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
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 involves collective processes are the way to go. Polyvocal art projects that involve collective processes are the way to go.

Correction* speaks to the importance of collaboration and collective action to bring about social change. Our Prize Council identified art projects throughout the world that advance social justice 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.

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 through 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

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.”
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, Masera, Johannesurg, 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. 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. This initiative demonstrates ARAC’s commitment to excavate and revaluate 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 recognize 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 (AAA), an independent nonprofit organization based in Hong Kong. This essay was originally written in nomination of ARAC’s working model for Art and Social Justice in the summer of 2022.

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 XARHATAKUARHU (foro de expresión, Cherán); UNAPKUKA, MUAC, Mexico City; Empoderamiento de la propia identidad, Centro Cultural Clavijero Morelia Michoacán; Museo de Sitio, Cherán Michoacan; Caminos De Nana Echeri, Careyes Jalisco; and La Panza de las Ausencias, Salón Acné 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 the advocacy 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 directly on these water sources and the forest for 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 XARHATAKUARHU (foro de expresión, Cherán); UNAPKUKA, MUAC, Mexico City; Empoderamiento de la propia identidad, Centro Cultural Clavijero Morelia Michoacán; Museo de Sitio, Cherán Michoacan; Caminos De Nana Echeri, Careyes Jalisco; and La Panza de las Ausencias, Salón Acné 7, CDMX.

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 16, 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 Victor Alfonzo 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 “Keris” (senior) chosen among the “comuneros” and “comunerías” (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. 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. Armored 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.” 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.”

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 Collectivo 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 resistance is not just a matter of reacting to violence, but also a means of creating new possibilities for self-determination and self-rule. It is a form of art that is deeply intertwined with the community’s struggle for autonomy and freedom, and it serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural expression in the context of political struggle. In this way, Colectivo Cherani is not only engaging in a process of cultural recovery, but also in a process of political empowerment that seeks to transform society from within.
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.

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, Syallistudina, 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 improppenss, we seek to unsettle the dominant rule(r) while affirming the capacity for liberation that lies between us.”

KUNCI Study Forum & Collective

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


Ibid.
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 disrupt 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.

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 continuously 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: The Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind
Nabil 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 knowledge-making, 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. In 2003, Rabah established the Al Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, a precursor to these projects, beginning in 1995 and formalized in 2003, Rabah established the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) vision. He co-founded Al Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in 1998, and the Riwaq Biennial in 2005, the moving 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 ongoing project, an initiative in 2017 to explore instances where Palestine lacked a national pavilion, so the Riwaq project developed out of documents the buildings in Riwaq’s Registry of Historic Villages they occupied. The projects exist as both what 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 museum’s resilience and location, the museum finds new forms of presentation, exhibits, and thematic groupings. Each iteration presents a rethinking of taxonomical areas rooted in traditional natural history categorizations: The Earth and Solar System, the Earth and Paleontology and the Botanical departments develop into vectors for thinking beyond the rigid and ossified categorizations of the natural museum. Thinking through these ways, early on he constructs 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 creative critique, it is a monumental...a museum can be a form of art itself.”

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 allotment 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, has remarked, 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 syntax that Rabah’s museum rests upon is fourfold.

Act 1, Curving, 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, on-canvas, photo-realistic 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 ideological and philosophical moorings. Isn’t there some sense of the gothic? Don’t all political ideas and ideologies secretly hope to become the architecture of our collective being—organizing and determining our movements and possibilities in a way that is consistent with the definitions and possibilities of the fourfold syntax that Rabah’s museum rests upon.

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 infrastructure crumbles.”

Riwaq Rehabilitation of the Palestinian Museum of Natural History and 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. 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.

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.
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, 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
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, and individual creativity, they offer politically generative practices that can serve as models for political empowerment throughout the world.”

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 parcelled 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 over determining 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 Mango 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.”

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 Beetson, Andrea Fisher, and Tony Albert. 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

Dawn Chan
proppaNOW: Occurrent Affair

“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.?“

Jennifer Herd

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 parcelled 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 overtaking 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 Mango 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.”

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 Beetson, Andrea Fisher, and Tony Albert. 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

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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.

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.
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.” (2003) a reference to the famous statement by African American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963. The mediated synergies between Black America and Black Australia were historically apparent, in that their voices were in opposition to the treatment 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. 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:

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 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.

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 expression 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. 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 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. 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. 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.

