

**Title**

Interlace: Inter-Institutional Engagement

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### **Title**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the processes in setting up an artist in residence between the State Parliament of Western Australia and the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University, providing the artist access to all areas of the Parliament. All artists have been chosen for their political and socially charged work. This paper discusses the inaugural artist residency and installation Interlace by long-term collaborators Nicola Kaye and Stephen Terry.

Interlace focused on power relations embedded within parliamentary protocols. This was significant for the artists, as they had to adhere to the strictures of this political space in an ethical manner, concomitantly building trust in a highly charged environment. Their residency researched the field of digital and interactive art and the performative body where parliamentarians and general staff were invited to become 'actors' within their artwork. This process sought to extend a form of engagement with parliamentary staff that was symbolic, dynamic and inclusive, regardless of position. Interlace was site-specific within the Parliament building, where films were projected within a working Parliament whilst the House was in session; offering an alternative experience for the Parliament staff of their 'closed space'. The work was adapted and shown within the University gallery to a different audience, revealing interior spaces not afforded to the general public.

This paper illuminates the importance of creative engagement within diverse institutions in meaning-making, inclusivity and representation, and how creative research impact can build agency through a site-specific context outside of the traditional gallery environment.

### **Biographies**

Dr Nicola Kaye

Dr Nicola Kaye lectures at the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University. A digital-based artist, having exhibited nationally and internationally, she collaborates with artist Stephen Terry. Recently they were awarded the inaugural J.S. Battye Creative Research Fellowship at the State Library of WA, and the inaugural

Parliament of WA and ECU Artist Residency. Nicola has presented at a number of national and international conferences, and has published book chapters and a book, *Physical/Virtual Sites: Using Creative Practice to Develop Alternative Communicative Spaces*. Her creative and written works explore social movements and cultural institutions/archives focusing on digital culture.

#### Professor Clive Barstow

Professor Clive Barstow is Executive Dean of Arts & Humanities at Edith Cowan University. His exhibition profile includes forty years of international exhibitions, artist residencies and publications in Europe, America, Asia and Australia. His work is held in a number of collections, including the Musee National d'Art Modern Pompidou Centre Paris. Clive is President of the Australian Council of Deans & Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA). His recent exhibitions include "Tomorrow is History" at Turner Galleries, Perth and "Giving Yesterday A Tomorrow" at the Hu Jiang Gallery China, and recent publications include "Encountering the Third Space, University of Oxford, UK.

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### **Interlace: Inter-Institutional Engagement**

**Keywords:** Visual Arts, Engagement, Inter-Institutional, Alternative Spaces, Power Relationships

This paper explicates how inter-institutional engagement through creative research has significant impact in building advocacy outside the traditional gallery. The processes in setting up an artist in residence between the State Parliament of Western Australia and the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University (ECU) is discussed. A brief overview is provided of the previous two artist in residences before a more focused analysis of the inaugural residency and installation *Interlace* is explored. All artists were invited—Nicola Kaye, Stephen Terry, Dianne Jones and Penelope Farlarno—and were chosen for their political and socially orientated work.

Professor Clive Barstow, Executive Dean of Arts & Humanities is responsible for the management and direction of the ECU Art Collection—a unique body of work that reflects the visual history of Western Australia. The collection includes significant Aboriginal artworks from the remote regions of Western Australia and through a loan agreement with the WA Parliament, both institutions agreed to share artworks to promote Aboriginal culture and storytelling. Through discussions with the then Speaker of the House, the Honourable Michael Sutherland, an artist in residency scheme was hatched whereby ECU would choose a significant artist to reside in Parliament House for a period of three months with total access to all areas of the building.

The now established and successful artist in residency program housed at the Western Australian Parliament House and run by ECU's School of Arts & Humanities came about through a chance meeting of unlike minds. Initially the Speaker of the House suggested a 'livening up' of the dusty corridors of power might help promote more visitors to the house, while Barstow suggested a more subversive approach where each artist could make commentary on the specific nature of the building and its position in terms of political decision making. Parliament House is adorned with portraits of power, mainly male and always white, a lasting legacy of colonial authority that seeps into every corner of life within the building. This presented a

perfect opportunity to bring reflection and critique to this hallowed and protected space and to share this reflection with the Parliamentarians and with the public. Thankfully the Speaker of the House agreed—a brave decision considering the risk of the unknown and the possible negative responses that could come from both within and outside of this institution.

