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ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEPREDATION:
THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN

by
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ABSTRACT

Dissertation: This project delves into the critical issue of environmental degradation within the Murray Darling River system, examining the multifaceted relationship between water, the Australian landscape, capitalism, and environmental adversity. This thesis sheds light on the profound implications of water representation in this region. Water, an essential element for life, knows no geographical boundaries, transcending artificial divisions. However, in 'free markets', the smooth flow of capital often intersects with the natural flow of water, giving rise to turbulence manifesting in crises and catastrophes. Much of the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) experienced significant changes in land cover and land use with the arrival of European settlers in the 1800s. The construction of dams and the development of irrigation followed in the early 1900s. European land uses significantly changed the hydrology and water quality of catchments in the MDB. Land use(s) continues to change today, and the consequences of global warming are also impacting the catchments. However, the introduction of European land use, including irrigation, had the most profound influence on river water quality. The rivers continue to adjust to those changes today.

Studio Work: This body of work seeks to foreground critical issues related to the imaging and ownership of land, exploring the potent intersection of art, dissent, and water awareness in the MDB. It posits that visual art remains one of the most effective forms of protest, offering artists a powerful medium to confront the profound impacts of climate change. Comprising paintings, installations, and animation, this project represents a thought-provoking and poetic exploration. Embedded within this body of work are images and words that act as conduits, illuminating the broader contextual forces and offering insights into the artist's perspective. The plumbing installation, meticulously depicting the materials of a plumbing system with tubing painted to resemble rivers, unveils hidden networks while accentuating the significance of drainage and water pipes in our daily routines. The small blue LED light signifies a deconstructive method of analysing text; the word 'landscape' becomes a verb and articulates a lively substance that runs alongside and inside humans – power and water. The project also explores movement through animation, challenging binary distinctions between life and stillness, humans and non-humans.

INTRODUCTION

This project plays out in the MDB. The dual outcomes of this thesis are a body of visual artwork and a paper that elaborates on the work's political, historical, and cultural underpinnings. Water is a concept if you think slowly about an idea that runs fast through a landscape. Water is not passive; it is a raw and active substance.

Water is vital, vibrant and has lively powers; it has a force with earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption.

While I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and their significant relationship to the MDB, the core of this thesis delves into the water markets, particularly those traded on the New York Stock Exchange. I recognise my identity as a white woman of European heritage, and I wish to express my commitment to the concerns of First Nations people. Given my heritage, I am not in a position to represent the indigenous concerns of the Murray-Darling River region. I note the region's complex politics with more than 40 First Nations who share my grave concerns for the Basin.¹ In addition to the limitations of this thesis Sullivan, (2023) reviewed the recent changes in the MDB (see Appendix A for further information).

Throughout history, artists have found water to be a significant source of inspiration. Water's fluidity, transparency, and reflective qualities can carry symbolic meanings and metaphors. It can represent purity, life, renewal, and transformation. It has an aesthetic appeal; its shimmering surfaces, ripples and effects are captivating, and the light on the water can create mesmerising visual effects. Bodies of water, whether tranquil lakes, raging seas, or gentle streams, evoke various moods and atmospheres. It is inherently dynamic, constantly in motion. Water holds a cultural, mythological, and spiritual significance in many societies, and capturing the energy and rhythm of water in art can bring a sense of dynamism to the work.

Water consumption in Australia has changed since the country was settled in 1788. Human interaction with the land has been altered due to colonisation and development, leading to a shift in the relationship between people and the environment. It is important to

¹ Kath Sullivan, "Government strikes Murray-Darling Basin Deal with Greens", *ABC News*, accessed November 27, 2023, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-27/murray-darling-basin-water-deal/103153548?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=mail

note that the MDB and waters are the traditional territories of over 40 Indigenous nations. About 5% of the Basin comprises floodplain forests, lakes, rivers, and other wetland habitats. The rivers are a vital water source for around three million Australians, including farms that require irrigation. As a result, a significant amount of water is extracted from these rivers.²

The MDB spans over one-seventh of Australian land, covering most of New South Wales, parts of Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, and the Australian Capital Territory. It encompasses the Murray River and Darling River/Baarka and their tributaries.

Chapter one, I will explore the politics of water in the MDB. However, has it achieved its objectives, and are water markets at the heart of the problem? I will include environmental historian Daniel Connell, author and political journalist Margaret Simons, and UK researcher Ross Beveridge's insights into this issue.

Chapter two examines the impact of masculinity versus femininity on the landscape and how historical events could have influenced the environment. Academic and artist Ross Gibson and Feminist author Kay Schaffer have this perspective based on a colonial mentality of domination and control.

Chapter three discusses works by visual artists Bonita Ely, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Hans Haacke. Australian-born Bonita Ely uses installations, sculptures, and performances to bring attention to ecological and social issues. American artist Robert Smithson is famous for his earthworks and land art, including the iconic Spiral Jetty. Nancy Holt's space and place landscapes emphasise the relationship between nature and culture and highlight the Earth's geological processes. At the same time, German-born US-based conceptual artist Hans Haacke is well-known for linking art to politics.

Chapter four, I discuss my painting and installation-based art practice. I use water from the MDB in the artwork and portray unidentified men wearing suits who symbolise the fundamental structure of our community, such as government, corporate management, private enterprises, and workplaces. The work is based on satire as a story method that exposes flaws in people or a system in power.

² Jamie Pittock, "With less than a year to go, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is in a dreadful mess. These five steps are needed to fix it", *The Conversation*, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/with-less-than-a-year-to-go-the-murray-darling-basin-plan-is-in-a-dreadful-mess-these-5-steps-are-needed-to-fix-it-209328>

In 2012, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was passed as law by the Labor government. The plan is set to be fully implemented and audited by June 30, 2024. Its primary goal is to restrict the amount of water taken from the Basin to enhance the state of freshwater ecosystems while still upholding the social and financial advantages of irrigated agriculture. But will this plan play out?

CHAPTER ONE

The Politics of Water in the Murray Darling River System

My artwork is centred around a narrative of masculine figures, through which I aim to convey my message. Chapter one of my written piece delves into the concept of masculinity in water markets, which is the very essence of my artwork. I have carefully chosen these figures to narrate a complex story about the MDB, which will be further explored and discussed in Chapter Four. This chapter explores how water management practices and the implementation of water markets have impacted the MDB. Water, or the lack of it, can have significant long-term impacts on the local dynamics of water in this region. Water scarcity in Australia and the increasing need for water resources is a considerable concern. Water availability is crucial for humanity due to the current ecological and climate change crisis. The damage to the built and natural environment in the MDB is captured in the news and the drone footage widely shared on social media – it's obvious and front of mind. Our climate's extreme and unpredictable nature is evident, with floods, droughts, and the devastating effects of blackwater on our native fish making headlines.

Privatisation is a significant aspect of contemporary politics, and this approach has transformed the role of Governments and the relationships between the state and society globally.³ Policies like privatisation, market liberalisation, and commercialisation of public entities have been key in this transformation since the 1980s.⁴ This chapter acknowledges the Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), established in 2012 and developed to improve the river's health and its floodplains and increase the water available to the environment.

The political voices in this chapter who provide valuable analysis that reveals concealed connections and enhances our comprehension of water politics are environmental historian Daniel Connell, author and political journalist Margaret Simons and UK Researcher Ross Beveridge, who offers insightful analysis into the global social and political dilemma of water.

³ Jacques Ranciere, *Hatred of Democracy*, (London: Verso, 2009), 15. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 62; Erik Swyngedouw, "The Antinomies of the Post-political City. In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production," *International Journal of Environmental Research* 33, no.3 (2009): 601; Slavoj Zizek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, (London: Verso, 2008), 22.

⁴ Peter Marcuse, "From Critical Urban Theory to the Right of the City," *City* 13, no. 2-3 (2009): 185.

Privatisation of Water

Political academic and scholar Ross Beveridge deals with broader international apprehensions concerning water struggles. His scholarly research has determined that this is evident, locally, and globally, with many waterways under stress and humans being impacted by this subjugation through the water.⁵

Beveridge discusses in his article "From Post-Politics to a Politics of Possibility? Unravelling the privatisation of the Berlin Water Company" that privatisation decisions in sectors like the car industry, telecommunications, and postal services have not resulted in significant conflicts. Still, privatising drinking water supply and wastewater disposal have often been vehemently opposed.⁶ Water is an essential resource that other alternatives cannot replace. Additionally, water is closely linked to local contingencies in urban governance and nature, making it crucial to nature-society relationships.⁷⁸

In cities, the focus on making the land "competitive" was mainly due to challenges brought by globalisation. The goal was to make the land as attractive as possible to investment and seek the best conditions for conducting business.⁹ The introduction of a global water market and the reconfiguration of the public sector entailed not only an urban struggle but the privatisation that took place in cities was a noticeable change. It should be viewed as a component of the transformation of urban governance.¹⁰ This transformation resulted in new types of social and spatial fragmentation.¹¹

⁵ Ross Beveridge, *A Politics of Inevitability: The Privatisation of the Berlin Water Company, the Global City Discourse and Governance in 1990s Berlin*, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 52. Ross Beveridge, Frank Huesker, Matthias Naumann, "From post-politics to a politics of possibility? Unravelling the privatisation of Berlin Water Company," *Geoforum* 51, (2014): 66.

⁶ Beveridge, "From post-politics to a politics of possibility? Unravelling the privatisation of the Berlin Water Company," 66.

⁷ Karen Bakker, "The Limits of Neoliberal Natures: Debating Green Liberalism," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 715; Noel Castree, "Neoliberalising Nature: The Logistics of Deregulation and Regulation," *Environment and Planning A* 40, no. 1 (2008): 131.

⁸ Ben Page, "Paying for water and the geography of commodities," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 3 (2005): 293.

⁹ David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler* 71, no.1 (1989): 3.

¹⁰ Rhodante Ahlers, "Fixing and Nixing: The Politics of Water Privatisation," *Review of Radical Political Economies* 42, no. 2 (2010): 213.

¹¹ Steve Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 16.

Australia's continuing efforts to manage its water resources strategically and exert control over the region's water supply have defined its relationships with neighbouring states and downstream areas, particularly regarding the Murray and Darling Rivers, turning the tap off and on the river systems.

In 2019, the Four Corners “Cash Splash: Taxpayer Dollars, Secretive Deals and the Lucrative Business of Water” interview by Sean Rubinstein-Dunlop reported on a provocative program that exposed MD water as highly valuable and is sometimes referred to as liquid gold.¹² In 2023, Jamie Pittock, Professor, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, wrote that the MDBP is a historic deal between State and Federal Governments to save Australia’s most important river system. The A\$13 billion plan, inked over a decade ago, was supposed to rein in the water extracted by farmers and communities and ensure the environment got the needed water.¹³ The river system is essential for Australian agriculture and supports the river’s preservation. Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Budget 2020-2021 states that the Australian Federal Government has set aside A\$269.6 million of taxpayer funds for a four-year Murray-Darling Investment Package to implement a rescue plan in 2024.¹⁴

¹² “Cash Splash: Taxpayer dollars, secretive deals and the lucrative business of water,” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, accessed June 4, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZtgXELEeQQ>

¹³ Jamie Pittock, “With less than a year to go, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is in a dreadful mess. These five steps are needed to fix it”, *The Conversation*, July 18, 2023, 1.

