



of the *powhiri* welcoming ceremony. The fluttering fingertips of the sensual Māori *wahine*, her *moko* and make-up immaculate, hum even in the silence as she performs the *karanga*, followed by the appearance of four striking, feminine winds – North, South, East and West – heralded by digitised, kaleidoscopically-dazzling patterns, ever-shifting and ever-changing.

*Groundswell* (2005) is an intimate series of landscape vignettes of the living, breathing, corporeal *terra firma* of Ngawha Springs in Tai Tokerau, North Island – Reihana's father's traditional lands. Bubbling mineral springs appear to invoke the spirits of the ancestors, unhappy with the deleterious impact of mining which began in the late 19th century and has since generated a damaged moonscape. At the time of shooting the work these homelands were held in private control, up for sale, and haunted by the incarcerated living souls of Māori confined in the nearby prison. Reihana writes that the *taonga* of the site has been invested with a 'melancholic and post-apocalyptic air'.

**Warwick Thornton** is a Kaytej man from central Australia, whose customary lands reside to the north of Alice Springs where he has lived the majority of his life. A filmmaker of singularly distinctive vision, his first feature, *Samson and Delilah* (2009), took the national and international film world by storm. Winning numerous awards, including the Caméra d'Or at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival, it continues to challenge, confront and seduce Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike with its visceral depiction of damaged young romance in truly dysfunctional settings of time and place. Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* it was not.

*Stranded* is Thornton's first foray into creating work specifically for the white cube; being the cultural revolutionary that he is, he has created a vision in three dimensions, with himself placed innermost as the central Christ-like figure – dead centre, if you like – with the unexpected addition of a skull and crossbones. Thornton's figure revolves in space above a mirrored waterhole in the brilliant harshness of the broken heartland, heightened by the unnerving sounds of wide open spaces – the chirruping of native birds, the ubiquitous blowfly buzz, the *whoomp*-ing sensation of windmill... or wind turbine? Dream(ing) or nightmare, or both?

Laconic in his desire to discuss the work, Thornton invests it with a sharp satirical edge and literal flavour: for a limited time viewers will be able to collect a limited-edition cup of popcorn – FREE!! – adorned with a still from the work. *Roll up, roll up, get 'em while they last!* No sacrificial lamb in his taped-up cowboy boots, sweat-stained hat and scarified, clawed-up torso, Thornton's figure is one of redemption and sacrifice.

How many more years will we continue to be written out of our shared histories – not just pushed to the margins (white spaces for Indigenous people) but off the edges, re-investing in a utopian vision of white-washed looping recollections, smiling faces, colonial spaces? 1492, 1788, 1840, 1862, 1901, 1967, 1971, 1988, 2007, 2011...

*White cube/Black box  
Blak, Brown and Red standpoints  
Our day will come.*

**Brenda L Croft**  
Gurindji/Malgnin/Mudpurra peoples  
February, 2011

Endnotes

- 26 January, 1988, known annually as Australia Day, was Australia's bicentennial, an event for which the national slogan was 'Celebration of a nation', presenting a white-washed visage of the country. The day became known as Invasion/Survival Day for Indigenous people and their supporters. A satirical view is that it is the official celebration of Australia's first boat people or illegal immigrants.
- Prime Minister Julia Gillard, ABC Radio National, 26 January, 2011. Born in Wales in 1961, Gillard emigrated with her family to Adelaide in 1966.
- Further opinions can be viewed at Lisa Pryor, 'Flying the flag for an upside-down kind of patriotism', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 January, 2007. Mark Seymour, 'Australia. I love it, but leave me out of the flag waving', *The Age*, 24 January, 2010.
- Harold Thomas, a Luritja/Wombai man from central Australia, living in Adelaide, designed the Aboriginal flag, 'created as a symbol of unity and national identity for Aboriginal people during the land rights movement of the early 1970s'. First flown on the National Aborigines Day March in Adelaide, 1971. [www.aiatsis.gov.au/fastfacts/AboriginalFlag.html](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/fastfacts/AboriginalFlag.html)
- Cold Chisel formed in Adelaide in the early 1970s, disbanded in 1983 and reformed in 2009. Paul Kelly and Indigenous musician/activist Kev Carmody's song, 'From little things, big things grow', is widely regarded as an unofficial anthem depicting Aboriginal resistance to European domination and the start of the national land rights movement.
- The Racial Discrimination Act was suspended in 2007 to enable the NT Emergency Response, aka The Intervention, under the aegis of the Federal Liberal Government. The Basics Card was introduced as part of the enforced Income Management Scheme, which effectively placed Aboriginal people in affected communities back on 'rations'.
- 'Aboriginal' is written in the lower case in Canada in relation to Indigenous or First Nations people.
- Further information on this period, see 'The US-Dakota War', [www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/mnstatehistory/thedakotaconflict.html](http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/mnstatehistory/thedakotaconflict.html)
- Further reading: the artist's biography, 17th Biennale of Sydney, 2010, [www.bos17.com/biennale/artist/21](http://www.bos17.com/biennale/artist/21)
- Six Nations originally comprised five powerful Indian tribes or Nations: the Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga and Oneida, which collectively founded The League of Peace, or Iroquois Confederacy. The Confederacy governed with a council of fifty chiefs elected by female elders from each Nation, and as a system of government was one of the earliest forms of democracy. Its organisational structure was used later as the basis of the United States government and the United Nations. In 1712, the Tuscarora Nation joined the Five Nations. Further reading: [www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~pjohnson/six.html](http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~pjohnson/six.html)
- [www.maungarongo.com/page/75-Home](http://www.maungarongo.com/page/75-Home)

