

# **VERA LIST CENTER FORUM 2023: Correction\***

**October 12–14, 2023**

2022–2024

Jane Lombard Prize for Art and  
Social Justice Recipient

# **proppaNOW**

Jane Lombard Fellows

**Another Roadmap Africa Cluster  
Colectivo Cherani  
KUNCI Study Forum & Collective  
Khalil Rabah**

**VERA LIST CENTER  
FORUM 2023: Correction\***

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# VERA LIST CENTER FORUM 2023: Correction\* Welcome!

Correction, or the willingness to re-evaluate time-trusted protocols, is often demanded, yet rarely applied in the nuanced, considered, humane way necessary to foster social justice, equity, and inclusion. At the Vera List Center, we have just concluded the first year of our biennial research Focus Theme *Correction\**. Embarking on the second chapter of thinking through correction, we continue to question its potential for transformation and repair as well as its corollaries in discipline and censure. The asterisk in *Correction\** speaks to the complexities of correction, the necessity to consider subtexts and invisible histories as we navigate our current historic moment as a community of progressive, diverse, and creative people from all over the world. This year, we turn toward artistic modes that precisely center the “we” to respond to these complexities, prompted by artists and collectives working in community to advance social justice around the world through collaborative practices on a global scale.

Artists often point the way. At the VLC Forum last year, the seven new VLC Fellows each spoke to correction. They are currently developing groundbreaking art projects that challenge the carceral system, mass migration, media representation of Indigenous peoples, and standards of Western beauty, all of which we will showcase over the next several months. Today, at this year’s VLC Forum, we are honored to present to you the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Fellows as well as the recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice, proppaNOW. Each of the fellows was nominated by a member of the VLC’s international Prize Council for an existing, particularly courageous art project that provides an exemplary and enduring way to approach correction. The jury, chaired by Simone Leigh, then made the final selection among the forty nominated projects.

This publication is your guide to various entry points to the VLC Forum 2023: *Correction\**. The first part is dedicated to the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Fellows and the projects for which they were nominated: Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) for Another Roadmap School; Colectivo Cherani for the Cherán Cultural

Center; KUNCI Study Forum & Collective for its School of Improper Education; and Khalil Rabah for the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind. It includes their nominators’ essays, statements on correction by the artists themselves, and a brief profile for each.

The second part of this publication features proppaNOW, the urban Aboriginal artist collective from Brisbane, Australia, and recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize. The jury citation is followed by Dawn Chan’s nominator essay; reflections by proppaNOW member Warraba Weatherall, and detailed information on the proppaNOW exhibition, including a curatorial text by Eriola Pira and a conversation between proppaNOW and the Turtle Island-based artist collective New Red Order. The VLC Forum programs are listed at the end, convenings, workshops, the exhibition opening, prize ceremony, and a keynote. A highlight will be the dinner for all, culminating—at proppaNOW’s request—in a karaoke party.

With each VLC Forum, we try to capture significant developments in contemporary, politically engaged art practices. For this cycle, our Prize Council identified art projects throughout the world that advance social justice in their communities while focusing on “correction.” It is no coincidence that the majority of the nominated projects were developed by artist collectives, that they involve notions of land, and that they originate in majority population-countries. What to make of this? Black Lives Matter, the Standing Rock protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline, even Occupy Wall Street earlier on revealed the depth of systemic racism, and how it can be addressed only in collective action. Polyvocal art projects that involve collective processes are the way to go.

We are glad you are here. Thank you. And profound thanks to our VLC Forum presenters and the people who make it all possible—our funders, our board, and The New School.

— Carin Kuoni  
& the VLC team

# 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Fellows

The Jane Lombard Fellows were finalists for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice. What follows are the fellows' biographies and their statements on *Correction*\*, as well as adapted essays on the projects for which they were nominated written in summer 2022.

## Another Roadmap Africa Cluster Colectivo Cherani KUNCI Study Forum & Collective Khalil Rabah



Installation view, *Colectivo Cherani: Uinapikua*, Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC), Mexico City. Image courtesy of the artists and MUAC.

# Another Roadmap Africa Cluster

Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) comprises all of its working groups that are based in African cities and is currently active in the cities of Kampala, Nyanza, Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, Maseru, Johannesburg, Lagos, and Cairo. Founded in Uganda in 2015, ARAC exists to foster Africa-based conversations about the arts and education, particularly with respect to colonialism's epistemological and aesthetic legacies. It aims to develop a shared knowledge base and a structure of mutual learning that is genuinely accessible to and meaningful for cultural workers on the continent. The Another Roadmap for Arts Education Africa Cluster (ARAC) developed as localized and regional components of Another Roadmap School: collective research concerned with the history of arts education undertaken within a network of educators, artists and researchers working in four continents around the world, initiated at the Institute for Art Education at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2012.

## ARAC on *Correction*\*

“Can correction occur without erasure? What are the conditions for that erasure? In the case where correction speaks to revising or providing additional information, on what do we base the value and relevance of those provisions? ARAC seeks to identify, interrogate, disrupt, learn from, and imagine a way beyond these corrections. We are mindful that the word ‘correction’ itself is loaded and runs the risk of being misappropriated or convoluted—after all, correcting can also be an oppressive act. Therefore, we tread carefully and are mindful of our blind spots. If we are able to supplement or add criticality to what already exists, then we have achieved our goal.”



The Johannesburg Working Group presents its research at an International Meeting. Image courtesy Another Roadmap Africa Cluster.

## Another Roadmap Africa Cluster: Another Roadmap School

Özge Ersoy

Collective agency, resource distribution, and knowledge sharing represent a critical foundation in the advancement of arts education and social justice. It was in this spirit that the grassroots initiative Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) was founded in Uganda in 2015.

ARAC is part of an international network of practitioners and researchers of arts education, who work both in formal and informal educational settings in twenty-two cities on four continents. The name of the initiative draws on UNESCO's "Road Map for Art Education," a supranational document that was created in 2006 with the aim to explore the role of arts education in building a creative and culturally aware society. The purported universality of this document, in ARAC's own words, represents "deficiencies and abuses" in the acceptance and application of this policy despite the absence of substantial, nuanced, and context-aware research on arts education practices in different parts of the world, as well as the lack of discussion about how arts education relates to social justice. ARAC's work responds to this specific urgency.

In this effort, ARAC members analyze current policies and practices of arts education in various African contexts; examine the legacy of colonialism in this field; develop paradigms for practice and research in arts education; and build strategies to make this knowledge accessible in their respective local contexts. In this way, ARAC proposes a method for "correction," the Vera List Center's 2022–2024 Focus Theme, as it demonstrates a collective, long-term effort to study existing histories, policies, and systems and offer methods to de-center and revise them.

ARAC proposes a rare working method for mutual learning and resource redistribution in the field of arts education. It currently has working groups in Kampala, Nyanza, Lubumbashi, Kinshasa, Maseru, Johannesburg, Lagos, and Cairo and acts as a network structure where any member or working group can initiate projects and programs for collaboration. This type of horizontal knowledge exchange and organizational model enables collaborative work between self-organized initiatives and formal educational settings in different contexts in Africa, but also in dialogue with other geographies with

colonial legacies. ARAC's working model also responds to the limitations of the current infrastructure in arts education in Africa, where there are few departments, research institutes, academic positions, and publications dedicated to arts education, and small-scale grassroots initiatives often suffer from precarious working conditions and the lack of capacity to document and share their research and activities in a sustainable way.

The collective has an inspiring methodology to bring together research and artistic interventions ranging from in-depth analyses of specific case studies to self-organized initiatives that intervene on formal educational settings and international platforms. One of their most sustained research interventions in a formal educational setting is the three-year staff and curriculum development project for the Nagenda International Academy of Art and Design (NIAAD), a school in Uganda that operated between 2015 and 2017, where they organized a series of week-long workshops during the semester breaks and distance learning activities for and with the administrative and teaching staff.<sup>1</sup> The project aimed to better connect the curricula with recent developments in the arts and to interrogate the colonial legacies in the educational models and tools.

An example of resource building is their publications and exhibition kits about historical initiatives of cultural mediation that are rarely discussed in formal educational settings, such as the Medu Art Ensemble, a collective of South African cultural workers active in Botswana between 1977 and 1984, who used poster making, music, and film as part of the anti-apartheid resistance movement.<sup>2</sup> This initiative demonstrates ARAC's commitment to excavate and reactivate the methods of lesser-known historical efforts and their belief in the potential of art making as a form of collective learning.

As part of the larger Another Roadmap School initiative, ARAC also contributes to the development of a glossary of arts education as a public resource, where research groups analyze art educational terms from different contexts and juxtapose terms and genealogies so as to contribute to a more nuanced international discussion. For instance, ARAC prefers the term "symbolic creative work" over "the arts" as they reconsider the gap between the imported terms related to culture and those that emerged from local and Indigenous contexts and were devalued by colonial powers.

ARAC members have been an immense inspiration for cultural workers like myself—a member of Asia Art Archive, a Hong Kong-based organization that aims to

create a more generous art history—who think about specific regions as sites that generate theory to enable decolonial efforts. For me, ARAC is not simply an initiative that produces and shares knowledge about arts educational possibilities in places with colonial histories. It is also an urgent, vibrant, decentralized, and collective response to the ever-increasing commodification of education and the resulting disintegration of sites and tools of critical thinking in civil society.

*Özge Ersoy is Senior Curator at Asia Art Archive (AAA), an independent nonprofit organization based in Hong Kong. This essay was originally written in nomination of Another Roadmap Africa Cluster for their project Another Roadmap School for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.*

1 Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, "Decolonizing Art Education: A Staff and Curriculum Development Project at NIAAD (2015–2017)," Another Roadmap School (August 15, 2017). <https://another-roadmap.net/kampalaentebbe/blog/decolonizing-art-education-a-staff-and-curriculum-development-project-at-niaad-2015-2017>.

2 Puleng Plessie and Rangoato Hlasane, "How to Work with Archives that are 'Not There'?" Engaging Medu Art Ensemble in the Now," Another Roadmap School (February 24, 2019). <https://another-roadmap.net/intertwining-histories/tools-for-education/learning-units/how-to-work-with-archives-that-are-not-there-engaging-medu-art-ensemble-in-the-now>.

# Colectivo Cherani

Colectivo Cherani is a group of artists from Cherán K’eri that includes Betel Cucué, Giovanni Fabián Guerrero, Francisco Huaroco Rosas, Ariel Pañeda, and Alain Silva Guardian. Their work emanates from deep roots in the P’urhepecha culture. In 2011, the community fought in defense of its territory, and since then their work has revolutionized techniques and learned processes from the Western tradition that coexist, are enriched by, and transformed with Indigenous knowledge to manifest a stand before a contemporary reality. Through visual arts, they have managed to revitalize memory from intimate daily life in community spaces as open interlocutors. Notable projects and exhibitions include *XARHATAKUARHIKUARHU* (foro de expresión, Cherán); *UINAPIKUA*, MUAC, Mexico City; *Empoderamiento de la propia identidad*, Centro Cultural Clavijero Morelia Michoacán; Museo de Sitio, Cherán Michoacán; *Caminos De Nana Echeri*, Careyes Jalisco; and *La Panza de las Ausencias*, Salón Acme N° 7, CDMX.

## Cherani on *Correction*\*

“Elemental correction. In our contemporary life as Native people, the root of being P’urhepecha sprouts out, putting itself before the social systems of the present time. In 2011, because of ecocide and ignorance of the rights of Indigenous people, we reached a turning point in the forests of the Cherán community (the forest in our worldview is sacred). With firmness and devotion towards life and the territory, we collectively denied the authorities at all levels, putting a system governed by “uses and customs” first. From this radical change of experience came organic acts of self-correction and empowerment, and an initial artistic production disinterested in belonging to globalized ideas. Art in our native community embraces the mentality of our ancestors, such as the ways of living, called uses and customs. From the Indigenous being, a restructuring is provided, evidencing the habits of the Eurocentric man. More than being an example to follow, we are a fire that is amplified by virtue of being observed and respected. Fire transforms, modifies, gives us shelter, gives us life, but it also turns to ashes or damages when it is not listened to with veneration. Fire as a beginning of correction...”

## Colectivo Cherani: Cherán Cultural Center

Fabiola Palacios with  
Pablo José Ramírez

Colectivo Cherani is a political and artistic initiative made up of an intergenerational group of artists: Betel Cucué, Giovanni Fabián Guerrero, Francisco Huaroco Rosas, Ariel Pañeda, and Alain Silva Guardian. Its name refers to the place where the collective emerged, Cherán, a town located in the State of Michoacán, Mexico.

In 2011, the P’urhepecha community of Cherán began a political uprising against the violent threat of logging groups associated with organized crime. These groups entered through the forest armed and willing to deforest areas near the main water sources of the community. Cherán, with approximately 20,000 inhabitants, depends directly on these water sources and the forest for its consumption.

The groups of loggers were also linked to cases of extortion, homicide, and kidnapping, for which the community lived in a state of alert and indignation at the increase in violence. The organization of the uprising was led by women. On April 15, 2011, in the early hours of the morning, they blocked the entry of logging trucks and took some of the workers hostage. The objective was to stop the situation and expel the loggers, the police, and the politicians. After many confrontations, the town began a process of self-government. As Alejandra González Hernández and Víctor Alfonso Zertuche Cobos explain:

In January 2012, a democratic election was duly held, giving rise to the constitution of a new government figure: the first indigenous municipal government called “Mayor Council of Communal Government” (Concejo Mayor de Gobierno Comunal), composed of 12 “K’eris” (seniors) chosen among the “comuneros” and “comuneras” (members of the community), three for each of four districts. There is no hierarchy among them, that is to say, all occupy the same position within the communal government. They were appointed for a 3-year period 2012–2015.<sup>1</sup>

Cherán Keri. Image courtesy of Colectivo Cherani.