¹⁴ “Investing in the Murray-Darling Basin Communities and Building Confidence in the Basin Plan,” Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Budget 2020-2021, accessed August 12, 2023, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview202021/MurrayDarlingBasin#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20the%202020,Budget%20Measures%3A%20Budget%20Paper%20No.



Figure 1. Tim J Keegan. *Aerial: The Darling River from 15,000 feet. Near Menindee on the flight from Dubbo to Broken Hill.* 2009. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/suburbanbloke/3515389244/>

Pittock maintains that less than a year out and the plan's deadlines are a mess. Governments cannot agree on who will get the water and when. There is a debate regarding the investment value and effectiveness of the rescue plan for river systems. It has yet to be determined if it will be successful. Unfortunately, the issue remains unresolved, and the river system continues to face a crisis. Australia faced one of the most severe droughts in 2020, followed by extensive flooding the next year. The media coverage highlighted the devastating effects of mass fish mortality, struggling farmers, and the flooding of several states. Grants were given to irrigators to conserve water, but big businesses benefited the most from it, using taxpayers' money.¹⁵

¹⁵ "Cash Splash: Taxpayer dollars, secretive deals and the lucrative business of water," Australian Broadcasting Corporation.



Figure 2. Ben Spraggon, *A Map of the Murray Darling Basin in Australia*, 2016. ABC News <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-21/what-is-the-murray-darling-basin-plan/8043180>

The MDB is shaped like a fan from the rivers that flow westward from the Great Dividing Range. Its river system is a massive network that covers over one million square kilometres and encompasses much of New South Wales, large portions of Victoria, south-eastern Queensland, and some parts of South Australia. The catchment on top is very flat and exits at Murray Bridge in South Australia.¹⁶ Rainfall is also low and variable, except in the east, and most parts of the catchment do not supply any run-off to the major streams.¹⁷ Political journalist Margaret Simons's *Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin* essay ascertains that the Darling-Baaka River is the third-longest in Australia, measuring 1,472 kilometres from its source in New South Wales to its confluence with the Murray River at the border town, Wentworth. It is in poor health through farming, economic structures such as dams and weirs, and Government policies. It depends on the boom-and-bust rains of the semi-tropical north, unlike the Murrumbidgee and

¹⁶ "The Basin," Murray Darling Basin Authority, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin>

¹⁷ Thilak Mallawaarachchi, et al. "Water Allocation in Australia's Murray-Darling Basin: Managing Change under heightened Uncertainty," *Economic Analysis and Policy*, Elsevier, 66 (C) (2020): 345.

Murray Rivers, which are fed by the melting snow in the spring. During the drought periods of 2019, it rarely ran at all.¹⁸

In the 1980s, the cotton industry's growth towards northern regions caused less water to flow into the Menindee Lakes. Recent findings indicate that managing water upstream has caused drought in the Lower Darling for up to three years before it hits upstream areas. Locals determined in 2020 that the NSW Government, with the support of the Commonwealth, has placed more importance on satisfying influential irrigation communities than the welfare of the Lower Darling, leading to a devastating outcome.¹⁹ The Menindee Lakes, once an ephemeral lake system, are no longer in their natural state. They are controlled by a series of outlets, weirs, and regulators installed in the 1960s to store water for agriculture. These are massive eroded dry riverbeds on the terrain, generally managed by WaterNSW.²⁰

The Tragedy of the Murray Darling River

In her significant and thoroughly researched article, Simons unpacks the worrying concerns of the Basin and ascertains that the Menindee Lakes region plays a crucial role in the MDBP's narrative. Nonetheless, it would have remained unknown if not for the occurrences of the 2018 and 2019 summers. Millions of fish died during this period, leaving a silver hue from their bellies on the scenery. This incident drew the interest of the residents, water officials and media.²¹ More recently, in March 2023, satellite analysis showed toxic blackwater flowed into the Darling-Baaka River via the Wetherell outlet two days before the deaths of the fish. This is one of the worst mass fish kills in living memory, which saw millions of fish floating dead on the Darling-Baaka River near Menindee. It may have been attributed to an alleged failed strategy to release a combination of "blackwater" and clean water by authorities.²²

¹⁸ Margaret Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin," *Quarterly Essay*, no. 77 (2020): 18.

¹⁹ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin," 18.

²⁰ "Menindee Lakes: A Series of Lakes Along the Darling River," WaterNSW, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.watarnsw.com.au/nsw-dams/regional-nsw-dams/menindee-lakes>

²¹ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin," 21.

²² Anne Davies, "Menindee Fish Kill May Have Been Partly Caused by the Release of 'Black' and Clean Water by Authorities, Researchers Claim," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/apr/11/menindee-mass-fish-kill-satellite-images-researchers-blackwater-release-darling-baaka-river-australia>



Figure 3. Samara Anderson, *Dead Fish near Menindee*, 2023. Australian Associated Press
<https://theconversation.com/with-less-than-a-year-to-go-the-murray-darling-basin-plan-is-in-a-dreadful-mess-these-5-steps-are-needed-to-fix-it->

During dry years, the lakes remain empty; however, when they are filled with water, they become a thriving habitat for waterbirds and fish. These lakes serve as a breeding ground for golden and silver perch and a popular recreational spot for boaters from Broken Hill.²³ The Menindee Lakes are now man-made water storage areas equipped with gates, weirs, and spillways. Despite being shallow, they can hold up to 2000 gigalitres of water, which is beneficial for a water system that needs more supply.²⁴ The Menindee Lakes were a series of lakes once connected to the Darling River by short creeks. Still, the Menindee Lake Scheme has reduced the frequency of flooding in the Lakes due to being destroyed by weirs, and constant low flows of water have fragmented the river system and blocked fish passage.²⁵

Simons further contends that the Southern Riverina Irrigators claim that the Barmah - Millewa Forest covers 66,000 ha and spans the New South Wales – Victoria border between Tocumwal, Deniliquin, and Echuca. It is being flooded too often by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Basin Authority to supply water for almond growers and South Australia. In the spring and summer of 2018/19, Lake Victoria wasn't filled enough,

²³ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin." 19.

²⁴ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin." 19.

²⁵ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin." 21.

forcing the Basin Authority to use overbank transfers from Hume Dam to prevent a water shortage in the upcoming months.²⁶ More water was lost than usual during "conveyance" due to the heat and increased evaporation. Additionally, water breaching the banks and seeping in further compounded the loss. Commonwealth oversees environmental water management and faces a challenge when fulfilling irrigation orders that affect water availability for the downstream environment. The river was fully utilised for irrigation, leaving no room for environmental water. Due to this, the creeks and wetlands downstream could not receive their usual water supply during springtime. Additionally, excessive irrigation water caused the flooding in the Barmah Forest to last longer than necessary.²⁷

There are ongoing disputes among graziers, indigenous Australians, environmentalists, and irrigators regarding the degradation of the river system, the use of extensive irrigation and the introduction of "water markets". These markets allow the complete river flow diversion for cash crop irrigation and water credits. The MDBA provides water in the MDB to be purchased and sold permanently or temporarily through various markets, with surface water being the most frequently traded form, but some groundwater is also being exchanged.²⁸

Environmental historian Daniel Connell explains that water management and distribution regulations differ from state to state and valley to valley. These regulations are very complex and challenging to understand, even for professionals. Generally, a person needs a permit to take water, and an allocation is issued based on the type of permit and the season. There are two types of water licenses in the Basin: general security and high security. General security licenses are more common, while high-security licenses are typically held by farmers growing perennial crops like grapevines, fruit, and nut trees that need irrigation yearly.²⁹

The MDB is now a severely modified river system that bears little resemblance to that viewed by the first Europeans. The environment was cared for by indigenous Australians for thousands of years, the MDB evolved in response to the fast changes over the past 200 years. Today's flora and fauna are shaped by environmental influences that are very different from those now dominant. A devastating future will emerge in response to the environmental conditions imposed in recent decades. In the past few years, the Darling River experienced the

²⁶ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin." 21.

²⁷ Simons, "The Tragedy of the Murray Darling Basin." 21.

²⁸ "2020 Basin Plan Evaluation," Murray- Darling Basin Authority, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/bp-eval-2020-full-report.pdf>

²⁹ Daniel Connell, *Water Politics in the Murray-Darling Basin*, (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2007), 203.

largest toxic algal bloom ever recorded anywhere in the world. Still only partially understood. It has become clear that water plays a significant role in both legal and political realms, with its value as a commodity being recognised.³⁰

We have limited our perception of water to simply meeting our requirements. Our focus on nature revolves around ourselves, disregarding its true essence. Our restricted perceptions, societal norms, economic factors, and creativity shape our interactions with nature, leading us to believe we can control it rather than acknowledge our mutual dependence. The idea of separating nature and culture is a concept created by humans. It's important to note that creating "water markets" is a crucial link between water, energy, and food. Yet, it is often disregarded, and these elements are closely intertwined, making it difficult to separate them.

Water produces energy through various forms, including hydropower, transportation, sewerage, and sustaining life. It is a fundamental part of a human right that should be shared equitably among all living beings on the planet. However, the fair distribution of this resource has become a political and ethical issue that reflects our values of democracy. The insights raised by a study of water as the materiality of ethics and as a substance linked to humans by a principle of reciprocity in the MDB suggest the importance of opening our imagination regarding how we think about water.

³⁰ "The Effects of Drought in the Murray-Darling Basin," Murray Darling Basin Authority, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.mdba.gov.au/climate-and-river-health/climate/drought>

CHAPTER TWO

Construction of the Australian Landscape through the Colonial Lens

Continuing with the theme of masculinity in the MDB, the narrative once again revolves around telling this story through the characterisation of the storyteller. This chapter shows how the Masculine versus Feminine proposition has impacted the historical development in depicting the landscape. This piece explores how European art vision, methodology, and perception have affected the Australian landscape's representation since the colonisers arrived in 1788.³¹ In my research, the colonial viewpoint of the Australian landscape is analysed from the perspective of male figures such as surveyors, officers, and bushmen. Furthermore, the work explores the notion that the landscape possesses feminine qualities. Australian culture has a unique discourse in linking the landscape to national identity. This discussion has significantly shaped the nation's past, including ideas about masculinity, the hostile and empty land, the bush representing Australia's essence, and the feminine landscape.

The depiction of landscape in Australian culture has formed people's interpretation of the environment and human behaviour. Thus, landscape dialogue has dramatically influenced the narrative of Australia's history as a colonial settler nation. It is worth noting that the term "landscape" encompasses a range of concepts in Australian cultural studies, from the natural environment to its representation in art and literature.³²

Academic and artist Ross Gibson explains that "landscape" refers to how we portray nature. In the Australian settler context, nature is often seen as threatening culture and civilisation.³³ Gibson considers the explorer is like Adam, but what about Eve? Perhaps Eve can be seen as the landscape herself, something the hero can enter and become a part of.³⁴ Tom Griffiths, a Fellow in the History Program at Australian National University, supports Gibson by

³¹ "Colonial Period, 1788- 1901," Australian War Memorial, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/colonial>

³² Tracey Ireland, "The Absence of Ghosts: Landscape and Identity in the Archaeology of Australia's Settler Culture," *Historical Archaeology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 56.

