KARRABING FILM COLLECTIVE



MERMAIDS: MIRROR WORLDS

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Making it happen, making it one

The cooperative of grassroots media artists known as 'Karrabing Film Collective'(KFC) has been making autonomous films, installations, sound and other artworks for more than a decade, from their homelands, west of so-called Darwin. KFC formed in the wake of the NT Emergency Response (aka 'the Intervention'), when collective members were homeless and living in tents in the bush.

KFC makes films and other art with their ancestors, on and with country Mermaids, mud, blowflies, honeybee, dog, cockatoo, barramundi, pelican homelands, tents, phone cameras, troopies and tinnies vs colonial time extractive capital, and the late liberal state.



image:

FINNISS LITHIUM PROJECT

KFC work is clairvoyant and fierce, vital and urgent.

Making it happen, making it one, is how three KFC women - Angelina Lewis, Cecilia Lewis and Danielle Lane - described the emergent forces of their video-power in a planning Zoom for this show.

'Low tide turning' is an autonomous creative zone, what Anishinabe/Minnesota Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor called 'survivance' (1999)¹. More than an entity, KFC is connective practice -- flexible, contingent and possible. *Making it happen* conjoins families, clans, ancestral and colonized historical time, Law, songs, stories, memory, and radical visions. Films emerge when the season is right and the stars between the so-called 'Anson Bay' and 'Cox Peninsula', New York, and the rest of the world, align

From the beginning, the collective has documented the micro and encompassing 'effort of endurance' (Povinelli 2012) required for Karrabing families to survive precarious, disadvantaged, policed, racist, unjust relations and delimiting conditions of north Australian existence, from dispossession to housing regulation, targeting and mass media profiling.

With young people snagged between story, sense and uncertainty, and everyone fed up with the status quos of poverty, compliance and disempowerment, KFC movies commenced a decade ago by playing with 'improvisational realism' (Lea & Povinelli 2018) to simultaneously make and show an ongoing 'otherwise'.

1. "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survival name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry" (p. vii).

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Making it happen, making it one - continued...

'When the Dogs Talked' (2013), 'Windjarrameru - The Stealing C*nt\$' (2015), 'Wutharr' (2016), and two 2019 works, 'The Riots' and 'Day in the Life' position viewers at once intimately and uncomfortably near to prolonged state violence and the persistent twists of its slow knives. Here, dystopia is not apocalyptic, but everyday, suffocating, and absurd.

KFC production is mobile and migratory. It visits, sits down, dwells, explores, plays, camps and hunts. Imagining, scripting, designing, shooting and editing a KFC video ignites and kindles connection in place of the dangerous and divisive dominations of berragut (whitefella) controls on land, lives and livelihoods.

As some KFC members describe it, making films, *making it happen*, reveals story places as still points in connecting currents, songlines, and family histories. Returning to long-time unvisited places to make a video is like sitting down to hear story in the early dry season when footprints first break the ground again, refreshing memory. You remember, you learn, you make it happen.

Shot on handheld phones threaded with degraded archival and corrupted mining infomercials, KFC works have progressively pushed the affordances of digital chroma, screen speed, scale, double exposure, overlay, embodied point of view, temporal inversions, split screens, and insertions to visualise the monstrous futures of climate emergency, extraction, toxicity and imperial Australian legal domination.

The world is ending, slowly by slowly... We can sense it. When you're walking through the bush, your hair stands on end.

KFC was using hazmat PPE and talking 'bio-hazard quarantine' before an endangered forest animal virus started choking human airways. Pre and mid-pandemic futurist cli-fi dramas, 'The Mermaids' (2018) and 'Zombies' (2021), ride schlock horror into bush and waterways, letting loose ancestral non and trans human forms and forces as protagonists, point-of-view and supporting cast.

What was the world like before? A grandson asks. Before the water was poisoned the mermaids would come out in the moonlight... lots of food was everywhere... today, there's nothing. Sugarbag all gone. The mermaids are starving. Whitefellas all hooked on the idea that the mud's what they need to save themselves. The backbone-biting blowflies that live in the mud will kill everyone if they're disturbed, berragut included.

KFC cli-fi defends the future from inside the din of native title-protected extraction, and desperate 'green economic' production. Audio sampling and sound composition are feature forces. The obscenities of corporate propaganda – Monsanto, the frackers, the subterranean rare earth pillagers, Dow Chemicals – are rendered ultra-audible through catatonic slow play drawl. An acoustic ecology of kitch electro horror tones, gurgles, bleats, shrieks, signal buzz, zaps, kriol dialogue, bush crunch, footsteps, breath and tears calls makers, ancestors and audiences into new assemblages of listening.

