

looking here
looking north



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Exhibition

12 January – 10 February 2019

Launch

19 January 2019

Performances

Alfira O'Sullivan 19 January 2019

Kartika Suharto-Martin and Alfira O'Sullivan 10 February 2019

Artist Talk/Cultural Day

10 February 2019

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Woven artist collective:

Kartika Suharto-Martin

Ida Lawrence

Mashara Wachjudy

Bridie Gillman

Sofiyah Ruqayah

Alfira O'Sullivan

Essay by Leyla Stevens

Between 'here'
and 'there':
Migrations of
memory, gesture
& archives

In her book addressing the global entanglements that saw both the destruction and conservation of Indonesia's rainforests, Anna Tsing asks the question, 'why is global capitalism so messy?' Her contribution to that question is to reconceive reductive notions of what constitutes the local and global and instead focuses on the sticky 'grip of worldly exchanges', or what she calls *friction*.¹ According to Tsing, global capitalism is not played out through smooth, homogenising processes but enacted within the local by 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.'²

In the group exhibition, *looking here looking north*, Tsing's concept of friction is evident in various ways throughout each of the artists' works. The exhibition involves the work of six female artists from *Woven*, an Australian based collective of artists who hold personal ties to Indonesia. Themes of family, memory and belonging run as an undercurrent throughout the show, bringing together a diverse range of practices and media. The exhibition offers a meditation on the friction that enables cross-cultural forms of belonging and identity. It invites us to think of the 'stickiness' of Tsing's global connections and how they play out through personal histories, where home and family is situated across geopolitical borders and tied together by uneven and creative moments of exchange.

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i. memory

Those who grew up between two cultures know how tenuous it can be to step back and forth between two homes. To cross the gulf of physical distance, memories become a currency — we trade shared histories and reminisce on the past to bring those missing closer. This temporal quality of memory is evident in Sofiyah Ruqayah's amorphous watercolours, which are based on the shifting memories she holds of an ancestor's tomb in her mother's village in West Java. Interspersed throughout the work are elements of photographic collage, acting as small mnemonic touchstones to fix in sight before blending into the larger flow of the composition, which twists and stretches out like roots.

¹Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: an ethnography of global connection* (Princeton N.J, Princeton University Press, 2005),1.

²*ibid.*,4.

Where Ruqayah's watercolours gesture towards embodied forms of memory, the large-scale narrative paintings by Ida Lawrence reveal how memory is shaped through language. Lawrence, who is Javanese-Australian, recounts moments from her time spent living in Indonesia in English alongside a translated version in Bahasa Indonesia. She makes transparent her uncertain relationship with Indonesian by adding grammatical corrections to her mistakes. To translate is an exercise of not only switching between two languages but a negotiation between two identities. Her translations make visible the hierarchies of difference in cross-cultural communication, where one language is fluent and the other learnt, where loss occurs on either side of this process.

ii. archives

Both the respective works of Bridie Gillman and Mashara Wachjudy respond to notions of place as they move across virtual and imagined archives.

Gillman's photographic series and two channel video are quiet observations of the liminal spaces that occur in sites of tourism: where sticky points of difference and troublesome histories have been wiped clean to produce an artifice of local culture. Gillman's use of fixed frames and long durational shots extends upon a tradition of image making that invites a slow witnessing of the everyday. Here the objectifying tourist gaze is suspended and turned back on itself — inviting a critique on who gets watched and who gets to look.

In *Konstruksi*, the sculptural installation by Mashara Wachjudy, archival images of place sourced from Google Street View are re-sampled onto shiny vinyl banners and hung over bamboo scaffolding. The artist describes her use of Google Maps as a way of re-navigating the streets from her family *kampung* (village) in Bandung. The word *kampung* holds a layered significance in Indonesian, denoting places of community, nostalgia and tradition. Wachjudy mines accessible online imagery to locate her own personal sites of belonging. Through an assemblage of material fragments that reference Indonesian vernacular, she thus re-creates remembered signs from her *kampung*.

iii. performativity

While gender is not a defining theme to the show, the works of Alfira O'Sullivan and Kartika Suharto-Martin in differing ways stage a performing of cross-cultural femininity. In her work, *Siti Suharti*, Suharto-Martin re-creates the kind of kitsch music video associated with *keroncong*, a popular music genre in Java. Suharto-Martin, whose family history is interwoven

with *keroncong* singers and musicians, re-frames the retro nationalism associated with *keroncong* to include the contemporary experience of Javanese diaspora — who relive forms of home — in Australia.

In O’Sullivan’s installation, the vision of Indonesian textiles strung up on the iconic hills hoist, similarly allows us to glimpse the diasporic connections that occur in Australian backyards. O’Sullivan activates her installation through a dance performance that reveals how the borders between her identity as a mother and as a dancer merge into large piles of daily laundry. O’Sullivan redresses idealised representations of motherhood by providing a more complex narrative: where creative and domestic forms of labour coincide.

iv. epilogue

In the exhibition title, *looking here looking north*, we find a negotiation between two cardinal directions. In various ways the exhibition speaks to the title’s implied subjectivity of *here*, where notions of home and belonging are not fixed geographical coordinates but fluid trajectories that connect in the global. Here we can echo Tsing and find the beauty in these messy moments of friction that run throughout the show — monuments of bamboo and vinyl, a tourist hesitating to cross a road, imaginations of place and family. Such moments of collision and connection speak of fluid histories that spread across geographical boundaries: a migration of memory and gesture, a story of disparate things combined, connecting *here* to *there*.





Ida Lawrence, *Dimas's Wifi Tower* (detail), 2018. Acrylic on canvas
152x183cm. Courtesy of the artist. Photo Ida Lawrence.



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Bridie Gillman, *BALI STATE OF MIND* (stills), 2017-18. Two-channel video installation. Courtesy the artist and Edwina Corlette Gallery. The artist acknowledges this work has been produced in collaboration with Asha Madge.





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Alfira O'Sullivan, *Weekends are for washing* (Installation detail), 2018. Hills hoist, wooden pegs, cloth, traditional Indonesian dance costumes, video projection. Courtesy the artist. The artist acknowledges the video component of this work was made in collaboration with Joshua O'Sullivan. Music: "Saya Nyanyi Sambil Jemur Kain" by Nonaria. Photo Kyati Suharto.



Kartika Suharto-Martin, Siti Suharti (video stills), 2018. Video installation (including television, small table, woven mat, video). Courtesy the artist The artist acknowledges the works has been produced in collaboration with Suharto for music accompaniment.

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