³³ Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Indiana: University Press, 1992), 212.

³⁴ Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, 88.

suggesting that the competing realities of geography, history, land, and culture have created a fundamental and persistent tension between origins and identity.³⁵

Gibson's book, *South of the West*, has a central argument that the Australian identity is predicated in a contradiction at its very heart. He argues that Australia is the 'south of the west', exploring the geographical metaphors used to locate the continent to show how the 'South', in a European tradition, has stood synonymously for an "Other". Australia, as a Southland, is established to have been constructed in terms of its very marginality to that source of colonial power that 'discovered' it. This leads to what Gibson describes as the 'bifurcated' nature of Australian identity – the very self, for an Australian, is displaced. Regarding practical Australian identity, 'we' are not defined simply as the other; 'we' also are the other – the south of the west.³⁶

Colonial: Surveyor, Officer, and Bushman / or Masculine view

The masculine coloniser walking the landscape could be considered as three male archetypes representing the earlier settlers: a surveyor, an officer, and a bushman in the colonised landscape alongside the indigenous. The following will explain the implausibility of the quest to reify the entire continent regarding its submissiveness and bounty as a mythological ploy.³⁷

Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General of New South in 1828, saw his mission as translating the tracts of wilderness into intellectually defined objects through survey and naming. At that time, the settlement was confined to areas close to Sydney, the east coast claimed for Britain.³⁸ Mitchell undertook extensive journeys of exploration in eastern Australia to lay the necessary framework for this imperial possession. Reading his exploration diaries, they detail how each expedition was led by Aboriginal guides who negotiated with the various tribes encountered along the way. Although Mitchell records daily encounters with different groups of Aboriginal people, he wrote that he saw "a country which is yet in the same state as it

³⁵ Tom Griffiths, "Ecology and Empire: Towards an Australian History of the World," in *Ecology and Empire*, ed. Tom Griffith and Libby Robin. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 11.

³⁶ Alan McKee, "What is Postcolonialism?" *Screen* 35:3, Autumn (1994): 1.

³⁷ Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, 89.

³⁸ Ross Gibson, *26 Views of the Starburst World: William Dawes at Sydney Cove 1788-91*, (Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2012), 55.

was when formed by its maker... A land so inviting, and still without inhabitants".³⁹ Mitchell named the valleys of Victoria "Australia Felix". He wrote, "Of this Eden, it seemed that I was the only Adam, and it was indeed a sort of paradise to me."⁴⁰ However, to the early explorers, the land was envisioned as a utopian paradise, which other writers later used to depict the potential of the entire continent.⁴¹ However, as Mitchell and his men ventured into the bush, the explorers soon realised its dangers and mysteries, often without much success. Gibson would ascertain that closer to the coastal colonies of New South Wales, The Blue Mountains were "penetrated" — the word repeatedly appears in explorers' journals. They were explored with heroic energy, and the Outback was seen as one of the last great frontiers of Earth.⁴²

As an artist, delving into the historical gaps and imagining the process of colonisation can be a terrifying and invasive experience for the local inhabitants. I recognise that this process must have been devoid of any positive change, and the explorers mistakenly reshaped what had been already established by the indigenous communities. The British government tasked Mitchell to survey and name the land while maintaining a relationship with the local inhabitants. He utilised a camera lucida to add the same perspective found in European Renaissance art and imperialist culture to his artwork.⁴³ In a publicised etching, *Day Crater of Murroa, or Mount Napier, In Australia Felix* was taken from an original sketch by Mitchell; it shows a broad angled view of a crater of Murroa or Mount Napier and in the scene are two European men with a naked Aboriginal man sitting on a rock with a spear.

³⁹ William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991), 71.

⁴⁰ Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, 88.

⁴¹ "Exploration Codes of Practice: The Codes of Practice Outline Mandatory Requirements for Explorers in the Exploration of Resources," NSW Government, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://www.resourcesregulator.nsw.gov.au/rehabilitation/exploration/exploration-codes-of-practice>

⁴² Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, 88.

⁴³ Ruby Davies, "Contested Visions, Expansive Views: The Landscape of the Darling River in Western NSW" (Master of Visual Arts, The University of Sydney, 2005) 18.



Figure 4. Major T. L. Mitchell del. A Picken Lith. Day and Haghe Lithographers to the Queen. *Day Crater of Murroa, or Mount Napier, In Australia Felix*, 1839.

The small figures in the landscape invite us, as a viewer, to look out on the space they have come upon. It hints at the sublime, an elevated high moral-spiritual purity or excellence. The vanishing point goes past the crater and out into the distance.

On the one hand, Mitchell was tasked with evaluating the land's water prospects and grazing potential. On the other hand, he was responsible for protecting the rights of the native inhabitants whose lands were being surveyed, measured, and secured for the British crown. Mitchell's, *Three Expeditions* discusses these aspects at various times in his trip along the Darling in 1853.⁴⁴

Charles Napier Sturt, a British officer and explorer, led several expeditions into the country's interior, starting from Sydney and later from Adelaide. During these expeditions, Sturt and another explorer, Hamilton Hume, were sent by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Ralph Darling, to investigate the course of the Macquarie River. In early 1829, he discovered the Upper Darling, which he named after the Governor.⁴⁵ In 1830 Sturt named the Murray River

⁴⁴ Major Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia, with Descriptions of the Recently Explored Region of Australia Felix, and the Present Colony of New South Wales*, (T & W Boone, London, 1839), 222.

⁴⁵ "Discover Darling Outback NSW," Darling River History: European History, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://darlingriver.com.au/darling-river-history/>

after Sir George Murray, British Secretary of State for the colonies.⁴⁶ Gibson notes that Sturt would corroborate that the land is attractive, and the explorer has been led aside into nothingness. But there is always one region that remains “savage,” “feminine,” and “other” and this is a mythological ploy that explains away the implausibility of the quest to reify the entire continent in terms of its submissiveness and bounty. Gibson would ascertain that Sturt and Mitchell’s rivalry is legendary. Still, Sturt would say that Nature had intentionally closed herself to civilised men and that she might have one domain where indigenous people might roam on her.⁴⁷

In the 19th century, some artists and writers challenged the prevailing beliefs and advocated for a more nuanced understanding of Aboriginal culture and history. However, the bushman remained a prominent feature in the landscape, and landscape art played a significant role in shaping and preserving the legend of the Australian bush. The images of the Heidelberg School from the 1880s and 1890s, portraying a small, heroic figure in vast open spaces, have become iconic in Australian culture. One of the school’s outstanding painters, Frederick McCubbin, captures in his artwork scenes from colonial Australia, including his famous painting, *The Pioneer* of 1904, which depicts a settler family in the bush.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “River Murray,” SA History Hub, accessed August 13, 2023, <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/subjects/river-murray#:~:text=South%20Australia%27s%20existence.-,Named%20in%201830%20by%20Charles%20Sturt%20after%20Sir%20George%20Murray,flow%20being%20within%20South%20Australia>

⁴⁷ Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, 89.

⁴⁸ James Gleeson, ed. *Australian Painters Colonial 1788-1880; Impressionists 1881-1930; Modern 1931-1970*, (Dee Why West, NSW: Lansdowne Press, 1982), 224.



Figure 5. Frederick McCubbin, *The Pioneer*, 1904. Oil on canvas, 225 x 295.7cm, National Gallery of Victoria, exhibited in the Ian Potter Centre in Federation Square, Melbourne.

While the artwork is often interpreted as a celebration of the pioneering spirit and the development of the Australian nation, it also reflects a Eurocentric perspective of colonialism. The painting portrays the land as a resource to be exploited and controlled rather than a complex ecosystem with its intrinsic value.

From a colonial indigenous perspective, Bain Attwood, a historian at Monash University, has published extensively on the history of colonialism and is an essential writer of Aboriginal history. Attwood explains the colonisation and invasion of Australia in 1788, and the theories of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, such as Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, played a significant role in the evolution of human society that led to commerce and empire.⁴⁹ Attwood argues that the introduction of colonisation, Christianity, culture, and progress allowed for the creation of history on a continent like Australia to become a European standard.⁵⁰

In the past, wealthy pastoralists saw the outback as a passive and compliant entity waiting to be married and consumed. The Darling River was an essential navigable river over a

⁴⁹ Bain Attwood, "Introduction, The Past as Future: Aborigines, Australia and the (Dis)course of History," in *In the Age of Mabo*, ed. Bain Attwood, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), ix.

⁵⁰ Attwood, "Introduction, The Past as Future: Aborigines, Australia and the (Dis)course of History," viii.

century ago. Still, like all the rivers in Australia, the Darling is prone to drought and damaging floods, and in 1890, W. C. Piguenit was on location. He captured the scene in his great panoramic canvas, *The Flood in the Darling 1890* (1895), held since in the Art Gallery of NSW collection.



Figure 6. W. C. Piguenit, *The Flood in the Darling 1890*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 172.5cm x 249cm. Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney.

In his painting, Piguenit depicts a grand, picturesque aesthetic scene of the Darling, a feminine life-giving wilderness.⁵¹ Tim Bonyhady is one of Australia's environmental and cultural historians, and he discusses important matters that ruminate from the painting as referenced in his book *The Colonial Earth*. Bonyhady would indicate that through Piguenit's scrapbook, we discover his recognition of the importance of preserving native plants in the area for their crucial role as fodder during droughts. He advocated for water conservation, and it is believed that Piguenit's well-known work, *The Flood on the Darling, 1890*, was intended to promote water conservation in the West to prepare for future droughts.⁵²

The MDB has been traditionally linked to feminine qualities such as nurturing, fertility, and the life-giving attributes of water. These characteristics are evident in the region's natural environment, including the rivers, wetlands, and floodplains that sustain the area's biodiversity and agriculture. However, there was always a sense of uncertainty. The bush became

⁵¹ Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 283.

⁵² Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, 283.

associated with danger, especially for those who identified themselves as bushmen in the nationalist tradition. It posed a risk of assimilation, isolation, and death. While possessing and controlling the land was considered heroic, it was also doubted due to the perceived threat of the bush as a symbol of the monstrous feminine.⁵³ The native son will become the victim and powerless against these forces.

The Land as Feminine

In 1988, Prof. Kay Schaffer, a significant figure in Australian and feminist scholarship, thoroughly analysed how Australia is often symbolised as a mother figure and the land as her body. This representation is rooted in the colonialist mindset of dominating and controlling, which portrays the land as a feminine entity to be conquered. The language used in the 19th and early 20th centuries often sexualised the settlers' relationship with the land, and the explorers were portrayed as uncovering its secrets. In contrast to the European view of Mother Earth as benevolent, Australia is frequently depicted as a "witch mother" who subjects her subordinates to cruel experiments.⁵⁴

As the nineteenth century progressed in land exploration and settlement, people began to view the land as harsh, raw, obdurate, cruel, barren, and fickle. The bush described in Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife* acknowledges the "everlasting, maddening sameness of stunted trees [which] makes a man want to break away". It became more familiar to Australians and replaced earlier Arcadian fantasies.⁵⁵ In the twentieth century, Australian historian and academic W.K. Hancock codified the landscape metaphor as a body of lack. In his book *Australia*, the author portrays the land as a wild and empty place that needs taming.⁵⁶ Vance Palmer's book *The Legend of the Nineties* notes the outlook of pioneers who viewed Australia as an unattractive and unsupportive motherland. At the same time, Miriam Dixon, the author of *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia 1788-1975*, studied women's experiences during the colonial era and described Australia as an unloved woman.⁵⁷

⁵³ Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 62.

