



*Making Ground* is held on land where sovereignty was never ceded; in nipaluna, on the land and waters of the Muwinina people. CONSTANCE and all contributors pay respect to elders past, present and future, and recognise the Palawa people as the traditional and ongoing custodians of lutruwita.

**constanceari.org/  
making-ground**

*Making Ground* brings together eight artists across three sites of colonial ruin. Marian Abboud, Elyas Alavi, Hannah Brontë, Shiraz Bayjoo and Shivanjani Lal, Dean Cross, Sancintya Mohini Simpson and Shireen Taweel augment these sites, their work sitting in dialogue with the landscape and histories of each place. Taken together, this exhibition explores displacement, connection and memory in the digital age.

Displacement and its effects are explored from different points of understanding. How is it experienced by an Indigenous person, living in a country stolen from them? And how is it experienced by a person separated from an ancestral homeland by distance, but to which they remain connected? Do these experiences intersect?

There are moments of overlap in these works, and moments of difference. Water appears and reappears, as a bearer of memory, a point of return, but also a carrier of stolen bodies. Intergenerationality is something that underscores many of these works. And so is the idea of the bridge, or the portal, that connects one thing, or one place, to another.

Together these artists map the ways in which memory and connection, knowledge, language, history, loss and trauma are passed through not only familial systems, but community, land, forest, water, body and

technology. Examining how these systems connect us to place and time.

It's impossible to separate art from the moment in time in which it's made. Putting together this project and responding to these ideas in this moment has meant that the artists have viewed these ideas through an additional lens - one of restricted movement caused by a pandemic, digital spaces taking on new meaning and importance. These spaces simultaneously abstract us from, and connect us with, time, place and each other. They can both dis-place and re-place us.

Many of the artists in *Making Ground* have never visited these sites, and some have never set foot on the island. Their movements and actions have been restricted in many expected and unexpected ways in the process of making or adapting work for this exhibition. All of this work has been done remotely; digital space has been a site of investigation and a site of working. And the lines between curation and collaboration blur ever more slightly.

The exhibition moves through nipaluna (Hobart) linking three former military batteries, which stand as reminders of the immense loss and brutality of colonialism. Princes Park Magazine, a former gunpowder store that lies hidden under a city park; Alexandra Battery, a large fort complex that sits on a suburban hillside, now sandwiched amongst houses and apartments; and Blinking Billy Point, the ruined casement of a military searchlight, placed on the shores of timtumili minanya (River Derwent) to watch for 'intruders' travelling by water.

None of these sites were made to display artworks. They are hard, unyielding and inflexible. Each evening for the duration of the exhibition they are activated and awakened with the works of these eight artists, then dismantled and returned to dormancy each day. *Making Ground* offers up these colonial sites for artists from Indigenous and diasporic backgrounds to reclaim and occupy. Their interventions are temporary, fleeting, but act as a disruption of these spaces - like the soft distortion of light moving against sandstone, or the echo of two rivers speaking.

**Nadia Refaei, 2021**

**Princes Park Magazine  
Alexandra Battery  
Blinking Billy Point**

## **Making Ground**

**MARIAN ABOUD**

**ELYAS ALAVI**

**HANNAH BRONTË**

**SHIRAZ BAYJOO  
& SHIVANJANI LAL**

**DEAN CROSS**

**SANCINTYA MOHINI SIMPSON**

**SHIREEN TAWHEEL**

Curated by **Nadia Refaei**

**22-24, 30-31 January 2021**

## ALEXANDRA BATTERY:

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson**, *Across Dark Waters*, 2019, dual-channel video and sound: 6.52 min

*Across Dark Waters* explores the movement of bodies and lived experience of indentured labourers sent to work, from India to South Africa, on colonial sugar plantations. Sancintya Mohini Simpson navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the colonial archive. Sancintya's work is informed by the archival material that is available to her, and the living memory and reality of herself and family. Continuing to trace her maternal background of indenture, she creates a new archive that speaks to shared narratives of indentured labour, and her re-representation of history creates a reflective space for ongoing resistance and healing.

