

Here:

After





FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY IS SITUATED ON THE LAND OF THE CABROGAL OF THE DARUG NATION. THE TEXTS IN THIS CATALOGUE REFERENCE LOCALITIES ON DARUG LAND. WE ACKNOWLEDGE ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT, AND THE ELDERS OF THE FUTURE. THIS ALWAYS WAS AND ALWAYS WILL BE ABORIGINAL LAND.



26.FEB–26.JUN.2021

*Jazz Money
Kalanjay Dhir
Justine Youssef
& Leila El Rayes
Michelle Ly
Serwah Attafuah*

Curated by Tian Zhang

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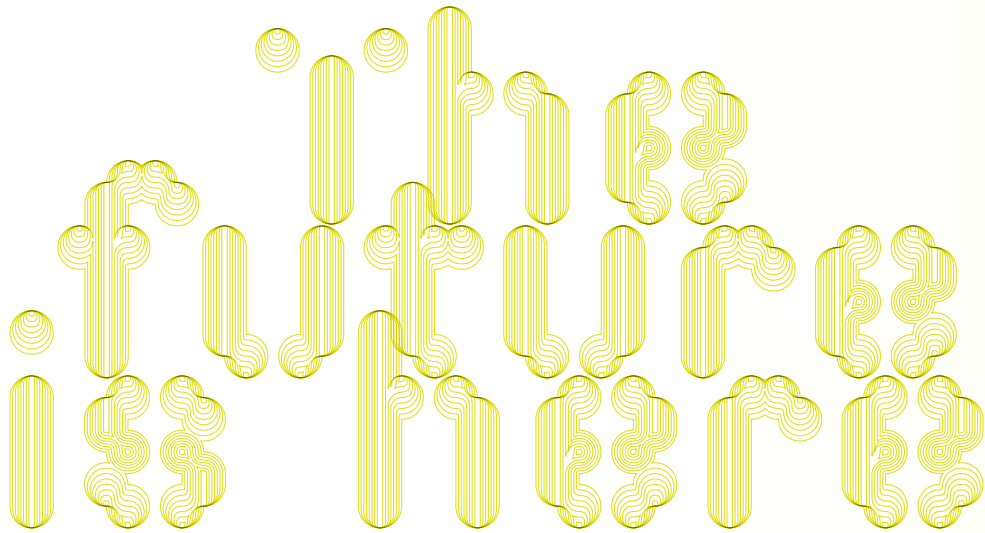
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TIAN ZHANG

Growing up, I was never into sci-fi. There was something about the genre, with its mostly-white, mostly-male protagonists in their fictional-yet-mostly white worlds, that I just could not relate to. It all seemed so *alien*. If science fiction was a place to play out all our greatest possibilities, where were the people like me?

The future is not neutral. Just like the writing of history is biased, so is writing the future. As Palyku writer Ambelin Kwaymullina notes, speculative fiction is rife with colonial tropes of invasion and white heroes.¹ Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati, co-directors of *Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace* have similarly argued that the lack of non-white people in science fiction shows that the dominant culture fundamentally does not see a future for them.²

We are nothing if we can't see ourselves in the future. To be the ancestors to thriving generations, to be the authors of our histories yet-to-come might be some of the most potent forms of resistance for First Nations people and people of colour. However, as our current reality appears more and more like the dystopian nightmares (and actualities) of our predecessors, it can be difficult to see ways out.

It has been said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.³ The covid-19 pandemic has made this glaringly apparent, as our so-called leaders trade our

wellbeing for the economy. We find ourselves pulled into the spiral of working, staying healthy and surviving, rather than fighting for a more beautiful existence.

In the essay 'The Pandemic is a Portal', Arundhati Roy remembers how, historically, pandemics have forced societies to abandon old systems and adopt new ways.⁴ This one is no different, as we have seen seismic shifts happen almost overnight. If the pandemic has created a temporary opening, Roy encourages us to step through the portal, daring us to imagine and fight for a new world.