⁵⁴ Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, 62.

⁵⁵ Henry Lawson, "The Drover's Wife," in *The Drover's Wife*, ed. Frank Moorhouse, (North Sydney: Penguin Random House Australia, 2017), 35.

⁵⁶ W.K. (William Keith) Hancock, *Australia*, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1945), 12.

⁵⁷ Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present*, (Ringwood Vic: Penguin, 1999), 35.

Teresa de Lauretis proposes that narrative plays a crucial role in constructing identity, and narrative constantly reconstructs the world as a two-character drama in which humans create and recreate themselves using abstract or purely symbolic concepts such as the womb, the earth, the grave, and the woman.⁵⁸ These concepts can be interpreted as mere spaces and thought of as mutually identical processes of transformation where a human becomes a version of themselves. According to de Lauretis, reading, writing, and speaking are often associated with masculinity. At the same time, femininity is relegated to a category of discourse and a symbolic "other." Similarly, the land is often viewed as a symbolic "other" that takes on various disguises in Australia.

This dominance of landscape art was so significant that art historian Bernard Smith remarked in 1976 that it was primarily responsible for the country's preoccupation with the natural environment and creating and maintaining a false consciousness of what it is to be Australian.⁵⁹ The notion that the Australian national character is a product of our personal or ancestral encounters with the harshness of the wilderness is still prevalent in Australian society. The texts and representations that created the bush myth were consciously made to express the emergence of a new national culture. They also contain descriptions of gender relations that continued to resonate in Australian culture throughout the 20th century. The concept of the national character originated from the challenges faced by our forefathers in the rugged Australian wilderness and still resonates today in popular films.⁶⁰

In the fourth instalment of the *Mad Max* franchise, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), a significant moment brings the entire story together when Imperator Furiosa (played by Charlize Theron) discovers that her home (The Green Place) is an idyllic land she remembers from her childhood. The homeland she has been striving to reach no longer exists; it is a swampland instead and uninhabitable. This realisation causes her to collapse and scream in the desert. The director, co-writer and co-producer, Australian George Miller, captures this moment around three-quarters of the way through the film and marks a crucial turning point for the character and plot. Furiosa has been credited with being a positive feminist action hero and an actual

⁵⁸ Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, 61.

⁵⁹ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), 143.

⁶⁰ Other films that include the male in the Outback include *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Man from Snowy River*, and *Crocodile Dundee*.

main character of *Fury Road*. She is innovative, wily, resourceful, and adaptable.⁶¹ In the movie, Furiosa embodies the traits of a heroic figure determined to carry out a rescue mission that catalyses the establishment of a matriarchal society. This is a remedy to the savage and warlike tribes depicted in previous *Mad Max* movies, and these elements differentiate this film from the male-focused narratives of its predecessors.



Figure 7. George Miller, *Furiosa's Scream*, 2015. *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Village Roadshow Pictures

⁶¹ Kyle Smith, "Why 'Mad Max: Fury Road' is the Feminist Picture of the Year," *New York Post*, May 14, 2015, <https://nypost.com/2015/05/14/why-mad-max-fury-road-is-the-feminist-picture-of-the-year/>

CHAPTER THREE

Artists in the Field - Plumbing the Landscape

Through my research, I've found four artists who approach the topic of water, politics, art, and the land with nuance, and I've realised that these topics are interconnected.

Bonita Ely, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Hans Haacke are all artists who have made significant contributions to visual art. While each artist has a distinct style and approach, they share a common thread through their engagement with environmental concerns, the exploration of space and place and their critical examination of social and political concerns. For example, Bonita Ely expresses ecological and social issues through her installations, sculptures, and performances. She has a personal connection to the MDB as she grew up there. She often incorporates natural elements and materials, highlighting the impact of human activity on the environment.

American artist Robert Smithson is well-known for his earthworks and land art, such as the iconic "Spiral Jetty." His works often involve the transformation of natural landscapes, emphasising the interconnectedness of nature and culture and drawing attention to the Earth's geological processes. Married to Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt was fascinated with space and place in her practice. Holt is renowned for her site-specific installations and sculptures that engage with the environment, exploring themes of perception and the relationship between the viewer and the landscape. German-born Hans Haacke, who primarily practiced in America, is a conceptual artist recognised for his engaged works examining power structures and social systems. His installations often incorporate text, photographs, and data, addressing corporate influence, economic systems, and institutional critique. Haacke's works challenge viewers to question the role of art and its relationship to politics.

Bonita Ely

Bonita Ely is an Australian artist whose art frequently explores socio-political themes, including environmental justice, feminism, and indigenous rights. Through her work, she confronts viewers with the consequences of human actions and prompts reflections on societal

norms and values.⁶² A noteworthy project is "The Murray River Project," which she initiated in 1977 to document the Murray River borders and the landscape changes over time. The project was also conducted in 2007 and 2009.⁶³

In the 1970s, Ely produced a historical work that explores environmental issues in the MDB through various mediums such as sculpture, photography, and installation. She has used landscape elements like mud, sand, and water to create large-scale installations that raise awareness of environmental challenges. Ely's art often includes found objects and materials like discarded irrigation pipes and rusted machinery, which she uses to comment on the adverse effects of human activity on the natural world.⁶⁴

In June of 1980, Ely presented a new Australian recipe called "Murray River Punch," enacted at lunchtime as part of a "Women at Work" project. Using deadpan satirical humour, Ely aimed to bring attention to the severely polluted Murray River, Australia's longest river spanning several states. Despite the Murray River being a site of personal significance for Ely, who grew up along its southern banks in the small community of Robinvale in north-western Victoria, she constructed her accounts using conventional linguistic forms.⁶⁵

⁶² "Bonita Ely Murray River Punch, 1980," Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/works/2012.34/>

⁶³ Bonita Ely, "Bonita Ely," accessed April 22, 2023, <https://bonitaely.com/murray-river-project-continued>

⁶⁴ Ely, "Bonita Ely."

⁶⁵ John McDonald, "Rivers of Despair at Loss of Darling," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/rivers-of-despair-at-loss-of-darling-20190930-p52w96.html>



Figure 8. Bonita Ely, *Murray River Punch*, 1980. Inkjet print, 48.4 x 33.1 cm.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
<https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/bonita-ely/>



Figure 9. Bonita Ely, *Murray River Punch*, 1980. Inkjet prints, 16 parts: 48.4 x 33.1cm each.
Mounts 58.7 x 43.6cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
<https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/artists/bonita-ely/>

The artwork involved utilising contaminated Murray River water that was stripped of its oxygen and allowed to remain stagnant. This was caused by the weirs that obstructed the river's flow from its mountainous origin to Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. Along with this, other components were incorporated into the mixture, such as dried Carp, chemical fertilizers, urine, human excrement, and toilet paper.⁶⁶

Ely's creative pursuits have sparked a new way of envisioning landscapes, where living organisms thrive on paper and interact with watercolour to form intricate ecological connections. This concept embodies the entwining of native and introduced species in the struggling Murray and Darling Rivers, where new opportunities emerge amidst environmental challenges. Through this approach, the animation *Men in the Cities*, discussed further in Chapter Four, becomes a platform for creative expression, where organisms grow on painted paper to create a vibrant and dynamic ecosystem. Rather than exerting constant technical control over tools and materials, the practice plays a small but vital role in the creation of works for envisioning sites as miniature worlds.

Ely's work goes beyond sharing her personal experiences, interests, and likes. One of her pieces, *Menindee Fish Kill 2019*, is a powerful performance captured on camera, which she and photographer Melissa Williams-Brown created in response to the tragic event happening in the Menindee Lakes in the MDB in 2019.⁶⁷ This piece of work is inspired by John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia*. It portrays Ely floating among dead fish in the water. During the performance, Ely wore garments with a paisley pattern, an ancient Persian design weavers adopted in a Scottish town called Paisley in the 19th century. The performance conveyed themes of colonialism, melancholy, and environmental guilt.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ely, "Bonita Ely."

⁶⁷ Barnaby Smith, "River on the Brink: Inside the Murray Darling Basin," *Artguide Australia*, September, (2019): 1. https://artguide.com.au/river-on-the-brink-inside-the-murray-darling-basin/?fbclid=IwAR3IBE_qstT5R9UTM46c7EVXwUE1OQIKLrVh_cNvV3ffXtPoW9X3hxEC-I

⁶⁸ Bonita Ely, "Menindee Fish Kill, 2019," accessed May 2, 2023, <https://bonitaely.com>



Figure 10. Bonita Ely, *Menindee Fish Kill 2019*, 2019. Photographic print, performance for the camera, photographer, Melissa Williams Brown
<https://bonitaely.com/>

Although her art has expanded in breadth, she prefers to call it eclectic, and her approach varies, and the subjects she portrays come in different forms.⁶⁹ Her art is primarily narrative-based, and she sees herself as a storyteller, which is also essential to my work.⁷⁰

Robert Smithson

Robert Smithson, whose untimely death at age 35, left behind a significant legacy of mighty works. He was famous for his earthworks and land art, particularly the iconic *Spiral Jetty*. Smithson's creations frequently involve altering natural landscapes, highlighting the

⁶⁹ Maryanne Taouk, "They're still alive: Bonita Ely on the Enduring legacy of her performance art," Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://www.mca.com.au/stories-and-ideas/theyre-still-alive-bonita-ely-on-the-enduring-legacy-of-her-performance-art/>

⁷⁰ "Art Forum: Bonita Ely," Australian National University, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://soad.cass.anu.edu.au/files/video/art-forum-bonita-ely>

connection between nature and culture, and bringing attention to the Earth's geological processes.

He continues to be as intriguing a figure in the art world today as he was back then. Smithson's ideals were expressed not only through the objects and pictures he produced but, perhaps most importantly, through written words, which hold a distinct place among all works by artists. His writings and art are so closely intertwined that it is reasonable to assume that they were produced as a part of the same project.⁷¹

Writing was, in general, an essential element of his activity, along with drawing, mapping, mirroring, digging, diagramming, and taking photographs. Smithson, associated with the land art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was an avid reader and intellectual and sought to extend art outside the confines of galleries and museums. While his works are primarily concerned with the relationship between art and the natural environment, there are ways in which his artistic sensibility can be seen as a response to broader political and environmental concerns related to water.⁷²

Smithson's best-known work is *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a massive sculpture made of rock and earth that extends from Rozel Point into the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

⁷¹ Jack Flam, "Introduction Reading Robert Smithson," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xiii.

⁷² Flam, "Introduction Reading Robert Smithson," xiii.