Over the period of three years, the residency has created uniquely engaging artistic opportunities in art historical, cultural and political contexts. Artists had provision of a functioning office, access to archival and other research material, opportunities to observe political process and appointments to engage with and interview staff. Exploratory performative and new media practices were encouraged as well as more ‘traditional’ methodologies.

The fact that Western Australia has decreasing opportunities for artists to exhibit in private galleries<sup>1</sup> and in particular in institutions deemed at nationally significant level when it comes to claiming non-traditional outputs for ERA, means that artists have to look for alternative, and in this case unique opportunities to exhibit. Impact and engagement measures in the most recent ERA assessment should be an area of strength for the arts and humanities, and this project in particular has created a distinctive form of impact both on the Parliamentarians sharing the thoughts and ideas of the artists throughout the residency, and to the public who visit Parliament House who can engage in much needed discourse around the established processes and operations of State Parliament.

Three of the four artists have been coincidentally female, bringing to the fore issues of gender and equity to a space where history has until recently excluded them. Artist Penelope Forlano investigated the theme of the emerging presence of females in the ongoing story of Parliament, and cleverly and pertinently symbolised

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<sup>1</sup> Between the very short timeframe of presenting this paper at the 2019 ACUADS conference and the submission for publication, owner and Director of Turner Galleries in Perth, Helen Turner, announced the imminent closure of Turner Galleries after twenty years in operation from the Church Gallery to its’ current incarnation. Turner Galleries is one of Perth’s largest commercial galleries and arguably Perth’s premiere commercial space. This gallery closure, adding to a host of recent closures, clearly demonstrates the significant problems facing Perth’s cultural landscape, and the necessity therefore of engaging with diverse institutions and spaces.



Figure 1: Penelope Forlano (2018), *The Shield of Voices* [installation shot–Parliament House], (image courtesy of the artist).

their presence through calling cards. *The Shield of Voices* (Figures 1 & 2) documents the struggle that women have faced in history and in gaining equity and respect in our highest institution of decision makers. Forlano (2018) remarked:

When I started, I was overwhelmed by the architecture and its rich interior. I recognized that this space was still very much in the style of a Victorian gentleman's club despite this space housing our democratically elected individuals and that we are a multicultural society, sitting on Aboriginal land, in the 21st century. I was immediately drawn to the stories of the pioneering women. Women had to combat some challenges very foreign to me. One of Edith Cowan's first speeches reminded me that it wasn't that long ago that women were once considered men's property.



Figure 2: Penelope Forlano (2018), *The Shield of Voices* [detail], (image courtesy of the artist).

Artist Dianne Jones was selected specifically for her work on Aboriginal identity as a missing piece of history within white man's storytelling. Her series of explicit and provocative photographs entitled *The Grand Tour* (Figure 3) as a search for 'the roots of civilisation... [was] critiqued as essential to ensuring ruling class control through the maintenance of cultural hegemony' (Jones, 2017, n.p.). Referencing Marcia Langton's (2003) commentary:

The very idea of an 'Australian' landscape is based on *erasure*. This erasure is not simply that of nature subsumed and recast by culture, but that of the distinctly Aboriginal, autochthonous spiritual landscapes obliterated by the recreant settler visions which literally followed the frontier in the canvas bags of artists who came to paint the new land. (p. 52)

Jones presents a form of erasure beyond representational Arcadian landscapes, rather she offers a compelling proposition of female Aboriginal representation within the power structures of the Australian Parliamentary system. Jones' work created a



Figure 3: Dianne Jones (2017), *The Grand Tour*, [digital print], (image courtesy of the artist).

much-needed jolt to the system through a clever play of white male erasure, replaced with Aboriginal female Parliamentarians as the new (and original) decision makers of this ancient land. In her summary of the residency Jones (2017) comments:

As a Noongar artist invited to spend time in Parliament House, I was taken on tours of the building, its many rooms, halls and artworks. I witnessed tours regularly. I learnt about the many symbols and traditions that evoke how a culture creates a sense of grandeur befitting the gravitas of ‘founding a nation’, the historical ties with Britain, the solemn rituals required for power to make laws impacting us every day. The height, the arches, the statues and the leather-bound books are crafted to induce awe, to speak of some divine right to possess and govern us. I am not a tourist here on Noongar land. (n.p.)