When our futures are under siege, we need to dream in more vivid and dazzling detail. Speculation offers a tool for us to conjure different scenarios, make fresh connections and give resonance to new ways of thinking and doing. The artists in *Here: After* act as fortune-tellers, soothsayers and dreamers. Rather than absorb the narratives we have been given, they draw on lived experience and connection to place to construct new realities grounded in the here and the after.

In the video work *Say Swear* (2019), Leila El Rayes and Justine Youssef utilise surreal and autoethnographic techniques to create a series of playful vignettes set in the dream-like surrounds of the Auburn Botanic Gardens. To create the work, El Rayes and Youssef drew from their own memories of the gardens and research into the site's history. The Darug peoples have been and continue to be custodians of the area since time immemorial. The location was, however, turned into a clay mine by colonisers and the excavated area subsequently used as a rubbish dump—a polluted past that is sometimes literally unearthed when discarded car parts and household items appear in the garden beds. Transformed into Japanese-styled gardens by an engineer who had never been to Japan, the gardens are now a popular spot for cultural gatherings for local Middle Eastern communities. The site itself reveals the absurd layers of the colonial project—destructive, myopic and, at times, pure confabulation—as well as the complicity of migrant settlers in maintaining this delusion.

From this bizarre past, the artists have projected hallucinatory sequences that also reference popular culture and their own lived experiences. Brimming with iconography, the work marries old and new symbols—some recognisable, others intentionally coded—which take on humorous, absurd or exaggerated meanings. Like an extant car part materialising on the surface, the work deconstructs time, place and culture to bring forth hidden complexities.

Kalanjay Dhir's video installation *Immersion: Parra River Patch* (2021) utilises video game aesthetics to examine our relationship to the environment. In an alternative reality that looks very much like the current, an avatar wades through the muddy waters of the Parramatta River. Although the game follows the character's journey, the main protagonist of the work is actually the river.

While bodies of water might be considered givers of life, this one removes health from the game's character. An entity that senses and remembers, the river feels hurt and can hurt back. However,

with each stroke, past construction sites and rainwater drains, the character's ego melts away. The work connects to cultural practices and knowledge systems where nature, such as waterways, are sovereign and spiritual entities. What if we could feel the river's pain? What if we understood the natural environment to be as important or even more so than the self?

Likewise, Jazz Money's installation *Bub, Listen Up* (2021) features the voice of an Elder speaking to us from the future, where rivers are sacred again and mines do not exist. Gender, the government, land ownership and money are equally a thing of the past. As the narrator goes on, concepts that are so normalised today become increasingly foreign. From this temporal distance, we see how such constructs scaffold each other to form a sophisticated web—a fiction created by dead white men that we take on as reality.

Through the accompanying portrait Money proposes a way forward from the world that we know to the utopian future channelled in the audio. Money's sibling Indiah, a non-binary First Nations person sits in front of a mirror putting on make-up. What might our world look like if Indigenous sovereignty, queer paradigms, creativity and care were prioritised? The work urges us to re-examine the frameworks that we uphold.

Michelle Ly's comic *The Departure From My Time* (2021) is similarly set in the near future, looking back on today. In an intimate reflection on a changing area, an Asian-Australian woman contemplates her experience growing up in Cabramatta. While initially concerned that her suburb is transforming, she comes to realise that change can be beautiful.

Touching on the complexities of displacement, the protagonist realises that this place was never hers to begin with. Her connection to place is auxiliary to the sovereignty of First Nations people. This awareness is critical for migrants and their descendants, whose pursuit for cultural expression and belonging can inadvertently erase First Nations histories and struggles. Ly's work is a reminder that our belonging should never come at another's cost.

Serwah Attafuaah also takes Cabramatta, Fairfield and surrounds as the starting point for a vibrant triptych. Attafuaah's series prophesies the future of suburban living—a future that is green and sustainable, where food is grown locally and everything is solar powered. We have learnt to use technology to collaborate with, rather than control nature.

The works also depicts the persistence of youth culture in the western suburbs—riding, drifting and messing around. However, rather than recreate dystopic cyberpunk tropes, where society has collapsed despite highly advanced technology, Attafuaah has imagined a future world we might actually want to live in.

Speculating on the here and the after, the artists in this exhibition give us tools to reconfigure a radically different tomorrow.

