilities connected with this. A common view is that we belong to Country, rather than Country belonging to us."

"Caring for Country is holistic, with the physical interconnected with the social, the cultural and the spiritual. Sustainable environmental practices are embedded in our culture through traditional hunting, harvesting, and managing plants and animals. Our cultural expressions reflect our symbiotic relationship with Country. Our stories are evidence of the countless generations of interaction with and nurturing of Country, and we continue to speak, sing and enact our connections. In Indigenous world views, the health of the land, water, sky and people are deeply interconnected. If Country is sick, our people are sick. Healing Country means healing ourselves."⁵

Morrisson, Stephanie von Gavel, and Emma Woodward, "Indigenous: Outlook and Impact," in *Australia State of the Environment 2021* (Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra), accessed May 17, 2024, soe.dcceew.gov.au/land/pressures/introduced-and-invasive-species.

7. Zena Cumpston, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," in Zena Cumpston, Michael-Shawn Fletcher, and Lesley Head, *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (First Knowledge Series), ed. Margo Neale (Port Melbourne, Victoria: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 37.

The stories of our plants are a landscape that I have spent much time traversing. For me, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interactions with our plant kin over deep time illuminate not only the complexity of our knowledge and the effectiveness of oral transmission over millennia, but also the ignorance and ongoing extractive project at the core of colonisation. Due to many incursions across our cultural landscapes (but most especially intensive agriculture and land clearing) there are now more introduced plant species in Australia than native species.⁶ This is particularly troubling when we consider that 200 scientists from 30 countries worldwide recently identified Australia as the country with the highest proportion of unique plant species on Earth.⁷ So, we are integral to the continued health of biodiversity on the planet but we are also over-represented as a leader in extinction since colonisation began in Australia just over 200 years ago.

In my co-authored book, *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (2022), I devoted an entire chapter ('looking back, moving forward') to the history of past failures to recognise our custodianship and knowledge and how this relates to the ongoing circumstance and rampant extraction that sits at the core of the colonial project in Australia today;

"Botanists interacted with Indigenous peoples across Australia, these connections were so rarely conducive to respectful engagement. The Indigenous people who accompanied botanists provided vital knowledge of Country needed to find and identify specimens and explain their many uses, as well as word lists and the context of their importance, not only for people but within the larger ecology: for example, their symbiotic relationships with other plants and animals. Despite their centrality to the collection and documentation processes, Aboriginal guides were seen merely as informants, not skilled knowledge holders; resources to be mined and discarded when they no longer served a purpose. Curiously, these early botanists and naturalists are still credited with the discovery of species, completely erasing many millennia of Indigenous peoples' expert knowledge, custodianship, stewardship and innovation related to plants."⁸

Over and over we see the ongoing harms of colonisation in the disrespect for and erasure of Indigenous knowledge. Today, many scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have posited colonisation and its ongoing circumstance as irrefutably linked to climate change.⁹ While some cling to the idea that our climate catastrophe is the great equaliser (affecting all peoples) in truth, climate change has been proven as more immediately, directly and catastrophically affecting Indigenous peoples worldwide.¹⁰ In a cruel irony, as articulated here by the United Nations, we contribute to climate change the least;

"Climate change poses threats and dangers to the survival of indigenous communities worldwide, even though indigenous peoples contribute the least to greenhouse emissions. In fact, indigenous peoples are vital to, and active in, the many ecosystems that inhabit their lands and territories and may therefore help enhance the resilience of these ecosystems. In addition, indigenous peoples interpret and react to the impacts of climate change in creative ways,

3. See: "Abundance Room Sheet," from *ngaraiya* (together, us group, all in it together), exhibition on show at Broken Hill City Art Gallery, May 3–July 28, 2024, curated by Zena Cumpston and Nici Cumpston, accessed May 17, 2024, ngaraiya.com.au/.

4. To better understand 'cultural landscapes' see Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Melbourne, "Landscapes," Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy, accessed May 17, 2024, fvloc.com.au/sections/landscapes.

5. Zena Cumpston, Pia Harkness, Rosemary Hill, Terri Janke, Joe

6. Zena Cumpston, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," in Zena Cumpston,

7. Zena Cumpston, Michael-Shawn Fletcher, and Lesley Head, *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (First Knowledge Series), ed. Margo Neale (Port Melbourne, Victoria: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 37.

8. Zena Cumpston, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," in Zena Cumpston,

9. Zena Cumpston, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," in Zena Cumpston,

10. Jeffrey C. Standen et al., "Aboriginal Population and Climate

Change in Australia: Implications for Health and Adaptation Planning," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 12 (2022): 7502, doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19127502.

11. Jeffrey C. Standen et al., "Aboriginal Population and Climate

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12. Jeffrey C. Standen et al., "Aboriginal Population and Climate

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13. Jeffrey C. Standen et al., "Aboriginal Population and Climate

Change in Australia: Implications for Health and Adaptation Planning," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 12 (2022): 7502, doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19127502.

drawing on traditional knowledge and other technologies to find solutions which may help society at large to cope with impending changes.”¹¹

The intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for the first time since it began over three decades ago, acknowledged in a 2022 report that colonialism is a historic and ongoing driver of the climate crisis.¹² Until we accept that in order to heal our Earth we must stop subjugating people and lands, it seems the climate crisis will remain on its same terrifying trajectory.

Today, many would have us believe that Indigenous knowledge is finally being respected and empowered. In ‘Australia’ I assert that this is certainly not the case. We hear government, scientists and the wider community speaking of its importance and centrality, without meaningful action to empower the holders of this knowledge, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Perhaps no greater evidence of the lie of this supposed respect and wish to empower can be seen than in our recent referendum to empower First Peoples in decision making, to give Australia’s First Peoples a ‘Voice to Parliament’ (much like the one surreptitiously enjoyed for decades by mining companies). After many months of enduring soul-destroying racist tirades in the media we watched a landslide ‘no’ vote prevail before polls had even closed across the country.¹³

As an Aboriginal person who worked in academia for many years, I have seen the institutional smoke and mirrors that tips its hat to ‘decolonising’ practices in knowledge production. I eventually limped away from the institution, battered, bruised, and demoralised. Over and over again, I saw our knowledges being extracted, our Indigenous Intellectual and Cultural Property receiving no protections. Promises of reciprocity were broken and our people kicked to the curb once the ‘decolonising’ optics no longer required their presence. I saw non-Indigenous people repeatedly elevated as leaders in Indigenous knowledge.¹⁴ I cried myself to sleep too many times after falling into traps that used all the right language but were in fact designed to ‘show’ engagement whilst enacting dispossession and white supremacy.¹⁵

There is perhaps no better example of the ways in which this respect-for-Indigenous-people and-knowledge-sleight-of-hand plays out in Australia than the ‘bush foods’ industry. This industry revolves around cultivating and commodifying the ancient foodways of Australia’s First Peoples and is highly lucrative, generating more than AUS\$80 million in revenue. By 2025 this is estimated to double to AUS\$160 million.¹⁶ Sadly, less than 2% of the benefit of this industry goes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An industry built on our knowledge and use of plant foods, our thousands of years of custodianship and scientific innovation delivers very little benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. And yet, it is almost continuously conceptualised, spoken of and showcased as a celebration and empowerment of our people and culture.

The text included in my series *ngarta-kiira (to return to Country)* seeks to draw attention to what I see are very strong parallels between the Aboriginal art industry and the bush foods industry. My text pays homage to and directly references the work of Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang activist/artist Richard Bell: specifically *Bell’s Theorem*:

11. Summary for Policymakers, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. H.-O. Pörtner et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 3–33, doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844.001.

12. IPCC.

13. Ben.

14. Here is one of many examples: Jack Latimore, “Vice-Chancellor Urged to Rethink Pick for Aboriginal Knowledge Director,” SBS, accessed April 10, 2024, sbs.com.au/nitv/article/vice-chancellor-urged-to-rethink-pick-for-aboriginal-knowledge-director.

15. Jimmy Elwood and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, “Conspicuous Consumption: Economies of Virtue and the Commodification of Indigeneity,” *Public 32* (2021): 121–133, doi.org/10.1386/public_00077_1.



Zena Cumpston (Barkandji people), *Ngayi – I call out to you*, 2024 (triptych), Melbourne, Wurundjeri Country, lino collage, kopi, on Fabriano paper, artist's proof, 59.4 × 42cm, courtesy of the artist

Aboriginal Art—It’s a White Thing! (2002).¹⁷ Bell brilliantly illuminates and critiques the disparities in benefit of the (also highly lucrative) Aboriginal art industry. This industry also most often sits within the Australian psyche as one which uplifts and empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but which, in real terms, too often delivers more gains to its non-Indigenous participants. The inequities and injustices of this, our shared world, must be taken apart and examined.

I cannot be given a platform to speak without speaking for those whose voices are being denied. To fail to do so renders my daily mission, every part of the work I do to empower my own colonised people, devoid of any integrity. Many conflicts are happening right now, many of them may be conceptualised as, at their core, fights over land that enact both colonisation and genocide. But whether you can truly see what is being enacted or not, there is no question that colonisation and capitalism have been proven over time to coalesce to destroy our lands, and with this, eventually, all life.

As artists we are privileged as the storytellers of our communities, but we also have a responsibility to hold a mirror to our society and to speak for those who do not have a platform to be heard. To create works that matter, artists must be brave, they must boldly tell the stories of their people and culture and importantly, be supported with safe cultural spaces in which to operate, no matter how difficult and challenging some of those stories may be. Our arts community is terminally ill if it is a place of bullying, of fear, of censorship, of self-interest, of silencing. It must never be a space bereft of community, to be healthy and vibrant it must embrace and support collective action, solidarity, but most importantly care. If you advocate only for yourself as an artist you are, at best, narcissus, frozen

16. S. Laurie, *Australian Native Foods and Botanicals* – 2019/20 Market Study (Botanicals ANFa, Sydney, 2020).

17. Richard Bell, “Bell’s Theorem: Aboriginal Art—It’s a White Thing!,” *e-flux Journal* 90 (April 2018): 1–3.

within vacuous self-interest and failing miserably in the deep honour bestowed upon you as a storyteller.

It is not too late. There is much we can all do, big and small, to fight against the horror, violence and toxicity ever-present in our world today. Leading with active care is perhaps the first step, and may reveal to us all a collective path forward.

I call out to you with a call to empower our shared humanity, with a call to action from my dear friend, activist and organiser LJ Amsterdam;

“Taking action right now does not require that you have your analysis perfectly articulated, or understand the entirety of history; it does, however, require a moral fury. And choosing action is a commitment to changing and being changed. I am not stuck—not stuck in my ways, my beliefs, my language. I can unmoor myself from my reference points, from what I was conditioned to accept as truth, from the diversionary excuse not to act because no action I could do could possibly be of any impact. Doing more is being more. What the hands do, the heart learns.”¹⁸

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SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURES: SUPPORTING THE LONG BREATH OF STRUGGLE THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICE

Eliesta, Gatari, Sanne, Alec (on behalf of Struggles for Sovereignty)

This is a collectively written text by Struggles for Sovereignty (SFS), a collective rooted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, focusing on social and ecological justice. SFS collaborates with practitioners, communities and grassroots cultural initiatives across the Indonesian archipelago and other Majority World contexts, who are working on the frontline of decolonial and ecological struggles. Through their programmes, they explore the possibilities of cultural practice to act as a tool in developing lasting solidarity infrastructures.



Paser Adat (Indigenous / Customary) community mapping and protection signs in Rangan, East Kalimantan, image courtesy of Yurni Sadariah

18. LJ Amsterdam, “Palestine and Israel | A Love Letter to

All Who March,” *The Forge*, March 1, 2024, accessed April 20, 2024, forgeorganizing.org/article/love-letter-all-who-march-o.

We wanted to use the opportunity of this text, published as part of the ongoing, multi-part, translocal endeavour that is *Soils*, to reflect on what has driven our engagement with this collaboration and the questions that have guided us throughout the process. We have included some of these questions below as triggers for this collective writing.



Mosintuwu Festival 2022: To Remember, Preserve and Celebrate Soils, Water and Forest, image courtesy of Institut Mosintuwu

For us, *Soils* grew from a desire to explore the entangled histories of colonialism linking the Netherlands, Australia and Indonesia and the devastating effects these colonialisms and imperialisms have had and the part they continue to play in the destruction of communities and ecologies in each context. Given the role of art and its institutions in the reproduction of Western modern ways of knowing, seeing and inhabiting the Earth, we approached this project from an understanding that the inherently interconnected nature of colonialism and ecological destruction cannot simply be approached as a theme or issue, but must be enacted and embodied in our ways of working. This is no easy task. It requires a certain level of vulnerability from everyone involved and that we each be honest and open about our relative individual, collective and organisational privileges (whether colonial, racial, financial, gender-based or otherwise). It was important that we put all these on the table to be discussed and navigated together in solidarity.

A second key understanding informing this project was that outcome-focused logics of production and accumulation, and neoliberal common senses embodied by Western modern art institutions, need to be countered. Instead, there is a need to create time and space for open-ended processes that prioritise collaboration and communities across geographies and contexts. Together, these understandings gave rise to a range of questions underpinning our engagement with *Soils*.

that aims to create jobs and increase foreign investment by reducing regulations for business licences and land acquisition. The law is a threat to labour rights and land rights and has led to large-scale deforestation among other forms of social and ecological destruction

How can we enact and embody a decolonial ecological approach in artistic and curatorial practice—not only in themes and issues addressed, but in our ways of working, in the kind of organisations we build, and in who we work with and for?

Throughout long and complex histories of colonialism—from Dutch and Japanese occupation to the ongoing forms of coloniality that proliferate under neoliberalism—our home, Indonesia, has been exploited on many levels. This has led to the decimation of our environments, communities, local knowledges and cosmologies. The end of direct colonial occupation by the Dutch did not mean that people gained sovereignty over their territories or that our land was free from extraction. Coloniality is still embedded in our everyday politics and manifests itself through policies such as the Omnibus Law, or Job Creation Act,¹ a recently passed law supporting large-scale international investments. This law cedes even more power to a neoliberal oligarchy and is slowly but surely leading to the further displacement of communities and ecological destruction. Many areas across the archipelago have become sacrifice zones.² Repression, displacement and land-grabbing are escalating under multi-sectoral mass developments, including tourism, mining, power plants, so-called ‘food estates’ and the relocation of the capital city from Jakarta, on the island of Java, to Kalimantan, to name just a few. The idea of ‘development’ threatens our ecologies, as our non-human kin are not seen as living beings, but as resources to be extracted.

In his book *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World* (2020), Malcom Ferdinand brings the concept of modernity’s double fracture to light.³ Ferdinand identifies how modernity produced both a colonial fracture and an environmental fracture by creating a duality between nature and culture while also positioning coloniser above colonised, men above women. Colonialism, with its desire to conquer, disregarded customary law and positioned Indigenous land as empty land whose sole purpose was to be a site of extraction. This has implications



Women of Poso Village creating an Ovarium Painting, image courtesy of Institut Mosintuwu

1. Act No.

2. Term

3. “The Double Fracture of Modernity,” a concept outlined in:

for the way we navigate the ecological destruction we are currently facing and highlights the urgent need for environmental movements to address the histories and cultural foundations of colonialism.