list of works

**Rebecca BELMORE**

born 1960, Upsala, Ontario, Canada  
Anishinaabe-Canadian  
*The Named and the Unnamed*, 2002  
video installation, 38:25 minutes  
Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, The University of British Columbia  
Purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program and the Morris and Helen Belkin Foundation, 2005

**Dana CLAXTON**

born 1959, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Canada  
Hunkpapa, Lakota Sioux  
*Rattle*, 2003  
four channel digital video installation, sound, 11:25 minutes  
courtesy the artist

**Alan MICHELSON**

born 1953, Buffalo, New York, USA  
Six Nations Mowhawk Turtle Clan  
*TwoRow II*, 2005  
four channel digital video installation, sound, 13:05 minutes  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 2006

**Nova PAUL**

born 1973, Aotearoa/New Zealand  
Te Uri Ro Roi and Te Parawhau/Ngā Puhi tribe  
*This Is Not Dying*, 2010  
16mm film (digital transfer), sound, 20:00 minutes  
courtesy the artist

**Lisa REIHANA**

born 1964, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand  
Ngā Puhi: Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tu tribe  
*Groundswell*, 2002  
eight channel digital video installation, sound, 30:00 minutes  
courtesy the artist and ARTPROJECTS, New Zealand  
*Te Po O Matariki*, 2010  
video, 13:30 minutes  
courtesy the artist and ARTPROJECTS, New Zealand

**Warwick THORNTON**

born 1970, Alice Springs, Australia  
Kaytej language group  
*Stranded*, 2011  
3D digital video, sound, 11:06 minutes  
producer: Fiona Pakes; editor: David Gross; production designer: Sam Wilde; sound designer: Liam Egan; digital colourist: Trish Cahill; composer: Ben Blick-Hodge; stills compositing and grade: Jeremy Saunders  
courtesy the artist, produced by Scarlet Pictures with the kind support of AFTRS, Panavision Australia and Definition Films, commissioned by Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund 2011

*Stop(the)Gap: International Indigenous art in motion*  
24 February – 21 April 2011

A Samstag Museum of Art and 2011 BigPond Adelaide Film Festival Project  
Curator: Brenda L Croft

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Curator's acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the country in which this project is being held, the Kauria people, their ancestors and their descendants to come; my respects for having me as an Aboriginal visitor, living and working in your country.

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Very special thanks to curatorial advisory colleagues and friends Kathleen Ash-Milby, David Garneau and Megan Tamati-Quennell and also for their respective institutions' support, and to Nunga woman Yhonnie Scarce, who has been a joy to mentor.