To support this new system, the existence of political parties was prohibited. For the four districts of Cherán, there is now a single town council and decisions are made collectively. Armed checkpoints were created and stationed by women and men from the community, whose task it is to safeguard the points of entry to the town. To deal with cases of minor crimes that occur in the community, a self-governed justice system was also created. It is called the Justice Procurement and Mediation Council. According to Giovanna Gasparello:

“It is composed of eight people nominated by the bonfire assemblies and appointed by the neighborhood assemblies. Its work is divided into four areas: criminal, familial, civil, and civil protection and roads.”<sup>2</sup> According to Rubén, a member of the community interviewed by Gasparello in 2021, “mediation involves speaking to people’s consciences, and they are invited to understand; those who have committed an error are told to accept it publicly and commit to not doing it again. Our system is not punitive because, for starters, we do not even have a formal jail.”<sup>6</sup>

As part of this political process, Colectivo Cherani has created a cultural movement that seeks to recover and resignify the plurality of religious, artistic and historical

expressions of the P’urhepecha people. The collective is characterized by its use of various artistic techniques including painting, murals, graffiti, photography, video, and hand-embellished objects. The group has revitalized traditional forms of artmaking such as carving human and animal masks out of wood, creating toys such as tops, yo-yos, valeros, and pinolas by hand, embroidering napkins, tablecloths, blouses, and shirts, and crafting ornaments with flowers and colored papers.

Colectivo Cherani represents a paradigmatic case of art rooted in the social practice of autonomy, which functions not as mere representation, intellectualized critique, or performative reenactment, but as a vital component of their political project. Cherani’s work is driven by the plurality of voices it is composed of—its murals and projects involve the community and deal with issues that interest its members, such as the defense of natural resources and the preservation of historical memory. In countries such as Mexico, where the state apparatus has been co-opted by the political establishment and the forces of narcopower and corruption, Cherán and the work of Colectivo Cherani signal that other forms of social organization are not only possible but urgent, existing beyond the Nation-State and liberal justice systems. This form

of social organization has been possible thanks to an unprecedented social mobilization rooted in Indigenous P'urhepecha solidarity and knowledge.

The Cherán territory has been recognized nationally and internationally by multiple people engaged in activism, cultural promotion, environmentalism, and communication, who have documented the different processes of struggle and organization of the movement. Cherani recalls the importance of autonomy, communal justice, self-government, resistance, and the role of art and ancestral Indigenous traditions. Their political project sustains the struggle of Indigenous people against contemporary forms of settler colonialism, state violence, and the continuous extraction of natural resources.

*Fabiola Palacios is an art historian and social worker who studies contemporary art from Central America with a focus on gender and affect theory. Pablo José Ramírez is a Curator at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Previously, he was the inaugural Adjunct Curator of First Nations and Indigenous Art at Tate Modern (2019–2023). This essay was originally written in nomination of Colectivo Cherani's Cherán Cultural Center for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.*

- 1 Alejandra González Hernández and Victor Alfonso Zertuche Cobos, "Cherán. 5 years of self-government in an indigenous community in Mexico," *Open Democracy / ISA RC-47: Open Movements* (December 2, 2016). <https://opendemocracy.net/alejandra-gonz-lez-hern-ndez-v-ctor-alfonso-zertuche-cobos/cher-n-5-years-of-self-government-in-indi>.
- 2 Giovanna Gasparello, "Communal Responses to Structural Violence and Dispossession in Cherán, Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 48, no. 1, iss. 236 (January 2021), 57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X20975004>.
- 3 Ibid.

# KUNCI Study Forum & Collective

KUNCI experiments with methods in producing and sharing knowledge through the acts of studying together at the intersections between affective, manual and intellectual labor. Since its founding in 1999 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, KUNCI has been continuously transforming its structure, ways and medium of working. Initially formed as a cultural studies study group, at present KUNCI's practices emphasize on collectivizing study, by way of making-space, discussion, library, research, publishing, press and school-organizing. KUNCI traverses and connects institutional, disciplinary and local boundaries. KUNCI'S membership is based on friendship and informality, as well as self-organized and collaborative principles. Members of KUNCI are Antariksa (founder), Brigitta Isabella, Ferdiansyah Thajib, Fiky Daulay, Gatari Surya Kusuma, Hayyul Qoyyum, Nuraini Juliastuti (founder), Rifki Akbar Pratama, Syafiatudina, and Verry Handayani.

## KUNCI on *Correction*\*

"Correction is hardly discussed without recalling school; correction is a part of the process of teachers marking or correcting students' mistakes, as well as the police against citizens. In Indonesian lingo, what the police often do to correct also invokes the word school (sekolah) by referring to being imprisoned as being educated (di-sekolah-kan). We deliberately move away from and against correction as a mode of subjection. In the School of Improper Education, correction is closer to revision, annotation, and clarification than coercion and subjection. Correction can hold the process of making amends. We are standing in correction to be more capable of being with each other amid our differences. Therefore correction becomes a continuous process of studying together while examining togetherness. Through study, we seek the space for dissents and alliances. Through improperness, we seek to unsettle the dominant rule(r) while affirming the capacity for liberation that lies between us."

The School of Improper Education regular meetings are usually held offline, where we share the learning space, practice role distribution, and experiment with various study tools. Image courtesy of KUNCI.



## KUNCI Study Forum & Collective: School of Improper Education

Qinyi Lim

Initiated in 2016, KUNCI (Key) Study Forum & Collective's School of Improper Education (SoIE) signifies a point of transition between the first and second generation of KUNCI members.

KUNCI, a research institute, is a product of Reformasi (reform), a movement to depose the authoritarian Indonesian President Suharto in 1998 and to ensure the democratic transition of power thereafter. Led by impulse and encounters with an expanded multidisciplinary cultural discourse, former student activists Antariksa and Nuraini Juliastuti co-founded KUNCI in 1999 as a way to navigate the oppressive conservative political atmosphere, and to provide a means of deciphering and articulating the phenomenon of a newly liberated popular culture and society through the lens of cultural studies.

The inception of SoIE marks twenty years since the formation of KUNCI and yet, it follows in the same vein and spirit of curiosity that drove the founding of the collective. Here, the base question of the project lies in exploring ways of negotiating theory and practice while being cognizant and critical of the homogenizing effect that such vocabulary and pedagogy might have on the community they work with in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In short, in a time of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, the collective asks: what are alternative forms of education, what would be considered an "improper" education, and how does one subvert or interrupt the hierarchies of knowledge embedded within our contemporary discourse?

The project started by experimenting with four different pedagogical methods coming from different historical and sociopolitical contexts—the Jacotot method, as conceptualized in Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987); the Turba (*turun ke bawah*, going below) method that was created by Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute for the People's Culture) in 1950s and 60s Indonesia; the Nyantrik, an ascetic form of teaching evolved from Islamic boarding schools and now associated with traditional forms of performing arts in Indonesia; and lastly, Taman Siswa (Garden of Students) taken from educator and activist Soewardi Soeryaningrat's (1889–1959) principles for teaching as a form of resistance against the Dutch education curriculum espoused in the then colony.<sup>1</sup>

As an ongoing project, the true and full impact has yet to be recognized, but at a time where tertiary and specialized education is becoming a norm, this project creates a platform where intergenerational exchanges based on uncertainty and curiosity are embraced. It can be seen as a decolonial gesture toward the hierarchy imposed by Western modes of knowledge construction and modernity. This project allows for discussions related to methodology—in the case of the Taman Siswa, Nyantrik, and Turba methods—to be examined closely by the group and their collaborators.

While driven by a common curiosity, the tools that SoIE has deployed can be quite embedded within the context of Indonesia and Yogyakarta; however, this has not stopped the collective from being aware of their colleagues elsewhere who practice with similar aims in mind. Rather, they have been in open dialogue with other organizations such as The Showroom (London) and Casco Art Institute (Utrecht) and have embraced a spirit of fluidity and precarity by being amateur intellectuals who move in and out of institutions of knowledge.

With regards to the relevance of *Correction*\*, KUNCI's SoIE pushes us to question the societal norms we experience every day, how these constructs are formed, and under whose criteria. SoIE can be seen as an attempt to correct the sometimes overdependence on the colonial categorical imperative as well as a way to introduce plurality in understanding our everyday. It can be seen as a platform to not only discuss corrections of our understanding of "proper education," but also to question whether such corrections are necessary to construct something anew in the multitudes of pedagogy that surface.

*Qinyi Lim is Curator at National Gallery Singapore. This essay was originally written in nomination of KUNCI Study Forum & Collective's School of Improper Education for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.*

1 KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, "The School of Improper Education," *Critical Times* 3, no. 3 (December 1, 2020): 566–578. <https://read.dukeupress.edu/critical-times/article/3/3/566/170839/The-School-of-Improper-Education>.

## Khalil Rabah



Installation view of *Relocation, Among Other Things*, 2022, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria. Image courtesy Khalil Rabah.

Khalil Rabah is a conceptual artist whose artistic practice uses multiple forms of performative action to investigate histories of removal, erasure, displacement, and marginalization. He is the founder of the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind. Rabah's long standing art projects also include the third edition of the fifth Riwaq Biennale (2003–2018); *Scale Models* (2006–present); and *Collaborations: by in form* (2010–present). The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind's goal is to inform, organize, and excite interest in the natural and cultural history of Palestine. The care and expansion of the Museum's unique collections continue to support the dissemination of knowledge through publications, exhibitions, and education projects. Provoking visitors' fascination, amazement, delight, and surprise remain the cornerstones of our mission today. The Museum's four main departments—the Anthropological Department, the Botanical Department, the Geology and Paleontology Department, and the Earth and Solar System Department—maintain and expand their collections while continually engaging in new research into their specific areas of focus. Each department promotes its work and discoveries through public events and conferences, at both the international and local levels.

### Khalil Rabah on *Correction*\*

"The Institutional History of the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind is cubist in its impossibility; it is occupied, exiled at home, and everywhere abroad. An entirely new place, it rests nowhere while waiting for our return. Four centuries behind the times, as unpatriotic as it is inefficient, it is the stupid obstinacy of the refugee, and the subject of a natural contempt. The museum is greedy, existing in such abject poverty that opinion is an impossible luxury. The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind is the observance of accursed ignorance, insists on the infinity of traces and persists irrespective of fragmentation. It is a local rehabilitation of the future. The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind is the International; an institution in the service of universal history. It is only this impossible."

# Khalil Rabah: The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind

Nabila Abdel Nabi

“One of the things I am trying to do and the reason I am trying to have a biennale in Palestine, is because maybe we will recognize the urgent need for such an industry, cultural production, knowledge dissemination, and participation. You know when we started to establish the al-Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem, people were asking us what a contemporary art foundation was in the first place.”

Khalil Rabah

One often wonders how to do justice to artists who, beyond making artworks that travel through exhibition circuits, split the majority of their labor between being community builders, cultural facilitators, and educators.

Throughout his decades-long practice, Khalil Rabah has reflected on themes of knowledge-making, displacement, memory, identity, and the interactions between humans and their surroundings in multifaceted ways. Early on in his career, Rabah played a foundational role in fostering the art ecology in Ramallah and elsewhere in Palestine, carving out a space for his experimental and conceptual practice at a moment when many artists of his generation were creating art in line with the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) vision. He co-founded Al Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem in 1998, and the Riwaq Biennial in 2005, the roving exhibition arm of the Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation. A precursor to these projects, beginning in 1995 and formalized in 2003, Rabah established the ongoing project entitled the Palestine Museum of Natural History and Humankind, a semi-fictional institution founded to “promote wonder, discovery, and knowledge.” The communities he has built through the biennial and the museum since their inception have developed into networks reaching across the United States, the Persian Gulf, Europe, and of course Palestine.

The semi-fictional museum is the greatest and longest-running example of the kinds of public art projects Rabah develops, which are almost always connected to the community in which they exist. Many of Rabah’s works can be viewed as permutations of the Palestinian Museum, which itself collaborates with the Riwaq Biennial. At the Venice Biennale in 2009, for example,

Palestine lacked a national pavilion, so the Riwaq Biennial entered itself—a biennial within a biennial. It showed photorealist paintings of its brochure and a map referring to the *50 Villages* project, an initiative in which Riwaq rehabilitates the cluster of historic buildings that are located in or around Palestinian villages. This project developed out of *50320 Names* (2007), Rabah documents the buildings in Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine and the people living in Palestinian villages who did not possess legal ownership of the heritage houses they occupied. The projects exist as both living archives, which are exhibited within the itinerant biennial, and as artworks about the archive itself.<sup>1</sup> Much of Rabah’s work follows the same ambiguous lines—hovering between artwork and actual public platform. In most cases they are linked to existing institutions.