Responding to this reality, we began thinking about the ways of working needed to try to counter the uneven distribution of privilege, resources, visibility and access that are part of the legacy of these colonial histories of domination. We sought ways to counter the often-extractive nature of platforming or showcasing the situated work of grassroots communities in Western modern art museums. Our first step was to ensure that the foundation of our engagement with *Soils* was a redistribution of resources to our collaborators—communities who are working on the frontline of colonial and ecological struggles—to support their ongoing activities in their own contexts without strings attached or direction from any of the curatorial team of the project. Specifically, for *Soils*, we invited our long-term collaborators Lian Gogali and Yurni Sadariah to join us as Fellows. Both have a strong practice of working with their communities in a common struggle for their own lands. As such, we did not want to put them in a position where they had to produce a new or commissioned work. Instead, we wanted to support the continuation of their ongoing activities by using *Soils* as their struggle infrastructure, offering both financial support and a translocal network with a spirit of solidarity.

What forms of artistic and cultural practice are being developed to support decolonial ecological struggles by grassroots community initiatives as well as by those in the arts and cultural field?

In Poso, Central Sulawesi, our collaborator Lian Gogali and her organisation Institut Mosintuwu work together with their local communities to resist various kinds of mass development: from so-called ‘green’ energy power plants to monoculture plantations, both of which have grown with alarming speed in the past decade. One of the main problems in the region is the Hydroelectric Power Plant (PLTA) run by Poso Energy, an ongoing development that is destroying Lake Poso, an ancient lake that is rich in biodiversity and an important source of livelihood, tradition and spirituality. A similar situation is happening in Rangan, the home area of our collaborator Yurni Sadariah. Here, palm monocultures, coal mining and forest logging are having a huge impact on the ecological landscape, devastating local traditions, including Belian, a ritual using plant leaves from the indigenous forest—now rare because more than 95% of the indigenous forest has been destroyed. The ecological impact on the biodiversity and cosmologies in Poso and Rangan is undeniable. However, though our Fellows and their communities face harsh realities as their homes are turned into sacrifice zones, cultural practice has become a way for them to negotiate with those in power. Through their cultural activities—which for *Soils* include a communal edible garden and solidarity economy in the case of Lian and a grassroots *Sekolah Adat* (Indigenous/Customary School) in the case of Yurni—they inhabit an ambiguous grey zone, using soft power as a tactic to resist oppressive power relations while working on a grassroots level to preserve their ways of living, which are being erased.

For us, our role as curators and collaborators is to act as a catalyst or support infrastructure for the Fellows and their communities to sustain and continue their work in whichever way they wish. As a collective formed in an art context, Struggles for Sovereignty (SFS) has a broad network, which includes artists who are skilled in inhabiting this grey zone, using art and cultural practices as tools for storytelling and awareness raising; for speaking directly to power; and for working with communities towards developing local infrastructures for their social, cultural, economic and ecological sovereignty. Aside from our two Fellows, Yurni and Lian, we are also collaborating with Badan Kajian Pertanahan (BKP), Moelyono and Riar Rizaldi for this project: artists and friends with whom we have an ongoing relationship and, in many cases, have worked with since our very first SFS programme in 2020.

Badan Kajian Pertanahan (BKP)⁴ is a duo consisting of Bunga Siagian and Ismal Muntaha, who have created an artistic-cultural lab in Jatiwangi, Majalengka, West Java. Through their speculative practice, they navigate the land rights struggle faced by their village of Wates through claims of cultural ownership, developing new rituals, infrastructure and festivals together with their local community to reassert their sovereignty over their ancestral land. This includes Museum Wakare, a museum made of pressed earth they erected in the centre of Wates to recount their communities’ long history on and with the land, underscoring its cultural significance. Through a new institutional cooperation between Museum Wakare and Van Abbemuseum (2024–2027), they critically examine and work toward a new understanding and practice of the concept of *Adat/Tradition*, which was first introduced by the Dutch colonial regime. Their collaboration kicked off with a performance lecture that reverses the well-known practice of repatriation, in which museums return cultural objects that were stolen during colonial time to their rightful owners, by performing an epistemological repatriation of the problematic legacy of the colonial concept of tradition back to the Dutch public.

Moelyono is an artist who is known for his long-term collaborations with communities, the stories and struggles of whom he often shares through his gallery-based works. In the *Soils* exhibitions, he presents two



Lake Poso, Central Sulawesi, image courtesy of Institut Mosintuwu

4. Badan Kajian Pertanahan (BKP) translates as ‘The Agency for the Study of Land Affairs’. Their name being a twist on the official governmental department, BKP mimics ‘authority’ through the use of artistic and creative practice. Their primary goal is to gain cultural ownership over their land, which has been in dispute since the 1950s, when it was taken by the Japanese colonisers as the site of a military base and has since been in the possession of the Indonesian air force.

paintings depicting Ludruk, a form of non-hierarchical people's theatre founded in East Java, which satirises the performers' everyday lives and struggles: whether struggles against eviction and hunger or the struggle of trans women claiming their right to speak in public. They show that struggles require collective work and that land is not merely a resource to be owned or extracted, but it is a culture, an identity, and a way of living. The two paintings are the result of a five-year collaboration with a group of Ludruk performers (consisting of farmers, trans women and other local community members), working together on their practice and struggles.

Riar Rizaldi is an artist and filmmaker whose works arise from an extended research process, often involving engagement with local communities. During his research for *Kasiterit*, one of the trilogy of films he has presented throughout this project, Riar worked with Adat communities on Bangka Island. The film thereby builds from a deep understanding of the complexities of extraction on Bangka, including our own implication in the dispossession and displacement of the local communities by tin mining, tin being an essential component in the production of ubiquitous devices such as laptops and mobile phones.

Each of the artists we collaborate with is embedded in the communities they work with, actively engaging in their struggles and nurturing relationships of friendship and trust. Artistic practice is therefore an expanded notion; it does not merely denote a way of doing art, but a way to engage or intertwine with aspects of communities' daily lives and the issues they are struggling against, through long-term cultural practice.

What forms of care work are needed to build a solidarity network based on mutual empowerment, using the arts as infrastructure?

As SFS, we approach our curatorial practice as a collective practice. Through our work, we have gotten to know many different communities working in diverse territories across the world, each facing a broad range of struggles. Their varied and inspiring practices have made us reflect on how we can adapt art and its institutions from within. We have learned that the struggle for social and ecological justice should not focus on a single context or stop after the end of a specific project, but maintain a spirit of continuation, sustainability and solidarity with others in resisting multi-layered forms of exploitation. At this stage, we feel art should detach from its forms and instead be used as a tool to enable and weave a network of mutual solidarity among communities and territories. This is evident in the daily practices and work of our collaborators. In our experience, art has the possibility to enable a space where land-based knowledges can be experienced and shared by others, where we can develop an understanding of the differences in each other's contexts, articulate our situated positions and think together about the best methods for us to work together in ways that are meaningful for all.

In one of our conversations with our Fellows, Lian Gogali reminded us that whatever the problem is, it should be shared with our collaborators, because the way we address the issues we face is an inherent part of the methodology of our collaborative work. To maintain an equal relationship among collaborators, we should face any problems together rather than divide ourselves into fixed silos of specific roles such as curator, artist,

community, etc. It is important to move beyond the traditional centralised model in which artists only have contact with a project's curatorial team rather than with each other, and create a safe space where decisions can be made collectively, and practices, challenges and constraints can be shared as honestly and openly as possible. A process like this does not happen overnight; it takes time and is only possible if our collaborators nurture this process together with us. Therefore, for us, curating is not just about selecting or making exhibitions, but about grafting new branches to enrich our existing solidarity networks. As art and cultural workers, we need to continually reflect on and question our position and ways of working, even more so when we work on issues relating to social and ecological injustice.



Paser Adat (Indigenous/Customary) community mapping and protection signs in Rangan, East Kalimantan, image courtesy of Yurni Sadariah

The question is: How do we support our collaborators who are fighting for and with their lives for social and ecological justice? What we have learned is that process is key, allowing support over the longer term by building and maintaining friendships through care and solidarity and by creating space to share vulnerabilities, build trust, learn and listen. We do this through regular individual and group conversations, video calls, WhatsApp or Signal messages, by sharing cooking recipes and photos of activities that our Fellows are undertaking, by reminding ourselves to eat well and take a good rest and to check, recheck and evaluate our

relationships as a strategy of mutual collective care. For us, *Soils* has become a way to experiment with taking care of each other, to ‘*memanjangkan napas perjuangan*’ as Lian would say: to ‘sustain a long breath in our struggles’.⁵

It is here we leave you, for now, with a last reflection. Even though we have used some of the questions that guide our work as triggers for this collectively written text, our responses are not meant as answers. These are questions to which we don’t expect to be able to find fixed answers; questions to which any response is necessarily dialogical and therefore contextual, precarious and temporary; questions that we need to check ourselves with again and again, to ensure we are carrying forward the ethics and the spirit we want to achieve into every aspect of our collective ways of working, while remaining open and vulnerable enough to be able to hear and be in solidarity with those we collaborate with.

5. The idea of ‘sustaining our long breath’, which Lian Gogali often mentions, includes the acknowledgment of emotions, affect and care work as important methods in activist work.



















Have you glimpsed
the dreams of a forest?

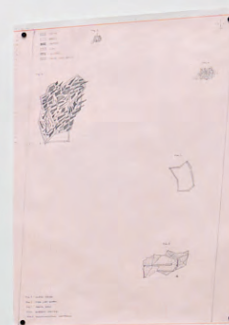








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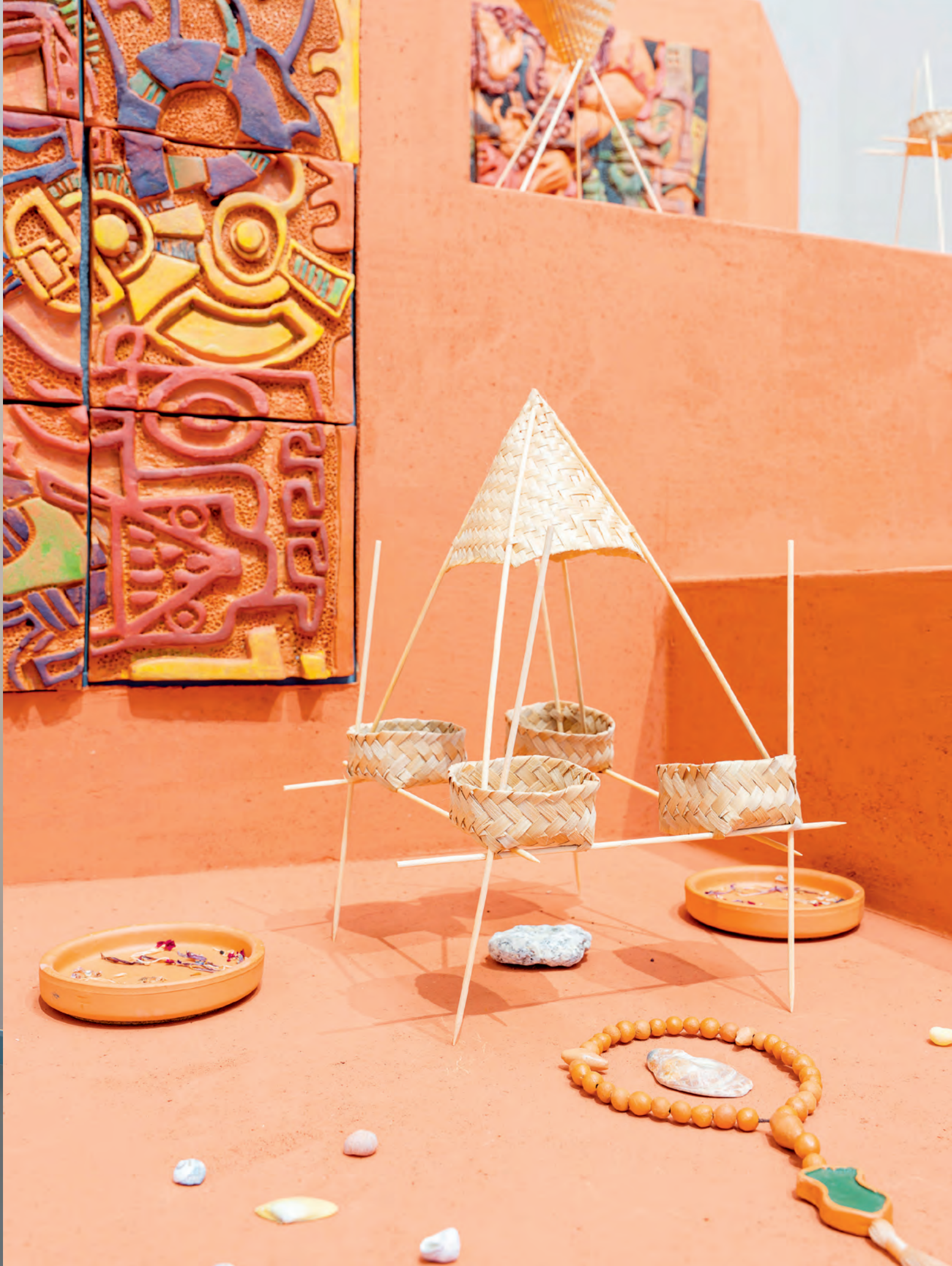
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MONUMENT FOR THE WORD
"BREAD" SPOKEN ALOUD

ANGURK, BETTER KNOWN AS WILLIAM
Y, WAS CONVICTED OF RECEIVING CLOTH
ING IT TO HAVE BEEN STOLEN. AFTER
G FROM THE FLEDGLING PENAL COLONY
NWURRUNG COUNTRY, AT SULLIVAN BAY
ENT-DAY SORRENT) IN 1803, BUCKLEY
ROUP OF WATHAURUNG MEN AND WOMEN,
RECEIVED HIM INTO THEIR COMMUNITY.
S HIM A KIND OF ASYLUM. BUCKLEY LIVED
THAURUNG PEOPLE FOR THE FOLLOWING
HE LATER WROTE THAT HE WAS GIVEN
ME MURRANOURK, 'WHICH I AFTERWARDS
T WAS THE NAME OF A MAN FORMERLY
LONGING TO THEIR TRIBE, WHO HAD
URIED AT THE SPOT WHERE I HAD FOUND
CE OF SPEAR I STILL CARRIED WITH ME.'