Figure 11. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation, photographer, George Steinmetz
<https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit-our-locations-sites/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty>

In *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson responds to water by creating a work shaped by and shapes the surrounding natural environment. The artwork consists of a 457-metre coil of rock and earth that juts out into the lake, forming a spiral shape visible from above.⁷³

Considering *Spiral Jetty* for my work also necessitates acknowledging their multi-domain contradictions: forms of writing that are both art and text, descriptive and performative, a sculpture that is both an imposition in a lake and a habitat for the species who live there. The works by authors who straddle confessional, critical, and descriptive storytelling and, in each case, reflect and teach us something about the nature of water and politics and assist us in imagining new possibilities for the environment. My inspiration for my work comes from Smithson's interdisciplinary linguistic work, and I chose *Spiral Jetty* as it has a connection to territory.

In addition to *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson realised an essential group of works that address water-related themes. For example, *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968,

⁷³ "Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*," Dia Art Foundation, accessed March 14, 2023, <https://www.diaart.org/visit/visit-our-locations-sites/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty>

consists of a collection of rocks and soil samples taken from a quarry in New Jersey that were transported from their original location into the art gallery setting along with photographs and maps documenting the site.⁷⁴

This work is essential to me because it can be seen as a criticism of the adverse effects of industrial activities, particularly mining, on the environment, especially water quality. It also represents a miniature universe and conveys an allegory through words and objects. It can be utilised as a small-scale representation of the current geopolitical state where human actions have caused significant changes in the climate and environment.



Figure 12. Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)*, 1968.
Painted wooden bins, limestone, gelatine silver prints and typescript on paper,
with graphite and transfer letters mounted on the mat board.

Bins installed: 41.9 x 208.9 x 261.6 cm. Framed: 103.5 x 78.1 x 2.5 cm. Sheet: 101.3 x 75.9 cm.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/nonsite-franklin-new-jersey>

⁷⁴ "A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)," Holt/Smithson Foundation, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/nonsite-franklin-new-jersey>

Nancy Holt

A married couple, Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson were intrigued by space and place in their artistic pursuits. Holt gained recognition for her installations and sculptures designed for locations and incorporated the environment, examining the connection between perception, the viewer, and the natural and cultural surroundings.

While water was not a dominant theme in Holt's work, she did engage with the concept of water in several of her pieces.⁷⁵ One of Holt's most well-known works is *Pipeline* (1986), created in response to the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline.



Figure 13. Nancy Holt, *Pipeline*, 1986. Steel and oil installation. 9.1 x 9.8 x 4.6 m (indoor section). 9 x 4.6 x 1.8 m (outdoor section #1); 3 x 9.5 x 5.5 m (outdoor section #2). Visual Arts Centre of Alaska, Anchorage. [Permanently closed, 1992].

<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/search?term=pipeline>

The Visual Arts Centre of Alaska in Anchorage invited Holt to visit the state in March 1986, hoping she would produce a piece of art honouring the area's beauty. Holt was instead impacted by the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline's trespassing across unspoiled nature. Holt returned to Alaska in July of 1986 and created the System Work *Pipeline* as a response.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Nancy Holt," Holt/Smithson Foundation, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org>

⁷⁶ "Pipeline," Holt/Smithson Foundation, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/pipeline-0>

The steel pipes of the structure visibly pass through the building to the internal area below as they twist in and out of the gallery. Several pipes drip oil, which collects thickly and covers a spotless, snow-white substrate. *Pipeline*, one of Holt's most apparent political pieces, reveals the unseen shortcomings of industrialisation and the disastrous effects of unrestrained ambition. I have chosen to include this work as it addresses my concerns when I visited the MDB and was confronted by it resembling a plumbing system.

Holt also worked with other mediums, such as video and photography, and authored books and essays about art throughout her career. In the work *Hometown*, Holt tackles a significant subject that would be vital to her work for the rest of her life and in this concrete poem, she shows how language and place relate to each other.⁷⁷

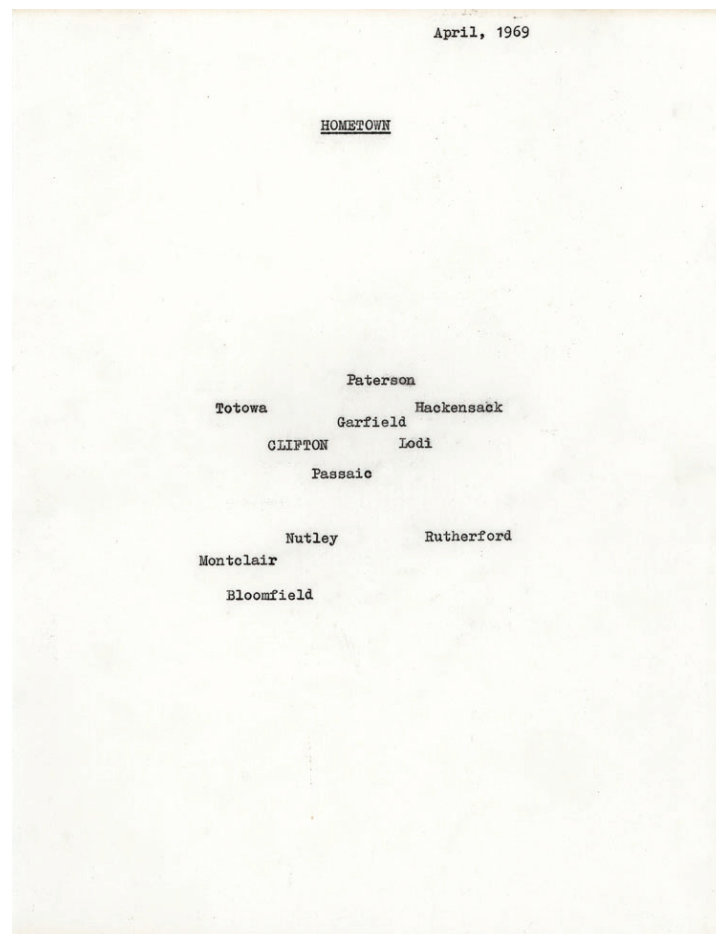


Figure 14. Nancy Holt, *Hometown*, 1969. Ink on paper, 27.9 x 21.6cm.
Holt/Smithson Foundation, New Mexico, USA/Artists Rights Society, New York
<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/hometown>

⁷⁷ "Hometown," Holt/Smithson Foundation, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/hometo>
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The names of towns in New Jersey are typed on a letter-sized piece of paper in the work. Their location on the page corresponds to where the towns are in real life. Holt is exploring the limitations and constraints of a map by reducing it to its essential pieces, and she is also looking at her geography, having relocated with her parents as a youth to Bloomfield, New Jersey, and then to Clifton, New Jersey, where she attended high school.⁷⁸

Her visual and linguistic work, like mine, focuses on refining current graphical perceptions of the environment through word and image, and her concrete poetry has proven helpful in my mapping efforts. I am particularly drawn to her functional, sculptural work, made of standard system materials such as plumbing, electricity, drainage, heating, gas, and ventilation. The electrical systems illuminate, the heating systems heat, the drainage systems drain, the ventilation systems circulate the air, and so on; the sculptures are part of open-ended systems, part of the globe.⁷⁹

Hans Haacke

Hans Haacke, while German-born, primarily practised in America, is a conceptual artist recognised for his politically engaged artworks that critique systems of power and explore social and economic systems. His installations often incorporate text, photographs, and data, addressing corporate influence, economic systems, and institutional critique. Haacke's works challenge viewers to question the role of art and its relationship to politics. He has also created works that address environmental concerns, including water-related political issues. In the early 1960s, Haacke made works that examined the interplay between physical and biological systems and their natural processes. In *Condensation Cube* (1963-1965), for example, Haacke filled a plexiglass cube with distilled water, which then condensed and evaporated in response to changes in temperature and humidity.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ "Hometown," Holt/Smithson Foundation.

⁷⁹ Nancy Holt, "Ventilation Series," in *Nancy Holt: Sightlines*, ed. Alena J. Williams. (California: University of California Press, 2011), 144.

⁸⁰ "Hans Haacke: Condensation Cube 1963 - 1965," Tate, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/haacke-condensation-cube-t13214>

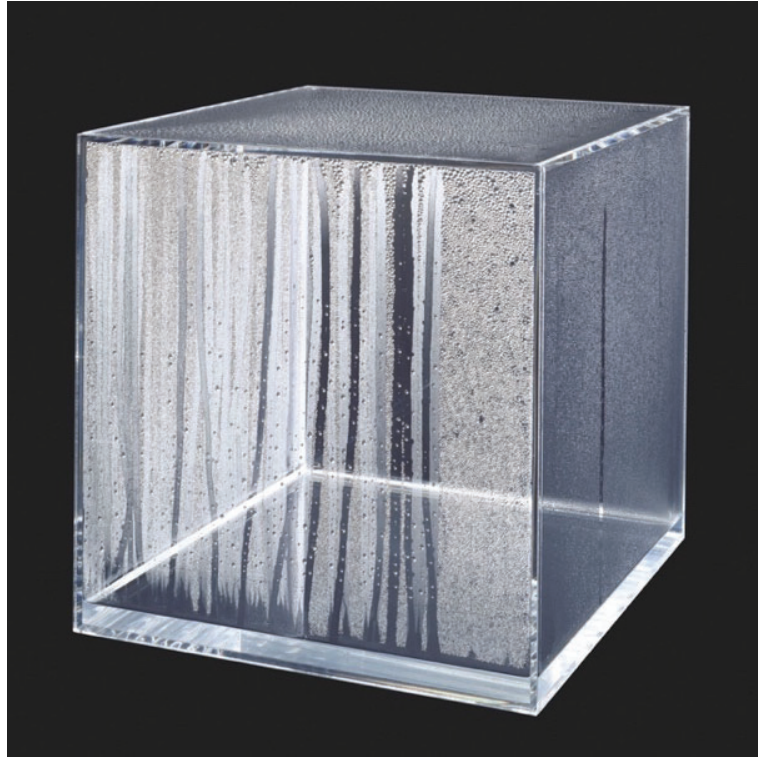


Figure 15. Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1963-65. Perspex, steel, and water, 305 x 305 x 305 mm. Tate, UK
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/haacke-condensation-cube-t13214>

Condensation Cube varies from the idea of the static object animated only by the observer's interaction but shares a cube shape with minimalist artists. It comprises a tightly sealed Perspex box with some water inside. According to the temperature and the ambient light, condensation starts to collect and flow down the box's sides. The setting in which the piece is displayed will consequently affect how it looks.⁸¹ The cube's minimalism refers to my geometric concerns while exhibiting pieces in a gallery, and it departs from the notion of the static object animated solely by the viewer's interaction.

Haacke's *Condensation Cube* embodies my own interest in the simplicity and purity of geometric forms. In Chapter Four, I will discuss in detail the piece titled *48 Painted Panels* which was initially contained in three wooden boxes, cunningly designed to conceal the panels from view. As the two dimensional panels are removed from the box, the viewer's interaction with the work brings it to life, creating a three-dimensional effect.

Another one of Haacke's works is the *Rhine Water Purification Plant: 1972*.

⁸¹ "Condensation Cube 1963-5," Tate.