The Palestinian Museum is laid out as an ongoing project. According to the installation’s circumstances and location, the museum finds new forms of presentation, exhibits, and thematic groupings.<sup>2</sup> Each iteration presents a rethinking of taxonomical areas rooted in traditional natural history categorizations: The Earth and Solar System, Anthropology, Geology and Palaeontology and the Botanical departments develop into vectors for thinking beyond the rigid and ossified categorizations of the national museum. Thinking through these departmental constructions, Rabah asks if the museological processes and forms of knowledge-making and dissemination applied in the West can hold under conditions of colonization and displacement. As he puts it, “The making and un-making of museums presents a new possibility of creating museums that aren’t necessarily monumental...a museum can be a form of art itself.”<sup>3</sup>

In recent versions of the museum, the department of the Earth and Solar System has been developed into a multimedia installation entitled *The lowest point on earth memorial park* (2017) to explore instances where the Israeli state has weaponized climate change in the ongoing occupation. This section includes works such as *Dead Sea* and *93%-95%*, in which Rabah brings attention to water recession in areas of the Dead Sea that were conceded to the Palestinian authority. As an example of weaponizing climate change, the allotted space was expected to dry out and disappear within a few short decades, leaving behind barren, salt-poisoned lands. In this instance, Rabah employs the parameters of the natural sciences to understand settler colonialism through a climatic perspective. As Eyal Weizman, Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, asks in relation to the history of Palestine, “What’s the relation between natural cycles and how they mobilize

political processes and the political ideologies that go with them? What is the relation between the definition of the desert and legal realities?”<sup>4</sup> Half of Palestine now lives under what is termed the aridity line, a transversal movement that cuts across different political borders. The Earth and Solar System section powerfully articulates Rabah’s provocation to scale out to the “humankind” in the museum’s title, raising the question: is or could there be an affiliation between those communities living at the threshold of habitable climate conditions?<sup>5</sup> And how might braiding local spheres of knowledge, beyond the formalized fields of science, catalyze an inter-scalar process in which knowledge is developed ecologically—that is, across physical and psychical terrains? In fact many of the works in the museum center the perspectives of plants and animals, asking us to consider the world from their perspective.

The syntax that Rabah’s museum rests upon is fourfold. *Act I, Carving*, presents the title of the museum newsletter (which presents a fictionalized history of the museum that differs slightly from issue to issue) as engraved text, in a heavy black granite stone. *Act II, Painting*, recreates each leaf of the twenty-four-page newsletter into a large, oil-on-canvas, photorealistic painting, which is installed on an archival rack system. *Act III, Molding*, features the title of the work as a neon light, and *Act IV, Printing* includes the placement of the printed edition of the newsletter in the gallery, allowing visitors to take a copy with them.

The newsletter is divided into editorial sections that correspond to the museum’s categorizations. The Anthropology section in the summer 2011 issue, for example, contains “Seven Theses on Resistance from the Department of Anthropology” that begins with the following reflexive meditation:

The question of HUMANKIND is a question of philosophical anthropology. It raises a particular problem because HUMANKIND is both the subject and the object of any knowledge of itself.

While the Botanical section’s “Report on International Conservation” wryly unfolds a philosophical debate on the intertwined destinies of architecture, education, and politics:

BOTANY wondered aloud if modernists ever imagined that their buildings would outlast their ideas by such a margin...Is architecture then in some sense the goal of politics? Don’t all political ideas and sympathies secretly hope to become the

architecture of our collective being—organizing and determining our movements and our possibilities in a similar way.

As Kelly O’Reilly observes, “Through his astute and well-targeted parodies, Rabah suspended his Museum somewhere in between a museum of the absurd and the horrors of political reality, reminding us that Palestine does not have its own national museum or gallery and is faced with international indifference as its social, cultural and ecological infrastructures are torn apart.”

Renowned for its dark humor and deployment of the absurd, Rabah’s work has often been read as institutional critique. However, the artist’s framework arguably moves beyond the museum itself. Instead, he turns the very modes of analysis and institutional processes into his medium in order to challenge and dismantle the basis of knowledge formation and history-making itself in the context of colonialization.

With the museum at the heart of his multidimensional and collaborative projects, Rabah pursues an incredibly complex endeavor: on the one hand, he aims to dismantle normalized narratives of history that seek to deny Palestine a past, and on the other hand, he outlines the possibilities of reclaiming materials that gesture to a collective past and therefore a future. That he grounds this inquiry in an ethos of adaptability and collective participation in the building of historical narratives is perhaps something all museums could take note of nowadays.

*Nabila Abdel Nabi is Curator, International Art, at Tate. This essay was originally written in nomination of Khalil Rabah for his project the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.*

- 1 Melissa Gronlund, “Palestinian artist Khalil Rabah questions what’s real in landmark Sharjah exhibition,” *The National News* (May 6, 2022), <https://www.thenationalnews.com/weekend/2022/05/06/palestinian-artist-khalil-rabah-questions-whats-real-in-landmark-sharjah-exhibition/>.
- 2 “Khalil Rabah: Scale Models,” *e-flux* (September 12, 2015), <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/29040/khalil-rabah/>.
- 3 “Guggenheim Abu Dhabi | Spotlight: Khalil Rabah,” Abu Dhabi Culture (June 29, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANUjsVSwRs&t=5s>.
- 4 Eyal Weizman, “Violence, climate change, and shifting shorelines,” *Aridity Lines*, podcast audio (2020), <https://ocean-archive.org/view/2495>.
- 5 Ibid.





*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this text will contain names of the deceased.*

proppaNOW is one of Australia's leading Aboriginal artist collectives challenging the politics of Aboriginal art and culture. The collective is focused on generating contemporary art that is thought provoking, subversive, and re-thinking what it means to be a "contemporary artist." proppaNOW takes working-class frameworks, which surrounded most of the artists growing up, of impoverished and oppressed peoples, and drives them into the art world. This has spurred the composition of contemporary liberation art, which talks about the daily struggles of coming up against the forces of modernism and capitalism. The focus and support for each other has also allowed the collective to foster the projection of our individual careers. proppaNOW received the Jane Lombard Prize for *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, an exhibition celebrating the work of the collective originally installed at the University of Queensland Art Museum that is traveling throughout Australia into 2025. Following the announcement of the prize at the 2022 VLC Forum, the collective invited three new members: Shannon Brett, Lily Eather, and Warraba Weatherall, who join Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Megan Cope, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, and the late Laurie Nilsen.

# proppaNOW

# Jury Citation proppaNOW Recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice

“We are honored to bestow the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice on proppaNOW, the First Nations artist collective from Brisbane, Australia. Founded in 2003 to combat the invisibility of urban Aboriginal contemporary art that addresses the issues of our time, it has broken with expectations of what is proper (“proppa”) in Aboriginal art; created a new sovereign space for First Nations artists internationally outside colonial stereotypes, desires for authenticity, and capitalist capitulations; and opened new political imaginaries.

Confronting the ongoing presence of settler colonialism, proppaNOW’s work demonstrates the synergy of the struggles for artistic representation and social change. The artists remain grounded in community, family, and the love grown of the grassroots. With their center in Brisbane, individual and collaborative artworks, and interventions in public space, they forge ways to share and transfer knowledge to emerging generations. As their work weaves between communal assembly, assembly, and individual creativity, they offer politically generative practices that can serve as models for political empowerment throughout the world.”

**Simone Leigh**  
Jury chair, artist

**Carin Kuoni**  
Senior Director/Chief Curator, VLC; Asst. Professor,  
Visual Studies, The New School, *ex officio*

**Cuauhtémoc Medina**  
Chief Curator, MUAC, Mexico

**Wanda Nanibush**  
Curator, Indigenous Art,  
Art Gallery of Toronto

**Rasha Salti**  
Curator, writer, researcher, editor, part of the artistic  
committee of the 12th Berlin Biennale

# proppaNOW: Occurrent Affair Dawn Chan

“Aboriginal Art is bought, sold and promoted from within the system, that is, Western Art consigns it to ‘Pigeon-holing’ within that system. Why can’t an Art movement arise and be separate from but equal to Western Art—within its own aesthetic, its own voices, its own infrastructure, etc.?”

Richard Bell, “Bell’s Theorem”

It is not a stretch to assert that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in Australia are ongoingly overlooked. Neither is it a stretch to see that such erasure is part and parcel of the structural racism—not to mention theft of land and inheritance—faced by Aboriginal Australians more broadly. And yet, to say that all Aboriginal art ends up erased and dismissed, is far too simple a story to tell. There are those who will point to success stories: to the careers of artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye, an artist whose abstract batik and acrylics went on to be featured in museums from Osaka, Japan, to Cologne, Germany.

But even while Aboriginal artists may find their share of successes, some of them have noticed that much of that recognition ends up parceled out to art that happens to conform to a constrictive vision of Aboriginal life as imagined by white settler culture. As Aboriginal artists have struggled for decades with the forces overdetermining the reception of their work, many have remarked on the disproportionate opportunities often conferred to so-called “traditional” art—art that has often come out of more remote northern and central desert communities. As curator and critic Margo Neale noted in *Artlink Magazine*:

In addition to the bias towards the authenticity of so-called traditional work, the remote north regions had a structural advantage. They had a collective identity. They were

from named communities, often with distinct recognizable art styles, and they worked through government-funded art centers with access to a range of networks not available to any individual artist.<sup>1</sup>

Such socioeconomic conditions relegate Aboriginal art to the status of museum artifacts drawn solely from remote communities, leaving present-day urban Aboriginal artists and their work in a place of invisible limbo. It was under such conditions that the art collective proppaNOW was formed. First unofficially gathering in 1997, the group started out with members Richard Bell, Jennifer Herd, Vernon Ah Kee, Fiona Foley, Bianca Beeton, Andrea Fisher, and Tony Albert.<sup>2</sup> The group was founded on principles of self-determination, with a mission to promote and uplift the perspectives of urban Aboriginal artists who were making all sorts of artwork, not just art that conformed to a narrow, palatable vision of what Indigenous people could do. proppaNOW drew inspiration for its name from the Indigenous phrase “proper way”: the way to proceed in a given situation that remains respectful to broader community standards.

What spurred the group to formalize its status as a collective was the 2004 formation of the Queensland Indigenous Artists Marketing Export Agency. proppaNOW’s members saw that the agency’s support for Queensland Indigenous art entirely excluded city-based Aboriginal artists. Jennifer Herd—a proppaNOW member who has been referred to, somewhat humorously in the other artists’ interviews, as the “matriarch” of the group—has spoken about this exclusion. Born in Brisbane, Herd grew up knowing little about her grandmother and mother’s stories. Through studying theater and fashion, and then eventually making art that addressed this disconnect, she eventually sought out more about her roots. “I remember when I went looking for my mother,” she said. “They wouldn’t



Jennifer Herd, *In defence*, 2021, vinyl lettering. UQ Art Museum window commission. Photo by Carl Warner. Courtesy of the artist and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

give me any information, and I wrote her name down. And I said, you've got to help me, I can't find any information on her." <sup>4</sup>

Reflecting on the ways that urban Aboriginal artists have not only been disconnected from their heritage under the systemic oppression and generational trauma engendered by a colonial state but have also been marginalized and tokenized as artists, Herd has said, "I think urban artists are always put on the back burner, so to speak.... You see some of these remote area artists... get good representation, and a lot of attention..."<sup>5</sup> There is an irony that should not go overlooked: the Aboriginal artists whose daily lives are most upended by the rhythms of an imported settler culture—artists whose connections to the land and languages of their forebears have arguably been most subjected to rupture by a land-grab of vastly unjust proportions—have thus ended up the most invisible and least supported on a global art stage.

The decades of work done by proppaNOW's members to counteract stereotypes and raise visibility for urban Aboriginal artists—and Aboriginal people more broadly, particularly those residing in urban settings—came to a head in the group's standout 2021 show, *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, at the University of Queensland Art Museum.

The show's title is a play on an Australian TV show, *A Current Affair*, a nightly news program broadcast since the 1970s that has often been criticized for its sensationalist bent.

Featuring drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures, installations, and video, the wide-ranging show—as I understand from its documentation—encompassed a bold mix of abstraction and representation, wordplay and humor and grief, delving into updated responses to the question of what it means to be an urban Aboriginal artist working today. From Megan Cope's use of fluorescent, glow-in-the-dark puns lampooning Rupert Murdoch's empire (in *Arsenal*, 2021) to Vernon Ah Kee's suspension of twelve riot shields in midair (in *Scratch the Surface*, 2019), proppaNOW's artists saw the exhibition as an opportunity to address topics ranging from media bias to police brutality. A community conversation titled "A Yarn Event," which the group also staged at the museum, broadened the number of voices participating in the discussion. It brought in the Aboriginal perspectives of participants such as Lisa Whop, a Goemulgal epidemiologist specializing in cervical cancer among Aboriginal women, and Kevin Yow Yeh, a Wakka Wakka and South Sea Islander who, in his capacity as a social worker, has run a program that supports legal services, advocacy, and bail for Indigenous youth.

In the context of proppaNOW's nomination for the Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice, the group represents a critical contrast to a somewhat common model of social practice, of which I remain simultaneously admiring and skeptical: the sort of practice which, intentionally or not, draws a definitive bright line between the artist and their audience. The artist, on the one hand, appears from on high, with institutional support—while audience members, on the other hand, arrive ready to learn, participate, and ostensibly see some improvement in the conditions dictating the shape of their lives. This model of artmaking can be artificial and even condescending. It can bring with it a whiff of the Savior and the Saved.