CT OF NAMING BECAME IMPORTANT AT
D TRANSFORMING MOMENT OF BUCKLEY'S
EARS LATER, WHEN HE ARRIVED AT JOHN
N'S CAMP AT INDENTED HEAD, SHORTLY
R BATMAN CLAIMED TO HAVE SIGNED
TY WITH WURUNDJERI ELDERS NEAR THE

THE SITE OF MELBOURNE. ON 6 JUNE 1838,
WAS INITIALLY UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE
THE MEN AT BATMAN'S CAMP. HIS ENGLISH
HE DESERTED HIM. ONE OF BREAD, WHICH HE
DESERTED BUCKLEY A PIECE OF BATMAN'S CAMPFIRE.
D EAT. AS HE SAT AT BATMAN'S CAMPFIRE,
E OF THE BREAD PROMPTED THE MEMORY
E OF MOTHER TONGUE, AND BUCKLEY
HIS MOTHER TONGUE, BUCKLEY BUILT THE
TED THE BRICKLAYER, BUCKLEY BUILT THE
AS A BRICKLAYER'S HOUSE. MELBOURNE'S
Y FOR BATMAN'S HOUSE. MELBOURNE'S
T PERMANENT EUROPEAN DWELLING.

NUMENT IMAGINES—THROUGH BUCKLEY'S
YING—THE CAMPFIRE AT INDENTED HEAD
UCKLEY TASTED THAT BREAD, COOKED ON
AME FIRE, AND SPOKE ALOUD ITS NAME.

D INSIDE THIS FREE-STANDING CHIMNEY
D SPEAK ALOUD THE WORD 'BREAD'.
ALONG THE WORD 'BREAD'. REMEMBERING
MOMENT AT JOHN BATMAN'S CAMPFIRE
D THE WEIGHT OF THAT SINGLE WORD.

THIS MONUMENT REMEMBERS CORANDERRI.
THIS MONUMENT REMEMBERS THE LONG JOURNEY
FROM ADIRANDI IN 1882.
THE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN
WALKING TO THIS HOME BY THE BANKS
OF THE BRISBANE, THE KUMBA RIVER
A HOME FOR THE WURLAGIN.
DISPLACED BY THE INVASION THAT BEGAN
IN 1838 WITH BATMAN'S TREATY,
AND A HOME FOR ASSIMILATED PEOPLE
FROM OTHER PARTS OF VICTORIA AND BEYOND.
THIS MONUMENT REMEMBERS THE BEAUTY
OF CORANDERRI.
THE BOUNTY OF THAT HOME,
AND THE CONTINUING FORCE
OF WHAT IS CREATED AT CORANDERRI.
THIS MONUMENT REMEMBERS THE
DESTRUCTION OF CORANDERRI IN 1920.

"ITS RESIDENTS FORCED TO LIVE THERE
WAS ONLY A EAST OF BRISBANE
FIVE OLD PEOPLE WHO WOULD NOT LEAVE.
THE HOUSES CLEARED AWAY.
THE HOUSES FROM CORANDERRI.
THE BRICKS FROM CORANDERRI
USED TO SUPPLEMENT BUILDING MATERIALS
FOR THE EXPANSION OF MELBOURNE.
THIS MONUMENT IS CREATED
FROM USED BRICKS.
COLLECTED FROM
THE CITIZENS OF MELBOURNE IN 2018.
FOR AN ORIEL.
THAT IS ALSO A CHIMNEY.
THE SOUND OF A HOME.

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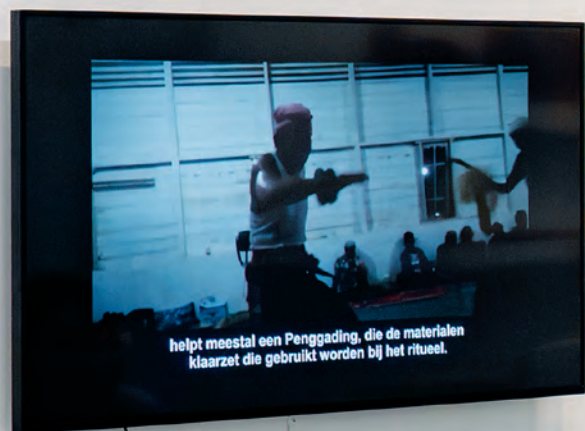
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JOURNEYS AND SITUATIONS

Victoria Lynn



Writing in the Van Abbemuseum version of the *Soils* publication, I want to look back at the development and exhibition of the project in Australia. This is where the project started and from where it has drawn much of its inspiration and learning. It therefore seems very relevant for people who will encounter a new version of its stories in Eindhoven to learn more about the origins not only of the exhibition but of the place where it was generated.



TarraWarra Museum of Art, image courtesy of Tourism Australia

When I started as Director of TarraWarra Museum of Art in 2012, several of my colleagues remarked on the breathtaking views across Wurundjeri Country through the Museum's windows. Partially in response to these comments, and as an extension of my own curatorial practice of working with First Nations artists since my career began in the late 1980s, I adopted a site-responsive approach to our programming by exploring the complexities of the Museum's relationship to Wurundjeri Country. This journey has had many twists and turns. Through a process of deep listening and ongoing engagement, many challenges and several major and collaborative projects, I feel that we have truly opened the Museum to a greater understanding and appreciation of Wurundjeri culture and custodianship of the lands and waters in which we are grounded. This consideration of art and place extends to our work with First Nations artists, communities and voices across Australia. We seek to cultivate an awareness of and reflection on ecological and environmental fragilities, and our aim is to provide a safe space for the exploration of complex and often painful stories by artists who are deeply involved in issues of First Nations rights, environmental sustainability and the politics of the Majority World. At the heart of this programme has been the firm belief that providing a platform for people from diverse cultures, languages and genders can enable, facilitate and generate meaningful experiences for them, the Museum and our audiences. This form of exhibition-making and collaboration with communities outside of the contemporary arts has resulted in many gestures of reconciliation that, over time, generate something greater than the sum of its parts. The benefit of working in one place over time is that trust can be built, and understanding can be deepened.

The Soils Project develops many of these ideas. At the heart of the project is a group of situated practices and diverse knowledges that have come together through zoom meetings, webinars, a workshop, site visits in the Netherlands, Indonesia and Australia, and now an exhibition. The project has raised questions of ancestry, belonging and colonisation and, for TarraWarra Museum of Art, develops upon the work we have done to date with diverse communities and First Nations artists.

The Soils Project has brought many painful memories to the surface for all the participants. It has been an intense, at times difficult, cautious, and yet generative journey. It highlights the Museum's and indeed my own position of privilege along with the colonial context from which the contemporary art world in Australia has benefited. This is the reason why, on this occasion, I bring my biography into the discussion. I am a settler Australian with Irish convict, Cornish, Russian/Ukrainian and German ancestry. My mother was a European immigrant who experienced extreme displacement in her lifetime as did the generations before her. In tandem with my artist father, she was passionate about the diasporic stories and journeys of artists who immigrated to Australia in the 1950s, many of whom were friends. Some say that intergenerational trauma is inherited through changes to DNA. Perhaps my sensitivity to other people's stories of displacement is indeed in my genes. But it is also the nature of art practice and society in Australia today that artists draw on diverse cultural, linguistic and gender backgrounds. My ongoing collaboration with Hetti Perkins (Arrernte and Kalkadoon) since the early 1990s at the Art Gallery of New South Wales has embedded a lifetime

curiosity about and respect for the 'panoptic view of Country' in 60,000 years of First Nations creativity in this country.¹

The ancestral and contemporary stories and situated knowledges of the *Soils* participants are necessarily entangled with the site-responsive curatorial practice involved in *The Soils Project*. Thus, the situatedness of this project not only shines a light on the history and significance of TarraWarra Museum of Art as an institution, but also the land upon which it stands and the personal journeys of its founders.

The Museum

The Museum is located on the TarraWarra Estate and is a gift by the founding patrons, the late Marc Besen AC and Eva Besen AO, who donated more than 600 works from their collection of Australian art. The Museum operates as a not-for-profit charitable institution with a Board of Directors and is funded by the TarraWarra Museum of Art Foundation, along with generous government grants, philanthropic foundations, trusts, sponsors and donors. In 1979, Eva and Marc Besen purchased the property at Tarrawarra. Eva's parents had immigrated from Europe. Marc had immigrated from what was then known as Romania. They met in the late 1940s. It was after their honeymoon to Europe in 1950, where they visited the Rembrandts and Vermeers at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, that they decided to collect Australian art by their contemporaries. TarraWarra Estate (a capital W is used to distinguish the name from the local government area of Tarrawarra) is 400 hectares, bordered by six kilometres of winding Birrarung (Yarra River) frontage. What began as a neglected cattle breeding property became a family retreat and a private sculpture park. In 1983, the Besens established a vineyard. After seeing their works on display in the inaugural exhibition at the Monash University Gallery in the mid-1970s, curated by Patrick McCaughey, they made the decision to one day gift their works so that others could share their love of Australian art. The Museum opened in December 2003.

With a vision to display the work of modern and contemporary Australian and international art, the Museum was established in the tradition of the Western museum of modern art: to collect, conserve, exhibit and publish. The Besens always valued excellence, beauty and the harmony between art, architecture and nature. The award-winning Museum, designed by the late Allan Powell, and surrounding landscape designed by Tract, complete with an avenue of poplar trees, epitomise and honour this sense of harmonious interplay between light, the seasons, art and architecture.

The area

The Museum sits on ground that bears multiple histories reaching back millennia. Tarrawarra is a Wurundjeri Woiwurrung word that approximately translates as 'slow moving waters' and is the name given to the local government area in which the Museum is located. Following the formal establishment of the District of Port Phillip as an administrative division within the colony of New South Wales in September 1836, the Wurundjeri—as with all the many other Aboriginal peoples of south-east

Australia—were rapidly and forcibly dispossessed of their traditional lands and waters. With complete disregard for Aboriginal lore and sovereignty, the land was subsequently parcelled up into cadastral divisions which squatters were encouraged to take and occupy. From around 1839 to 1844, the resident squatter on the parcel of land then known as View Hill—which encompassed approximately 12,000 acres along the Birrarung between present-day Yarra Glen and Healesville—was a Scot named John Thomson. Although it would continue to be known as View Hill for most of its 19th-century European occupation, between 1853 and 1856, the same parcel of land was designated as the parish of Tarrawarra, a subdivision of the County of Evelyn (which had been proclaimed in 1849, two years before the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales to create the colony of Victoria). In 1893, David Syme, the owner and publisher of *The Age* newspaper, purchased the property and renamed it Tarrawarra. Demand for farming land, particularly after World War I, resulted in subdivision, and the former View Hill station was gradually broken up.

The Wurundjeri story of the land prior to colonisation includes creation stories that can be sourced in other volumes.² They involve the formation of the Birrarung and its tributaries and the history of the Wurundjeri people. These are not stories for me to tell, nor do I have permission to do so. Much research has been done on the First Nations story after colonisation, particularly around the history of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station and the figure of Ngurungaeta William Barak (c. 1824–1903). Coranderrk, and its governing body the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation, lie at the heart of *The Soils Project*.

Exhibitions and programmes

The two contrasting realities above provide the context for much of the Museum's programme since I started at TarraWarra, and for *The Soils Project*. On the one hand, we respect and honour the history of Australian art embedded in our collection and the gift of the Museum. On the other, we have found ways to collaborate with First Nations artists on Country. At times, we intertwine the two, creating new perspectives on the past from the point of view of the present. This is a form of radical juxtaposition and perhaps not unusual in Australia because the acute contrast between settler and First Nations economies is a daily reality. Radical juxtaposition can prise open stories and traces from diverse histories and cultures that can create an intervention into how we relate to the land around us in more ethically driven ways. As we will see below, *The Soils Project* has taken a longer course than a single exhibition, one that weaves its way over time and through multiple questions and situations, opening generative thinking for the participants.

The First Peoples of Australia are the oldest continuing culture in the world—over 60,000 years—and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists comprise a significant proportion of the art-making community here. Acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the original Custodians of the lands and waters on which the Museum stands, we have worked on an ongoing engagement with the Wurundjeri community, and we have sought to understand and communicate the complexity of our site, focusing on the broader intersections between art and place.

While Senior Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO has a long association with Eva and Marc Besen, the relationship between the Museum and Wurundjeri has deepened in the last decade. During this time, we have explored Wurundjeri Country through the lens of artists and from the perspectives of colonial history, First Nations history, and environmental and ecological changes. This has been a process of symbolically breaking down the walls of the Museum, interrogating the real meanings of the views through the windows, and traversing Country with the permissions and guidance of First Nations Elders and people.

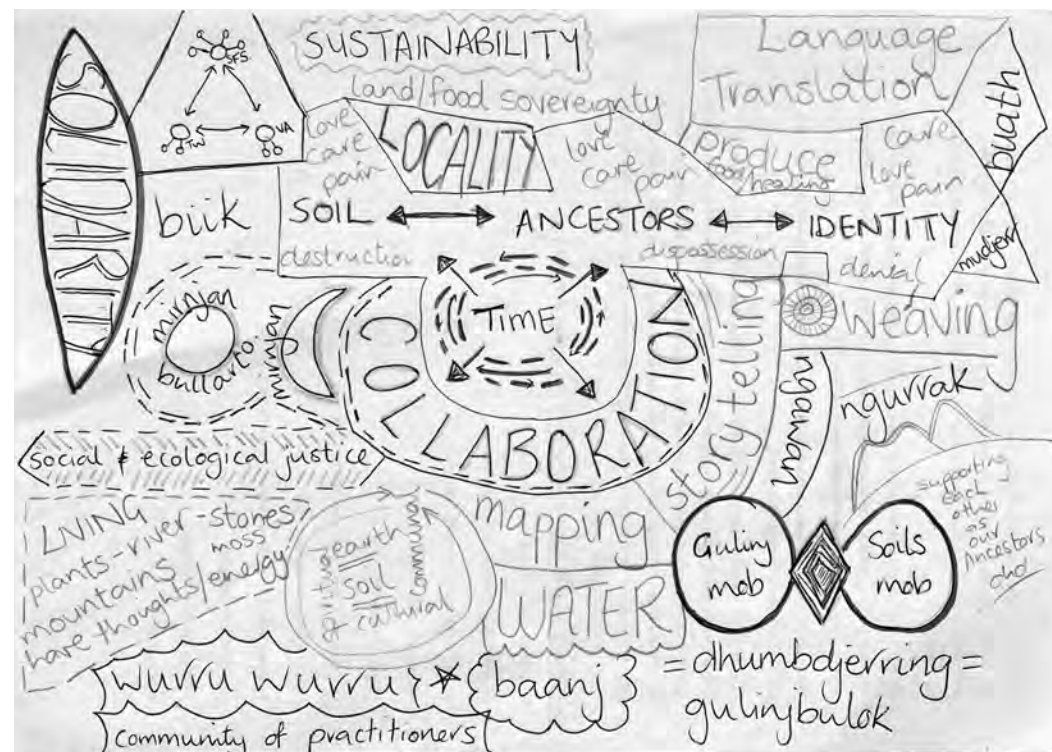
From this grounding in place, we seek to foster a culture and community that proudly recognises and respects the living traditions, deep knowledge systems, compelling artistry and ongoing connection to Country of the First Peoples across Australia. In 2012, we began this process with a weekend symposium, *The Landscape Awry*, with leading Australian thinkers, artists and academics discussing the place and importance of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. Aunty Joy introduced us to Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, which was established by Wurundjeri people and other displaced Aboriginal people in 1863. Coranderrk soon emerged as a highly successful and largely self-sufficient and self-governing community. However, in the ensuing years, there were repeated attempts to break up the station to make it available to farmers and pastoralists who coveted its fertile soil. Despite the community's defiant opposition and organised political resistance, these powerful colonial forces eventually led to the closure of Coranderrk and the forced removal of most of the community to Lake Tyers in 1924. Since its acquisition by the Indigenous Land Corporation in 1998, 200 acres of the original site has been managed by Wurundjeri Custodians the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation (WEAC). Acknowledging the enormous significance of Coranderrk to Wurundjeri and other Kulin people, WEAC is guided by the framework of 'yalingbuth, yalingbu, yirramboi'—yesterday, today, tomorrow—which reflects their philosophy to honour their Ancestors, to be Custodians of Country, and to leave a strong legacy for future generations. The Museum has continued to engage with Aunty Joy (who joined our Board in 2022) and WEAC (with whom we signed a memorandum of understanding for *The Soils Project* in 2022). Two of WEAC's Directors, Uncle Dave Wandin and Brooke Wandin—who also participate in *The Soils Project* as Fellows—have provided important cultural knowledge, guidance and protocols for the participants and the Museum.