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.” 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 inferences 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.”

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.” 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 too 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 a reminder that they 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 redistribution 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. What we need is for institutions to ethically amply 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.
8 Personal interview with proppaNOW member Tony Albert, July 2, 2022.

proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood! Notes on an Exhibition

Eriola Pira

The idea of an Aboriginal urban collective was conceived in the early 1990’s by a group of white historians, who assumed, 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 won’t let off easy from there on. Richard Bell’s painting The Truth Hurts directly stages this implication and confrontation. A member of the Kamarilo, 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 identification of a material history and truths, 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 systemic 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 legitimised 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, honouring the Bama warriors of the North Queensland rainforests in the Atherton Tableland and referencing the traditional painted shields of the region, inscribed 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, a traditional 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
Mitigating some of the consequences of resource extraction in the early colonial era, Quandamooka artist Megan Cope's Kinyinyarwa Guwinyanba (“place of oyster rocks”) in Jandai and Gowar languages) is an ecological and cultural restoration project that melds the connections between ancestral processes and the land ruptured by colonialism. Since 2016, Cope has engaged with this ecolandscape 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 the destruction of Indigenous lifeways and futures. Her work points to the causality between the destruction of Indigenous ecosystems and the expansion of the settler colonies. This object, 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 repositions and reclaims these fictional images of Aboriginality to reinscribe the stories and people they expunged back into the cultural record, exploring contemporary Indigenous objects, and "revisioning the Aborigine."

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 culture iconography and posters, draws connections between Indigenous and Black struggles for self-determination, civil rights, and social justice in Australia. 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 Guyu 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 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.
Hallway

proppaNOW
Exhibition Checklist

1 Laurie Nilsen
Dollar Dilemma (Flag), 2020
Full color print on polyester
118½ × 70¾ 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 ½ × 17 ¼ 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
19⅞ × 29⅜ in each
Courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf, Sydney.

6 Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee
Conversations IV, 2023
Barbed wire, aluminum, patina
23 ½ × 31 ½ × 23 ½ 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 ¼ × 94 ¼ in
Private collection, New York.

14 Richard Bell
Man with Wallet, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
94 ½ × 70 ½ 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).

13–14
16
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7–12
2
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26
27
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
_Whitetellanormalblackfella_
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 barbecue 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 Dooley) is announcing measures to restitute 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 Etather, 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
Hm, 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 idea 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—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 Etather, 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 looks at us. So I think that basically, all of us, we're quite tired of bashing 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 9/11 it 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 political 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 rematriation. 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 elevated at state level, it's part of what's needed. And I 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 this all 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 neighborhoods and burn their fucking cars. Like they're doing in France.

Megan, pN Get rid of their possessions, strip them back.
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 cliches I like to think about is “think globally, act locally.”

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 aliyship 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 lifetimes. 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 rematriation, 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.
VLC Forum 2023 Participant Biographies

Vernon Ah Kee (proppaNOW) was born in 1967 in Innisfail, North Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. He was born to the Kuku-Yalanji people, Yidyinda, Gugu Yimidhirr people. Ah Kee’s contextual text pieces, videos, photographs and drawings form a critique of Australian popular culture from the perspective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience. 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 milieu of the Torres Strait. His work combines both individual 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 Kamarilaroi, Kooma, Jinan 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 Guugu Yimidhirr 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 engages with the Kuku Yalanji people of 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.

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 Hockey (proppaNOW) was born in 1981, Cloncurry, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Hockey belongs to the Waanyi people. Hockey 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 his paintings that comment on Aboriginal 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 Be, The Whitney Museum of American Art: Volume I, Downtown Edition, BRIC Brooklyn (2014). Her writing and interviews appear in Prattazine, Art Papers, Canvas, Ibraza, and Ozola, 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, exploration, and undermining of the idea of a center. Lane is the Executive Director of ATNSC: Center for Healing & Creative Leadership, an urban retreat center and social practice experimentation in holistic health, leadership development, Indigenous arts and culture.