What is truly commendable about the work done by proppaNOW is that, rather than forcing any such distinction between artist and participant, it has always acknowledged that the stakes of an artist's practice directly reflect the broader conditions of the community in which they have roots. As such, artists advocating for their own cultural worth are contributing to a crucial part of what it means to re-narrate specific stories and histories in order to address a community's erasure and bring the world toward a more just place. It is imperative that artmaking of this kind be considered in any global search for artists who are truly agents of social and political change.

*Dawn Chan is currently a contributing critic for the arts section of the New York Times, and serves on the faculty at Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies. This essay was originally written in nomination of proppaNOW for their project OCCURRENT AFFAIR for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.*

- 1 Margo Neale, "Learning to be proppa: Aboriginal artists collective proppaNOW," *Artlink Magazine* (March 1, 2010). <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/3359/learning-to-be-proppa-aboriginal-artists-collecti/>.
- 2 The current members, as of August 2023, are Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Shannon Brett, Megan Cope, Lily Eather, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, and Warraba Weatherall.
- 3 "Jennifer Herd Digital Story: The James C Sourris AM Collection 2020–21," State Library of Queensland (October 22, 2021). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8C5z5vxEeg>.
- 4 Jennifer Herd, interview with Margo Neale, Toowong, Queensland (January 3, 2005). Quoted in "Learning to be proppa: Aboriginal artists collective proppaNOW."

# Still Asleep

## Warraba Weatherall

In 2003, an Australian Aboriginal art collective was established to give urban-based Aboriginal artists a voice and visibility. The proppaNOW collective would go on to become Queensland's leading Indigenous arts collective, who presented a unique and often controversial perspective of Black Australia. These aims were and continue to be contentious within the broader Australian political landscape, due to an inability for most Australians to not only understand, but to address the countless inequities of ongoing colonialism.

The proppaNOW collective developed a statement of intent for their ambitions under the title "We have a dream,"<sup>1</sup> (2003) a reference to the famous statement by African American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963.<sup>2</sup> The mediated synergies between Black America and Black Australia were historically apparent, in that their voices were in opposition to the treatment

We have a dream...

proppaNOW, the Brisbane based Aboriginal artists' collective, has this message for all. We have a dream that one day there will be an autonomous Aboriginal Art Department in every major art gallery and museum in this country. That the curators of Aboriginal Art there will share the same benefits and job security with their non-Aboriginal co-workers—instead of one-year contracts. And that the said departments have their own purchasing budgets. We also hold that decisions to purchase works by the curatorial staff are made after consultation with a local consultative committee consisting of respected members of the Aboriginal community. We have a dream that one day the Queensland Art Gallery will accept that it has a third rate (at best) collection of Aboriginal Art and must stop trying to play

of their people by the nation state. To contextualize the contemporary circumstances of Australian Aboriginal peoples, we are still the *only* British colony without a treaty in place with the Indigenous peoples to recognize our sovereignty and governance.<sup>3</sup> The generational struggle for Aboriginal Land Rights has defined our political positions and continues to influence the experiences of Black Australia. This consciousness has been central to the artistic practices of the proppaNOW collective, whose agitation developed opportunities and networks that supported the self-determination of contemporary Aboriginal artists.

"We have a dream" lists a range of aspirations for the Australian arts sector to both recognize the importance of Indigenous contemporary art practices, and to ensure that institutions support the redress of power to achieve this. The collective published the following:

For the most part, the statement holds its relevance today, where the only critical point achieved thus far is that "major art institutions in [Australia] have acknowledged the outstanding contribution to the Arts by Aboriginal Artists." It is important to recognize that institutions were not historically created to support the voices and creative expressions of our peoples. In fact, when we begin to look deeper into how institutions function, we also recognize that the same oppressive power dynamics are continually affirmed and reproduced through various social and political structures. When settler colonialism occurs on such a vast scale, it is not an event, but a structure that enacts a system of privilege for white Australians to maintain power.<sup>4</sup> The naturalization of these powers is precisely what proppaNOW and others oppose; however, many within institutions are blind to their own comfortability. Internally, there may be good intentions for institutional change, but there is not an informed understanding of how to achieve it. Symbolic gestures, such as the establishment of Aboriginal advisory boards that merely "advise" are a common reduction of the advocacy of Aboriginal peoples—they give the impression that things are changing but as a body, they hold no power. Without the agency of Aboriginal peoples to genuinely enact structural change within institutions, it would require the autonomy of an Aboriginal art department, but the

catch up. We believe it would be not only wise, but more prudent to purchase works by living artists from Queensland. We have a dream that the National Gallery of Australia and the other major art institutions in this country acknowledge the outstanding contribution to the Australian community of the so-called Urban Aboriginal Artists. (Most of whom come from Qld—e.g., Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley, Gordon Hookey, Tracey Moffatt to name just a few). We have a dream that the new Gallery of Modern Art will open with an exhibition of the works of Queensland's finest artists. Further, we would ask that this show include those from the Urban Aboriginal Art movement, established and emerging. We have a dream that the staff at the Govt funded art institutions that, after a phasing in period, that no employee shall stay in any one job for more than five years.

extent of that change is typically at the discretion of the institution. So then, why are there so few Aboriginal peoples in decision making roles within institutions?

In Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism industry brings in \$AU8.4 billion annually, and it is estimated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts industry brings a further \$AU400 million to the Australian economy each year.<sup>5</sup> When we delve deeper into those figures, we see that \$AU54 million of visual arts revenue was actually generated from inauthentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, i.e., Indigenous artmaking techniques that have been appropriated by non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>6</sup> Even though the Aboriginal arts market produces so much revenue, it doesn't reinvest money back into the broader Aboriginal Arts sector to support its sustainability or address ethical concerns raised by Aboriginal communities. Unfortunately, without cultural efficacy and governance, institutions will continue to demonstrate they are unable to reflect the social and cultural fabric from the very communities they are supposed to represent.<sup>7</sup>

For as long as I can remember, Aboriginal peoples have campaigned for the right to self-determination; "to freely determine our political status and freely pursue our economic, social, and cultural development."<sup>8</sup> However,

we don't possess the economic or political power to provide redress ourselves, and the architectures of institutional systems were originally designed to deny us access to these opportunities. When we recognize that the dominant culture of Australia is a thinly veiled extension of colonialism, correction not only establishes itself as an important opportunity to achieve cultural redress, but at its foundational form, it critically signifies the difference between cultural survival and assimilation. This rhetorical trade-off is continually experienced by Aboriginal peoples, where the dominance of social and political influences has regularly attempted to coerce Indigenous peoples to the latter. The irony for Aboriginal peoples to dream of our own liberation as merely 3% of the national population is polarizing, whereby the power disparities for reconciliation remind us that "the white man's dream continues the Aboriginal man's nightmare."<sup>9</sup>

As far as correction goes, we need to ask ourselves what we are correcting and why. We need to be critically aware of our own experiences and the intersections between local, national, and international conversations. We need to remind ourselves that all knowledge is geopolitical, and therefore all contemporary discourse of a nation is grounded in Indigenous peoples' histories and futures. Correction serves no purpose if the same oppressive framework continues in the hands of a new master; sometimes we all need a reminder that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>10</sup> The murky conundrum is that correction is often subjective, and it depends on our social, cultural, and political standpoints. The contemporary intersections of these dynamics can be even more complex when they perpetuate transcolonialism, such as the continual reduction of Indigenous discourse by larger diasporic communities living on unceded Indigenous lands. We have to be critically aware and consistently accountable, if we are to collectively achieve such corrections—as more often than not we are witnessing neocolonialism masqueraded as allyship. What is paramount in these discursive conversations, is that we see these violent frameworks as byproducts of our oppression, and to recognize they do not support our collective efforts of liberation.

The problem is that Aboriginal aspirations have continually been reduced to appear like things are changing, albeit at a glacial pace, but the key issue is still the inability to share power and have Aboriginal peoples be a genuine part of the process. Although, these efforts of retribution can be significantly volatile, as the changes need to be ratified in institutional policy, otherwise they have the potential to dramatically change with new

political leadership.<sup>11</sup> What we need is for institutions to ethically amplify the Aboriginal leadership of artists, curators and arts workers, who possess the knowledge and understanding of how to achieve sector reform that enshrines cultural values within policy. Beyond Australia, the global correlation of Indigenous peoples emphasizes the need to support the voices of the peoples who intimately know its methods. When it comes to correction, it is imperative that its foundations begin with the original peoples of that land.

- 1 proppaNOW, "We have a dream," 2003.
- 2 "Read Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech in its entirety," NPR, accessed 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety>.
- 3 "Why doesn't Australia have an indigenous treaty?" BBC News, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-40024622>.
- 4 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. DOI: 10.1080/14623520601056240. See also Nikhil Pal Singh, "The Pervasive Power of the Settler Mindset," *Boston Review* (November 26, 2019). <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/nikhil-pal-singh-pervasive-power-settler-mindset/>; Luke Briscoe, "Racism in media provides a blockage for Indigenous prosperity in the digital economy," *SBS News* (June 11, 2020). <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/racism-in-media-provides-a-blockage-for-indigenous-prosperity-in-a-digital-economy/3n0syvqmh>.
- 5 "Re: PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION PROCESS FOR 2021-22, 2020." National Association for the Visual Arts. [https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/171663\\_national\\_association\\_for\\_the\\_visual\\_arts.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/171663_national_association_for_the_visual_arts.pdf).
- 6 "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Crafts." Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2020. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-arts/report>.
- 7 Personal interview with proppaNOW member Tony Albert, July 2, 2023.
- 8 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 2007. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf).
- 9 Michael Mansell, "Beyond 2001—The White Man's Dream may be an Aboriginal Nightmare," Aboriginal Provisional Government, 1992.
- 10 Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (New York: Penguin Books Unlimited, 2018). Quote originally delivered in speech "The Personal or the Political," Conference on Feminist Theory, 1979. [https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde\\_The\\_Masters\\_Tools.pdf](https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf).
- 11 Albert, 2023.

# proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood!

## Notes on an Exhibition

### Eriola Pira

The idea of an Aboriginal urban collective was conceived as far back as 1997, and, depending on your source, this exhibition *proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood!* takes its title from proppaNOW's third or fifth exhibition, presented at the Amersham Street Studio, West End, Brisbane, in 2005. The story of proppaNOW, its activities, and accomplishments since its founding in 2003 is briefly recounted in this publication you hold in your hands, as is the Aboriginal experience of settler-colonialism in the Australian context, with its resonances and connections to the Black Power movement and the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty in this country. This exhibition is the collective's first in so-called North America, and is presented at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries at The New School. It encapsulates the collective's outsized role and influence in Australia and beyond, while also expanding and correcting ideas of what Aboriginal art can and should be.

*proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood!* announces the collective's arrival on these shores. The title facetiously pretends to preempt the viewer's reaction to and reception of proppaNOW's irreverent, biting, and confrontational presence and art. In linguistic form, structures of power are pointed to—with the assumption that the gallery visitor will be white like the majority of those in the New York art world. The viewer is thus already implicated and isn't let off easy from there on. Richard Bell's painting *The Truth Hurts* directly stages this implication and confrontation. A member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities, Bell came to art through activism and considers his artistic output and approach as an act of protest. A wordplay on "Black Lives Matter" (and its denial, "All Lives Matter"), the almost imperceptible

and luminescent words "White Lies Matter" reveal the ideological and material effects of white lies, myths, and falsehoods at the heart of any present-day settler colonial state. This truth hurts. Less clear is who it hurts the most.

Among the most pernicious of white lies, upon which the systematic erasure and oppression of First Nations peoples in Australia were founded and perpetuated, is *terra nullius*. The legal fiction that the "land belonged to no one" conveniently justified and legitimized the dispossession of First Nations peoples and—by extension—the myth that the land was peacefully settled. Jennifer Herd, a Mbarbarrum artist of Far North Queensland, corrects the official historical record and contemporary understandings of the history of First Nations warriors and the continuous fight against colonization. Herd's geometric shield design, honoring the Bama warriors of the North Queensland rainforests in the Atherton Tableland and referencing the traditional painted shields of the region, inscribe into public memory the Frontier Wars. *In defence*—three vinyl shields overlaid with camouflage installed on the gallery windows overlooking Fifth Avenue—symbolizes resistance, identity, and cultural continuity. While the late Laurie Nilsen's *Dollar Dilemma (Flag)* at the gallery entrance marks it as Aboriginal, Herd's work shields this Aboriginal space and her fellow artists, for whom the war is not over, and the fight against loss, deprivation, and oppression continues.

The resilience and preservation of Indigenous culture were at the heart of Laurie Nilsen's life-long dedication to the emu, his tribal totem. The animal appears in drawings and sculptures and often features or is made of barbed wire, another one of Nilsen's political symbols. Nilsen

grew up handling barbed wire for fencing, the kinds of fences landowners put up around rural Queensland through which emus and other Native species die in search of water. First Nations peoples, treated as “ethnics” in their own land and entrapped within white Australian hegemonic structures, experience similar barbed enclosures and being locked out. Nilsen himself had to dive through barbed wire after being shot at by a white Australian for hunting in Mandandanji Country. More broadly, the artist’s use of barbed wire refers to restricted movement and restricted areas, policing and incarceration, as well as frontiers and wars.