Utilising storytelling, fantasy, absurdity and alternate realities, they bend time and place to highlight cracks in our current system and manifest new possibilities. Cultivating visions that are simultaneously resonant, personal and connected to here, they offer a glimpse into a future that might just be within our grasp.

The future is *here*—and it is ours.

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1. Ambelin Kwaymullina, 'Reflecting on Indigenous Worlds, Indigenous Futurisms and Artificial Intelligence,' last modified September 16, 2017, <http://motherofinvention.twelfthplanetpress.com/2017/09/16/reflecting-on-indigenous-worlds-indigenous-futurisms-and-artificial-intelligence/>
 2. Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati, 'Opinion: The Indigenous future is your future,' last modified April 29, 2016, <https://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2016/04/28/the-indigenous-future-is-your-future-jason-lewis.html>
 3. A quote attributed to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, as cited in Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (New Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2012), 8.
 4. Arundhati Roy, 'The Pandemic is a Portal,' last modified April 4, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

[bio]

Based in Sydney across Gadigal and Darug lands, Tian Zhang is an independent curator and changemaker working at the intersections of art and cultural practice. Her work often involves a recalibration of rituals and cultural phenomena within our understandings of contemporary art and life.

Tian is a founding co-director of Pari, a new artist-run space for Parramatta and was formerly Chair and co-director of Firstdraft. She has curated and produced work for Blacktown Arts, Parramatta Artists' Studios, Utp, Brisbane Experimental Arts Festival and Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts. She currently sits on the Australia Council's Leadership Program Alumni Steering Committee and is on the board of Utp.

[acknowledgments]

This essay and exhibition was developed across unceded Gadigal and Darug lands. The curator pays respects to Elders past, present and of the future.

JAZZ MONEY

Bub, Listen Up

2021, digital print on poly silk, sound,
100cm x 200cm and 100cm x 100cm, 5:47 min

Thinking about utopias leads me to thinking about the worlds that queer communities create for themselves, and in doing so, create a world that is safer for all people to exist in. Will children of the future need to 'come out'? Will they be raised with binary genders assigned at birth? How do you explain concepts so arbitrary once society has moved beyond them.

The monologue of this piece comes from a parent to their child, trying to describe the absurd reality of the early 21st century. In listening to this piece in the contemporary moment, we can envision the world we need to move towards - a world of sovereign Indigenous peoples, post-capitalism, post-prison industrial complex, a gender queer world built on community and care, a world full of forests, renewable energy, reinvigorated ecosystems and artistic expression.

The portrait is of my sibling Indiah, who navigates the world elegantly as a non-binary Indigenous person. Coupled with the monologue, it is unclear if they are the person delivering the monologue, or receiving it, or else an uncle from the future watching you hear the news of where you must take this planet.



[bio]

Jazz Money is an award-winning poet and filmmaker of Wiradjuri heritage, currently based on the beautiful sovereign lands of the Darug and Gundungarra nations. Her poetry has been published widely and reimagined as murals, installation and film. Jazz was the 2020 winner of the David Unaipon Award from the State Library of Queensland, and her debut collection of poetry 'how to make a basket' is forthcoming in 2021 with University of Queensland Press.

[acknowledgments]

This photo was taken on Jaara land in the Kulin nation, the text was written on the land of the Darug and Gundungarra. With thanks to model Indiah Money, mandaang guwu darling sibling.

[image credit]

Jazz Money, *Bub, Listen Up*, 2021, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

JUSTINE
YOUSSEF
& LEILA EL
RAYES

Say Swear

2019, single-channel video, 6:02 min

Words by Enoch Mailangi, 2019

The last time I went to Parra I made a conscious effort to count the amount of South Sydney Rabbitoh logos I saw on cars and people. Documented in the notes section of my iPhone was twenty-three, I don't know why I did it, I just did.

At the turn of the 20th Century football players wearing these jerseys would spend their mornings skinning Rabbits around the then scanty streets of Sydney howling the words 'Rabbitoh!' on every sale. By midday the players and their game-day jerseys would be drenched in blood and fur.