Figure 16. Hans Haacke, *Rhine-Water Purification Plant*, 1972. Glass and acrylic containers, water, goldfish, etc. Hans Haacke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; via Paula Cooper Gallery.
<https://www.paulacoopergallery.com/news/hans-haacke-in-territories-of-waste>

The piece consisted of a series of photographs and diagrams that documented the chemical processes used to purify water at a treatment plant in Germany. By presenting the mundane, industrial process of water purification as a work of art, Haacke challenged the traditional boundaries between art and the everyday world. Moreover, the work can be seen as a critique of the impact of industrialisation on the environment, particularly the contamination of water sources.⁸² A sizable glass tank in the *Rhine Water Purification Plant*; 1972 is square in shape. Smaller rectangular and cylindrical tanks next to a sizable window use a short tube to transfer water from the Rhine River, contaminated by the Krefeld sewage plant's murky outflow, to the enormous, square glass tank. There are goldfish within the vast, square glass tank, which releases a clear tube into the wooden floor. The water is pumped through a second water filtration system before being used to irrigate the Museum Haus Lange gardens.⁸³

Haacke drew attention to the Krefeld Sewage Plant's contribution to the river's degradation by displaying the plant's murky discharge, which had been legally treated and could flow back into the Rhine. He pioneered grey-water reclamation by putting the water

⁸² "Artist Report: Hans Haacke," Art and Urban Sustainability, accessed March 14, 2023, <https://timkef.wordpress.com/2015/04/20/artist-report-hans-haacke/>

⁸³ "Artist Report: Hans Haacke," Art and Urban Sustainability.

through an additional filtering system, and this work deals with water quality in the Rhine. Haacke has addressed issues related to the privatisation of water resources, and a series of photographs and text panels document the business practices of the *Rhine-water Purification Plant*, showing a substantial stake that water has in water companies.

Overall, the works of Ely, Smithson, Holt and Haacke engage with politics and water in art by challenging dominant power structures and addressing environmental and social issues related to water. A shift has occurred as writers re-evaluate the significance of art and its practitioners as "canaries in the coal mine" for today's environmental issues. Through their art, they advocate for greater awareness of the political and environmental implications of water and its uses and control systems.

It's fascinating that the artworks were chosen to demonstrate both the interdisciplinarity that characterises encounters with the landscape and the understanding that specific locations do lead to human involvement in the environment and these essential artists highlight and emphasise politics and water and their concurrent significance across several areas and discourses in the landscape. By allowing these opposing viewpoints to coexist, the choices of different materials, the legends associated with some of the locations, and how the artworks have been presented in various media and forms all contribute to ensuring their simultaneous relevance to my artwork.

CHAPTER FOUR

Studio Artwork

I am an artist who finds great joy in painting and bringing images to life within a frame. The paintings in my work explore the agency of suited figures through the example of the water markets, focusing on the 2020 droughts that affected large parts of the Murray-Darling River system in Australia and the floods that followed a year later. With the current ecological and climate change crisis, water availability has become a crucial issue for humanity. The damage to the built and natural environment in the MDB captured the headlines, and the water markets were brought to our attention.

For this project, I have expanded my field to examine language and written texts through painting, drawing, installation, video, and other media. I will use the space of visual arts so this materiality can take shape. These ideas are expressed through my childhood experiences that were populated with animate things rather than passive objects, where I chose to draw, paint, and write to make sense of this world. For this project, there became a guiding inspiration in my work - the water of the MDB.

Artwork One – 48 Painted Panels

This work comprises forty-eight individual images. The paintings depict anonymous men who represent the underlying system of our society, including politics, corporate boardrooms, private businesses, and offices. It's worth noting that the individuals responsible for making significant decisions may be kept from the public. Men in suits are a metaphor for a male-dominated workplace culture as the norm and putting a face on power. I am using a nuanced work that uses images and words to point to the broader contextual and 'environmental' forces under which the MDB functions and the underlying texts support a snapshot of my thinking. An A-frame supports the forty-eight painted panels as a semiotic index on a written and painted surface.

As a starting point for this work, Ross Gibson's *26 Views of the Starburst World* (2012) and *South of the West* (1992) were referenced to inform my ideas. I start by referring to writing as a

'shape-shifting device'⁸⁴. The word 'device,' with all its implications of function, is crucial here, and it does not make a mistake that what the structure deploys is intentional and the result is designed to accomplish a specific impact. This is a very deliberate critical practice. The views of *48 Painted Panels* are numbered and arranged on a grid of plywood, but not in the sense that one depends on the previous one. They also take different approaches. Each mode of engagement is adopted in reacting to the text in the thesis and will occlude and expose new insights and sentiments.⁸⁵ They overlap, but each may stand on its own. They differ in detail—some deal extensively with critical sources and relevant scholarly contexts, some concentrate on critical works, and others offer brief points of hypothesis or a simple notion before moving on. I will expose and close on a new set of insights and sentiments.

⁸⁴ Ross Gibson, *26 Views of a Starburst World*, (Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing, 2012), 15.

⁸⁵ Gibson, *26 Views of a Starburst World*, 15.



Figure 17: Amanda Bentley, *48 painted panels*, 2023. Timber frame, 48 panels, oil on panel, 28.5 x 26.5cm. Overall, 114 x 132.5cm. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.

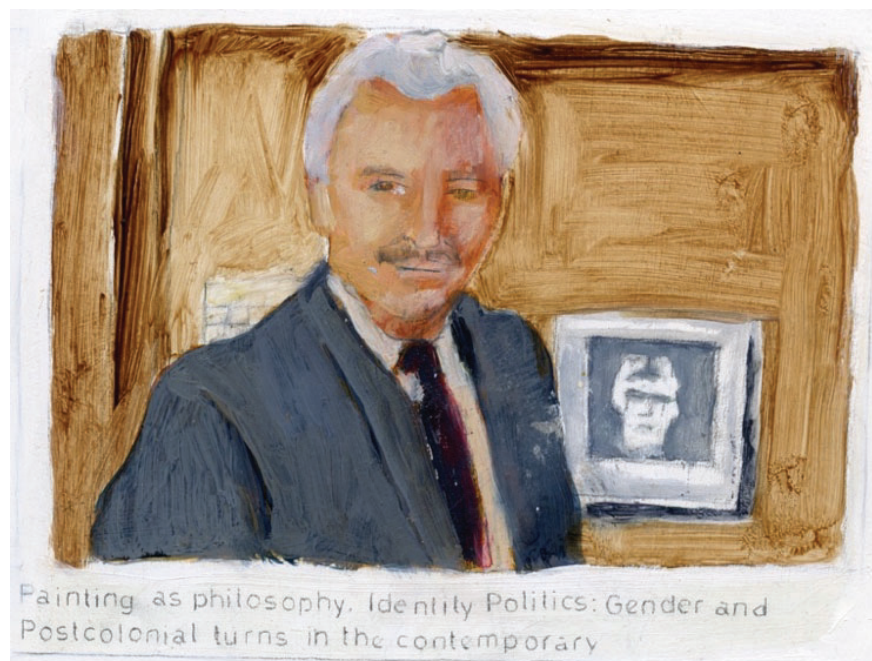


Figure 18: Amanda Bentley, *48 painted panels*, 2021. (Detail – work in progress). Oil on panel, 28.5 x 26.5cm. Overall, 114 x 132.5cm. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.



Figure 19: Amanda Bentley, *48 painted panels*, 2021. (Detail – work in progress). Oil on panel, 28.5 x 26.5cm. Overall, 114 x 132.5cm. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.

The paintings in the artwork are created using oil on panels that are thirty centimetres by twenty-six centimetres in size. To enrich the study, insights are gathered through exploring the boundaries of creative expression and the grid's geometric structure is utilised to establish spatial relationships and coordinates.⁸⁶ On examination, the connections between painting and storytelling and the interplay between text and imagery become clear; similar outcomes are used in graphic novels. The connections between moving images and painting are explored by carefully recreating individual frames with great admiration. These paintings aim to capture the essence of the hidden faces of power, the act of looking, and the contrast between movement and stillness.

Artwork Two – *Landscape*

The small blue light is a connotative power. While travelling through the MDB landscape, I noticed that the north-south and west-east routes were clearly labelled. Along the roadside, I saw neon signs whose meanings seemed to change constantly, leaving me with a

⁸⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 9.

sense of uncertainty and questioning the fluidity of things and their meaning unable to be grasped, raising the question that art is similar and constantly in flux.



Figure 20: Amanda Bentley, *Landscape*, 2023. LED sign, 100 x 30cm. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.

The natural scenery is formed through a physical process and originates within the body. Building upon Chapter Two and recognising the insights of academic and scholar Ross Gibson, I would like to mention William Dawes. Dawes was a multifaceted British officer who served as an astronomer, engineer, botanist, surveyor, explorer, abolitionist, and colonial administrator. He travelled to New South Wales with the First Fleet aboard HMS Sirius in 1788. In his language project, Dawes understood how people have a unique perspective when viewing a landscape. Dawes would suddenly abandon the clean framework of vocabulary and grammar that he had anticipated in favour of 'event-fragments'.⁸⁷ Dawes would mention that they were wound like 'filaments of micro-narrative meshing through time to contain his emergent understanding'. According to Gibson, this is also a trait of the Eora language—it "actively shapes and partakes of the world." The fourth chapter, in *26 Views*, headed 'Naa—To

⁸⁷ Ross Gibson, *26 Views of a Starburst World*, 15.

See,' illustrates how permutations of the verb for seeing take up the first full page of Dawes' writing in the journals. The orderly sequence of declensions and conjugations emphasises the exploratory component of Dawes' process of seeing.⁸⁸

What method could be appropriate for speaking a word for an energetic entity like water and consolidating it with the power of water markets? I aspire to articulate a lively substance that runs alongside and inside humans – power and water. The concept of materiality or mastery of nature involves creating a language better to understand the active forces present in a landscape. By examining the different elements of a landscape, we can observe how human energies, such as power, interact with it. These forces can positively or negatively affect the environment, improving or damaging it. I believe language holds significant influence in this regard.⁸⁹ The small blue LED light signifies a deconstructive method of analysing text, and like Dawes and his approach to the Eora language, the word 'landscape' becomes a verb. The flowing writing style or running writing mimics the movement of a river.

Artwork Three – *Plumbing Installation*

The *Plumbing Installation* is a series of conduits painted from water collected from the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers. The work is painted directly onto the walls of the gallery. It represents the ubiquitous materials of a plumbing system and brings the outside ideas of the MDB into the gallery system. The painting forms part of an open-ended system, part of the globe, because it means and reveals pieces of massive, concealed networks. The drainage systems remove excess water, and water pipes transport clean water to our homes. Like Nancy Holt's artwork, the plumbing system is often concealed behind walls or beneath the ground, yet it serves a vital purpose in everyday routines. We often overlook their importance, and it can be challenging to acknowledge how much we depend on them.⁹⁰

The plumbing installation in the exhibition represents water flowing down from a symbolic source through imitation painted conduits, a simulacrum, and the domestic sculpture

⁸⁸ Ross Gibson, *26 Views of a Starburst World*, 34.