Mitigating some of the consequences of resource extraction in the early colonial era, Quandmooka artist Megan Cope’s *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba* (“place of oyster rocks” in Jandai and Gowar languages) is an ecological and cultural restoration project that mends the connections between ancestral processes and the land ruptured by colonialism. Since 2016, Cope has engaged with this ecohistory and the devastation of Aboriginal middens and oyster reefs in Quandamooka Country towards rebuilding Native ecosystems and reclaiming Indigenous lifeways and futures. Her work points to the causality between the destruction of Indigenous ecosystems and the expansion of the settler colonies built with limestone mined from the middens. Bridging this history to the present, *Cope’s Foundation I (line)*, modular constructions with a native Kinyinyarra shell embedded in a concrete base, evokes the contemporary urban grid and symbolize the continued presence of Aboriginal life in the metropolis.

A major force driving the urban Aboriginal art movement as a whole and members of proppaNOW in particular is the acknowledgment of the contemporary presence of First Nations peoples and the articulation of the lived Aboriginal urban experience in an urban environment. As most of the members were raised or live off traditional lands, the connection to Country and the assertion of Aboriginal identity and sovereignty in an urban context are central to their art and activism; as is pushing back on colonial narratives and images of First Nations peoples and what constitutes “Aboriginal art.” As proppaNOW, the descendants of those misrepresented or presumed culturally extinct tell their own stories in their own voice and manifest contemporary Aboriginal sovereignty through wrestling back narratives, reclaiming Indigenous objects, and “revisioning the Aborigine.”<sup>1</sup>

Girramay, Yidindji, and Kuku Yalanji artist Tony Albert has coined the term *Aboriginalia* to describe his collection and interventions into vintage kitschy objects and images—tea towels, ashtrays, and other bric-a-brac produced by and for commercial and white-domestic consumption that feature naive and racist depictions of Aboriginal people as if stuck in a pre-contact state. These objects, which made Aboriginal culture accessible to white Australia without having to interact with First Nations peoples, are an extension of the erasure and the denial of the experiences of Aboriginal people who have survived colonization. Albert repurposes and reclaims these fictional images of Aboriginality to reinscribe the stories and people they expunged back into the Australian historical record, exploring contemporary



Megan Cope, *Foundations II*, 2016, Oyster shells and cast concrete. Photo by Zan Wimberley, Courtesy of UNSW Galleries.

legacies of colonialism and identity construction. Through humor, irony, and not to mention the use of pop culture references, Albert issues a challenge and a riposte to contemporary recipients of these images, which in Australia as in this country are overwhelmingly white and have yet to contend with the inheritance of white lies. A sense of humor and precision that makes no concessions to an audience distinguishes the collective as an art movement that mixes genres, disciplines, and political forms of expression and makes any of the member’s work immediately recognizable as proppaNOW.

For Vernon Ah Kee, that directness, be it in the eyes of portraits of his ancestors (he is of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji, Koko Berrin, and Gugu Yimithirr peoples) or text-based work, is both confronting and unforgiving. His black-and-white text compositions balance immediacy and humor with ambiguity and impasse to expose the underlying racism in Australian society. The intention and effect of the wordplay and parody, in Universal font bolded and in lower case, are no less than to denounce, implicate, and incriminate the white viewer in the history of colonizer and the colonized, and their contemporary narratives. In a strategic sleight of hand and tactical reversal, Ah Kee and other proppaNOW members turn the tables to embody the colonizer’s position and language, turning the viewer into a witness or victim of colonial violence.

In the documentary *proppaNOW*, on view in the Aronson hallway, Ah Kee chronicles the beginnings of the collective and the principles for members: their ability and desire to express their anger and discontent at a time when they were being overlooked in favor of “authentic” Aboriginal art, giving themselves a voice and collective identity as urban Aboriginal artists, as well as to their “mob” (as First Nations people refer to themselves). proppaNOW’s unwavering activism and fierce advocacy on issues ranging from land rights and community politics to environmentalism, health, the representation of Aboriginal people, and Indigenous excellence is mapped out in Gordon Hookey’s (Waanji) forty-year collection of political and protest posters. This expansive collection, which includes local and global pop culture iconography and posters, draws connections between Indigenous and Black struggles for self-determination, civil rights, and social justice in Australia and elsewhere. While the centrality of urban Aboriginal art is no longer in question and proppaNOW’s role in this positioning is undeniable, the issues that members of proppaNOW now set out to address individually and collectively for them still remain. New members have joined the ranks and are taking aim with the collective’s ever-sharp ambitions.

<sup>1</sup> “Revisioning the Aborigine.” ABC Radio National (February 6, 2017). <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/awaye/not-an-animal-or-a-plant/8202872>.



Laurie Nilsen, *Dollar Dilemma (Flag)*, 2020, mixed media on archival paper, 30 x 42.5cm. Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2020. Photograph: Carl Warner. Courtesy the artist’s estate, FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane and UQ Art Museum, Queensland.

1 Laurie Nilsen  
*Dollar Dilemma (Flag)*, 2020  
 Full color print on polyester  
 118 1/10 x 70 9/10 in  
 Courtesy the Estate of Laurie Nilsen and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.

2 Megan Cope  
*Kinyingarra Guwinyanba (On-Country)*, 2022  
 Single-channel digital video  
 8:12 min  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

3 Megan Cope  
*Foundation I (line)*, 2016  
 Oyster shells, cast concrete,  
 94 1/2 x 17 3/4 in  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

4 Jennifer Herd  
*In defence*, 2021  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.

5 Tony Albert  
*Ashtralia #2, 3, 5, 6, 14, 20, 2023*  
 Pigment print on paper  
 19 7/10 x 29 1/2 in each  
 Courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

6 Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee  
*Conversations IV*, 2023  
 Barbed wire, aluminum, patina  
 23 3/5 x 31 1/2 x 23 3/5 in  
 Courtesy the Estate of Laurie Nilsen, and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.

7 Vernon Ah Kee  
*to make a contented slave*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

8 Vernon Ah Kee  
*all these scars*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

9 Vernon Ah Kee  
*new caught sullen peoples*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

10 Vernon Ah Kee  
*ill-like*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

11 Vernon Ah Kee  
*therewasafall*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

12 Vernon Ah Kee  
*table corpse*, 2023  
 Vinyl  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

13 Richard Bell  
*The Truth Hurts*, 2020  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 70 4/5 x 94 1/2 in  
 Private collection, New York.

14 Richard Bell  
*Man with Wallet*, 2023  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 94 1/2 x 70 4/5 in  
 Courtesy the artist, Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane), and OSMOS Gallery.

15 Gordon Hookey  
 Selections from the artist's personal poster collection, 1960–1990  
 Installation, printed matter  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

16 Vernon Ah Kee  
*proppaNOW*, 2021  
 Color video documentary with sound  
 126 min  
 Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin (Brisbane).

16

15

Hallway

Gallery

1

2

3

13–14

6

4

Street

7–12

5

# proppaNOW

## Exhibition Checklist

# proppaNOW

## Screening Program

As part of the exhibition, this series of films brings together a selection of moving-image works by members of proppaNOW, all created within the last twenty years. Political and social issues concerning Aboriginal people and communities in Australia unite the films, but each artist offers distinct aesthetic sensibilities, tone, and approaches to liberation. The films will be screened at Kellen Auditorium (66 Fifth Avenue, New York) on October 13 at 5 pm and 6 pm; October 19 at 6:30 pm; and October 26 at 6:30 pm, in the sequence listed below. The total running time is 48:45 min. Selections and text by Camila Palomino.

**Warraba Weatherall**  
*Bana*  
2022, 5:38 min, single-channel digital video

Presented through the surrealist composition device of the exquisite corpse, Warraba Weatherall considers racialized scientific practices and their continuation through the possession of cultural property and human remains in museum collections. Along with images of the artist himself as “specimen,” Weatherall uses sound to stage the power struggles between institutions and Aboriginal people amid the psychological wounds of colonialism: the audio that plays over the video is a concealed version of the Australian National Anthem interpreted through morse code, while Weatherall defends himself by singing a Kamilaroi song.

**Vernon Ah Kee**  
*Whitefella normal blackfellame*  
2004, 00:28 min, single-channel digital video

This black-and-white video is a short piece that introduces the powerful poetics of Ah Kee. Originally commissioned by the SBS Television and Australian Centre for Moving Image, this video is the first moving image work by Ah Kee, who has since created multiple videos and films, including the documentary *proppaNOW*, in the Aronson Galleries. Through emphasizing binaries of color and race through word and image, Ah Kee forms an elegiac critique of the subjectivity of an Aboriginal person within contemporary Australian society.

**Richard Bell**  
*The Dinner Party*  
2013, 20:30 min, single-channel digital video

*Broken English*  
2011, 11:28 min, single-channel digital video

These two films by Richard Bell, part of the *Imagining Victory* series, bring together Bell’s work as an artist and activist and his biting humor and unrelenting critique of pervasive colonial structures in Australia.

*The Dinner Party* is a dream-like film bordering on an absurd soap opera that unravels questions of Aboriginal sovereignty. Moving between a family barbeque and a dinner party at a wealthy art collector’s mansion, in the reality of the film, news breaks that the Australian Prime Minister (played by Aboriginal activist Gary Doley) is announcing measures to reconstitute land to Aboriginal people and re-distribute the wealth, land, and power of white Australians. What emerges is a series of conversations about Aboriginal political empowerment and the white fears of dispossession. Bell casts a supercharged fantastical reckoning and plays a fictionalized version of himself alongside cameos from proppaNOW members including Gordon Hookey and the late Laurie Nilsen.

*Broken English* explores histories of colonization in Australia and the ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australians, confronting racist narratives and opinions within Australia directly. Footage of re-enactments of Captain Cook’s mid-eighteenth-century landing in Australia and impromptu interviews with white Australians on key issues around Aboriginal history and sovereignty reveal racism and a spectrum of ignorance and silence. Woven throughout is a chess match between Bell and activist Gary Foley, along with interviews of Aboriginal folks, each sharing their struggles and visions of liberation.

**Tony Albert**  
*You Wreck Me*  
2020, 4:06 min, single-channel digital video

Tony Albert offers a humorous and self-deprecating rendition of Miley Cyrus’s infamous 2013 *Wrecking Ball* music video. The work was commissioned by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and coincided with national celebrations of the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook’s arrival to Australia, and the debut of a \$50 million monument to the controversial figure. Riding an exercise ball, Albert lip syncs to Cyrus’s *Wrecking Ball* while obliterating various monuments and using parody as a means of questioning national and colonial history.

**Tony Albert**  
*Moving Target*  
2015, 6:35 min, single-channel digital video

This video was originally part of a multimedia installation, a collaboration between Albert and choreographer Stephen Page. *Moving Target* celebrates the strength of young Aboriginal men, with the choreography interpreting themes of identity and masculinity within an Aboriginal Australian context, while also foregrounding vulnerability. Originally projected on a stripped-back and a beaten-up car, Page and Albert’s collaboration sought to directly address concerns of racial profiling against young Black men globally, as well as their resilience in the face of injustice.



# On Country proppaNOW in Conversation with New Red Order

Reflecting on connections to land and country, to language and identity, to the political and the polemical, creative and critical throughlines connect the practices of artist collectives proppaNOW and New Red Order. With this complex set of interrelationships in mind, the Vera List Center invited the artists to join each other in dialogue on the occasion of proppaNOW's arrival in New York City in October 2023. Thinking and working across hemispheres, the conversation covers topics ranging from land acknowledgments to Indigenous sovereignty and the limitations and potentials of the global. Through this dialogue, the collectives respond to the ongoing effects of settler colonialism, while jointly envisioning a world beyond it. This conversation took place over two sessions in July 2023 over Zoom and has been edited for clarity.

## Participants

proppaNOW: Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Megan Cope, Lily Eather, Gordon Hookey, Warraba Weatherall

New Red Order: Jackson Polys, Zack Khalil

## Facilitators

Re'al Christian and Eriola Pira, Vera List Center

**Jackson Polys, NRO** One of our goals is to try to think through the potential overlaps in terms of our practice shared concerns. How our respective groups differ in terms of formation and production of work, how we operate, and then our respective relations to land, maybe drawing out some of the distinctions between how settler colonialism affects this continent or our position here. We are one of the many Indigenous people and groups in this area working. But both Zack and myself are not from this region, so that's another facet to our participation here and interaction with you all.

**Megan Cope, pN** Hmm, well, I guess we're connected in that way. We say that we're based in Brisbane as a collective, but we come from many parts of Queensland. Not all of us can produce work on our countries, on our territories, and make a living. So that's just part of what we've inherited. But here we have a protocol of hosting and acknowledgment, so we wanted to make sure that we're following protocols, which I believe in the US are similar when you arrive on unceded indigenous land.

**Jackson, NRO** I can respond to the way we've dealt with or negotiated expectations around territorial acknowledgment. One of the conceits of New Red Order is that it was never "founded." It arose in contradistinction to the Improved Order of Red Men, a secret society that claims lineage to the Boston Tea Party, where the settlers threw tea into the Boston Harbor while dressed up as Natives, in order to separate themselves from the British, enact this ideal of freedom, and embody the "savage" in order to do that. NRO formed as a public secret society, which is related to the "public secret" of settler colonialism (Taussig 1999).

**Megan, pN** Yeah.

**Jackson, NRO** So to connect that back to territorial acknowledgment, one of the first instances in which we approach that subject was through this performance and collaboration with Jim Fletcher, who has experience as a former Native American impersonator. And it was his work with a theater company that had got called out for inappropriately representing people. And then we started working with him, and worked on this performance called *The Informants at Artists Space* in 2017, in which he enacted an apology, we revisited that event at the Whitney Museum called the *Savage Philosophy of Endless Acknowledgment* in 2018. We were trying to intervene with the simultaneous critique and promotion of the practice of land acknowledgment or territorial acknowledgment, which was just then catching steam. So we wanted to try to make sure that

any pronouncement of a land acknowledgment was not just something that honored or respected Native people or claimed to do so, but was also anchored to a commitment to Indigenous people in that area and beyond, and to find ways to make that material.