When they played in those blood stained jumpers that same afternoon, opponents from wealthier rugby clubs did not always appreciate the aroma and would mockingly repeat the "Rabbitoh!" cry.

At the turn of this century the lines between the two legacy teams, Sydney Roosters and South Sydney Rabbitohs, morphed into something new, although football was only a performative facade. Underneath the game, in those intersecting areas, priding the Sydney Roosters meant either one, or all, of these things; you weren't a house, you weren't an immigrant, and more importantly, you weren't Black.

And with the rapid gentrification of the South Sydney areas and replacements to out west mostly targeting Indigenous and migrant communities, maybe I was counting to see if there were any other blakfullas out west, who'd been displaced by their government housing like my nan in Waterloo. Who once told me the reason you go for the rabbitohs is 'because you're Aboriginal.' At the time it was illogical, I was however a know-it-all, but now it's reasoning makes more sense everyday. Although I still hate football.

So by holding the cardinal red and myrtle green, or it's infamous emblem, it meant no matter how high or low you went in life this was one way we could find each other if we ever got lost.

And maybe I felt lost that day.

...

Say Swear questions the flippant contemporary art gestures and engagements with Western Sydney through cheek and occasional protuberances. Offering a moment's reprieve to it's spelled out audience. It pokes-up. Marrying the ideas of what it means to be seen as an expendable body and declaring how pride operates differently for cultural revolutions than the state. Futurism first, ask questions later, it pinpoints precise feelings of intergenerational isolation many settler-migrants experience, even when born here. *Say Swear* incorporates



the cultural perspectives of finding your place in a colonised country and thrusts the needed responsibility back on it's community through humour and desire.

Say Swear cannot be wholly consumed due to its layered components - revealing the dangers of xenophobia and class inequality in these areas, it recenters what it means to be part of a community whilst living in solitude. And much like a jersey doused in blood and fur; its selected symbols are championed for what they are born from; crisis.

After seeing *Say Swear* what I am left to interrogate is the distinct difference between the ideas of *Western Sydney* and *The Area*. Instead of a rabbit logo it's the ethnolect or the specific drool paired with the turn of phrase 'Say Swear!' - it's how you code to mark each other - like a TN paired with the scent of an Impulse deodorant for the house party. And then a Gucci handbag or Chanel mademoiselle for the job interview. There are several distinctions between the two; a *Western Sydney* artist would apologise for being late, the artist from *The Area* would be the first to show and the last to leave.

In my fashionable opinion, the artists from *The Area* collaborate –it's fruitful, meaningful, and never about them. Whilst the *Western Sydney* artist explores the elaborate colonial design which centres the self, often times co-opting *The Area* aesthetic, or mimicking its success. In fact *The Area* is never comfortable with canon, if it was, you could tell. *Western Sydney* reads like a script, rehearsed, rigid, and never satisfied.

You'd be a cynic if you didn't say *The Area* is a community unobsessed with geographical borders, or box-ticking for that matter, it was designed to function in the way of 'who claims you, not who you claim.' It understands displacement, whilst *Western Sydney* weaponises its production of multiculturalism to other and alienate our marginalised. *Western Sydney* is all about progressing the colonial project titled Australia; through the brutalising of Arab settler-migrants, and First Nations people globally. For what *Western Sydney* symbolises is the rapid progression of bordering stolen land, transforming our O.G's cultural, economic and ecological landscapes to that of four numbers. I mean doesn't '*Area based artist*' sound better in your bio? The *Western Sydney* Artist would tell you yes. *The Area* Artist would tell you it's kept in the lexicon of spoken phrases for a reason, for we have learnt that they can steal our bodies, but never our oral-based histories and culture. Better left off the books, no paper trail for people looking to adopt.

You could say *Area Pride* isn't really about defining ourselves through a juggernaut of a barbaric Western postcode system. What does it matter when you're only developing the idea of *Western Sydney* prepping for when the slums become beach fronts just in time for climate change? All it's really asking is 'are you in the trenches with us?' and then following it up with 'But who's your cousin?' 'Are you a snitch?' and my personal favourite 'what's that smell?'