⁸⁹ A unique examination of the language used in art when Joseph Kosuth produced *One and Three Chairs* (1965), which included a real chair, a photograph of the chair, and a thesaurus definition of a chair demonstrating how all three forms constitute an image of a concept this has helped artists to scrutinise the question of language.

⁹⁰ "Nancy Holt," Holt/Smithson Foundation, accessed March 17, 2023, <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org>

represents water courses, and so does industry.⁹¹ Even in industry, the modern geometric design of plumbing has achieved an impressive level of intricacy. The pipes collect and organise so many contradicting signs within signs that the signifying function becomes circular and cancels out. As I work on the image, I see myself looking down and studying the Earth, it is populated by people who believe they are individuals but are, in fact, merely components of a more incredible system. The painting depicts a political landscape using small masculine figures in suits. I added a female figure to the piece to ensure a more diverse representation, and she is positioned within the artwork. This representation is rooted in the colonialist mindset of dominating and controlling, which portrays the ground as a feminine entity to be mastered. The plumbing is symbolic of humans conquering and penetrating the earth.

⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (France: Semiotext(e), 1981), 1.



Figure 21. Amanda Bentley, *Plumbing Installation*, 2022. (Detail – work in progress). Watercolour on paper, 2.5 x 8m. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.

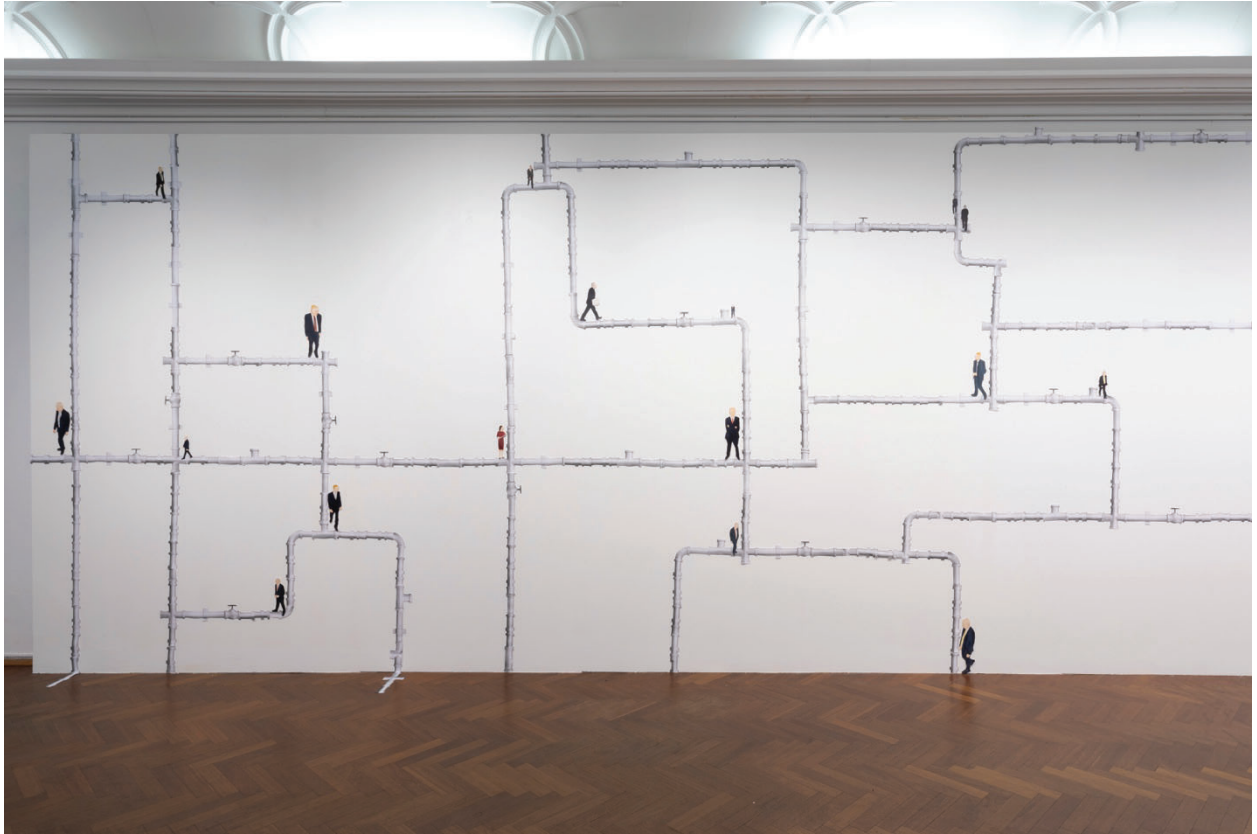


Figure 22. Amanda Bentley, *Plumbing Installation*, 2023. (Detail). Watercolour on paper, 2.5 x 8m. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space, Sydney University, Sydney.

Artwork Four – *Men in Suits*

The ‘film still’ is taken into a moving image, and through animation, I can positively portray the movement of matter. The challenges of the MDB allow the energy to question the traditional ideas of agency and break down the binary distinctions between life and stillness, humans, and non-humans, organic and inorganic, and water and power. I aim to encourage the audience to be more open to the aesthetic and emotional impact of the images.

Statistics are required to produce the animation; a storyboard is created. One hundred and twenty scenes are needed. Fifteen hundred frames are hand-painted, creating a short film loop. The original hand-painted frames are stored in eight small archival boxes. Twenty-four frames per second are required to create a sixty-second animation. Once completed, the work is numbered, scanned, uploaded, organised on the Adobe Premier timeline, and exported to a USB drive. The timing is checked to ensure the film is one minute long and looped accordingly.



Figure 23: Amanda Bentley, *Animation*, 2023. Sydney College of the Arts Project Space.

My goal is to develop work with materiality that recognises the force, energy, and intensity of actants (or actors in animation) as much as their physical form, their bodies painted with water is in their DNA.⁹² When considering these small entities, I focus on concepts that emphasise individual and group actions. Although the smallest unit (actor/actant) may possess a significant drive or influence, it never operates in isolation.⁹³ Its effectiveness always relies on the interaction and cooperation of multiple entities or forces. The concept of agency is altered when we consider drawings as human objects that play an active role rather than just being created. For example, politics is viewed as a means of keeping us safe and a system that imposes order on our lives. Whether we realise it or not, we play a role in this confinement system.

This animation aims to develop a theory of distributive agency by examining a real-life scenario: the water markets in the MDB. At the same time, if I look back to Chapter Two on the

⁹² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Duke University Press: USA, 2010), 9.

⁹³ Jane Bennett, in her book, *Vibrant Matter* she discusses that an actant can be a combination of human and non-human elements, and it is not an object or a subject but an "intervener."

Colonial, Teresa de Lauretis proposed that narrative plays a crucial role in constructing identity, and narrative constantly reconstructs the world as a two-character drama in which humans create and recreate themselves using abstract or purely symbolic concepts.⁹⁴ These concepts can be interpreted as mere spaces and thought of as mutually identical processes of transformation where a human, whether written or painted, becomes a version of themselves. According to de Lauretis, reading, writing, and speaking are often associated with masculinity. At the same time, femininity is relegated to a category of discourse and a symbolic "other."

As mentioned, the symbolism of the works with men in suits and animation also references South African artist William Kentridge's forms and his significant hand drawn animations. I acknowledge this artist is noteworthy for further research with respect to methodology, rather than direct content.

As internet technology advances, larger virtual worlds are being created and expanded. Through electronics, I can transport myself into these worlds and take on the form of a tiny organism navigating through a three-dimensional landscape. In my work, I see the graphics display a system where the small figures are represented and become lines and paint in a system that has evolved from the landscape to the gigabyte, the gigabyte to the internet. The boardroom is where decisions are made for the landscape – at a physical distance. The ephemeral world of the internet, the money markets where the digital world cannot control floods or droughts.

⁹⁴ Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 61.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a deep dive into the political works of Daniel Connell, Margaret Simons, and Ross Beveridge has provided me with valuable insights into the root causes of the devastating floods and droughts that plagued the nation in 2020 and 2021. It has become unmistakably clear that corruption and political manoeuvring were among the major driving forces behind these environmental crises, with the “water markets” emerging as a central issue in the broader MDB problem.

The vitality of floodplains hinges on the crucial practice of regularly flooding wetlands and rivers by restoring their connection with water sources. Nonetheless, it is disconcerting that only a mere 2% of these vital regions within the MDB receive planned water releases from the authorities. This glaring deficiency underscores the need for increased accountability and transparency within organisations like the MDB Authority, as exemplified by the criticism it faced in 2019 when a royal commission in South Australia highlighted the importance of sharing information about water allocation for environmental purposes with the public.

Taking inspiration from Bonita Ely’s exploration of the complexities associated with an Anglo/European heritage, my perspective on the MDB crisis is uniquely informed by a feminist lens. Through my artwork, I aim to shed light on the pervasive issue of male dominance in various spheres, ranging from the corridors of political power to corporate boardrooms and private enterprises. To convey this message, I employ faceless men in suits as a powerful metaphor, symbolising the hidden networks and opaque dealings that often perpetuate these imbalances. Ultimately, my artistic endeavour seeks to unmask these power structures, giving them a face and, in doing so, empowering those affected by them to confront and address the issues at hand.

In a world where environmental challenges are increasingly intertwined with political and social dynamics, my hope is that my work contributes to a broader dialogue on the MDB crisis and the urgent need for change. By recognising the influence of corruption and political interests, as well as the importance of diverse perspectives, we can take significant steps toward a more equitable and sustainable future for our environment and society.

While some may contend that the river system is beyond recovery and declare it as “dead,” such perspective fails to acknowledge the enduring resilience of these natural wonders.

Instead of being extinguished, the rivers have been pushed into a state of diminished vitality, a state unlike any they have faced in their long and storied history. These rivers have traversed the continent for hundreds of thousands of years, charting a course that, despite the manifold impacts of human interventions, still retains an inherent perfection waiting to be restored.

On my recent travels to the MDB I was able to reflect on the plight of our rivers and it is essential to recognise the immense value they hold, not only in terms of environmental significance but also as symbols of nature's resilience and adaptability. While challenges persist, there remains hope that through collective effort and responsible stewardship, we can rekindle the life force of these rivers, ensuring they continue to flow as a vital artery of our landscape, nurturing and sustaining all that relies upon them for generations to come.

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APPENDIX A

it is important to note that First Nations will have a say in MDB on November 27, the Albanese government struck a deal with the Greens that could see more than 700 gigalitres of water used for farming each year, allocated to the environment through Commonwealth buybacks across the MDB. The deal includes \$100 million allocated to help First Nations people participate in the water market, an independent audit of water allocated to the environment throughout the Basin, and the legislated commitment to return 450 gigalitres of water each year by December 31, 2027.

As part of the agreement, announced at Parliament House on 27 November, the Commonwealth will have the power to cancel state-run water-saving infrastructure projects. Legislation will be amended to acknowledge First Nation people's connection, history, and water needs.