Since 2012, the Museum has worked with numerous First Nations artists in consultation with the Wandoon Estate. In 2013–14 we commissioned the exhibition *Future Memorials* by Jonathan Jones (Wiradyuri and Kamilaroi), Tom Nicholson (Celtic-Australian) and Aunty Joy in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of Coranderrk. This exhibition was juxtaposed with a survey of the work of modernist Australian landscape artist Russell Drysdale, who features in our collection, providing telling comparisons between two attitudes to Country. The second phase of the collaborative project between the three artists was the development of *untitled (seven monuments)*, a major public artwork which has been installed throughout the region of present-day Healesville and surrounds to delineate the boundaries of Coranderrk when it was at its largest, in 1866, at some 4,850 acres. The work was launched at Coranderrk in April 2019, and a book on the project was published in 2024.

I outline the details of some of these key initiatives in our history to highlight the time it takes to build relationships between people, rather than between institutions, and the mutual trust that evolves through the process. In many respects, *The Soils Project* is a result of this significant history of engagement and could not have happened without the extensive work that has been done to date.



The Soils Project: On Country workshop participants at Memo Hall, Healesville,
image courtesy of Victoria Lynn



Mind map of *The Soils Project*, 2022, courtesy of Brooke Wandin

The Soils Project

Charles Esche, Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, has visited TarraWarra Museum of Art several times over many years. On one of those visits, around 2016, I invited him to propose a project. Initially conceived as a workshop, *The Soils Project* began as a research platform bringing together writers, artists and academics around concepts of 'decoloniality'. Beginning in earnest in 2018, the project expanded over time, as we waited for the global pandemic to subside. A collaboration between the Van Abbemuseum, Struggles for Sovereignty (Indonesia), and TarraWarra (along with First Nations and other advisors) subsequently developed through regular zoom meetings. In 2021, the group invited artists and thinkers to present a series of closed webinars to further develop the project. In May–June 2022, a series of three international webinars were presented, titled *The Soils Project: Groundwork*. In October 2022, a two-week workshop was held in Healesville, titled *The Soils Project: On Country*. The workshop, which included members of the three collaborating organisations and a group of invited artists, guest speakers, First Nations Elders and local artists, provided an opportunity to listen, learn and exchange ideas.

In summary, these gatherings were devised to share the situated knowledges and practices of the participants as a way of building an understanding of the common ground, differences and diversity amongst the groups. Museums are used to doing things in the reverse order: first the exhibition, then the discussions and public programmes. Often research takes place in the background. *The Soils Project* is different. Along the way, it was clear that an exhibition was not the endpoint of our meetings but, rather, an iteration along the way. It is just one publicly visible part of a web of relations, one which continues in 2024 at the Van Abbemuseum and in 2025 in Indonesia, in a form yet to be realised. What follows are some of the questions we asked of each other during our zoom calls:

- How do we care for the soil and nurture Country and creativity?
- How do we involve participants from the beginning, as fellow travellers?
- Who is this project for?
- How do we create a project that is not extractivist?
- What of restitution and repatriation?
- How do we honour the rights of nature?
- What of justice for First Nations/Adat communities and their sovereignty to land?
- Is decolonisation possible in a settler state such as Australia?
- How do we keep the project going over several years and places?
- How do we recognise the different colonial histories embedded in the diverse situated practices? Can we indigenise the museum?
- How do we undo the Eurocentric?
- How can an institution such as a museum care?
- How can institutions create safe spaces for People of Colour?
- How do we not deactivate the practice of those we work with (by simply taking them out of their context)?

- How does the activity recognise the knowledge background, not just a form?
- How do we prevent this knowledge from being stolen?
- How do we bring the experience and benefit into the First Nations communities?
- How can the infrastructure of art be used to support the First Nations communities?
- How could we support the development of projects in those communities, based on this project we are doing together?
- How can we bring in different publics throughout the process?
- What are the conditions for gathering?
- What are the conditions for exhibiting?
- Why are meandering gatherings important?
- How do we build relations of trust and safety across our differences?
- How can we honour this time together?
- In what ways can we acknowledge that our institutions are also implicated in the colonial project?
- Can we ‘hack’ the idea of art itself?

We did not aim to resolutely answer these questions, but we were and continue to be mindful of the difficult questions that sovereign soils generate. The irresolvable differences between our histories and economies were obvious early on but were also part of the thinking: the Dutch colonisation of Indonesia and the British colonisation of Australia. The First World economies of the Netherlands and Australia and of the Van Abbemuseum and TarraWarra Museum were also clearly in stark contrast to the volunteer basis of the collective Struggles for Sovereignty and the economic reality of the First Nations Australian and Indonesian Adat communities. This raised several ethical considerations, including equity. In collaboration we devised the idea of ‘fellow travellers’, participants who would join the project early on as Fellows, participate in the webinars and workshop, and be given the option of contributing to the exhibitions, but not be beholden to do so. Each Fellow was given a fee, production funds and support to travel to Australia for the workshop and exhibition. In addition, the project contributed financially to support the Indonesian participants—Struggles for Sovereignty; Institut Mosintuwu, based in Poso District, Central Sulawesi; and PEREMPUAN AMAN (the Women’s Association of the ‘Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago’), Rangan, East Kalimantan—to undertake activities in their locality that may or may not result in projects for the exhibitions.

The stories shared by First Nations Australians during these gatherings raised painful and traumatic memories and histories as well as joyous expressions of hope and creativity. Those of us working in the arts in Australia are mostly familiar (though by no means comfortable) with the irresolvable nature of working on unceded territory. Notwithstanding the important milestones each year with NAIDOC Week, National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week, many past injustices are inseparable from the present. The link between coloniality and modernity (the history of Western modernity producing museums such as the Van Abbemuseum and TarraWarra) is a significant conversation in this project. The decolonial thinker Rolando Vázquez introduced us to the notion that modernity and coloniality are intertwined and, as he comments in this volume, “the whole

history of modern and contemporary art is tied to colonial history and has appropriated aesthetic resources from all over the world to create its canons and collections”.³ Furthermore, the irrefutable connection between colonisation and climate change, and how it has affected the soil, rainfall, water, fire and food sovereignty in Australia and Indonesia, is equally relevant to the project.⁴ The role of women as leaders in their communities (for example, Granny Jemima Burns Wandin Dunolly at Coranderrk or Tadum Burake in Central Sulawesi) is acknowledged and honoured. Australia’s work on repatriation and restitution of First Nations artefacts was explained to us by Yorta Yorta curator Kimberley Moulton at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum and compared with the situation in the Netherlands by the Beyond Walls collective. There were differences in views on the question of the terms ‘decolonial’ and ‘decolonisation’. Although it is too complex to discuss in detail in this essay, in brief, there are First Nations curators and thinkers who use the term ‘indigenisation’ of the museum because it is their view that it is impossible to decolonise a settler state. To indigenise is an affirmative gesture, one that centres Indigenous ways of being, whereas decoloniality centres coloniality even through its negation.

During *The Soils Project* workshop, we were reminded by Quandamooka artist Megan Cope about ‘proppa’ old knowledge and the ‘proppa way’ of doing things. We learned from Uncle Dave about his work in resurrecting Indigenous farming practices and about fire and water. Barkandji artist Zena Cumpston discussed her research into indigenous plants and the need for them to grow in communities and to heal the Earth, which is sick from the invasion of people and species. The chef Nornie Bero, from the Meriam People of Mer Island in the Torres Strait, told us about Indigenous farming and food production. Mbak Yurni shared her community’s fight for sovereignty on Kalimantan. Wapke Feenstra told us about rural Brabant, southern Netherlands, and the notion of walking the land. Aldo Ramos spoke to his work with the Indigenous Kwarte Umuque community, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. Beyond Walls shared the museological history of stolen artefacts in the Netherlands through Dutch colonisation. Peta Clancy (Yorta Yorta, Bangerang) showed us how the Merri Creek was diverted in the colonisation of Victoria. Megan Cope and Brooke Wandin showed us how to weave with local grasses. Struggles for Sovereignty taught us Indonesian concepts of ‘dhumbu-bulok’ (many voices) and the tradition of Ludruk: a theatre performance from East Java that criticised the Dutch regime. Cassie Leatham took us into the rainforest of Toolangi and taught us about bush tucker. There were many encounters. We thought deeply about how to care for Country, without owning it.

Soil is both a metaphor and matter. During the workshop, with a prompt from soil scientist Samantha Grover, we wove together our stories of soil. Australia has some of the world’s oldest soil. It is a living substance. Even after centuries of mistreatment, soil has the capacity, with care, to regenerate. Soil can sustain life, generate food, hold energy, water and life. Over time, it is a measure of human and animal activity. Soil brought to the fore the idea of non-linguistic experiences and the non-human. Soil also generated stories of Ancestors, maps and identity. Yet our focus on soil as metaphor and matter does not erase the deep and irreconcilable differences of our mutual histories, it is not intended to. The metaphor of

3. Teresa Cos Rebollo, Charles Esche, and Rolando Vázquez

4. Zena Cumpston, Lesley Head,

soil provides a pivot around which we can communicate despite those histories and is a motivation for our collective aim to sustain the communities that we each work and live within. The artists and participants in *The Soils Project* share an interest in not just what an exhibition is, but what this project does.

The exhibition at TarraWarra was one iteration of *The Soils Project*. It happened later than it was supposed to, but all the richer because of the pandemic delays. For the exhibition, the area around the Museum, and Coranderrk in particular, have been core. Megan Cope and settler artist Keg de Souza have collaborated on soil maps (chromatography) created from samples of soil sourced, with permission, from areas on Coranderrk that have significance for members of the Wandin family. Brooke Wandin and Megan Cope have created a map from images taken at View Hill, the site of one of the earliest colonial settlements in the Yarra Valley. Brooke has recorded her family learning language, which was played in the gallery to activate this map. D Harding (Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal) made two trips to Coranderrk, and in collaboration with Wandin family members, gathered soil for works on paper and for covering the windows of the Museum, creating a link between soil and the recognition of place. With permission from Wurundjeri Elders, Peta Clancy found the site from which a colonial photograph was taken on the Birrarung, just upstream from TarraWarra, and re-enacted this action through a First Nations lens.

Over time, *The Soils Project* has laid bare the differences between my institutional identity as a director of a museum and my personal convictions. While it was not possible for some participants to separate these two sides, it raises the question of whether institutions can, by definition, care. Or is it simply the people who work inside them who care, and is that enough? The project raised issues of trust and justice, and questions around where the funding was coming from. This involved complex and difficult discussions around truth telling, land rights, water rights, river rights, stolen land, stolen languages, stolen generations, stolen remains and stolen artefacts, and it unravelled the widely accepted definitions of art, artists and exhibitions. On the one hand, we had embarked on an impossible task in attempting to address the weight of history, the distinct differences between us, and the museum institution as a product of modernity. On the other hand, the dedication and enthusiasm of the participants to work with one another was palpable. What is the role of projects such as this? Why are we doing it? Each participant would have a different answer.

For me, small gestures of reconciliation, the creation of platforms for conversation and collaboration, making available sites (in this case a museum and a local town hall for the workshop) where alternative points of view are supported both financially and ethically, open possibilities not only for the participants and practitioners but also the attendees, public, visitors and the Museum itself. *The Soils Project* has created conduits of exchange that sit outside conventional routes. Such circuits can rewire, as it were, how we think, and each of us responds differently. I hope that this project has created a generosity of spirit, rather than a closed-off conversation in stagnant discourses. The project can bridge gaps between lived experiences, not permanently but perhaps for a moment, or a day, or a year. For *The Soils Project*, years of conversations in multiple languages have transformed into a rich dialogue between artistic creations.

Conversations continue—on the side, outside, over the web and beyond, in ways that are not contained or measured. Hence, we see the project as an endless, open-ended, multi-dimensional form of participatory weaving.

TarraWarra, and our sponsors and funders, do not support this out of a sense of patronage but, rather, in the spirit of the acknowledgement that real change requires real support. The project has contributed financially to the communities involved, and to the Struggles for Sovereignty collective who do not work in an institution. Moreover, there have been outcomes that are not for institutional or public consumption: exchanges of food, recipes, ideas, songs, knowledge and artworks between participants, outside of the institutional framework. *The Soils Project* is not contained by the institutions that have produced it. Rather, it exceeds them, becoming part of a broader conversation that both predates it and will continue afterwards. Such dialogues exist in wider society—in communities of the Netherlands, Indonesia and Australia—outside contemporary art discourse and, indeed, mainstream media. For the participants, *The Soils Project* has been a collaborative platform for specific, situated practices to be introduced to each other, raising awareness of issues that were completely unknown at the beginning. These translocal practices, situations and creations now have a presence beyond national borders and a broader platform for their voices to be heard. In this way, *The Soils Project* has created new alliances, friendships and collaborators. Moreover, it has provided the participants with an opportunity to write new texts and create new artworks and community projects, many of which were featured in the exhibition at TarraWarra.

After the project is completed in 2025, the communities of Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation, Institut Mosintuwu and PEREMPUAN AMAN, the Kwarte Umuke community, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, the families and communities of Megan Cope and D Harding, the Wurundjeri Elders with whom Peta Clancy has engaged on her project and her family will continue their fight for self-determination. And we could say the museums will simply move on to the next exhibition. However, for TarraWarra, there have been several real and long-term outcomes: a public webinar series freely available online, a publication series and an exhibition that raises multiple complexities for audiences; a memorandum of understanding with the Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation, which includes an annual retainer for WEAC; the finalisation of a Reconciliation Action Plan; the commissioning of Wurundjeri horticulturalist Craig Murphy-Wandin to create a permanent indigenous garden with OCULUS in our forthcoming Eva and Marc Besen Centre (opening end 2024); and the limited edition publication of a booklet by Zena Cumpston on indigenous plants that are important to the Wurundjeri community and cultural landscape, with the proceeds of its sale going to the communities involved in the project. I have no doubt that there will be long-term outcomes emerging from the exhibition at Van Abbemuseum as well.