**Warraba Weatherall, pN** The acknowledgments and welcomes within Australia are very similar to that. They actually derive from customary processes but have been standardized within a Western way of presenting them. That becomes tokenized a lot of the time. For example, when you have ministers and officials who are doing acknowledgments, but it's not their country—then they'll acknowledge the traditional owners, but most of the time they won't actually speak their names. In many ways it becomes redundant. Many times they probably don't even know the name, or they're too scared to pronounce it. So the symbolic nature of it reduces it just to performance. But because we're all minorities in our own country, it's important to build those global conversations between Indigenous mobs to find that power, to learn from other people, and to mirror our experiences. But then also, what does that mean? A sort of global resolution?

**Richard Bell, pN** Yeah, I find the welcome to country and land acknowledgment really tedious. So, yeah... I'm not a great believer in symbolism. No, sir. For me, the welcome to countries annoy me, but the white people look so much more annoyed. And I kind of like that.

**Jackson, NRO** [laughs] Yeah, yeah, it's definitely true. I mean, it's something that we could question and critique, but in many—maybe a majority of those instances—we would consider the benefit being that visibility could be a valuable irritant to those who have to wrestle with that presence.

**Gordon Hookey, pN** For me, I like the acknowledgment of First Nations that this is our land and our country, like when you're driving through, especially in New South Wales, where there are signs that say this is traditional land. I have a sense of warmth from the people from that country when I bypass those signs. Even though it may be tokenistic and symbolic, I'd rather have it there than not.

**Richard, pN** Oh, me, too.

**Megan, pN** Yeah. Well, it's step one in a long list of steps. So, when do we take step two?

**Lily Eather, pN** For my generation, in a sense it's

gone the other way, like it's really fashionable to be Indigenous. I'm 26, and you almost feel like there are certain groups out there that associate with Indigenous people to get a kick out of it or to be able to say that they have Indigenous friends, and I don't know if that's some kind of white guilt ... It's very interesting.

**Warraba, pN** Yeah. And in the generation that is coming through now, what's starting to happen is that a lot more of the mob is looking at our own, regenerating our own cultural practices and knowledge.

**Gordon, pN** With us as well, even as artists we've had to get recognition internationally before our own country even looked at us. And in winning this... being the recipient of this award, it goes a long way to just reinforce what we're saying about how we have to make a little bit of a splash internationally before Australia even looked at us because basically, all of us, we're quite tired of banging our heads up against the wall within our own country in order to hear our voice or even make a statement.

**Zack Khalil, NRO** Hmm! That's super interesting. One other question I have is a point of comparison. You're talking about the sixties to the nineties, and I feel like there's a sort of similar push for the American Indian movement. Post-Standing Rock (2015) exploded the level of visibility for Native American people here in a way that seems totally unprecedented. Where it is fashionable now, and our country is looking at our art and stuff like that. I'm just wondering if it had a ripple effect there, or if there's any similar turning points in time in Australia as well.

**Gordon, pN** Yeah. And in the generation that is coming I think this was also because Standing Rock was such a big thing over social media. There was, how Megan was saying, during that time around 2015 there was a bit of a shift. I would say that it's actually because of that global consciousness about Standing Rock and other places around the world that things were happening, that then people were like, "Oh, I need to get on board with this or get left behind within the local politic as well."

**Jackson, NRO** With regard to global colony, that's been the challenge for us here. "Indigenous" is a tricky term, because on the one hand, it's expansive, it can allow for different forms of connection to those who have similar experiences with colonization. But it's also, in some ways, it could be exclusionary for some people. So [for instance] "American Indians" is obviously a misnomer,

but then [the term] "Native" was a way to try to [amend] that. But for us, "Native American" feels domesticating; it's still within the confines of the so-called United States.

**Megan, pN** Hmm!

**Warraba, pN** Yeah, it's a eurocentric construct of trying to identify the other, but then they determine their own identity through that. But it's important to mention that there are various waves [of colonization]. There's different dynamics that happen with the first invasion, with neocolonialism, with all of these different things.

**Megan, pN** I think that these things are really critical when we look to the future, [especially] the process of repatriation. When we think about it in the global colony, it's discussed [in relation to] climate change. If Indigenous peoples are going to be recognized and valued in the climate conversation—and I do believe that it is the only way forward, because who else has the knowledge and memory of deep time, of lands and waterways—it's important to understand why we are articulating all this so that the positionality of who holds the knowledge, and perhaps some of the solutions for the future is not in the marketplace.

**Zack, NRO** That's a great point. And that's definitely something that New Red Order, to use a crass term, is trying to capitalize on. If people are looking into Indigenous epistemologies at this time, it's a way to survive this new apocalypse we're all moving through currently. How can we share that knowledge and call people into that process, perhaps even call people into Indigeneity? It's a question. It's sketchy, and it's troubling, and it's fraught.

**Megan, pN** But we have already. I mean this new apocalypse that the colonizers are terrified of—who best to learn from than those who have already endured an apocalypse.

**Jackson, NRO** Yes.

**Richard, pN** But they all know it. They're not gonna fucking listen. We gotta get into the fucking rich neighbors and burn their fucking cars. Like they're doing in France.

**Megan, pN** Get rid of their possessions, strip them back.

**Gordon, pN** There's many different levels of identity for "Black fellas" or for Murri people in Australia. We call ourselves Murri if we're part of the state but we also identify with the land in the country where we come from as well. For example, even though I'm a Murri, I'm also a Waanji person as well, and I guess there's the overall identity relation to the country, Australia as well that way, or just Black fellas.

**Megan, pN** For us in Moreton Bay, Quandamooka country, the anchor of our identity is place, and how we relate to it. It informs us of who we are. And that's particularly reinforced through kinship structures that come through seasons and cycles. We're lucky because our people never left our ancestral lands. So Aboriginal people who have that, who have family who've never left our relation to country is paramount to our identity. But that's not everyone as well, and I acknowledge that. And like Gordon said, my aunties also say, "We're Goorie" when we're in a group and we're traveling away from the island.

**Lily, pN** Well, for me, personally, I've never lived on country, but my dad [Laurie Nilsen] did and his connection to land was absolutely palpable and informed his practice as well. I guess I absorbed that connection through him and my family, my grandma, going back and visiting country was a really special time. It's something I can't explain having not lived there, this deep sense of the importance of this place.

**Gordon, pN** It's like a belonging. You belong somewhere.

**Lily, pN** Yeah, even though I've never lived there. And that informed all of his art, his connection to country, environmental concerns, all the Black and white people living on the country.

**Tony Albert, pN** I think the relationship to land is fundamental to our identity and our existence. And that doesn't come from a sense of ownership. It comes from a sense of belonging.

**Warraba, pN** For me, country or land, it's the birthplace of all of our cultural knowledges, so when we look at the knowledge, kinship, and cultural epistemology that exist today within our practice as well, it all stems from from the landscape, from phenomena, from cycles, as Megan was saying. As a worldview, it's a paradigm that's grounded in country and not in some way that's been sort of abstracted through a white lens, but very much familiar in a cultural lens.

**Zack, NRO** Yeah, for me personally, as an Ojibway person the land is super central to my identity and my ability to practice my cultural heritage. I work a lot on repatriation, repatriation of ancestors and human remains, constantly trying to bring ancestors back to the land, and I always remember that the land and the ancestors are so deeply intertwined. In terms of our work as New Right Order, we are advocating for the return of land, so that our people can continue to thrive. I feel fortunate to come from a tribal community that is still based on its traditional land because there are so many Indigenous communities in the United States that aren't. So working hard to advocate for the return of those lands is a central part of our practice and my identity personally.

**Jackson, NRO** Similarly, I'm fortunate to belong to a community, people, Tlingit people, who have connections continually to the land, and although there were fights over ownership and continue to be fights over power, control, sovereignty, and the ability to steward the land in responsible ways, there is a significant percentage of Tlingit people who are still on those lands and waters. I recognize that that's a privileged position and not one that everyone has. Thinking through that difference and spectrum is part of what instigates New Red Order activities. As a Tlingit person, and Zack and Adam [Khalil] as Ojibway, coming from very different places, but having some overlapping epistemologies is a fertile place to confront the reality that we are also in some ways coming to our understanding of land and the particularities of ownership through a reactive lens. We're reacting against colonialism, European colonialism and ideas of ownership that don't always mesh with our ideas of ownership, if we can call them that.

**Gordon, pN** Well, for me, just looking at it, we have this connection to our land, country, and our people, but in the end the determinant is the power that the colonial structures hold. But we do have our own systems and our own values and norms, within this hierarchical colonial system that we live in. For us, it's a constant negotiation with ourselves, but also with the powers that be.

**Megan, pN** I feel that every generation has had its own delicate way of fighting. Every generation for the last six generations have gone from aggressive to passive, or a sort of peaceful resistance, in these different stages. It's important to know what language we're using, how we're fighting—not fight, sorry. Surviving is actually a better word.

**Jackson, NRO** I think one of the tricks is finding ways to fight in terms of articulating a sovereignty that allows for difference. That's one of the challenges we might face.

**Zack, NRO** In terms of overlaps and distinctions between how settler colonialism functions in each of our unique, continental contexts, it's interesting to pick up on that conversation around Standing Rock. In the United States context, we're finally trying to move past visibility as a goal in and out of itself, right? We're still here, but it isn't enough. We want our land back. I think the political and cultural moments that we've been moving through and Standing Rock in 2015, and the Black Lives Matter uprising in 2020, have pushed the mainstream into those conversations in the United States in a way that I don't want to get too excited about, but it is a step in the right direction.

**Warraba, pN** Definitely. There's always white fellas trying to play catch up. It's always reduced from our original terms of reference, so the onus is always on us, unfortunately, to educate. My father always asks me, "If you weren't making, if you didn't have to make political artwork today, what would you make art work about?"

**Lily, pN** I guess it depends on the people involved and what their intentions are, because there are many different directions that they can take. Of course there are white people out there that are involved with helping us out in the community, but it goes in other directions as well.

**Megan, pN** I just feel like we have surrendered enough for the purposes of capitalism and extraction and colonialism. We've lost enough. We're at stages now where we are building ourselves up again, and being able to speak in a way that is fearless, and does not have the consequences that our ancestors had a few generations ago. [We have to exist] as free agents to express ourselves and to represent our people, to make sure that we're in charge of not only what we present, but how it's handled by the audience.

**Gordon, pN** Yeah, yeah. Thinking globally and engaging with First Nations people around the world, we develop a strong sense of solidarity, a sense of learning and knowing that we're not alone. One of the clichés I like to think about is "think globally, act locally."

**Megan, pN** One of the questions we were asked] is, "What are the limitations of global, of co-opting or conflating Indigenous identities? Alternatively, how can this term build global solidarities?"

**Warraba, pN** It's a really good question, but I am always cautious of understanding it and not thinking of it too one dimensionally, because when we talk about conflating or co-opting identities it also, you got to think about who's the agent? Who's doing the co-opting? What's the power dynamics there? Which direction? What's the intention? Even things that are a bit more surface level, where people are directly appropriating artwork and regalia, they don't understand the cultural protocols that go with it.

**Jackson, NRO** For a lot of people in North America, their first encounter with anything Indigenous had to do with an appropriation. Whether it be through a mascot or monuments, or some stereotype that was reified through popular culture, so that in some ways it becomes necessary, through this re-education enterprise, to move through and acknowledge and work with those representations. That doesn't quite get to what Warraba was saying about looking forward to the future—if colonialism doesn't exist, what would we be doing. I really appreciate repositioning our focus in that regard. That's something that we have to do now: see how we can work together to do these things in parallel and continuously, and find ways to intermingle with them. And that's one of the exciting things about "Indigenous" as a term. Even if it might be dangerous, it allows us to meet together in global situations and talk through our differences so that we can remain focused on what's unique and at risk of being lost.

**Richard, pN** I think that's part of our cultural upbringing, developing the tools that's necessary to think communally. It was a pretty natural progression, really, starting a collective.

**Megan, pN** And in a lot of ways [a collective] art practice is a methodology or a movement that relies on that solidarity and political alliances. As friends, we naturally think and feel and strategize in similar ways. I guess there's unity in the vision of what the purpose of us being together is for because we can also see the past and previous generations. We can recognize all that, we're all connected to that.

**Richard, pN** Yeah. Yeah, I agree.

**Tony, pN** Really important, when symbiotics are nurtured rather than defended.

**Megan, pN** Yes!

**Tony, pN** That is a huge part of who we are, and something that has stuck with me for a very long time. So when you look from the outside looking in, Our member Vernon Ah Kee's wife said that she can be in any gallery situation and she can identify a proppaNOW artwork. It may not necessarily be an artwork by a proppaNOW member, but she identifies the way of thinking, a way of conceptualizing, and a way of working that is cohesive to who we are as a collective. And I loved the idea that it extends beyond just us.

**Gordon, pN** Yeah, connecting to what Tony said in relation to what Lisa, that's Vernon's wife, alluded to, that she's looking at proppaNOW, our philosophy, our attitude, as more of a movement, rather than a group of individuals. I just like to think that long after we're gone, proppaNOW art will remain—not necessarily by us, but by those that have been inspired or influenced in some way.