Inaugural artists in residence Nicola Kaye and Stephen Terry also focused on power relations embedded within Parliamentary protocols. They have a history of working within diverse cultural institutions—museums, libraries, and various historical contexts—subverting hierarchies and dominant narratives of power. This opportunity however, proved to be a more difficult undertaking than first anticipated by the artists—it is one thing to critique from outside the institution, but quite another from within the space itself. Furthermore, there was a weight of responsibility to ensure the continuation of the residency for subsequent artists, for the developing partnership that Barstow was building, and for the reputation of the university. The conundrum therefore, was how to engage socially and politically within constraints



imposed upon the site, and how to navigate their subsequent complicity? The following explicates how this trajectory was navigated.

There are many Parliamentary protocols (“Protocols”, n.d.) in which to adhere, and most significantly for the artists were those concerning filming and photographing within Parliament House:

Photography and filming are not permitted within Parliament House, including foyers and hallways, the members’ dining room, the visitors’ lounge and the courtyard, without the express approval of both Presiding Officers. ... When permission is granted, filming and photography shall not include persons without their approval; offend against the dignity of Parliament; be used for satire or ridicule; be used for party political advertising or election campaigns; or be used for sponsorship or advertising. (n.p.)

Given such seeming restrictions, how to involve the Parliamentarians and staff? What was the engagement to be, and what impact were the artists to engender? Given the resultant work would be shown within Parliament House, to a relatively closed audience—their decision was to make the work specific to such an audience, and thus to reveal the space and those working within it in a new and divergent manner.

Parliament House was described by many as a home away from home—a village, and as such the artists reflexively questioned what role art had within such a space, as Justine van Mourik (cited in Martin, 2019), Director of the Art Collection Parliament House in Canberra notes, ‘The purpose of art in the building is not to be a gallery, it really is more to provide a kind of environment that is conducive to work, it is more of a domestic setting. It’s like furnishing a very large house’. This was however antithetical to the artists aim, as for them it was how to critically intervene into the space and into the familial and everydayness of this context. Yet the domesticity van Mourik (2019) speaks of was most certainly shared by those the artists spoke with. Therefore the everydayness of the space, the normativity for those working within it, and how to navigate the exclusive/inclusive binary they found themselves in was to become their focus. The artists were extremely welcomed into the space, where they adopted Parliamentary protocols, such as adhering to the appropriate dress standards and so on. They were conspicuous to begin with, then very quickly became part of the fabric of the building, and most surprisingly, to some degree the culture—eating, drinking, conversing, inhabiting the space. Most

significantly there became an increasing engagement through a building of *trust* and respect that worked both-ways.

As the university urges us to make increasing connections with industries and diverse communities, the arts have a pivotal role to play. Outlined in the Australia Council's, *Engaged Communities: Arts Connecting with Communities*, it is noted:

Community engagement covers all the ways that artists and arts organisations can connect with communities. Engaging with a community is about creating a healthy and committed relationship between equals, based on mutual respect and reciprocity...Engaging with communities is a fluid activity which requires ongoing maintenance, communication and respect for the 'process' of working together. (n.p.)

The 'process' of working together develops relationships through respect and taking responsibility in navigating power relations, that elicited reciprocity and engagement.

The artists worked closely with Dr Isla MacPhail, Sergeant-at-Arms and Principal Research Officer at Parliament, who negotiated for the artists to film in the space. At first this brought much attention and to a degree suspicion, especially within unlikely spaces such as the toilets, which revealed Victorian fittings, and was incorporated into the artists archive. The common response to such suspicion and questioning, was the retort 'we are the artists in residence'. As artists it was accepted that what they were doing was invariably *different* and the longer they spent time there the more accepting people became.

It became imperative for the artists to engage directly with Parliamentarians and staff and as such to include them in the development of their work, yet they were disallowed to film individuals. It was this protocol they challenged by inviting Parliamentarians and staff to participate with the proviso they would be made anonymous by clothing them (metaphorically and filmically) with their developing archive comprising architecture, objects, sculptures, and the flora of Parliament House. Their intention was to render the individuals anonymous, and homogenous—regardless of position and in so doing challenge inherent power structures and hierarchies.



Figure 4: Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry (2016), *Interlace* [invitation], digital print, (image courtesy of the artists).