Senator Hanson-Young said the new funding for First Nations people, secured in return for the Greens' support of the Restoring Our Rivers Bill, was vital. "First Nations people and their communities have been left out of this plan until now," Senator Hanson-Young said. "For the first time, First Nations communities will be the objects of this act, and we plan to put them front and centre. First Nations communities need a say in how water is managed, an acknowledgement and a recognition that their connection to water is as strong as their connection to land, and that they have a say in how the MDB is managed going forward," Senator Hanson-Young said.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Kath Sullivan, "Government strikes Murray-Darling Basin Deal with Greens", *ABC News*, accessed November 27, 2023, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-27/murray-darling-basin-water-deal/103153548?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=mail

APPENDIX B

Thanks to a Fauvette Laurio scholarship in September 2023, I had the opportunity to embark on a journey along the Darling River Run. The adventure began in Walgett and continued through Bourke, Wilcannia, Broken Hill, Fowlers Gap, Menindee, Mungo National Park, and finally concluded in Wentworth, where the Darling River meets the Murray. I captured some stunning photographs along the way, which I would love to share with you.



Figure A1: Amanda Bentley, *Darling River, Trilby Station, back of Bourke*, 2023. Photographic print.



Figure A2: Amanda Bentley, *Back of Bourke*, 2023. Photographic print.



Figure A3: Amanda Bentley, *Menindee Lakes*, 2023. Photographic print.



Figure A4: Amanda Bentley, *Emus, Fowler's Gap*, 2023. Photographic print.



Figure A5: Amanda Bentley, *Murray River – Wentworth*, 2023. Photographic print.

APPENDIX C

I also feel it is important to include in this thesis work that I have been working on that shows a continuous chain of thought in my thinking process.

A project called “Disclaimer” for my Bachelor of Fine Arts since 2002. This project was inspired by various sources, including legal cases involving insurance company HIH and telephone company OneTel. Over the past two decades, I have also incorporated elements of politics and economics into my work.



Figure A6: Amanda Bentley, *Disclaimer*, 2002. Collage, and paint on paper. 20.32cm x 25.4cm.

The project started with this watercolor illustration.

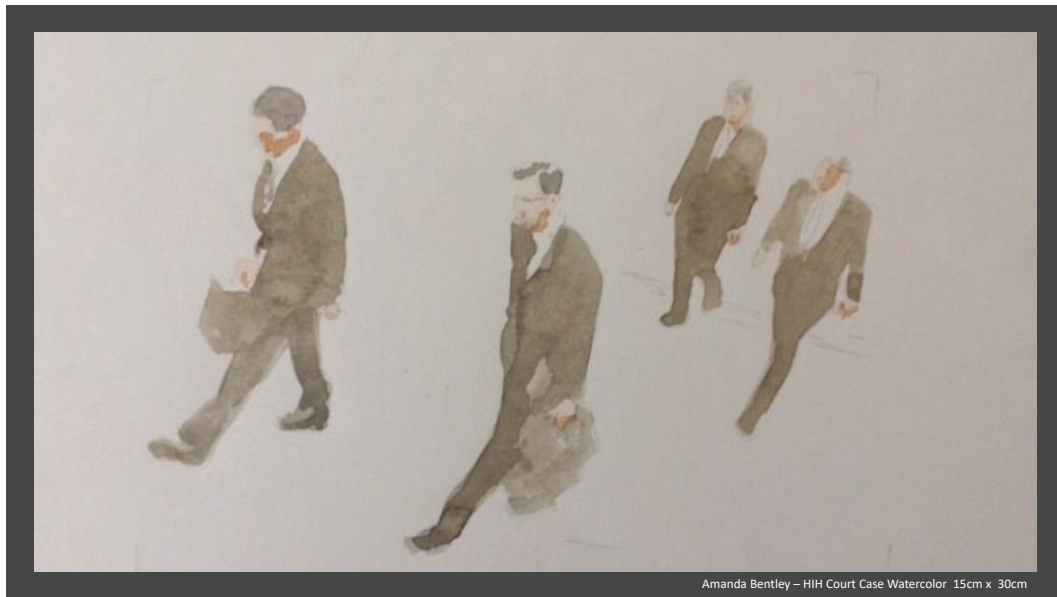


Figure A7: Amanda Bentley, *Disclaimer*, 2002. Watercolour. 12.7cm x 20cm.

Back in 2015, I became intrigued by Fortescue Metals Group and their public statements about the agreements they had made with three Chinese state-owned entities for the construction, financing, and transfer of the railway, port, and mine components of the Pilbara Iron Ore and Infrastructure Project in Western Australia and created a body of work called “Small Wheels”.

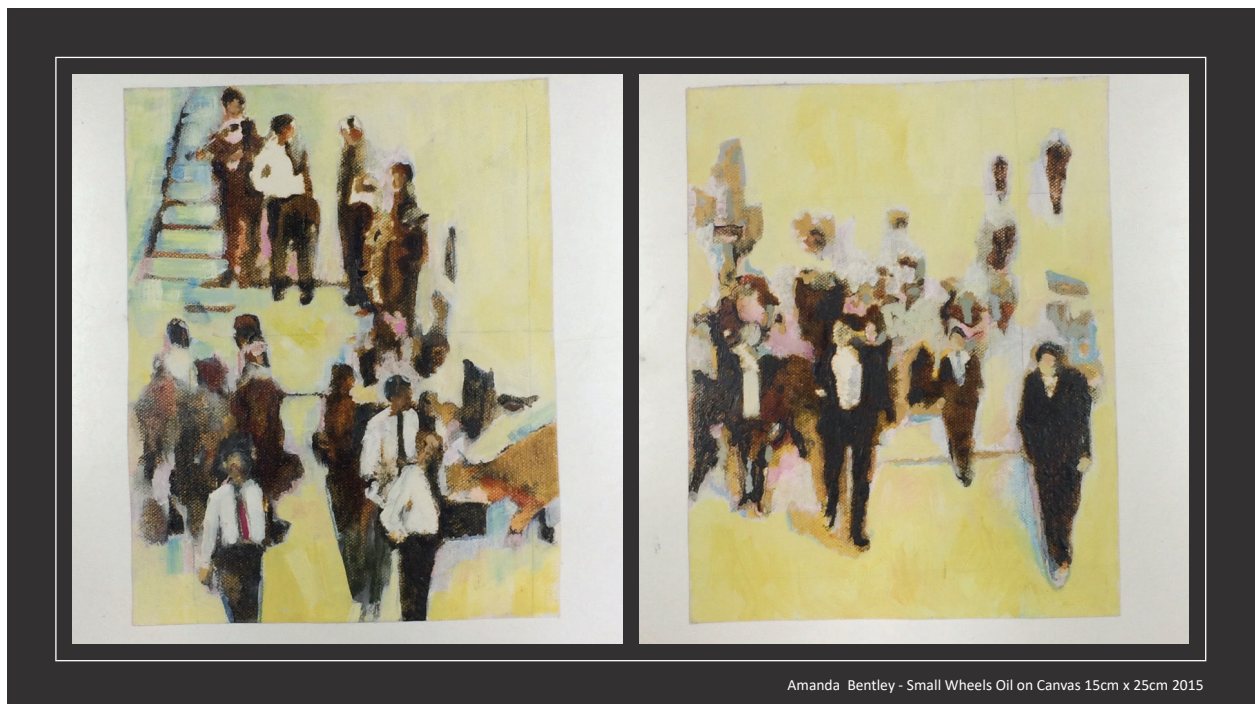


Figure A8: Amanda Bentley, *Small Wheels*, 2015. Oil on Canvas, 15cm x 25cm.

In 2017, "Legal Fictions" examined connections between contract law and education performance.



Figure A9: Amanda Bentley, *Legal Fictions*, 2017. Collage and paint on paper. 3m x 6m.

This statement refers to the beginnings of feminist work.



Figure A10: Amanda Bentley, *Legal Fictions* (feminist work), 2017. Oil paint on canvas. 6m x 1m.

In 2019 "Big Business Brought to Heel" was a work that delved into the relationship between the law and an individual's constitutional identity, the piece drew inspiration from regulatory actions against financial services companies, including fallout from the Hayne Royal Commission and ongoing investigations by the ACCC into digital platform services.



Figure A11: Amanda Bentley, *Still Life*, 2020. Charcoal on paper, each work, 91.44cm x 60.96cm.

As part of a Master of Contemporary Arts Degree in 2017, watercolour storyboards create new ideas, and since then, this technique has been in constant use.



Figure A12: Amanda Bentley, *Storyboards*, 2017. Watercolour on paper, Each work 21cm x 30cm.

3D sculptural containers were designed to store the pieces painted on panels.



Figure A13: Amanda Bentley, *3D sculptural containers*, 2017. Plywood. Each box 35cm x 35cm.

The animation for the MFA degree was hand painted watercolour on paper, which consisted of 1500 individual frames.



Figure A14: Amanda Bentley, *Animation layout*, 2022. Watercolour on paper, 7.5cm x 5.5cm.

And then scanned onto Adobe PremierPro.

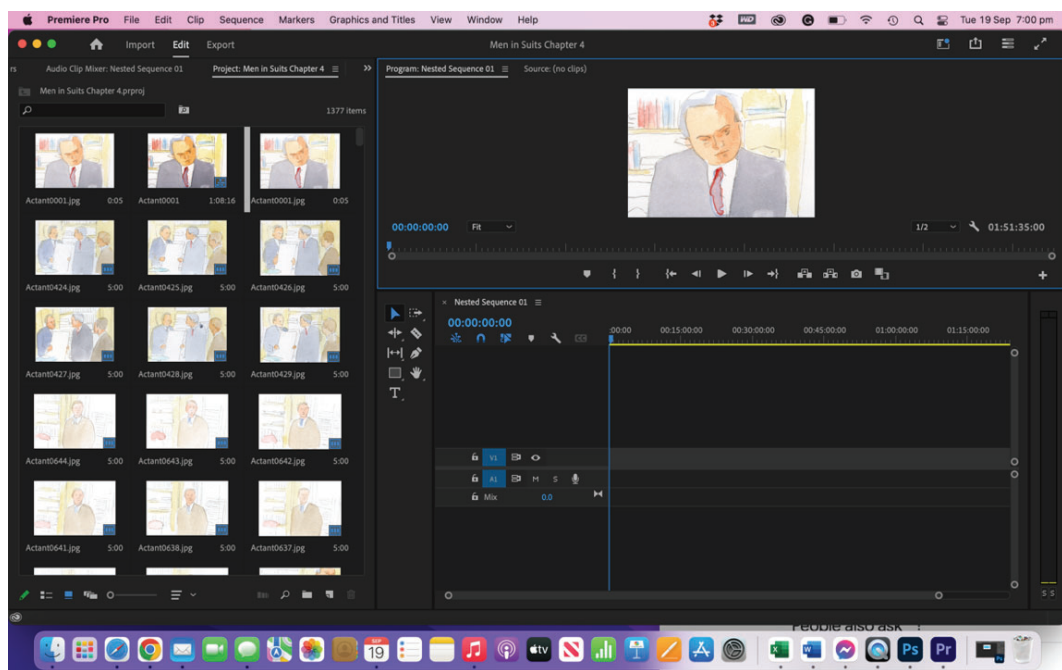


Figure A15: Amanda Bentley, *Animation*, 2023. Premier Pro screenshot.