**Marian Abboud**, *Not her Reflection (An ongoing series of cross cultural offerings)*, 2021, digital print on mesh

*Not her Reflection* is part of an ongoing series of work that investigates complex migrant histories in the style of classical folkloric Arabic storytelling and supernatural fiction, and revisiting the celestial phenomena through apparitions. Working across generations from the matriarchal bloodline, Marian looks at the overlapping connections of water memory and blessings through communal gatherings, the connection of place through different perspectives and the value we assign to knowledge and information that we now hold.

**Hannah Brontë**, *tellus terra portal*, 2021, digital print on mesh

Reflecting on the time capsule or memory of country that doesn't forget its burns from a year ago. And yet looking at where we are now, in a new pandemic, catastrophe - nature has seen cyclic changes. It all goes

around and seeps into the earth only to become rain. And fall back down to begin again.

**Elyas Alavi**, *Doesn't it taste of blood?*, 2020, neon, acrylic board

Earlier last year, I found one of my short poems painted on streets in Iran, picked up by the community as a kind of rallying cry. The short poem speaks to the toll of war on the individual. Hearing about it from friends, then seeing images that appear online, I felt a sense of giving ownership over my words to the people - especially as my books have recently been banned by the government in Iran.

Poem translated from Farsi to English:  
As you draw water from a well  
and make tea with that water,  
doesn't it taste of blood?

Although these words were erased off the streets by the authorities, some marks remain. The fragility and the process of making neon with human breath and gas is important and I see the object as alive. Neon acts as the spirit of that erased graffiti.

## BLINKING BILLY POINT:

**Shiraz Bayjoo and Shivanjani Lal**, *Nadi*, 2021, single-channel video and sound: 4.35 min

*Nadi*, meaning river, is a collaborative work by Shiraz Bayjoo and Shivanjani Lal. Shot on the Meghna River in Bangladesh and edited in London, with audio translated and read by their mothers: Arzmand Bayjoo, and Shakuntala Lal in Mauritian Creole and Fijian Hindi. *Nadi* is a site of both departure and return for these artists, as it explores their shared histories of indenture, language as a site of resilience and the movement of bodies both in the past as well as in the now.

## PRINCES PARK MAGAZINE:

**Shireen Taweel**, *tracing transcendence*, 2018, copper sculptures, dual-channel video: 10 min, sound: 3 hr

Shireen Taweel traces the presence of Muslim cameleers in the outback since the 1800s, and considers how the sacred sites and prayer spaces they left behind tell stories that resonate today in contemporary Muslim Australia. Inspired by remote Australian landscapes and Islamic decorative arts, Shireen's approach is rooted in cross-cultural dialogue. The resulting work is a delicate and meditative intersection of past, present and future.

## ONE ON EACH SITE:

**Dean Cross with Nadia Refaei**, *everyone stone displaced*, 2021, Ngunnawal/Ngambri stones, post boxes, text

This stone you can see on the table is one of three perfect skipping stones collected from my home. They are Ngunnawal/Ngambri stones. Chosen because they are flat, close to round and not too heavy or light. They left my hand from Warrang/Sydney on Gadigal and Wangal land, where I live, work and go to the post office. Each stone is a cypher. Coded with its history, embalmed in geological time. A stone is water disguised. That sentence is worth repeating. A stone is water disguised. These three stones that have landed on lutruwita should be considered ambassadors. They are every stone displaced. Lift your eyes briefly from the page. That stone wall your gaze landed on, the one weathered, worn and maybe even defaced, is someone's Country. Country transmogrified by colonial hands. But Country nonetheless – this is what we mean when we say Always Was and Always Will Be. Country persists. These three stones are 881 stones, skipped across the surface of the continent in one unbroken chain, a songline of stones shared across nations.

*Making Ground* is presented by CONSTANCE ARI in partnership with Mona Foma, and assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts.

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Image credit: Detail of *Dean Cross, every stone displaced*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



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