For the artists Parliament House was constructed like a filmset emanating pomp, privilege, ceremony and ritual. Parliamentarians and staff therefore became ‘actors’ within the artists constructed narratives. Many participated in being filmed, yet surprisingly some wore their specific Parliamentary regalia that demarcated their position, such as official gowns, or brought equipment particular to their job. Antithetical to the artist’s idea in challenging such hierarchies, the participants themselves held onto their prescribed institutionalised identity, seemingly unable to dissociate themselves.



Figure 5: Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry (2016), *Interlace* [installation shot #1], (image courtesy of the artists).

The resultant work *Interlace* was exhibited in the Parliament House Atrium, (Figure 5), which is centrally located, and a prominent site for eating, socialising and accessing the Chambers. The site-specificity of the work was incredibly important, intervening into the fabric of the building as the House was sitting and within the

everyday workings of the space. The place the work inhabited was not a gallery, or a space that could be domesticated, and was reinforced by the form of the work—digital projections. The projections had to be timed so the space was dark enough to view the work, as the lighting couldn't simply be turned off (Figure 6). The work added to this film set, and in fact became part of it—again the complicit nature of the residency. It was choreographed so the projections would be revealed as the speeches finished. In addition to the projections (four in total) there were large digital screens, a total of six works within the Atrium.



Figure 6: Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry (2016), *Interlace* [installation shot #2], (image courtesy of the artists).

Additionally, the artists were intrigued by the annunciator screens, that are ubiquitous (around two hundred or so) screening the goings on in the Upper and Lower House. These screens were used as a platform for the artists, as a site of surveillance, where for a short time their work intervened into every space, into the machinations of Parliamentary power. This was the artists way of proposing alternative narratives of the everyday workings of this site.

Engagement and the subsequent *impact* in this context are difficult to measure within current rubrics, yet it is significant. The work engaged the Parliamentarians and staff in a direct way where they had become embodied within the work. Although they had been rendered anonymous, there was great excitement and anticipation in firstly identifying themselves and then experiencing how they had been rendered. The participants, the Parliamentary actors, were framed within the site in real-time and projected, simultaneously, 'in-formed or in-framed by [being] physically present...in specific situations bound in time and space. The[ir] embodied existence [was] the

filter, the nexus and the materiality of the[ir] art experience” (“Embodiment”, 2017). The Parliamentary actors thus engaged with the work in a manner that was embodied.

Furthermore, *engagement* for the artists and their initial un-comfortability, was quickly usurped as they became embedded within the building and trust was quickly developed. A site that has the utmost protocols and strictures, was open to the artists filming and inhabiting the space at all times, day and night. The artists witnessed and became part, for the duration of the residency—a working Parliament. The *engagement* had become one of both complicity and acceptance. Furthermore, the work is on permanent display, demonstrating how art can intervene centres of power, strategising diverse forms of engagement in spaces seemingly closed and fixed. Even more urgently in our current climate where the Arts are increasingly having to justify their relevance—developing new and alternative venues and dynamic and diverse collaborative partners is essential.

The Parliament context is critical for art practitioners to have a presence and voice in developing funding and policy, as the visual arts peak body, the National Association for Visual Arts is importantly engendering with the recent “Arts Day on the Hill” program. As Holly Morrison (2019) notes this initiative importantly:

Brings together an artist or arts workers from every state and territory to be trained in policy engagement and advocacy ahead of meetings from MPs. This will happen on the first sitting after the winter break, each year for an initial three years.

In the case of this residency, however, advocacy is engendered by artists integrating and in fact inhabiting a working Parliament. The former Arts Minister, the Honourable John Day became involved in the *Interlace* project, and indeed became an actor within the work itself (we are all too aware of the complexity in getting ministers engaged in their portfolios)! As an extension of the success of *Interlace*, was presenting a development of the work, *Interlace: Amendment* in 2017 (Figure 7) in one of ECU’s galleries, Gallery 25, where a number of Parliamentary dignitaries and staff attended the exhibition.



Figure 7: Nicola Kaye & Stephen Terry (2017), *Interlace: amendment [invitation]*, (image courtesy of the artists).

Having such publics in a contemporary gallery context on the grounds of the university is prescient in demonstrating *engagement* and the enduring inter-institutional connections that can, and need to be developed and sustained.

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