**Megan, pN** I feel like New Red Order is similar. You guys apply the same strategies, informed by intergenerational progress, responsibility, and vision.

**Jackson, NRO** Yeah, I think there's a lot of similarity in terms of formation and wanting to ensure that there's a level of collectivity that exceeds a few individuals. Our bond arose out of a realization or an experience of being informants. We needed advocacy, but we didn't want the kind of allyship that was self-serving without any real commitment to Indigenous people. So in 2014, we put out a call allowing others to inform on their own culture, to move through successive levels of engagement toward a process that would guarantee that they had to renegotiate their own understanding of what it means to work for Indigenous people, alongside Indigenous people, what positionality they could assume, and standing up for and working toward Indigenous sovereignty. And that led to this platform where we—Adam, Zack, and I— are core contributors to this public secret society; not founders of an artist collective, but more of a collection agency for colonial debts. Anyone can join.

**Gordon, pN** Yeah!

**Zack, NRO** I definitely see a lot of overlap between the way our collectives work. I also love this idea of thinking intergenerationally. That's how I think about New Red Order when I'm the most optimistic. As something that could grow beyond us and beyond our control. It's positing a political future and reality for others to run with and to take off with. To Jackson's point, we're

calling in accomplices, we're calling in non-Indigenous people to fight alongside us and advocate for these aims, for the goal of the repatriation, for the return of all Indigenous land and life. I also wanna acknowledge what Warraba said earlier, about not just making work about colonialism. Not always countering, not using the re- words, like repatriation, or the de- words, like decolonization, and instead questioning what we do as Indigenous people in our communities. How do we practice our cultural values outside of pushing back against something? That's something I see in a lot of the work you all produce too. And it's really inspiring.

**Tony, pN** Thank you.

**Megan, pN** We're really invigorated by challenging the possibilities of what our art can be. And we're quite firm in saying that art is whatever we want it to be. Self-determination and resistance of prescribed notions of identity are paramount. At all times.

## VLC Forum 2023 Participant Biographies

**Vernon Ah Kee (proppaNOW)** was born in 1967 in Innisfail, North Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. He belongs to the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr people. Ah Kee's contextual text pieces, videos, photographs and drawings form a critique of Australian popular culture from the perspective of the Aboriginal experience of contemporary life. He particularly explores the dichotomy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies and cultures.

**Tony Albert (proppaNOW)** was born in 1981 in Townsville, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Albert is a descendant of the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. Albert is one of Australia's foremost contemporary artists with a longstanding interest in the cultural misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. Drawing on both personal and collective histories, his multidisciplinary practice considers the ways in which optimism might be utilized to overcome adversity. His work poses crucial questions such as how do we remember, give justice to, and rewrite complex and traumatic histories.

**Natalie Ball (Black, Modoc, and Klamath)** lives and works in her ancestral homelands in Southern Oregon/Northern California, where she serves as an elected official on the Klamath Tribes Tribal Council. She holds a bachelor's degree with a double major in Indigenous, Race, Ethnic Studies and Art from the University of Oregon and obtained her master's degree with a focus on Indigenous contemporary art at Massey University, Aotearoa (New Zealand). In 2018, Natalie earned her MFA in Painting and Printmaking at the Yale School of Art. She is the recipient of multiple awards and residencies and her work has been shown internationally, including a 2023 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

**Richard Bell (proppaNOW)** was born in 1953, Charleville, Queensland. He lives and works between Brisbane and overseas. Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. He works across a variety of media including painting, installation, performance and video. He grew out of a generation of Aboriginal activists and has remained committed to the politics of Aboriginal emancipation and self-determination. One of Australia's most significant artists, Bell's work explores the complex artistic and political problems of Western, colonial and Indigenous art production. Bell presented at the VLC's *Indigenous New York: Artist Perspectives* in 2017.

**Megan Cope (proppaNOW)** was born in 1982 in Brisbane. She lives and works in Brisbane. Cope is a Quandamooka

artist (North Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland). Her site-specific sculptural installations, public art and paintings investigate issues relating to colonial histories, culture, the environment and mapping practices. Cope's work often resists prescribed notions of Aboriginality, and examines the psychogeographies that challenge the grand narrative of "Australia" along with our sense of time and ownership in a settler colonial state. These explorations result in various material outcomes.

**Bethel Cucué (Colectivo Cherani)** is a visual artist, muralist, and Cantoya artisan, originally from the community of Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico. Her artistic practice focuses mainly on easel painting and large-format painting. Her work is influenced by the social and cultural environment of her community, and her work is inspired by customs, dances, parties, rituals, and everyday life; and in turn, she creates scenes and characters that are nourished from the language and aesthetics of the Purépecha region. Her most recent collective exhibitions include *Coyolxauhqui*, Banco de México Museum, Mexico City; *Uinapikua Cherani Collective*, MUAC, Mexico City; and *Proyecto Koala*, Embassy of Australia Mexico City.

**Lily Eather (proppaNOW)** was born in 1996 in Brisbane. She is a Mandandanji woman who lives and works in Brisbane, and the daughter of the late Laurie Nilsen, an early member of proppaNOW and renowned multidisciplinary artist in his own right. Eather has a deep commitment to upkeep his legacy through her current studies at The University of Queensland, majoring in Art History. Her career as a Theatre Nurse for the past seven years has allowed her to follow her passion for the arts on the side, and aspires to become a curator and writer. She is passionate about Indigenous and Australian art, and recognizes the need for Indigenous curatorship locally and globally.

**Alain Silva Guardian (Colectivo Cherani)** is an artist originally from Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico. Guardian studies graphics and painting and works through video and installation to investigate conceptual and aesthetic interests. His work is influenced by the representation of traditions and symbolic elements of daily P'urhepecha life. He has also collaborated on the mural intervention in public spaces in communities and cities throughout Mexico. He has been included in group exhibitions such as *SEVEN4FIFTEEN* at Exploring Visual Cultures; *II Biennial of Contemporary Art BARCO*; *Mariposas Migrantes*, Casa Michoacana, West Chicago; *Entre la ficción y la realidad*, *Calzada* and 8, Havana Cuba. He has participated in programs such as *Constellations Indigenous Contemporary Art from the Americas: Geopoetics*, TATE London UK; The XIV FEMSA BIENAL pedagogical program; and *Graphic Exchange/Graphic Exchange*, Australia.

**Giovanni Fabián Guerrero (Colectivo Cherani)** is a P'urépecha artist whose work emerges from the collective memory of his Cherán community that works in painting, installation, and sculpture. His large scale-paintings are ritual spaces where different personas he has created meet. His installations and sculptures emerge from a space in a symbolic imaginary, creating a contemporary narrative from a critical reflection on modernity. He studied at the Popular Faculty of Fine Arts of the UMSNH. Group exhibitions include *Arte de los pueblos de México*. *Disrupciones indígenas*, The Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City; *Memorabilia*, NOME Gallery, Berlin; *Raise the shadow*, Llano Gallery, Mexico City; *KIXPATLA, Change your view, change your face*, Art and Cosmopolitan, San Ildefonso, Mexico City; *Juchári K'eri K'uinchekua*, FEMSA Biennial, Morelia, Michoacan; AMEXICA, The Servais Family Collection and The Loft, Brussels, Belgium.

**Jennifer Herd (proppaNOW)** is from Eumundi, Queensland. She lives and works in Brisbane. Herd is a Mbarbarrum woman whose family roots lie in far North Queensland. Herd draws on her past experiences and knowledge in costume design, often incorporating stitching and pin holes in her installations, painting, drawing and sculptural works. She creates shield designs as a way of connecting to her heritage and culture. Herd's shield designs are presented as a reminder of speaking truth to power, frontier resistance and the aftermath of cultural identity stripped bare.

**Gordon Hookey (proppaNOW)** was born in 1961, Cloncurry, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Hookey belongs to the Waanji people. Hookey locates his art at the interface where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures converge. He explicitly attacks the establishment and implicates our current political representatives. His style and approach is distinctive in its vibrancy and best known for its biting satire of Australia's political landscape, its leaders and representatives.

**Fawz Kabra** is a curator and writer living in New York. She is director and curator of Brief Histories, a gallery and publishing initiative she co-founded where she collaborates with artists on solo and group exhibitions, and publication projects. Previously, Kabra was Assistant Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (2014-2016) and organized symposia and exhibitions including, the 13th Global Art Forum, *School is a Factory?* (2019); *No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects*, the *Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College* (2017); *The Way Things Can Go*, The New York Armory Show (2015); BRIC Biennial: Volume I, Downtown Edition, BRIC Brooklyn (2014). Her writing and interviews appear in *Protozine*, *Art Papers*, *Canvas*, *Ibraaz*, and *Ocula*, and her editorial projects

include the Center for Human Rights and the Arts, Bard College's *Through the Ruins: Talks on Human Rights and the Arts 1* (Station Hill Press, 2023). She is currently visiting faculty at CCS, Bard.

**M. Carmen Lane** is a two-spirit African-American and Haudenosaunee (Mohawk/Tuscarora) artist, writer, and facilitator living in Cleveland, Ohio. Lane's work integrates ancestry, legacy, and spirituality, and pursues expansion, experimentation, and play. Lane is founder and director of ATNSC: Center for Healing & Creative Leadership, an urban retreat center and social practice experiment in holistic health, leadership development, Indigenous arts and culture.

**Wanda Nanibush** is an Anishinaabe-kwe curator, image, word warrior, and community organizer from Beausoleil First Nation. Based in Toronto, Nanibush is the inaugural curator of Indigenous Art and co-lead of the Indigenous + Canadian Art Department at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She founded aabaakwad in 2018, which annually gathers together Indigenous artists, curators, and writers, most recently at the Venice Biennale. Wanda's latest retrospective *Robert Houle: Red is Beautiful* is touring. She was a member of the jury for the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice, contributed to the VLC's *Breaking Protocol* (2023), and presented at the VLC's *Indigenous New York: Curatorially Speaking* in 2016.

**New Red Order (NRO)** is a public secret society facilitated by core contributors Jackson Polys, Adam Khalil, and Zack Khalil. Polys is a multidisciplinary artist who examines negotiations toward the limits and viability of desires for Indigenous growth. He holds an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University and was the recipient of a Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Mentor Artist Fellowship. Adam Khalil is a filmmaker and artist whose practice attempts to subvert traditional forms of image making through humor, relation, and transgression. He received his BA from Bard College and is co-founder of COUSINS Collective. Zack Khalil is a filmmaker and artist whose work explores an Indigenous worldview and undermines traditional forms of historical authority through the excavation of alternative histories and the use of innovative documentary forms. He received his BA at Bard College in the Film and Electronic Arts Department, and is a UnionDocs Collaborative Fellow and Gates Millennium Scholar. Their work has appeared at Artists Space, Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Lincoln Center, Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, New York Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Toronto Biennial 2019, Walker Arts Center, and Whitney Biennial 2019, among other institutions.

**Puleng Plessie (Another Roadmap Africa Cluster)** is Curator: Education Mediation for the Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria. She is also the founder of Keep the Dream Arts which is a non-profit company responsible for community education. Her research explores the notion of facilitating dialogue to improve pedagogy by localizing content and introducing different IsiZulu terminologies used to reimagine the language and practices associated with arts education. Plessie is part of the Johannesburg Working Group of Another Roadmap School, a global network which aims to provide open spaces for trans-regional exchange and learning in arts education. Puleng sits on the Board of Trustees for Curriculum Development Projects Trust and the Advisory Committee for Tshwane University of Technology for the Department of Fine and Studio Arts, Faculty of Arts and Design. Plessie has further contributed research and edited *STANDING ITEMS: Critical pedagogies in South African Art, Design, and Architecture* (2018).

**Rifki Akbar Pratama (KUNCI Study Forum & Collective)** devotes himself to the confluence of history and psychology, the emotional histories of the left, intertemporal choice, and politics of affect as a researcher. Together with the KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, he dwells upon critical pedagogy, artistic practice, and knowledge production through the School of Improper Education program.

**Khalil Rabah** is a conceptual artist whose artistic practice uses multiple forms of performative action to investigate histories of removal, erasure, displacement, and marginalization. He is the founder of the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind. Rabah's long standing art projects also include the third edition of the fifth Riwaq Biennale (2003–2018); *Scale Models* (2006–present); and *Collaborations: by in form* (2010–present).

Trained as an architect (B.Arch from Universitas Indonesia and M.Arch from Cranbrook Academy of Art), **farid rakun** wears different hats depending on who is asking. He is a part of the artists' collective **ruangrupa** with whom he co-curated *SONSBEEK '16: transACTION* (Arnhem, Netherlands, 2016) and contributed to the collective artistic direction for *documenta fifteen* (Kassel, Germany, 2022). ruangrupa is a Jakarta-based collective established in 2000. It is a non-profit organization that strives to support the idea of art within urban and cultural context by involving artists and other disciplines such as social sciences, politics, technology, media, etc, to critically observe and engage with Indonesian urban contemporary issues. ruangrupa also produces collaborative works in the form of art projects such as exhibition, festival, art lab, workshop, research, as well as book, magazine and online journal publication.

**Pablo José Ramírez** is a Curator at the Hammer Museum. Previously, he was the inaugural Adjunct Curator of First Nations and Indigenous Art at Tate Modern (2019–2023).