The exhibition at TarraWarra included works by a combination of Fellows and invited artists, all of whom have created new works. Two works by Indonesian artist Moelyono result from a five-year collaboration with a group of Ludruk performers in Jombang, East Java. One of the paintings appropriates imagery from Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, a painting held in the collection of the Rijksmuseum. It was something

completely unexpected, but it draws an arc that tells a thousand stories from Eva and Marc Besen’s honeymoon visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 1950 to the present-day reality of East Java in the wake of historical colonisation by the Dutch.

On TarraWarra Estate, the farmers and gardeners treat the soil with as few chemicals as possible, aiming for an organic approach to winemaking. Having said that, although there are some sections that have been left as native bush, the Estate is populated with numerous European plant species. In Australia, soil from overseas is not allowed through quarantine, nor is it allowed out of the state of Victoria into other states. Soil is regulated and treated by governments with strict guidelines, as it is seen to be a potential carrier of disease. Our project has given rise to a different way of thinking about extracting and transporting soil: one that involves asking permission and following the ‘proppa’ way of doing things. As I write, machines are digging up the earth to make way for our new Eva and Marc Besen Centre. Auntie Joy has asked us to put aside rocks that can be repurposed in the indigenous garden. She and her son Craig have also identified rocks from the Lilydale Quarry. The care for soil, the ethics of its extraction and use, and an awareness of our impact on it will resonate for this director for a long time to come.

References

This essay includes passages that can also be found in other TarraWarra publications, including our Reconciliation Action Plan and website. Several facts and interpretative lenses included here are a result of my collaborative working relationships with Curator, Anthony Fitzpatrick; Exhibitions Manager, Charlotte Carter; and our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group: Anthony Fitzpatrick, Nicole Haverfield, Sandra Jacobs, Sarah Metzner, and Kali Michailidis.

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DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS: WEAVING EACH OTHER

Conversation between Rolando Vázquez (RV), Charles Esche (CE) and Teresa Cos Rebollo (TCR)

CE: The question of the decolonial obviously came and was born in the conditions of Abya Yala / the Americas. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what happens when it arrives in a settler colony like Australia, which is settled by different cultures, the British rather than the Spanish or Portuguese. How do we discuss this question of decoloniality in the context of Australia? How does decoloniality move from one place to another, and how does it change in the process?

RV: I think it is important to recognise that decoloniality comes from the history of Abya Yala and from the colonial period that began with Spanish and Portuguese imperialism. That was a period that is distinct from other colonial periods and other forms of colonisation, like, for example, the settler colonialism of the British Empire in Australia. Decoloniality emerges as a thinking from the Global South, grounded in Abya Yala, and provides a non-western vocabulary that allows for different experiences from the Global South to relate to each other. Decoloniality enables conversations that are impossible to have within the dominant vocabulary and epistemic territories of the west.

Here we are not speaking of the languages of Spanish and English, etc., but we are speaking of their logics. Within these imperial grammars, vocabularies and disciplines, the lived experiences of the Global South under oppression cannot be spoken and cannot be thought.

What decoloniality does is to open the possibility of a conversation from and between the experiences of the Global South by enabling an epistemic and aesthetic turn. An important step in this turn is the notion of coloniality conceptualised by Anibal Quijano. Unlike ‘colonialism’, the notion of ‘coloniality’ is not a Western term but an analytics that emerges

from the South to study and understand the dominant system from the perspective of the oppressed.

Decoloniality, of course, has long roots in authors such as Guamán Poma de Ayala, Fanon and Glissant, but crucially its location of thought is different from the currents of critique of the West (Marx, Foucault, Deleuze, Haraway, etc.). They are looking at the system of power critically but from a Western perspective and from within its epistemic and aesthetic territory. Decoloniality, emerging from experiences of the Global South, enables a conversation across other worlds that have been suppressed, offering a vocabulary to speak of the dominant system from the outside and to uncover that there is a plurality of worlds whose existence has been under erasure.

The experience of the María Lugones Decolonial Summer School has been to realise how decolonial epistemology and aesthetics enable relations across oppressions that are disabled or destroyed by the predominance of the relation to the dominant system. When we think of the dominant system in terms of its own vocabulary, concepts and thought, we are still thinking within it. Even when we are strongly against the dominant system we find ourselves bound to this one-way direction towards the system. But we spend little intellectual and political energy to engage in what María Lugones was telling us about: to know each other across oppressions.

The decolonial is not about becoming dominant. It's about creating the possibility of conversation, of learning from each other across oppressions without reducing the difference of every context. This is also the analysis we learn from the political thought of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. They say that there is one big 'NO' to the world based on universality that has no space for other worlds. One 'NO', a common opposition to the system that excludes difference. In its place, they embrace the pluriversal as a response to the one dominant system. What the dominant system did was to reduce difference, to destroy plurality.

Decoloniality doesn't draw a single response but, rather, enables coalitions against oppression. It says 'no' to the world that has no space for other worlds and enables other worlds to coexist in the pluriversal.

The thinking of decoloniality coming from Latin America has a different route than the postcolonial response to primarily British and French colonialism. Put simply, the postcolonial is an important strategy for opening up and pluralising the notion of modernity so that other histories can fit within it, such as saying that Indian history is also modern history. However, the decolonial does not seek to open the canon of modernity to be inclusive of other 'modernities' in that way. Instead, it wants to overcome the notion of modernity that is inseparable from coloniality. The decolonial posture is about going beyond the modern, beyond the contemporary, and not about claiming a place in it or diversifying it.

CE: Speaking from my point of view, it's fascinating and useful to see what occurs when this decolonial theory born in Abya Yala encounters other theories or even ways of being. You talked about the postcolonial, which is part of Australia's thinking, but I feel the decolonial has the capacity to change the conversation also in Australia or western Europe. Speaking personally, the decolonial gave me a voice in moving away

from an old Marxist analysis and starting to listen and learn from conversations that begin south to south but may also take place from south to north. In the context of Australia, which is a settler colony built on genocide and erasure in the most violent way, there is a strange coexistence of north and south consciousness that is perhaps fruitful territory for adding a position to decolonial thinking.

In terms of our *Soils* project, which was born in discussions with Victoria Lynn in Melbourne and expanded through a two-week workshop in Healesville, Victoria, the concept and practice of 'weaving' was something we shared, but from different positions. It was introduced by Aldo Ramos from Pluriversity, who brought it from Latin America, and was then picked up by Brooke Wandin, bringing it from an Aboriginal Indigenous context, and Yurni Sadariah, bringing it from Adat (Indigenous/Customary) culture in Sulawesi, Indonesia. In the workshop, 'weaving' became a language that could be shared and a technique that encouraged coalition building that in turn led to discussions about what was common and what was different. It seems important that those conversations used a material that Western art history marginalises as a craft. What I also find interesting, while admitting a very limited knowledge of the Aboriginal experience, is that the postcolonial idea of inclusion has pushed people to try to establish land rights within the legal structure of the Australian states despite the fact that those legal structures are firmly anchored in colonial power itself. Even the idea of the foundation of the state is something that can only exist within a concept of the colonial. Decoloniality allows us to think about coloniality as a present condition rather than existing solely in the past. It allows a questioning of the trajectory and place where change might happen, and I think it can help build coalitions with activists such as Uncle Bruce Pascoe and Uncle Dave Wandin, both of whom are working to re-establish Aboriginal land knowledges, or Zena Cumpston with her work on the use of indigenous plants. I am still in shock at the way that what you have called colonial 'arrogant ignorance' so easily dismissed Aboriginal knowledge of plants and destroyed the agricultural system of pre-invasion Australia. What we see now is that while plants from the northern hemisphere behave in unsustainable and often destructive ways, certainly in the long term, there is still a huge mainstream reluctance in Australia to learn from other epistemologies about their own environment.

RV: I think the relation to plants and to the territory you mention is key here. These concepts have been constructed by the imperial imagination for so long. In that sense, I'm quite critical of the free use of speculation and imagination, as if it would always be a good thing. We can think of colonialism as an imperial dream, and if we don't move out of the enclosure that the imperial imagination produces, we will never overcome the empire, and hence coloniality. With whose dreams are we dreaming?

That is why the critique of aesthetics is so fundamental, because we need to begin asking: With whose imagination are we imagining the world? If we just want to adapt the imperial imagination of 'landscape' to the Australian context, or, the reverse, to bring the plants of the colonies to the botanical gardens and world exhibitions in the metropolises of Europe, then that is the imperial imagination expressing itself. In fact, one of the challenges of the exhibitions, both at TarraWarra and Eindhoven, is how to

avoid putting plants or habitats into the museum in ways that replicate the imperial imagination of botanical gardens and landscapes. For me it's key to ask: How can we recover the freedom of dreaming our own dreams?

Here I see the significance of speaking about weaving and how the Pluriversity, Brooke Wandin and Yurni Sadariah can connect through weaving and bypass the disciplinary material language of Western aesthetics. This has the potential to respond to what we call the reduction of experience in the logic of modernity. The experience that we often get as aesthetic pleasure in modern Western aesthetics and mass media is an experience based on separation from Earth, community, ancestrality, the cosmological and time.

What these other aestheses do, like the weaving that the Pluriversity is bringing from the Iku people of Colombia, is to enable other forms of aesthetic experience that construct relations that are based on weaving and on the verbiage of the relational. They are not based on the object-subject separation, on the separation between the one who represents and the one who is represented. Weaving disobeys the system of separation and recovers relationality. The dominant subject enjoys privileges but is very poor in terms of relations. It has lost its relation to Earth and the communal, to other worlds of meaning, and to ancestral time and the cosmological. Through weaving you can create an encounter of experiences and coalitions that are not possible through the experience of separation of the individual subject, the individual artist of the west.

TCR: I think what you're saying about weaving can also be said about other practices of relationality that we have in the exhibition. We are seeing how the Adat artists of Indonesia as well as First Nations artists in Australia are using mapping as a way to relate to their territory. These relational maps are created by walking the territory and by creating these relationships with their ancestral lands. The weaving that the Pluriversity brings from the Iku people also follows this same practice of creating relations, as a continuous process. Can you tell us a bit more about how you see mapping? Because it also has a dark side.

RV: When looking at the dominant practices of mapping, I first picture what is traditionally a colonial practice where the mapping of territories is done in order to appropriate them. Mapping is a way to classify Earth for the appropriation of territory through ownership. What this dominant way of mapping does is impose an idea of space as an abstract category over place, over ancestral territories. The map becomes a representation of space that we could call placeless. It is actually a map that is only possible by being separated from place. It is usually viewed from above, considering the ownership of Earth and not a relation to Earth. The question is how to subvert that, and how to recover a way of mapping that is not about separation and ownership, that is about placing or emplacing, where place becomes a relation to time, to the ancestral, where a place relates to the communal and gives us the possibility of being positioned in relation, the possibility of recognising that we are in a place, that we inhabit a place instead of owning it.

The view from above of imperial mapping displaces us into abstraction. In one of my articles I speak about the 'Blue Marble' photo of the whole Earth from the Apollo missions. What that achieved was

the total reduction of Earth to an object of the abstract gaze that sees itself outside the world.

But the cartographic exercise you are talking about is more like counter-mapping. It tries to uncover the place, to go against placelessness and oppose the abstraction of a territory as just a measure of property on paper. Instead, it opens the possibility of 'positioning'—to be in a place that has memory and history and is in relation with other places. Rodolfo Kusch, the Argentinian philosopher, says that people in the deep Americas, the 'America profunda', express their way of being in the world as being placed ('estar' in Spanish). The modern way of thinking of the world is understanding being as projection, as unplaced or unpositioned ('ser' in Spanish).

What I have to emphasise here is the danger of thinking of place only in physical terms, because place is time as well. For 'Indigenous' peoples, territory is an ancestral place, not a place in space. It is a place that has a time and that is ancestral. The territory's memory and ancestrality is where we come from and where we will go back to. Territory is thus not just a physical thing in matter, in materiality. Dominant cartography reduces territory to an object that can be made into a title of ownership. Decolonial aesthetic is about moving from owning to owing, something that becomes clear in the relation to territory and the difference between space and place. Instead of using cartography for owning through the frame of capitalism, we move towards a form of cartography of owing, that is, one that enables us to recognise that we come from a place that is ancestral and that precedes us.

CE: The majority of the public who are going to come to TarraWarra or to Eindhoven are white, with their roots in colonial practices. And I wonder how you see the possibilities of communication with that public and what role the cultural field might take in that. There's usually a tendency with art exhibitions that address these questions for a defensive reaction to come from the mainstream art community, the critics or many white visitors. The responses I've witnessed often fall either into guilt and self-pity or an aggressive rejection of the subject as 'politicised' or 'not artistic'. But what I feel we are speaking about here is the building of a new relation and, as you said, a new imagination with Earth and each other that would benefit everything. How do you see this knot of problems as it relates to the white community and, particularly in Australia, to that extraordinarily displaced community that is entirely a result of colonialism? Do you see ways, from your own experience and your understanding of decoloniality, in which this antagonism could be addressed or produce more constructive relations?

RV: There are many issues here. One is the question: For whom are we doing this work? I think on the one hand, these exhibitions should be for those people who have historically been deprived, and the institutions should respond in the manner of restitution. I also think it's essential that there are things that should remain opaque for people who are not from those territories. One of the violences of the white gaze, especially in its logic of the exhibitionary format, is to force everything towards transparency—defined in terms of being legible and digestible for that gaze. When things don't appear as transparent to the white gaze, and are not

digestible or consumable, they are rejected because the condition for exhibiting those other worlds is that they must be consumed by the white gaze. This perpetuates epistemic and aesthetic violence and renews the classical anthropological approach of collecting the worlds of others for consumption. We are seeing that decoloniality is being more and more instrumentalised for creating exhibitions that should be consumable for the white gaze.

Upholding the right to opacity, using Glissant's words, is a serious issue. It is important to understand that there are some things from the Mayan, the Iku or the Wurundjeri that are not for the consumption of the white public. And there are, of course, other aspects that need to be shown, as they are important for those communities as forms of epistemic and aesthetic restitution. This exhibition project must ensure that those communities are not forced to make their material digestible and transparent to a gaze that will not understand it. The right to opacity is an important response to the forced transparency of white institutions and the misuse of the decolonial to uphold the mastery over the diversity of the world.

The other point is that you have a constituency for these museums that is mostly white, and this project should respond to that. Here it is key to position the publics, for example, by speaking about the white gaze and signalling the question: With whose eyes are we looking and through whose eyes are we being made to see? In this way, the publics become conscious of their position in history.