The way *Western Sydney* was pitched to us promises a cultural hub reminiscent of a startup. But what they didn't realise is that *The Area*, is tangible, I swear if you're wearing the right kicks with the right people you feel it's soil wedged above the sole. *The Area* which understands that feeling is not about what it is now, but what it's always been: Sovereign Land.

We often forget that *The Area* is forgiving. It understands what we have to do to survive. Often code-switching between two becomes the art, and at times the transition into *Western Sydney* from *The Area* can see us lose people with no return. But as the sea of rabbits enter the west for reasons we all know, it homes us.

•••

Say Swear compels me in all those directions. It gives me the space to breathe. Now I only count rabbits to fall asleep.

[bio]

Currently based on unceded Darug Land, Justine Youssef makes work that is site-responsive, attentive to her origins in South-West Asia, and focuses on moments and places that reconfigure authoritative realities.

Leila El Rayes's work celebrates vulnerability between melding identities and contexts. Working across sculpture, costume-making performance and video, her practice delves into ideas of hardship, desire and uncertainty to uncover moments of intricacy, fragility and beauty. Her work has been shown at Firstdraft, Liquid Architecture and PACT.

[acknowledgments]

This work was filmed and edited on unceded Darug land. The sound mix and colour grade was done on unceded Gadigal and Wangal lands. The artists pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Videographers: Akil Ahamat and Justine Youssef
Cast: Xander Khoury; Michelle Abraham; Claud Zoghbi; Julianna Beshara;
Samia Sayed; Mehmet Mevlütoğlu
Logo design: Amy Toma
Sound mix: Ry Edwards

[image credit]

Photograph of *Say Swear* at Auburn Botanic Gardens in 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

KALANJAY DHIR

Immersion: Parra River Patch

2021, single channel video, Samsung 65" curved monitor, grass, steel, vinyl, Mountain Dew Bottles, ultrasonic misters, 120mm RGB PC case fans, 600W Thermal Take PSU, brass, rock, Arduino Nano Every, Adafruit DRV2650-L Haptic Motor Controller, Vibrating mini motor disc, dimensions variable, 10 min

I have been thinking about immersion as a starting point to think outside of the self.

Little epidermis rubbing against the big river.

How can you exceed the bandwidth limitations of the body?

A quick dip, burrow in centuries of liquid history, chatter between skin and water. Swimming in shit feels so good.

I'm so rude, to live next to the Parramatta River for 25 years and not once asked, 'River, may I lie next to you?'



As a child when our pets died we would take their bodies behind the old 70s factories to artificial banks of the river. Imitating our father, my siblings and I would send their empty vessels down the river and pray. For us, the polluted Parramatta River emulated the polluted Ganges.

Growing up along the river I saw a commonality in respect towards elders and water in many cultures. There is an irony about living next to a beautiful body of water and not being able to swim in it.

Immersion: Parra River Patch was the first step for me in understanding the spiritual dissonance of settler projection onto unceded land. Imagining what a future relationship to the river could look like.

[bio]

Kalanjay Dhir is an artist/failed viral content creator based on unceded Darug Land in Western Sydney. He averages a daily screen time of 9 hours and 41 minutes, and his work draws on narratives in popular culture, sci-fi and spiritual texts. Kalanjay is interested in exploring mythological and speculative technologies through sculpture, video and chain emails. He enjoys thinking about what things could look like if built with a devotion similar to places of worship and gardens.

In addition to his solo work, Kalanjay is a founding co-director of Pari and cohost of 'Sunset with 2K' on FBI Radio with Kilimi. Since 2017 he has been in residence at Parramatta Artists' Studios.

[acknowledgments]

The work was made on the lands, waters and skies of the Burramattagal people of Darug nation. Dhir pays respects to Darug elders past, present and into the future.

Composed & Performed by Kalanjay Dhir
Mentored by Dara Gill
Videography: Murli Dhir and Rob Milazzo
Drone: Nicholas Pavlakis
Unity design: Alexandra Chalmers-Braithwaite
Design: Alex Tanazefi
Score & Sound Design: DJ Atro

Thanks to conversations with Akil Ahamat, Tante Sylvie, Dr Ian Wright, Carol Que, Ling and her tai chi class, the Next Wave 2020 artists (RIP), Emily Sweeney, Kerrie and Sri W. Dhir. *Immersion* is supported by City of Parramatta Council, Parramatta Artists' Studios, Create NSW and Next Wave.