**Sarah Rifky** is Senior Curator and Director of Programs at Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (ICA at VCU). A curator, art historian, and educator, Rifky contemplates the principle that every artwork is a school. She is founder of the Imaginary School Program at Beirut, an independent art space in Cairo, Egypt (2012–15), which evolved in response to the changing state of cultural infrastructure in Egypt in the wake of the Arab uprisings of 2011. She is cofounder, with artist Wael Shawky, of MASS Alexandria (2010), an independent study and studio program for young artists. As a curatorial agent of dOCUMENTA (13), she worked with the Maybe Education team to bring thirty students from Alexandria to work in Kassel, Germany as part of the exhibition, and cohosted, with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, The Cairo Seminar in Alexandria (2012). Throughout her career, Sarah has developed projects with artists working on pedagogy, including Luis Camnitzer and Adelita Husni Bey.

**Lineo Segoete (Another Roadmap Africa Cluster)** is a versatile professional writer, arts research-practitioner and project manager from Lesotho with her roots set in storytelling. Her work is grounded in critical literacies spanning from media, history and curriculum and pedagogy, and her practice focuses on cultural production and the preservation of creative heritage in Lesotho and across the African continent. She is co-founder and co-director of Ba re e ne re Literary Arts, Art First consultancy and co-convenor of the Africa Cluster of Another Roadmap (ARAC), a Pan-African network which focuses on decolonizing arts education practices through engaging with and activating archives and artistic practice.

**Warraba Weatherall (proppaNOW)** is a Kamilaroi visual artist, Lecturer at Griffith University and PhD candidate, who is currently based in Brisbane. Weatherall's artistic practice has a specific interest in archival repositories and structures, and the life of cultural materials and knowledges within these environments. He is also a lecturer for the Contemporary Australian Indigenous Arts (CAIA) degree at Griffith University's, Queensland College of Art. Weatherall is passionate about shifting cultural norms within the Australian visual arts sector and contributes to the sector through artistic practice, education and curation.

## About

### Vera List Center for Art and Politics

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a non-profit research center at The New School in New York. Founded in 1992, the VLC catalyzes and supports new forms of politically engaged art, research, public scholarship, and community around the world. The 2022–2024 Vera List Center Focus Theme *Correction\** and the programs, fellowship projects, publications, and exhibitions dedicated to it explore the tension, discomfort, potential, and sociopolitical implications of “correction.”

### The New School

In 1919, a few great minds imagined a school that would never settle for the status quo, one that would rethink the purpose of higher learning. The New School was the result. Today it is a progressive university housing five extraordinary schools and colleges. It is a place where scholars, artists, and designers find the support they need to unleash their intellect and creativity so that they can courageously challenge conventions. We dissolve walls between disciplines to create communities in which journalists collaborate with designers, architects with social researchers, and artists with activists. Our academic centers in New York City, Paris, Shanghai, and Mumbai offer over 10,000 students more than 135 undergraduate and graduate degree programs uniquely designed to prepare them to make a more just, beautiful, and better-designed world.

### Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice

The Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice is awarded by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics to an artist or a group of artists in recognition of a particular project's long-term impact, boldness, and artistic excellence. International in scope, it constitutes a unique meeting of scholars and students, the general public, and globally significant artists. The prize initiative unfolds over a two-year period and provides a multi-layered platform for artists as agents of social and political change.

The Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice, formerly the Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics, was renamed for the 2018–2020 cycle in gratitude to Jane Lombard, whose generous donations to the Vera List Center make possible the continuation of the prize. It is also made possible by Founding Supporters of the prize, James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach, Elizabeth R. Hilpman and Byron Tucker, Jane Lombard, Joshua Mack, and The New School.

The inaugural prize was presented in 2012 to Theaster Gates for *Dorchester Projects*; the second in 2014 to Abounaddara for *Emergency Cinema*; the third in 2016 to Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves for *Seeds of Change*; the fourth to Pan-African collective Chimurenga for their *Pan-African Space Station*; and the fifth recipient was Avni Sethi for *Conflictorium*. proppaNOW is the recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice for *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*.

### Vera List Center Board

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## Acknowledgments and Credits

We acknowledge that our work and assembly spaces occupy the unceded territory of the Lenape Nation. We recognize the Lenape as the custodians and stewards of this land, recognize their long history of welcoming many nations to Lenapehoking, and honor and pay respect to their ancestors past, present, and future. We acknowledge the historical and ongoing oppression of lands, cultures, and the peoples who have inhabited this continental land mass, now called the Americas, long before European settlers arrived. We turn to the arts and support Indigenous centered programming in the hope that our work contributes to decolonization and antiracism, to healing, and to a more just and equitable future for all.

The VLC Forum is the accomplishment of many generous friends. Foremost, we are humbled by the work of the artists we support and thank them for joining us in this vital discussion on the political power of art.

We are as always deeply grateful to the resourceful and intrepid board of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, led by officers JK Brown, Megan Noh, and Norman Kleeblatt.

Eternal thanks is owed to Jane Lombard for her visionary philanthropic investment in the Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice. Our gratitude extends to Richard Lombard and Nathalie Roy and to the Kettering Fund.

The Australian Consulate-General of New York has made a significant grant to support the programs honoring proppaNOW. Other institutional supporters of our 2022–2024 programs are the Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, Boris Lurie Art Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Italian Council, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, Dayton Foundation, and the American Chai Trust.

We gratefully recognize the members of our Producers Council whose leadership support ensures the success of our dynamic two-year program cycles; in particular, Frances F. L. Beatty, JK Brown and Eric Diefenbach, and Jane Lombard are the lead sponsors of our 2022–2024 Fellowship Program. They are joined by Producers Council members Michael Cohn, Megan Noh, Norman Kleeblatt, Linda Earle, Susan Hapgood, Alan Michelson, Andrea Woodner, Susan Meiselas, Tabor Banquer, and Beth Rudin DeWoody and Firooz Zehedi.

Members of The New Society have established legacy gift intentions to support the VLC’s future. We salute Eleanor Alper and Norman Kleeblatt for their generous and forward-looking commitment to our work.

We gratefully acknowledge members of Vera’s List, whose annual support anchors all our work in community. They are Mariana Amatullo, John Bacon, Jeff Baysa, Elizabeth Dickey, Simone Douglas, Frayda Feldman & the late Ronald Feldman, Alan Felsenthal, Margaret Fiore, Flurina Graf, Francis Greenburger, Hans Haacke, Jane Hait, Rohesia Hamilton Metcalfe, David Herskovits, Daniel Hill, Edwin Huddleson, Pia Infante, Germaine Ingram, Nina Katchadourian, Tom Klem, Moukhtar Kocache, Elisabeth Kostin, Carin Kuoni, Gisela Kuoni, Aimée Labarrere, Barbara Lee, Margaret Lee, Ruby Lerner, Lucy Lippard, Natasha Logan, Lenore Malen, Micaela Martegani, Louis Massiah, Naeem Mohaiemen, Fran Ilich Morales Muñoz, Sina Najafi, John Oakes, Mendi + Keith Obadike, Leyla Öztürk, Nancy Delman Portnoy, Laura Raicovich, Tatiana Rais, Chris Robbins, Silvia Rocciolo, Ingrid Schaffner, Rich Sheaffer, Sonam Singh, Pamela Tillis, Rose Turshen, Aleksandra Wagner, Jonathan Weinberg, and Tamara White.

Our academic home is The New School and we are indebted to colleagues across all colleges and programs. Special thanks to President Emeritus Dwight A. McBride, Interim President Donna L. Shalala, Provost Renée T. White, and Executive Dean of the Schools of Public Engagement Mary R. Watson. We are grateful to Dansha Cai, Vice Dean, Strategy and Administration, Schools of Public Engagement; Daniel Chou, Manager, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center; Anthony Curry, Director of Events and Special Projects, Parsons School of Design; Mark Fitzpatrick, Director, Events IT; and Daisy Wong, Assistant Director of the Galleries, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center. Thanks go to The New School Printmaking Club and Shana Agid, Dean, School of Art, Media and Technology. We are grateful to Meghan Greene, Director of Corporate & Foundation Relations at The New School, and recognize the support of Simone Douglas, Professor, Parsons Fine Arts, and Belinda Jackson, Programs Director, American Friends of the National Gallery of Australia, Inc. Thanks also go to Asia Art Archive in America.

We salute our designers, Chris Wu and the entire team at Wkshps!

This publication accompanies the Vera List Center Forum 2023, presented as part of the Center’s 2022–2024 Focus Theme *Correction\**. The VLC Forum is curated by Carin Kuoni and Eriola Pira with Camila Palomino and convened with the support of Tabor Banquer, Re’al Christian, and Adrienne Umeh.

*proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood!* is presented at The New School as part of the VLC Forum 2023: *Correction\**. The exhibition is curated by Eriola Pira with Camila Palomino.

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VLC Forum 2023 *Correction\**  
Schedule-at-a-Glance Please refer to p. 36 for participant biographies.

## Day One, Thursday, October 12

### 3–5 pm EDT Unchrono/logical Timeline Activation Chapter 2.2 New York

Workshop with Another Roadmap Africa Cluster  
Event Café at The New School University Center, 63 5th Avenue, lower level

Led by 2022–20224 Jane Lombard Fellow Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC), this workshop is an exercise in “inhabiting” histories. Participants engage with previous ARAC timelines, learn about local arts education and practices throughout Africa, and are invited to expand on collective timelines through memories, images, text, and sounds. Developed by the Johannesburg Working Group (JWG) and ARAC with member Lineo Segoete.

### 5–6:30 pm EDT Impossible Structures Panel conversation with Khalil Rabah Online

Jane Lombard Fellow Khalil Rabah reflects on the semi-fictional Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind, a roving museum dedicated to generating interest in the natural and cultural history of Palestine in conversation with curator Fawz Kabra. Rabah will discuss the ongoing project, the challenges of museology and national representation, and the impossibility of institutional structures and restructuring.

## Day Two, Friday, October 13

### 10–11:30 am EDT Blackness Is... Global Black and Indigenous Solidarities Online

Bringing together artists, writers, curators, and scholars from across Australia, the Americas, Africa and its diaspora, this conversation this conversation considers intersections between Indigenous and

Black subjectivities. Speakers include members of proppaNOW alongside Natalie Ball, Klamath/Modoc interdisciplinary artist; M. Carmen Lane, two-spirit African-American and Haudenosaunee (Mohawk/Tuscarora) artist, writer, and facilitator; and Puleng Plessie, member of Another Roadmap Africa Cluster.

### 5–6:15 pm EDT proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood! exhibition walkthrough with proppaNOW’s Lily Eather and Camila Palomino, VLC Curatorial Assistant

On view October 9–November 5, 2023  
Parsons School of Design, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries  
66 5th Avenue at 13th Street

This exhibition features the work of Aboriginal urban artist collective proppaNOW, recipient of the 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice, celebrating their unwavering commitment to pushing for greater visibility for Aboriginal struggles and rights within Australia and beyond.

### 6:30–8 pm EDT Prize Ceremony and Conversation proppaNOW with Wanda Nanibush The Auditorium at 66 West 12th Street

A ceremony honoring 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Prize for Art and Social Justice recipient proppaNOW followed by a conversation between members of the collective and prize jury member, Anishinaabe curator, artist, and educator Wanda Nanibush. Introduction by The New School Provost Renée T. White and VLC board member and artist Alan Michelson.

### 8–10 pm EDT VLC Forum 2023: Community Dinner and Party

Wollman Hall at The New School  
Enter at 65 West 11th Street

The annual VLC Forum Dinner extends the festivities into the night with a free dinner and party for all—celebrating proppaNOW, the Jane Lombard Fellows, Forum participants, and our communities. ARAC member Christian Nyampeta hosts, with a DJ set and karaoke to follow.

## Day Three, Saturday, October 14

### 11 am–12 pm EDT Igniting Resistance: A Conversation with Colectivo Cherani

Wollman Hall at The New School  
Enter at 65 West 11th Street

Jane Lombard Fellow Colectivo Cherani members Betel Cucué, Giovani Fabian, Alain Silva Guardian, and prize nominator, curator, art writer, and cultural theorist Pablo José Ramírez discuss the collective, the Purépecha resistance movement, and experiments in autonomy and self-governance. The conversation will be held in Spanish with live English interpretation.

### 12:30–2 pm EDT On Learning Together

Wollman Hall at The New School  
Enter at 65 West 11th Street

How can trust lead to growth and reflection, and create capacity for collective learning and studying? Bringing together Jane Lombard Fellows ARAC and KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, this conversation moderated by moderated by curator Sarah Rifky focuses on experimental pedagogies and solidarities within arts education.

### 2:30–4 pm EDT Keynote: On space, or putting the ruang in ruangrupa

Wollman Hall at The New School  
Enter at 65 West 11th Street

ruangrupa member farid rakun delivers the VLC Forum 2023 keynote and shares a story of using space as a guiding tool to give some sense to the collective’s journey to date.

Followed by a toast and reception.

The VLC Forum 2023: *Correction\** is dedicated to Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa (1976–2023) of the Kampala Working Group of ARAC.

# proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood!

October 9–

November 5, 2023

Parsons School of Design,  
Sheila C. Johnson Design Center,  
Arnold and Sheila Aronson Galleries  
The New School  
66 Fifth Avenue at 13th Street  
New York City

*Correction\**

THE  
NEW  
SCHOOL

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VERA LIST CENTER  
FOR ART AND POLITICS