We might encounter white guilt as a reaction. It shows that the publics are suddenly touched by something that shakes who they are or that reveals things of which they are not aware. They then revert to guilt as a way to preserve their focus on their individuality, their single self. Guilt becomes a mechanism to sustain a form of indolence, of indifference towards others by focusing on the self. Instead of opening towards others, and experiencing that humble liberation of being positioned and realising that their privileges are built in relation to the suffering of others, they turn back to their enclosed but dominant self.

Instead of generating guilt, I think it would be wonderful if this type of exhibition could bring across the poverty of the position of whiteness—and it is crucial here that we address and understand whiteness as a social-historical position and not as a racial category. While it might be the most powerful and privileged position in terms of material wealth and political power, it is for sure a very impoverished one. María Lugones and Toni Morrison help us to think of the condition of privilege, particularly of white masculinity, as grounded in a power over others, of making others inferior. It is a subjectivity that manifests itself through the dominant difference vis-a-vis the colonial difference. Whiteness is very impoverished in its experience of the world and its relation to others because it believes the false idea that the individual is self-sufficient. I think once whiteness understands that it lives in an enclosure and in the reduction of experience, it can see the great benefits of engaging with the decolonial and the plural connection to other worlds, of becoming more than a single self. In my pedagogies, I see my white students here in the Netherlands going through a process of humbling and recognition of how their condition of privilege is also one of extreme poverty in terms of being separated from Earth, the communal, their own ancestral memories and the cosmological. They then begin to connect to worlds that are still

in relation and see the possibility of becoming human in other ways. So I think in the colonial equation or the colonial difference between modernity and coloniality there are no winners. There is dominance and oppression, but the dominant side is a very poor thing that had to be dehumanised in order to become the dominant self. Its condition of indolence and indifference towards the suffering of others enables its own privileges and pleasures.

CE: What has been interesting about *The Soils Project* for us is the way that we in Eindhoven and at the Van Abbemuseum have started to position ourselves in relation to the place we are in, rather than trying to maintain the universalising space that is the model for the museum. At the same time, I have to say this is one of the hardest things to do because our infrastructures and our imagination are so invested in being placeless and autonomous—we are almost irredeemably modern in that sense.

I hope that *Soils*, even in the title, indicates an attempt to ground ourselves in other ways. I want to add that Victoria Lynn at TarraWarra has been working on this for much longer than us and working to position the Museum in relation to the Aboriginal community in the small town nearby. She was able to ease our relations with communities that are rightly very cautious about the demand for transparency and what they share because it usually led to their removal and erasure. Through TarraWarra, we learnt so much because we could talk and relate on relatively good terms. I hope we can begin a similar process in Eindhoven with *Soils*, developing dialogues with farmers and citizens who have been neglected in the search for a placeless aesthetics of 'quality' and individual genius. This is where, for me, the decolonial becomes a real working tool with which to put theory into practice.

Part of the relation to the institution here, however, is also the question of restitution. It is often understood in terms of the material restitution of objects that have been stolen, which is of course legitimate, but I think decoloniality understands it in broader terms. Can you give us your thoughts on restitution?

RV: As you said, restitution has come primarily from the debates around ethnographic collections and the restitution of material heritage. What we have been doing in this last year or so is advocating to go beyond material restitution to address epistemic and aesthetic forms of restitution. A contemporary art museum doesn't have looted objects because there was a strict separation between the ethnographic and the art museum, but the realisation that I explore in my book *Vistas of Modernity* is that the whole history of modern and contemporary art is tied to colonial history and has appropriated aesthetic resources from all over the world to create its canons and collections. It has clearly been complicit in the silencing of other aestheses, other temporalities, while gatekeeping the space for the contemporary. A key example here is what came to be called 'primitivism' in modern art.

Colonial violence was not just looting objects but also erasing, silencing and imposing a single mode of representation. So for me the spaces that are supposed to hold the modern or the contemporary must engage in a process of aesthetic and epistemic restitution, in part by transforming the vocabulary and the ways in which we think about what is valid or what is art. I hope that *Soils* is a small step towards that.

TCR: One thing that Charles and I are thinking about a lot is something we learned also from the concept of lumbung and what Ruangrupa very generously brought to western Europe in documenta 15. This idea explores how the ecosystems of sustainability can be shifted from the idea of everything pointing back to the institution, and understanding its job as brute survival and growth, towards a different relation with those places that produce the material that it might want to show, interpret or mediate. How can we sustain or support the sustainability of communities elsewhere upon which we are dependent? *Soils* very much wants to focus on that.

RV: I want to talk about patricia kaersenhout's work *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Too?* and the way an exhibition can have a politics of restitution by connecting local communities and assembling conversations that are integral to this question. The work is a wonderful example of how an intervention in the museum can enable communities to come together—communities that are often dispersed and certainly disregarded by the museum or art world. In addition, I think, speaking of epistemic restitution, the work challenges the exclusions of the Western canon and shows how decolonial aesthesis makes possible the emergence of constellations of art histories that have historically been peripheral to the dominant narrative. Epistemic restitution has a lot to do with uncovering those constellations. They don't need to be invented, they are there, but they are never narrated together and appreciated for the depth of their critique. I would see that uncovering as an act of epistemic restitution as well.

Soils

Index

of

works

GRAPHIC AND EXHIBITION DESIGN



Joseph Churchward (1931–2013),
Selected Archive: Tools, Designs,
'Suggestions'

Various paintings, drawings and materials,
 courtesy of David Bennewith

Joseph Churchward was a Samoan born type, graphic and advertising designer who worked in Aotearoa/New Zealand and for a brief period in Apia Samoa. He created over 600 typefaces by hand, often drawing inspiration from the cultures of the Pacific region. Churchward's work has in turn inspired the exhibition designers of *Soils*, David Bennewith and Sandra Kassenaar, who use his organic forms and movements turned into a cultural object, allowing a hybrid visual language to come into the galleries. By creating different elements that bring the exhibition together, the designers have constructed a rich physical experience for the visitors.

MATTER OF COLOUR /
COLOUR OF MATTER

Dorieke Schreurs,
Matter of Colour / Colour of Matter, 2024

Natural pigments, photographic installation,
 courtesy of the artist

Artist and researcher Dorieke Schreurs gives us a glimpse into her process of making the pigments and paints that colour the walls in the *Soils* exhibition, based entirely on natural pigments and bio-based binders. Schreurs works with colour as geological, cultural, and historical storytellers. For this exhibition, it means creating coloured soils to thematically embed related pieces of art. Schreurs has been advocating for a more sustainable art world and thanks to her involvement in *Soils*, the Van Abbemuseum is rethinking the use of plastic and synthetic paints in exhibition design from now on.

WORKS

This index details the works in the exhibition in the order they were presented in the rooms. The titles of the sections and the texts are those used to help exhibition visitors think about the works and connect them to each other. The exhibition designers, Sandra Kassenaar and David Bennewith, created elements and a visual language that unites *Soils* as a whole.

AS I REMEMBER IT



D Harding
As I Remember It (The Soils Project), 2023

Earth pigments and gum acacia on 200gsm Fabriano Accademia paper, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane



D Harding
As I Remember It (The Soils Project, NL), 2024

Earth pigments and gum acacia on 200gsm Fabriano Accademia paper, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

Upon entering *Soils*, you will see large sheets of paper hanging in the staircase and in the hall leading you towards the exhibition. The pigment used on these works by D Harding (Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal) come from both the soils of Coranderk, where *The Soils Project* began and the soils around the Van Abbe-museum. The artist collected the Coranderk soil with permission of the Wandin family, who are custodians of Wurundjeri Country. The pigment used on the library window is taken from the soil around the museum. The ochre sheet is from Coranderk. The artist chose to use this pigment as a way to connect to this place and bring its hidden stories through its colour. D's work often uses local soils to create a relation with the Earth around them, a way of being that was given to them by their Bidjara, Ghungalu, and Garingbal roots. The pigment on this window blocks the view through it, allowing only a certain perspective through which to see into the library. This draws attention to the right of opacity and asks whether transparency can also make some things invisible.

WATER AND SOIL

The Dutch landscape is shaped by water and soil. Today, both elements need care and repair from the damage done by ignorance and greed. The Dommel river flows past the Van Abbe-museum. It has been shaped by industry, pollution, and capital. Steffie de Gaetano and Giulia Pompilj's works bear witness to the river: its beauty, suffering, and its ability to recover. Diewke van den Heuvel's work takes us to the Swiss glaciers, the fragile sources of much Dutch and European freshwater. Both works ask, how can we care better for the ecosystems around us and how can we acknowledge our dependence on environmental changes far away from here?



Steffie de Gaetano & Giulia Pompilj
The Matter We Share, 2024

Dommel river soils and plants on chromatographic textile, courtesy of the artists

By means of chromatographic exposures, Steffie de Gaetano and Giulia Pompilj's work reveals the pollutants in the Dommel's river beds, uncovering a web of history intertwining colonialism and industrial extraction. *Permeance* and *The Matter We Share* trace, activate, and bring forth an alternative embodiment of the river's contaminated components.

Steffie de Gaetano & Giulia Pompilj
Activation of the chromatographic exposure of the river Dommel at Van Abbemuseum, 2024

Video of performance, courtesy of the artists



Steffie de Gaetano
Permeance, 2021

Dommel river soils on chromatographic filter paper (exposure catalysed through olive oil), courtesy of the artist

Steffie de Gaetano & Giulia Pompilj
Activation costumes for 'The Matter We Share', 2024

Chromatography costumes, courtesy of the artists

This video shows the activation of the chromatographic work *The Matter We Share*, through soils and plant matter foraged along the river Dommel. In the background, the

audio piece composed by Tine Theré plays field recordings of the nearby polluting zinc industry. Following the exposure to sunlight, the ephemeral colours of the river landscape begin to manifest on the textile.



Diewke van den Heuvel
More Moons and Bridge, from the series Melting Heart Connected, 2023-ongoing

Mixed media collage, courtesy of the artist

How do we witness climate change? Every year, Diewke van den Heuvel goes to the Aletsch glacier to see these changes with her own eyes, capturing and documenting this melting body of ice. As the glacier dwindles, so does our drinking water supply—attesting to the urgency of environmental catastrophes and our interconnectedness with the glacier. *Melting Heart* and the subsequent *Melting Heart Connected* are an invitation to sonically and visually immerse ourselves in the belly of the mountain, to bear witness and mourn its disappearance, and to go deeper to see what is hidden within.



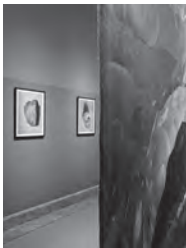
Diewke van den Heuvel
Cave (2020) and Beluga (2022), from the series Melting Heart, 2017-ongoing

Digital prints on recycled PET-bottle fabric, sound installation, courtesy of the artist

Diewke van den Heuvel
Three Tail Spirit, from the series Melting Heart Connected, 2024

Glazed clay sculpture, courtesy of the artist

Crafted from the soil of Noord-Brabant and glazed with sand and clay from the glacier's original site, the three-tailed sculpture embodies its essence and the three smaller glaciers which form the Aletsch. Following the exhibition, it will be reverently returned to the glacier to honour its enduring spirit, and to mourn its gradual disappearance.



Diewke van den Heuvel
Moss and Stone, from the series Melting Heart Connected, 2023-ongoing

Photographic prints, courtesy of the artist

RECLAIMING AND HEALING

We now leave the Netherlands and travel to other places: to Wurundjeri Country in present-day Australia and to Lake Poso in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Water and soil are central elements. Peta Clancy presents a spectacular river landscape, a place that has always had great significance to Aboriginal People. As a result of colonialism, this landscape is now private property. Greed has damaged the Earth through the extraction of resources but Lian Gogali is determined to heal the destroyed Earth by giving women healers a voice, restoring the wisdom that was erased by colonialism and capitalism. How can we preserve and value diverse systems of knowledge?



Lian Gogali and Institut Mosintuwu
Ovariums of Nature, 4th series, 2024

Paintings on fuya bark cloth, soils, water, seeds from Poso District, courtesy of the artists

The *Ovarium of Nature* paintings are a series of works created in collaboration with different communities of women in Poso District in Central Sulawesi. The paintings we present here (the fourth set in the series) were made together with young people from Poso on fuya bark cloth, using soil, water, seeds and leaves brought from the villages of those who made them. The aim was to make space for a conversation with a younger generation of women about the local soil, seed and plant cultures of Poso, and the effects of colonialism, extractivism, and developmentalism have had on them. The painting is meant as a symbol of solidarity, as well as a reminder that we have land, forest, and water to protect.



Peta Clancy
birraring ba brungergalk, 2023

Photographic installation: wall print on textile and photo prints, TarraWarra Museum of Art collection

The site of this nineteenth century image is near Coranderk where *The Soils Project* started. It shows the confluence of two rivers, a place Wurundjeri Traditional Custodians had visited for thousands of years prior to invasion. Today, it is only accessible through closed private property. The image is partially covered by contemporary photographs that are themselves collages of existing and new images. By both celebrating and distancing our view of the site, Peta Clancy (Yorta Yorta, Bangerang) raises the question of who has access to the image and the actual place, as well as the importance of reviving memory and claiming land that was never ceded in the first place.

Lian Gogali
Politik Meja Makan: Poso Before and After Colonisation, 2024

Mixed media installation, courtesy of the artist

With this installation, Lian Gogali shows Poso's traditional food and dining cultures, and the changes that were imposed by the Dutch on what and how food was eaten. The work also highlights how the palm oil plantations, natural resource extraction, and large-scale development projects that dominate Poso's landscape today, are a continuation of this colonisation, which continue to affect Poso's local food culture.



Lian Gogali and Institut Mosintuwu
Poso Women's Conference: Soil, Water, Forest, 2022

Video, courtesy of the artists

Institut Mosintuwu is a grassroots community organisation based in Tentena, Poso District, Central Sulawesi, founded by Lian Gogali. In May 2022, women from 22 surrounding villages gathered at Institut Mosintuwu for the *Poso Women's Conference: Soil, Water, Forest*. There were several days of discussions and activities, focusing on the role of women in protecting their land. The conference concluded with the women making an *Ovarium of Nature* painting to express their commitment to work together to protect nature, like protecting the womb; because nature is our mother.



Lian Gogali
Reclaiming Tadam Burake's Fragments, 2024

Cardboard puzzle, courtesy of the artist

Tadam Burake are the traditional women healers and community leaders of Poso, whose role and history were erased by Dutch colonisation. The imposition of Western customs and standards led to the marginalisation of women, limiting their role to the domestic sphere, and created changes in local seed, plant and food cultures. These changes impact the process of natural resource extraction that Poso's community still struggles against today. By making this puzzle, visitors can reconstruct the image of the Tadam Burake, reconstructing and reclaiming their (her)story.

RIVER IN MOURNING

What are the stories that are carried by the water of the river Dommel?
The Dommel river carries deep memories. This altar mourns the life of 25 women, girls and men that in 1595 were drowned in its waters during the so-called "witch hunts" in the region of Peelland. With this work, Valiana Aguilar, patricia kaersenhout and Rolando Vázquez bring us in relation to the river's memories to mourn their lives.