[image credit]

Photograph of *Immersion: Parra River Patch* in 2020. Image by Hersh Nat. Courtesy of the artist.



MICHELLE
LY

The Departure From My Time

2021, digital print, 160cm x 86cm

There's a certain unappreciated beauty in the Fairfield suburbs that seems to glow fervently to me. Growing up in this lush suburban world, especially Cabramatta, gave me plenty of opportunities to witness the ways architecture and culture coalesce to bring upon nostalgic sentiments of 'home'. I was fascinated by the char siu pork gleaming under the Australian sun and the statues of ancient Asian mythological creatures rusting away to unveil earthy tones and marble textures.

In my work, I wanted to encapsulate a degree of tenderness in the way the Fairfield suburbs are built around cultures that might be fading but are held together by an unyielding community. I love exploring colour and its role in articulating this vividness. I wanted viewers to grasp this beauty, the breathtaking awe of Cabramatta, and what was to come.

An optimistic introspection is rendered in the way that the work cherishes change, be it good or bad. To me, the definitive aspects of the Fairfield area are the countless heritages neighbouring upon each other—Middle Eastern cuisine was one stop away and the European grocery stores sat reassuringly along the streets. In my work, I focused on my idiosyncratic ties with South-East Asian culture, but I wanted to comment on the complex connections to ethnicity and culture that is present in these suburbs. You grow up and an epiphany sparks, your identity is something blurry. You learn English fluently but can barely read the language your parents speak. The Darug land that you reside on has thousands of years of Indigenous history, with its own beautiful culture and heritage.

I wanted to strip back the layers of a society built upon colonisation and immigration. These themes are woven into the panels whilst incorporating a sense of a transfiguring temporal dimension, where time flows ardently through our space and constantly repaints the way the world is coloured. My vision for the future of Fairfield's suburbs is one just as intertwined with culture as the present. It is somewhat of a paradox, where societal complexities exist against an urbanised simplicity. I wanted to capture an optimistic rendition of the future, honing in on a soulful interconnection of the past and future. I wanted the artwork to present an emotional journey filled with harmonious colour balances to convey a future built upon the struggles and love of the present.

[bio]

Michelle Ly is a South-West Sydney based artist working in digital illustration, drawing and painting. Her work uses portraiture and comic archetypes in a fusion of manga and realism to convey ideas of unceasing beauty and the ethereal. Working with vibrant colours, Ly explores the universal human experience of ardent appreciation towards intrinsic beauty.

[acknowledgments]

This work was made on unceded Darug land. The artist acknowledges Elders past, present and emerging.

[image credit]

Detail from *The Departure From My Time*, 2021, digital image. Courtesy of the artist.



SERWAH
ATTAFUAH

Sunset on Red Brick (Polding St)

Moonlight on Main (Railway Parade)

*Daybreak on Candy Paint (Moonrise
Lookout)*

2021, digital prints, 160cm x 58cm each

This is a series of vignettes exploring the future of youth, drift and dirt bike culture across surreal suburban streets of Fairfield city. I see Fairfield as quite a 'green' city (all the farms in Horsley, etc.) so I wanted to re-imagine the futuristic farming aspect of Fairfield—incorporating lots of plants on the buildings and more of a solarpunk vibe rather than an oppressive industrial cyberpunk vibe.



[bio]

Serwah is a self-taught digital artist, painter and heavy metal musician. Quoting *The Matrix* as her bible, her captivating visions of delicate cyborgs and surreal wastelands have established her as one of the most important digital Australian artists. Serwah's work speaks of empowerment, afrofuturism and her Ashanti/Akan heritage.

[acknowledgments]

This work was made on unceded Darug land. The artist pays respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[image credit]

Detail from *Moonlight on Main (Railway Parade)*, 2021, digital image. Courtesy of the artist.

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