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Making it happen, making it one - continued...

In 'Day in the Life', KFC discovered neat rows of soil samples in tied blue plastic bags in a bush clearing. That place is now a big hole. Country across the Finniss River region is being savaged in the global race to produce renewable energy storage technology as life-support in the climate catastrophe. Adelaide-based Core Lithium is generating some of the fastest ever multi-billion-dollar mining sector profits and feeding Tesla's cosmic capital ambition. Homeland waterways are already running 'milky' with toxic run-off². Dow Chemicals' former CEO is leading Australia's post-covid 'gas-fired recovery', a fracking-plus-plastics-manufacturing eco-nightmare for northern Australia.

KFC's speculative *mirror world* possession-dramas conjure the stakes of becoming-ancestor under present-future conditions of capture, invasion, possession, pollution and persistence. Showing, telling and making connections cracks the world colonial gaze of 'late toxic liberalism' (Povinelli 2020) that fixates on the spectacle of end times-Indigeneity in ruined 'remote' locales.

Perragut audiences all over the world stop and look and listen to KFC. The international film festival circuit and art-world have long recognised the value of its screens. Pre-covid, KFC members travelled extensively with their work. International biennales and major galleries have commissioned and produced significant shows, including a MoMA NYC solo in 2019. In the same year, a group of KFC women co-curated video, sound and spray-painted panels at Watch This Space gallery in Mparntwe (Alice Springs)³.

In 2022, the future ancestors foretell backwards that Karrabing has kept them alive. As KFC remakes itself and the world in each new project, so too are new ancestors, born into phone-camera, deep watery Law and family, coming up to keep making it happen.

The 2022 Coconut Studios show is the first exhibition of their work held in an art gallery on Larrakia country. Watching KFC films so close to their making matters.

Viva KFC.

- Dr Lisa Stefanoff, Mparntwe/Alice Springs, June 2022

This show is dedicated to Shannon Sing (1998 – 2022). Shannon travelled throughout the US, Europe and Southeast Asia with other Karrabing members. He will live on in Karrabing hearts and films forever.

² See Digging In: Why powering a green future means more mines. ABC TV 'Four Corners', 9 May 2022. https://www.abc.net.au/4corners/dgging-in:-why-powering-a-green-future-means-more/13873540.

³ https://www.wts.org.au/day-in-the-life

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KARRABING FILM COLLECTIVE, MERMAIDS : MIRROR WORLDS (2018) 2-channel video (sound, colour): 34:50 min.

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JUNE 3 - JUNE 26 2022

COCONUT STUDIOS 8/18 CARYOTA COURT, COCONUT GROVE, DARWIN NT, LARRAKIA COUNTRY VISIT www.coconutstudios.com.au FOR GALLERY OPENING HOURS

KARRABING FILM COLLECTIVE :

Trevor Bianamu, Ricky Bianamu, Sheree Bianamu, Cameron Bianamu, Relish Bianamu, Gavin Bianamu, Elizabeth A. Povinell Sandra Yarrowin, Daphne Yarrowin, Claude Holtze, Arthur Jorrock, Ethan Jorrock, Melissa Jorrock, Patsy Anne Jorrock Sharon Lane, Robyn Lane, Lorraine Lane, Daryl Lane, Danielle Lane, Kyle Sing Lane, Rex Edmunds, Cecilia Lewis Angelina Lewis, Kieran Sing, Aiden Sing, Kelvin Bigfoot, Katrina Lewis, Shekana Lewis, Natasha Bigfoot Lewis Peter Winsley, Quentin Shields, Marcia Lewis, Akadiya Lewis Lee, Ronald Lee, Claudette Gordon, Chloe Gordon Michael Gordon, Rex Sing, Linda Yarrowin, Claude Yarrowin, Jocelyn Yarrowin, Claudia Yarrowin, Roy Yarrowin Patrick Jorrock, Marcus Jorrock and Reggie Jorrock.

Screening, Gallery 1: Mermaids: Mirror Worlds (2018)

Screening, Gallery 2: Interviews - *Carriageworks*, 'The National' (2021), *The Riot* , MoMA PS1 (2019), *The Road*, Wexner Centre for the Arts, 'Cinetracts' (2020)

Curated by: Stephanie Martin and the Karrabing Film Collective.

Public program: The Karrabing Film Collective with Dr Kirsty Howey, Dr Lisa Stefanoff and Matthew van Roden.

GRAPHIC DESIGN: SWEAT PRESS GRAPHIC ARTS





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