In the altar their names are joined by the names of women from other parts of the world that have been killed for their struggle for justice and the protection of Earth. The names have been embroidered collectively by women in Yucatán and Eindhoven as an act of relationality, remembrance, and healing. Curative plants native to their lands are present in the cloth, evoking the power of mourning and the possibility to honour those that have been forgotten. Every week an offering of fresh flowers coming from the front garden of the museum is made.



Valiana Aguilar, patricia kaersenhout, and Rolando Vázquez
River in Mourning, 2024

Mixed media installation: willow tree altar, embroidered cloth, sound installation, video projection, courtesy of the artists

WILD ENCOUNTERS

Hira Nabi presents two film works from her long term project *How to Love a Tree* which reflect on forests and trees, disappearance, extinction, love, care, life and decay.
These works, the first and fourth chapter, take us to the soil and forests of Pakistan, and invite us to reflect on the deep connection between humans and the more-than human world that surrounds us. Can we find a better way to cherish our world and understand what it means to be part of something more than a disconnected collection of individuals?



Hira Nabi
How to Love a Tree (Prologue), 2022

Video installation, courtesy of the artist

In the first segment of *How to Love a Tree*, Hira Nabi invited four musicians to perform a concert for a dying tree. Understanding this as an act of palliative care and devotion, this gesture invites contemplation on our connections with trees, woodlands, forests, life, and deterioration. We welcome you in this intimate communion with nature, to listen, to observe, to meditate, and mourn the waning wilderness.



Hira Nabi
Wild Encounters, 2023

Video installation, courtesy of the artist

How can we foster interconnectedness, kindness and collective endurance with our desecrated environments? *Wild Encounters* maps out the temporality of the forest around Murree in the Galiyat region in Pakistan, with its many, varied timescales, inviting us into forest time starting with breathing and dreaming. In this multi-media installation, Hira Nabi explores colonial legacies in forest landscapes, reflecting on their impact and the lingering remnants of their destruction. The work serves as a catalyst for introspection, prompting a re-evaluation of our connection to Earth's delicate ecosystems.

AGAINST ERASURE

What was violently erased by colonial occupation, and what continues to resist it? The colonial oppressors made a deliberate effort to erase the cultures and eliminate the people that inhabited the lands they conquered. The works in this room reference knowledge and traditions that are now being recovered against oblivion. The deep significance of traditional Mayan houses, the medicinal uses of native plants and stories of resistance turned into satirical theatre are all examples of how different cultures have endured throughout the years and have been transmitted through generations. These works bring erased knowledges back to life.



Rolando Vázquez
Typology of Erasure W1 and Typology of Erasure B1, 2024

Photographic series after Bernd & Hilla Becher, courtesy of the artist

These concrete cell-houses are markers of erasure. Each one of them occupies the place where a Mayan house once stood. After the ravage of Hurricane Isidore on September 14th, 2002, the national disaster fund was not available for repairing traditional houses. The fund was available only to replace the damaged houses with these concrete cubes, which echoes the architecture of a prison cell with its disposability of life and the disregard for the relational worlds of the communities. These photos quote the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher. Their serialisation and aesthetic neutrality are used here to perform a critique of rational geometry and abstraction: a critique of modernity as the reduction of life.

Rolando Vázquez
'The Maya' Under Western Eyes, 2024

Magazines, postcards and tourist guides (1844-late twentieth century), courtesy of the artist

This vitrine collects artefacts of the Western gaze's appropriation and representation of 'the Maya'. Here the Mayan world appears as folklore and as a bygone archeological past. While the tourism industry continues to thrive, the Mayan communities carry the struggle to safeguard and dignify their relational ways of living.



Zena Cumpston
ngarta-kiira (to return to Country #1-#10), 2023

Linocut collage, kopi, on Fabriano paper, courtesy of the artist

These prints explore the interrelationships of people, plants and animals on Barkandji Country. They use Kopi, a white pigment used in traditional mourning practices and joyous occasions such as body painting for ceremony and celebration. As the Barkandji artist says: "Through each of these works I celebrate our knowledge, but I also mourn how rarely our knowledge as First Peoples is respected and empowered. Circles signpost a portal into Aboriginal knowledge of Country and signify return—return to our traditional foodways, our plant knowledge, our holistic land management practices. Circles speak to the foundational importance in our culture of true reciprocity, never taking without giving back."



Moelyono
Berkaca Dulu, 2020

Oil on canvas, courtesy of the artist

Appropriating the composition of *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro* (1857) by Javanese painter Raden Saleh, Moelyono reinterprets a famous episode in the 1825-1830 Java War. Prince Diponegoro was one of the Javanese knights that fiercely resisted Dutch colonial occupation during this period. After being invited to negotiate a truce with Lieutenant General Baron de Kock, he was instead captured by Dutch colonisers.

Moelyono
Tandak Samira, 2023

Oil on canvas, courtesy of the artist

Ludruk is a form of popular theatre that originated in East-Java as a form of peasant people's resistance to Dutch colonial rule. This form of folk art accommodates the participation of transwomen in the feminine roles. In *Tandak Samira*, Moelyono presents the story of Sakera, a leader in the peasant resistance movement against the Dutch colonial cultivation system, who was captured by the colonial rulers by being tricked into a Ludruk play. A few characters in this painting reference Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Night Watch* (1662).



Suumil Móokt'aan
Xaanil naaj: la palabra desde el territorio, 2024

Various wood (willow, poplar, pine), rye straw, soundscape, courtesy of the artists

This Mayan house stands here as an ambassador from whom we get to listen to living stories of the Sinanché community that speak about the significance of inhabiting their ancestral houses. The Mayan house of Yucatán is traditionally built using 13 different types of native trees. Nowadays, due to deforestation and the dispossession of land by the mega-projects, Mayan people have to build their houses with the trees and materials that are available. The materials used to build this house are responsibly sourced in Europe. The roof follows the traditional Brabant technique using rye, bringing together these different and unique vernacular architectures that are rooted in the territories that make them possible. Back in Sinanché, Suumil Móokt'aan are actively recovering their ancestral knowledges to create a space to care for Mother Earth.

THE STORY ROOM

In this exhibition, you will discover stories from many different soils. We also invite you to share your own stories and soils with other visitors.
The three projects in this room are all related to soils, memory and story-telling. Folktales and knowledge from the countryside were often considered of little value in a modern state like the Netherlands, but as times change it is necessary to reassess these relations with the Earth. What needs to be remembered or to exist again in order to create better relations for the future?



The Resurrection Committee

The Resurrection Committee and Eduard Constantijn
Wooden Vitrine, 2024

Artefacts, seeds, soil from Romania, courtesy of the artists

Anonymous artist from Transylvania
St Elijah's Ascent, 19th century

Glass icon, courtesy of Ovidiu Tichindeleanu

Anang Saptoto
Balai Eksperimentasi Penelitian Seni & Kehidupan, 2023

Banner, courtesy of the artist

Adelina Ivan
Lines, Weavings, Fringes, 2023

Textile collage, courtesy of the artist

Eduard Constantin
Indian Shot, 2024

Watercolour on paper, courtesy of the artist

Livia Pancu
Backward View, 2024

Planes and profiles, pencil on paper, courtesy of the artist

This 19th century glass icon was made in the region of Transylvania. Inside its wooden frame, three seeds, probably wheat, were kept hidden. The Resurrection Committee have taken the task of caring for seeds as a way to "answer to the call of the Earth". The Committee is based at The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life near Bucharest, where the soil has been depleted after years of intensive farming. They have gathered seeds and their stories in the drawers and invite you to touch, read and smell them. Other elements shown here speak about the connections between cultures and about a changing relation between what is planted, memory and imaginaries. Making these links between different places and stories serves as a way of helping the earth breathe again.



Museum Publics and Soph Booyeer
to know with, what makes our grounds (om te weten, hoe we samen aarden), 2024-ongoing

Soil texture tests (sub-soil submerged in water), courtesy of the artist



Soil Laboratory (Maarit Mäkelä, Riikka Latva-Somppi, Catharina Kajander & Tzuyu Chen)
Soil Stories, 2020

Collected soil samples from various locations around Finland, courtesy of the artists

Seeking to challenge the general fear of living organisms in museums, this installation invites visitors to contribute with their own soil samples

to a growing collection of Earthly stories. Samples from the Netherlands and Finland (where the research started) present the physical matter of soil—silt, clay, and sand—as material for the imagination. Gathered over the exhibition's duration, the soils will eventually be combined into sculptural objects during workshops at Dutch Design Week in October 2024.



Diepe wortels, 2024

Video, courtesy of the artists and Erfgoed Brabant

“For generations, different hands have been working the same soil. My parents’ hands, my parents’ parents’ hands and many hands before that. They all stood where I stand now.” This spoken word by Cat de Win-Haase is based on a conversation with John Heesakkers about his family farm. John's ancestors have been living and running the Jammiekeshoeve farm for seven generations, since 1781. The farm is transitioning to a sustainable forest farm, combining trees and shrubs with grains, fruit, vegetables and cattle.

Ik ben soms hier en ook niet hier, 2024

Video, courtesy of the artists and Erfgoed Brabant

Ik ben soms hier en ook niet hier is a spoken word by Jonathan Tjien Fooh. It is based on a conversation with Toetie and Achmed Soeropaiman and the personal connection they have with their soil. For 25 years, Achmed and Toetie have been renting a plot at Groen Gennep, a city garden in Eindhoven. They grow vegetables that their ancestors grew in Suriname and Java. As these vegetables are hard to find or very expensive in the Netherlands, they share them with others at their mosque. “With every seed in the earth, I dig deeper into myself, I get closer to Indonesia, Suriname, Saramacca, Closer to my ancestors.”

WEAVING A PLURIVERSITY

The Heart of the World is guarded by the Kwarte Umuke community in the mountain range of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in present-day Colombia. They preserve ancestral knowledge from their territory and encourage us to remember who we are in connection with Earth. They gifted each member of the Pluriversity Weavers a ‘woven letter’: an invitation to link our thinking with the soil on which we are standing and acknowledge the plurality of the world. In this room, you will find the letters and their replies. This invitation is an open one: how do we create a world in which many worlds can fit?



Pluriversity Weavers
A Woven Letter, 2023

Video, courtesy of the artists

Seynawiku Izquierdo Torres, Dwasimney Del Carmen Izquierdo Torres, Dwanimako Arroyo Izquierdo, Maria Eufemia Arroyo Izquierdo
Invitation From the Heart of the World to Weave Across Locations, 2023

Film and mixed media installation with manta, belt, headpiece, tutites and tutu woven in cotton, sisal and wood, 2023, courtesy of the artists

The participants of Pluriversity from the Kwarte Umuke community share with us their weavings and stories to inspire us with actions of rooted thinking. The Pluriversity respondents in the Netherlands, Aldo Ramos, Li Yuchen, Ana Bravo Pérez and Alik van der Kruijs, respond to the letter collectively, yet with their own soils and positionality. Mamo Arwawiku and the community in Kwarte Umuke share that thought always comes from the connection with the soil, the water, the trees, the food and the singing of the birds. These traditional weavings serve as invitations to walk the living territory, to bond us with the soil and to connect to the Earth's network of thoughts.



Pluriversity Weavers
Bundling in the Womb of Rooted Thought, 2024

Steel, willow branches, loam, local soil, pine wood, mixed media, courtesy of the artists

One of the tasks of learning with the Iku people is to build a Casa Marunzama: a living house for rooted dreams. Its building process requires walking the territory to find living materials, weaving a connection with life and the materials of the area we are inhabiting, and then paying back with thoughts in reciprocity. This wall is a piece of what the artists have learnt from Casa Marunzama on how to create a space beyond the concrete cube, as a way to weave knowledges rooted in the different soils, contexts and positionalities. In order to weave a Pluriversity, we start by spinning our stories as threads, connecting our thoughts with the original thread of the Mother.



Aldo Ramos
Soil is a Weaving of Memories, 2023

Knitted threads of memories found while walking soils in Petemoro, Mexico, and the swamp at Naardermeer, Netherlands, with a contribution from Brooke Wandin, courtesy of the artist

“The soil is made of memories, to know is to remember, to remember is to walk the paths of our ancestors, to walk those paths is to weave with the soil.” Aldo Ramos went back to his origins, to his grandmother’s knittings and to walking the land where his grandfather lived. Both are the first memories of connecting his thoughts with the soil and understanding what has shaped his thinking over the years.



Li Yuchen
Mother River, 2023

Woven cotton with silk embroidery, video projection, sound, courtesy of the artist

Above and underneath the soil, water is the limitless connector of different bodies, of thoughts and memories. Provoked by the woven letter, Li Yuchen started to think-feel with the water in her body and beyond. The red thread embroidered on a fabric is the same size as her, the mother river appears and travels through her own veins and lived experiences. Water continues to flow, flowing into the communal memories, remembering the worlds that have been lost and mourning what cannot be undone, with the change of landscape caused by the biggest dam in the world.

Ana Bravo Pérez
Mother Earth's Inner Organs, 2022

Coal, white sisal hammock and video projection, film, 16mm, 4K, sound, Wayuunaiki, Dutch, Spanish and English, courtesy of the artist

This film connects the sea harbours of the Netherlands, the open-pit coal mines in Colombia and the traditional territories of the Wayuu and Iku peoples. It is Ana Bravo Pérez’s attempt to share the world of Mma (Mother Earth) and to practise seeing coal as her inner organs. The film is an invitation to stop considering coal as only a dead black combustible rock that can be shipped worldwide for industrial purposes.

Alik van der Kruijs
1 cm = 1000 years, 2021

Tapestry woven with linen and paper, courtesy of the artist

This project investigates the notion of scale and time in the formation of the Earth. A colour and texture library constructed from limestone and worked out into a tapestry that addresses the industrial mining of the ENCI open-pit-quarry in Maastricht, The Netherlands. Alik van der Kruijs walked the quarry every week for months reflecting on the precedence of Mother Earth and what the excavation has taken away from the mountain, but also the new layers it has added to the landscape.

THE NEW RURAL AGENDA

The New Rural Agenda Temple is a spiritual and temporal home for a better future. The artist collective Jatiwangi art Factory work in a former terracotta tile factory in Majalengka, Java. The group's *New Rural Agenda* is a call for different communities across the Earth to come together to recognise land protection as a civic duty. The tiles on the temple were made by the group to express the connections between humans, animals, plants and the earth. How can we share our resources to benefit all creatures on Earth?



Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF)
New Rural Agenda Temple, 2022–2024

Ceramic tiles, textile, mixed media, collection Van Abbemuseum

33 BRICKS

For this work, Nicholson removed 33 bricks from the façade of the Van Abbemuseum leaving visible gaps. Inside, the bricks turn into small, monumental sculptures. The plaques tell stories about the colonial occupation of Naarm/ Melbourne in Australia and counter-stories around bricks and invasion.