Wanda Nanibush is an Anishinaabe-kwe curator, image, word, and community organizer from Beausoleil First Nation. Based in Toronto, Nanibush is the inaugural curator at the Native Art Centre. A contemporary 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 the complexities among the law 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, Kunsthalle Zürich, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Lincoln Center, Museum of Modern Art, and more. Khalil 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 networks toward the limits and possibilities of desire 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 Award. Adam Khalil is a filmmaker and artist whose work explores the complexities among the law 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, and more. Khalil presented at the VLC’s Indigenous New York: Curatorially Speaking in 2016.
workshop, research, as well as book, magazine and online art projects such as exhibition, festival, art lab, and publications and exhibitions dedicated to it explore the tension, discomfort, potential, and sociopolitical implications of "correction."
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, recording their love and commitment to 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 people that have inhabited this continental land mass, now called the Americas, 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 for the resources and intellectual support of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, led by officers JK Brown, Megan Noh, and Norman Klebba.

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 Renee T. White, and Executive Dean of the Schools of Public Engagement Mary Mohaiemen, Chair. We are grateful to Meghan Greene, Director of the Galleries, Sheila C. Johnson Design Center. Thanks also go to The New School Provost Renée T. White and VCL board member and artist Alan Michelson.

The Australian Consulate-General of New York has made a significant grant to support the programs honoring proppaNOW. Other important contributions to the 2022–2024 programs are the Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, Boris Lorue 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 who with steadfast support ensures the success of our dynamic two-year program cycles; in particular, Frances L. F. Beauty, 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 Klebba, Linda Earle, Susan Hanson, Alan Michele, 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 applaud Cleonor Álper and Norman Klebba for their generous and forward-looking commitment to our work.


This publication accompanies the Vera List Center Forum 2023, presented as part of the Center’s 2022–2024 Focus Theme “Corruption”. The VLC Forum is curated by Carin Kuoni and Erilo Pira with Camila Palomino and supported by the support of Tabor Banquer, Reál Christian, and Adrienne Umeh. proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood! is presented at The New School University Center, 63 5th Avenue, lower level. The exhibition is curated by Carin Kuoni and Erilo Pira with Camila Palomino.

Day One, Thursday, October 12
5–1 pt EDM Unchronological Timeline Activation Chapter 3 New York Workshop with Another Roadmap Africa Cluster Event Café at The New School University Center, 63 5th Avenue, lower level
5–6:15 pm EDT proppaNOW: There Goes the Neighbourhood! exhibition walkthrough with proppaNOW’s Lily Estar 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
5–6 pm EDT Prize Ceremony and Conversation proppaNOW with Wanda Nanibush The Auditorium at 66 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011 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, Aram V. Manoukian, 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.
6:30–9 pt EDM Panel conversation with Khalil Rabah and Q&A The New School Wollman Hall at The New School Enter at 65 West 11th Street A conversation honoring 2022–2024 Jane Lombard Fellow Khalil Rabah focuses on the semi-fictional Palestinian Museum of Natural History, a moving museum dedicated to generating interest in the natural and cultural history of Palestine in conversation with curator Fawzi Kabra. Rabah will discuss the ongoing project, the challenges of museology and national representation, and the impossibility of institutional structures and restructuring.
5–6:30 pm EDT Impossible Structures Panel conversation with Khalil Rabah Online
6:30–9 pt EDM Impossible Structures Panel conversation with Khalil Rabah Online
6:30–9 pt EDM Keynote: On space, or putting the ruang in ruangrupa The New School Enter at 65 West 11th Street ruangrupa member farid rakun delivers the VCL 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.
11–12 pt EDM Igniting Resistance: A Conversation with Colectivo Cherani Wollman Hall at The New School Enter at 65 West 11th Street
11–12 pm EDT Igniting Resistance: A Conversation with Colectivo Cherani members Betiel Cucu, Giovanni Fabian, Alan Silva Guardian, and prize nominee, curator, critic, and cultural theorist, Pablo Jose Ramirez discuss the collective’s, the Púrepecha resistance movement, and experiments in autonomy and self-governance. The conversation will be held in Spanish with live English interpretation.
12:30–2 pt EDM On Learning Together Wollman Hall at The New School Enter at 65 West 11th Street
On Learning Together Wellman 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 and AFC and KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, this conversation moderated by moderated by curator Sarah Hilly looks into experiences of collectives and solidarities within arts education.
2–3 pt EDM How can trust lead to growth and reflection, and create capacity for collective learning and studying? Bringing together Jane Lombard Fellows and AFC and KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, this conversation moderated by moderated by curator Sarah Hilly looks into experiences of collectives and solidarities within arts education.

Day Two, Friday, October 13
9:30–10:30 am EDT Blackness Is… Global Black and Indigenous Solidarities Online
Day Three, Saturday, October 14
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*