

Huw Davies Gallery

22 June - 16 July 2017

Presented through the PhotoAccess Indigenous Photomedia Artists Program

They Blew Up the Hospital I was Born In **Dean Cross**

Exploring collective memory, remembrance and the trauma of watching ones birthplace be destroyed, *They Blew Up the Hospital I was Born In* has been programmed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Royal Canberra Hospital implosion.



Image: Dean Cross, *Sometimes It All Just Feels Like Too Much*, 2017, video still from HD looped video

Place of Birth

Birthplace holds a special significance for Aboriginal people as a defining factor for a range of relationships and responsibilities integral to an individual's identity. Our obligations to kin and Country are strengthened and defined by our place of birth and ultimately guide the trajectory of our lives.

Place of birth can also determine your spiritual and physical totemic relationships with birds and animals that once made require a lifetime of devotion and protection and play a role in the health of both the

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individual and overall environment. Elaborate rituals and ceremonies have ushered new life into the world for endless generations and songs are sung to guide new spirits into the world and to create a safe and supportive space for mothers, surrounded by their sisters, aunts and grandmothers.

The concept of Country is central to Aboriginal identity; it is the intricate ongoing relationship with the land that nourishes both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Our language, songs and ceremonies are all intrinsically linked to our connection with the land. It is our birthright and has a profound impact on our wellbeing. Wellbeing encompasses the social, spiritual, emotional and cultural health of an individual and their community and is ultimately linked to a strong sense of self and belonging.

The value of this connection is told through the experience of Barangaroo. Barangaroo was a Cammeraygal woman from the 18th Century, a strong cultural woman and leader in her community during the early days of the colony. It is documented that both Barangaroo and her husband Bennelong requested permission from Governor Phillip to birth her child at the newly established Parliament House which had been erected on her ancestral lands. This plea to give birth on Country was rejected and Barangaroo was directed to the hospital where she later tragically died from birth complications.

Aboriginal mothers are more likely to have complications and are two to three times more likely to die during childbirth and in recent times health initiatives have been created to support Aboriginal women to birth on Country surrounded by their community. This empowers women by providing choices that are culturally safe and respectful and by continuing and unbroken connection to Country with the next generation.

Many of us live with the reality of our birthplaces lost to the construction of cities, carparks, supermarkets, the sprawl of modern housing and museums. The dislocation of people and their Country as a result of the waves of destruction inflicted by colonisation across the continent has amplified the devastation and loss experienced by our communities. The environment has been irrevocably altered, though our relationship to the land continues to be experienced as respect and reverence, offering us strength in spirit and self. Birthplace is a multidimensional concept that is definitively linked with who we are and our beginning in the world continues to shape the evolution of our cultural existence.

Hannah Presley, June 2017

Hannah Presley is an Aboriginal curator based in Melbourne

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Dean Cross | Artist statement

Dean Cross is a trans-disciplinary artist working through the sculptural and pictorial fields. His work often connects to social and cultural histories and interrogates what it means to be a 21st Century Australian in the context of our post-colonial globalised world.

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Dean Cross | About the artist

Dean Cross began his artistic life in Canberra with Australia's premier youth dance organization, QL2 Dance, where he has also become a newly appointed board member. He performed and choreographed contemporary dance for over fifteen years in all corners of the globe. More recently Dean has shifted his creative output away from dance toward a more traditional understanding of visual art and is currently completing his Bachelor of Visual Arts Honours at the Australian National University, School of Art & Design.

He has been fortunate to exhibit widely across Australia's east-coast including being a part of the The Churchie Emerging art Prize (2016), the M16 Drawing Prize, the Konica Minolta Redlands Art Prize (2015) and the Macquarie Group Art Prize (2015). Dean presented his first solo-show, *FRINGE DWELLINGS* at PhotoAccess in 2016 and his second, *Time Takes Too Much Time*, at M16 earlier this year. Dean has also exhibited at Blakdot Gallery, Melbourne, Collab Gallery, Sydney, and will present work at the Art Gallery of South Australia as a part of the second Tarnarhi Festival in 2017. Recently Dean worked as Tracey Moffatt's studio assistant in preparation for her exhibition at the 57th Venice Biennale, where Dean spent a month as a gallery attendant at the Australian Pavilion.

Dean was born and raised on Ngunnawal land, but his ancestral roots lie within the Worimi Nation.

Image List (L-R)

1. *Refuge (1986 – 1999)*, 2017, bedroom door, reclaimed rubble, 82.0 x 204.0 x 35.0 cm
2. *What Once Was Might Never Be Again*, 2017, steel, archival photos, glass, Perspex, oil-stick, variable dimensions
3. *The Hospital I was Born In Exploded*, 2006, synthetic polymer on canvas, 25.0 x 160.0 cm
4. *Mum's and Dad's*, 2017, antique lounges, bricks sourced from the ruin of the Canberra Hospital, variable dimensions
5. *Untitled Explosion (sometimes it all feels like too much)*, 2017, steel and HD video with sound, 20:00 mins*

Works are for sale, please contact PhotoAccess for further details

*Original footage of the Canberra Hospital implosion sourced from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_WKr-G6Lp8

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Public Program

Join Dean Cross, Leah King Smith and Duncan King Smith for an artists in conversation event on Sunday 16 July at 2pm in the Huw Davies Gallery. Free event. All welcome.

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Image: Dean Cross, *Sometimes It All Just Feels Like Too Much*, (detail), 2017, from HD looped video