While the Van Abbemuseum is connected to Dutch colonialism, this link to Australia emphasises the common colonial practices of the Western Europeans. Bricks are also an important building material in Dutch architectural traditions. *33 Bricks* honours those traditions while recognising the colonial history of violence and annihilation that bricks represent to other people.



Tom Nicholson
33 Bricks (Towards a Monument to Batman's Treaty), 2008–2024

Site specific work in two parts: brick exterior of the Van Abbemuseum with 33 bricks extracted; installation with the same 33 bricks extracted from the Van Abbemuseum exterior, 33 cast bronze texts, 33 plaque texts printed on paper pasted to the museum wall, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/ Brisbane

33 Bricks (Towards a Monument to Batman's Treaty) takes 33 bricks directly from the façade of the Van Abbemuseum's building, where you will now see gaps in the wall. Placed on these shelves, the bricks become small monumental sculptures whose plaques tell stories about another time and place; specifically the colonial occupation of Naarm/Melbourne, Australia, and narratives and counter-narratives around bricks and invasion. While the museum is closely connected to Dutch imperialism, this link to Australia emphasises the common colonial project of western Europe. It also suggests that bricks, so valued in Dutch architectural history through the Berlage and Delft schools, are also bound into histories of violence and erasure. This work is a meditation on this complexity, on monuments, and on words themselves.

WALKING THE TERRITORY AND PRACTISING LANGUAGE

How can we tell stories hidden in the soil without taking from the land? In this room, several artworks reveal stories hidden in the soils by using different kinds of ‘maps’. These focus on the deeper, richer connections between people and the land. Using oral history and traditional languages, as well as modification of scientific techniques help to decolonise. In this way, community-led map-making is reclaimed as a respectful means of storytelling.

Coranderck

Coranderck is the site of a large Aboriginal station where the soils for the chromatographies of Megan Cope (Quandamooka) and Keg de Souza are taken and one of the places where the Woiwurrung language is spoken. From 1863 to 1924 it became the home of Wurundjeri and other Aboriginal communities who had been displaced from their Country by the British colonial occupiers. In 1998, 80 hectares of the original station—including the manager's house, the only remaining building—was purchased

with funding from the Indigenous Land Corporation. Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation (WEAC) was established to manage and care for Coranderck and recover the knowledges lost by colonialism. It was on this land, with two of the Directors of WEAC, Wurundjeri Custodians Uncle Dave Wandin and Brooke Wandin, that the *Soils* journey started.



Megan Cope & Keg de Souza
Soil Stories of Coranderck, 2023

Mixed media installation with chromatography paper, silver nitrate, various soil samples from Coranderck selected and sourced with the guidance of Wandin Family members, courtesy of the artists and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/ Brisbane

In *Soil Stories of Coranderck*, Megan Cope (Quandamooka) and Keg de Souza used the scientific technique of soil chromatography to create a series of earth maps, using samples gathered with guidance by the Wandin family, from significant locations in Coranderck. This method reveals intricate layers of soil within the landscape, tracing and acknowledging diverse cultural and historical stories of the land. Beyond mere narration, Place is presented as multiple, complex and interrelated. The works hold Place in them.

Brooke Wandin & Megan Cope
biiknganjinu ngangudji – see our Country, 2023

Hand-drawn map of Wurundjeri Country, courtesy of the artists and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/ Brisbane

This work by Megan Cope (Quandamooka) and Brooke Wandin (Wurundjeri) depicts an outline of the panoramic view from a place known as View Hill in Wurundjeri Country. This place was the first colonial settlement in the area and with this artwork, the artists reclaim a landscape that is now privately owned. ‘Country’ is the word First Nations people use to describe their lands and commitments to Place that recognises that the land was never ceded to the colonial occupiers. This work is shown in relation with *biiknganjinu ngarnudji – hear our Country* to forge a profound connection to Country.

Brooke Wandin
biiknganjinu ngarnudji – hear our Country, 2023

Sound installation, courtesy of the artist

What does resistance sound like? *biiknganjinu ngarnudji – hear our Country* is a family recording of the Woiwurrung language from Wurundjeri Country. By centering language as a potent tool of cultural reclamation, the act of speaking asserts a deeply rooted cultural, ancestral and familial connection to Country. Through this act of ancient oral tradition, the Woiwurrung language is preserved and persists in this sound piece, while echoing far beyond it.



Yurni Sadariah and the Rangan Adat communities
Learning Traditional Agricultural Tools with the Paser Adat Community, 2024

Wooden replica of traditional tools from Rangan, courtesy of the artists

These replicas of traditional tools reflect the transformation in Rangan's landscape. Due to land evictions, mining and palm oil development, many of these tools are no longer used, and their function, as well as the knowledge around traditional farming techniques, are being lost. One of the long-term commitments of Yurni Sadariah is to reinvigorate the farming of native plants and the use of traditional tools.



Yurni Sadariah and the Rangan Adat communities
Rangan's Paser Adat Territories Map, 2024

Textile print, courtesy of the artists

These maps have been drawn by Yurni Sadariah and her community using oral and historical knowledge. They display the devastating effects that the expansion of palm oil plantations, logging concessions, and large-scale Javanese settlements as part of the Indonesian government's transmigration program, have had on the Rangan Paser Adat (Indigenous) territories. The map on the left shows the territory during the 1960s, before the larger land grabbing schemes had taken place. The map on the right depicts the current situation, highlighting the loss of ancestral forest and the displacement of the local Adat communities.

Yurni Sadariah
Kampong Rangan Pesaka Ulun Tuo (Rangan Village: An Inheritance of Ancestral Territories), 2023

Video, courtesy of the artists

An archival-based short video of the lives of the Paser Adat community in Rangan village, *Kampong Rangan Pesaka Ulun Tuo (Rangan Village: An Inheritance of Ancestral Territories)* showcases the histories of massive development projects, land degradation and extraction in Rangan Village, and how they affect the lives and struggles of the Paser Adat community.

COW AND LANDSCAPE

Wapke Feenstra's work involves five farms situated around Eindhoven. Here, the cows graze on sandy soil, on extracted peatlands, or beside little streams. Many people remain unconscious of what happens in this Dutch landscape. Recent protests have brought more attention to farmers, but still the most common assumptions about the countryside are projected onto it from the city. Feenstra's project gives voice to the land itself, through the constant change that generations of farmer families have experienced. In order to find a better balance between people and nature, we need to listen to each other. But can we really listen to each other? Is there space for the rural in today's art world?



Wapke Feenstra (Myvillages)
Cow and Landscape, 2020-2024

Mixed media installation, courtesy of the artist



Myvillages
Rural Undercurrent Vending Machines, 2022-2024

Vending machines trade various products from farms in Brabant, courtesy of the artists

From the *Rural Undercurrent Vending Machines* you can buy products that come straight from the local farms in Brabant. They are filled up regularly by people who work on the land themselves, some of whom you can see in the *Cow and Landscape* room nearby. Offering the products here gives you a chance to taste the fruits of our surrounding soils before or after your visit to the museum.

OPENING WEEKEND

During the opening weekend many of the *Soils* participants contributed to debates, discussions, dinners and performances that took place in the museum throughout the two days.

SATURDAY 15 JUNE



13:00-13:45 auditorium
Welcome speech by: Dewi van de Weerd, Ambassador International Cultural Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, director Charles Esche and artist Zena Cumpston (language: partly Dutch/English)

13:00-16:00 hall old building
Have a temporary tattoo inspired by the project *Cow and Landscape* by artist Wapke Feenstra



14:00-15:00 auditorium
Discussion on the *Cow and Landscape* project with artist Wapke Feenstra and rural sociologist Inez Dekker (language: Dutch)

14:00-16:00 classroom
Children's Art Club (limited number of places) Workshop soil pigments with Dorieke Schreurs, artist and Trienette Stevens, museum educator (for children aged 6-12)



14:00-14:45 hall old building
Free guided tours in Bahasa Indonesia, Spanish and English

15:00-15:45 hall old building
Free guided tour in Dutch



15:15-16:15 auditorium
Conversation: Mamo Arwawiku, and Dwanimako

OPENING WEEKEND

Arroyo Izquierdo of the Iku community Kwarte Umuke with Rolando Vázquez (main language Iku and Spanish, will be translated into English)

16:15-16:55 auditorium
Screening of film from artist Riar Rizaldi Bahasa Indonesia (English subtitles)

17:00-17:50 parliament
Conversation with Brooke Wandin, Valiana Aguilar and Yurni Sadariah



17:50-18:30 parliament
Performance by Lian Gogali on art installation: *Politik Meja Makan: Poso Before and After Colonisation*

SUNDAY 16 JUNE



11:30-12:30 parliament
Artist panel on the materiality of soil Discussion with D Harding, Dorieke Schreurs, Soph Boobyer, Diewke van den Heuvel and The Resurrection Committee, moderated by Giulia Bellinetti and Teresa Cos Rebollo (language: English)

12:00-16:00 front garden
Drawing plants workshop with Jacqueline Nas (drawing teacher) and Jeanette Renders (expert on native plants) and temporary tattoo station Both activities inspired by the project *Cow and Landscape* by artist Wapke Feenstra

12:45-14:00 classroom
Performance by Steffie de Gaetano and Giulia Pompilj: *The Matter We Share*



13:00-13:30 hall old building
Guided tour by artist Tom Nicholson along artwork *33 Bricks (Towards a Monument to Batman's Treaty)* (language: English)



14:30–15:15 parliament
Performance by BKP (Badan Kajian Pertanahan) × Hilmar Farid

The performative repatriation of the ‘Adatrecht’ book by BKP (Badan Kajian Pertanahan or Land Study Agency) was developed for the opening weekend of *Soils*. The performance featured a speech by Hilmar Farid the Indonesian Director-General of Culture. He approved the repatriation of the book by Cornelis Vollenhoven that was written between 1901–1931 and purported to outline the unwritten laws of indigenous (non-Javanese) and Chinese communities in the Dutch occupied Indonesian archipelago. The repatriation of this book is a way for people in contemporary Indonesia to free themselves from Dutch impositions and prejudices that still affect their lives in the coloniality of the Indonesian government. Repatriation, in particular, serves as a Foundation for BKP and their community to redefine and practice a new understanding of adat and how it relates to land struggles. Having been returned to the Netherlands through the Van Abbemuseum, the book erased using the earth of BKP’s home village of Wates will form part of the museum collection and will remain here as an object of contemplation for Dutch and international visitors.



15:45–16:45 auditorium
Artist talk: patricia kaersenhout, Suumil Móokt’aan, Pluriversity Weavers, Hira Nabi and Rolando Vázquez (language: English)

17:00–18:30 parliament
Pakaroso!: Soil Solidarity, an assembly facilitated by Lian Gogali with all participants and artists

SOILS Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven 15 June–24 November 2024
AUTHORS Teresa Cos Rebollo, Zena Cumpston, Charles Esche, Inez Dekker, Wapke Feenstra, Victoria Lynn, Rolando Vázquez, Struggles for Sovereignty (Eliesta Handitya, Gatari Surya Kusuma, Sanne Oorthuizen, Alec Steadman)
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VAN ABBEMUSEUM FELLOWS Beyond Walls (Armando Ello, Jeremy Flohr, Glenda Pattipeilohy, Suzanne Rastovac), Wapke Feenstra, Pluriversity Weavers (Ana Bravo Pérez, Alike van der Kruijs, Li Yuchen, Aldo Ramos), Suumil Móokt’aan (Valiana Aguilar, Ángel Kú), Rolando Vázquez,
TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART FELLOWS Megan Cope, Uncle Dave Wandin and Brooke Wandin (Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation)
STRUGGLES FOR SOVEREIGNTY FELLOWS Lian Gogali and Yurni Sadariah
ARTISTS AND PARTICIPANTS Valiana Aguilar, BKP (Badan Kajian Pertanahan), Soph Boobyer, Peta Clancy, Megan Cope, Zena Cumpston, Erfgoed Brabant (Selim Haase, Luke Linssen, Jonathan Tjien Fooh, Cat de Win-Haase), Wapke Feenstra, Steffie de Gaetano and Giulia Pompilj, Lian Gogali and Institut Mosintuwu, D Harding, Diewke van den Heuvel, Jatiwangi art Factory, patricia kaersenhout, Moelyono, Myvillages, Hira Nabi, Tom Nicholson, de Onkruidenier (Ronald Boer, Jonmar van Vlijmen, en Rosanne van Wijk), Pluriversity Weavers (Dwanimakom Arroyo Izquierdo, Mamo Arwawiku, Izquierdo Torrez, Maria Eufemia, Arroyo Izquierdo, Dwasimney Del Carmen Izquierdo Torres, Seynawiku Izquierdo Torres, Ana Bravo Pérez, Alike van der Kruijs, Li Yuchen, Aldo Ramos), Riar Rizaldi, Yurni Sadariah and the Rangan Adat communities, Dorieke Scheurs, Keg de Souza, Suumil Móokt’aan (Valiana Aguilar, Ángel Kú), The Resurrection Committee (Anonymous artist from 19th century Transylvania, Eduard Constantin, Adelina Ivan, Livia Pancu, Anang Saptoto, The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life), Rolando Vázquez, Brooke Wandin
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SOILS Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven 15 June–24 November 2024
CURATORS Teresa Cos Rebollo, Charles Esche
PROJECT LEADER Inge Borsje
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Webinar Series #2:
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TarraWarra Museum of Art

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ARTISTS' REPRESENTATIVES

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Webinar Series #1:

On Country

Stacie Piper (Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung and Ngurai Illim-Wurrung), Uncle Bruce Pascoe (Bunurong, Tasmanian and Yuin), Jonathan Jones (Wiradyuri and Kamilaroi)

Webinar Series #2:

The Soils Project: Groundwork

Uncle Dave Wandin (Wurundjeri), Brooke Wandin (Wurundjeri), Tiriki Onus (Yorta Yorta), Yurni Sadariah, Alban Mannisi

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Tilt

Loes Jansen, Nikki Dekkers

Webinar Series #1:

How Do You Learn to Cuddle a Cow?

Teresa Cos Rebollo, Charles Esche, Daphina Misiedjan, Myvillages (Kathrin Böhm and Wapke Feenstra), Aldo Ramos, Rolando Vázquez, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

Webinar Series #2:

The Soils Project: Groundwork

Inez Dekker (Myvillages), Charles Esche, John Heesakkers, Professor Brian Martin, Aldo Ramos, Toetie Soeropaiman and Achmed Soeropaiman

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Soils tell stories.

They bring forth life and remember what has happened. They give us a sense of who we are and what is important to us. Soils are matter and metaphor, literal and figurative. That is the idea behind this exhibition.

The Palestinian scholar Munir Fasheh speaks of four types of soils. They are the earth soil, the communal soil, the cultural soil and the spiritual soil. These soils nurture us if we take good care of them. The artists in this exhibition connect to soils from their understanding of their place on Earth. They want you to experience that connection too. We hope their work inspires you and prompts you to reflect on what your own soils mean to you.



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