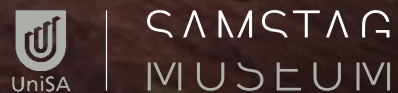
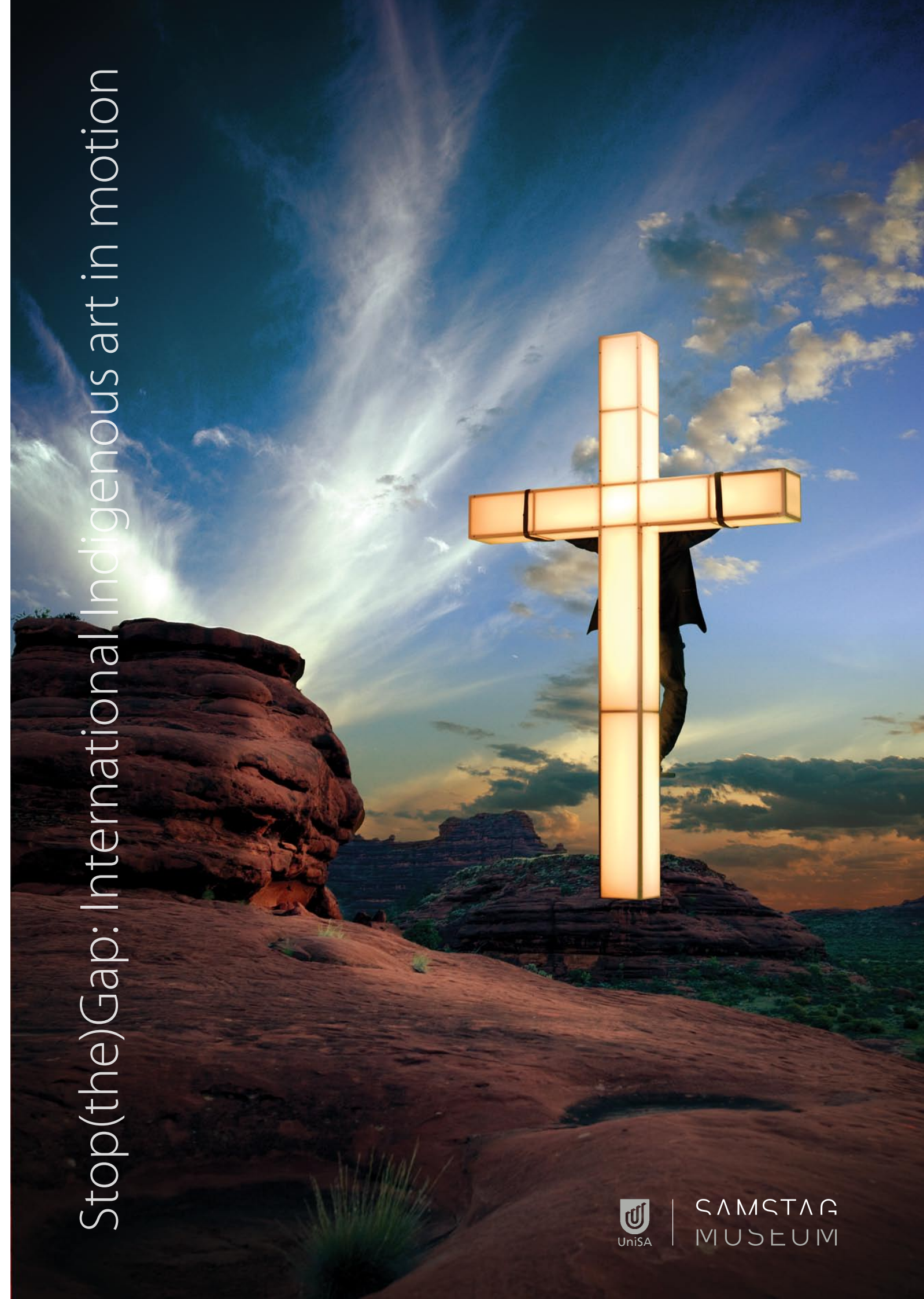
As always, this project would be nothing without the spirit, strength and vision of the artists: Rebecca Belmore, Dana Claxton, Alan Michelson, Nova Paul, Lisa Reihana and Warwick Thornton – you are all too deadly! As are Genevieve Grieves and r e a, with their outdoor projections at Port Adelaide.

The Samstag Museum gratefully acknowledges its sponsors and exhibition partners.



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Stop(the)Gap: International Indigenous art in motion





Rites of passage. Driving slowly down the coastal esplanade, parallel to a glorious stretch of seaside in Adelaide's north-west, on a classical antipodean summer's day, I am gripped with a sense of unease and rising irritation. It's the country's biggest public holiday: Australia Day, 26 January, 2011.

## Sell-abrasion of our nations<sup>1</sup> by Brenda L Croft

Say it loud, say it proud, bung another snag on the barbie, skol another beer, bowl another ball at the stumps. HOWZAT! Everywhere I turn, my eyeballs are beset by the colours of *another* country – the red, the white, and the *true* blue. Flags are flying from every second car, cruisin' for a nationalistic bruisin'; embroidered on hats, printed on bikinis, shirts and swimmers; in temporary tattoos adorning a multitude of faces and arms of young and old; snapping breezily from every public and many private flagpoles (since when did people start planting flagpoles in their front yards?). The faces are overwhelmingly white, their gait relaxed and confident. The expectation is that all of us are willing to be co-opted into this annual backslapping, colonial, self-righteous ritual.

*I'm a big advocate of the Australian flag. We love it.*<sup>2</sup>

Cars (and a few motorcycles) of every shape, shade and decade drive by, reddened arms resting lazily on open windows, drivers smugly showin' off... but for whom, and what purpose? And why do I feel like I am in the Deep South of the US of A, and that the *Aussie-Aussie-Aussie-oi-oi-oi* standard is an inversion of the 19th century US Confederate Battle Flag? Both ensigns refer to the 'Southern Cross', although in the case of the Confederate flag the cross referenced is the Cross of St Andrew, whereas 'our' Southern Cross can only be viewed in the celestial skies of the southern hemisphere. Maybe my unease is linked to how these innocuous symbols of stars and nationalistic colours have been increasingly appropriated for perversely patriotic purposes, and used like weapons.

*Australia. If you don't love it, leave.*<sup>3</sup>

With a sense of relief, I spy the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags hanging from the second floor of an ocean-front balcony, a defiant riposte to the (for now) restrained public gatherings on beaches, parks and lawns all over the country, a mood that will slowly but surely take a turn for the worse as the day lengthens, night starts to fall and more grog is consumed. Ironic, isn't it, how some sectors of the community are encouraged to drink in public places, while others are condemned?

The red, black and gold of the Aboriginal flag<sup>4</sup> first flew almost 40 years previously here in Adelaide, the City of Churches, childhood home of our flame-haired Prime Minister as well as revered Aussie icons such as Cold Chisel and Paul Kelly, one of Australia's most cherished singer-songwriters, whose songs have become integrally linked to many aspects of national identity and history, both white and black.<sup>5</sup>

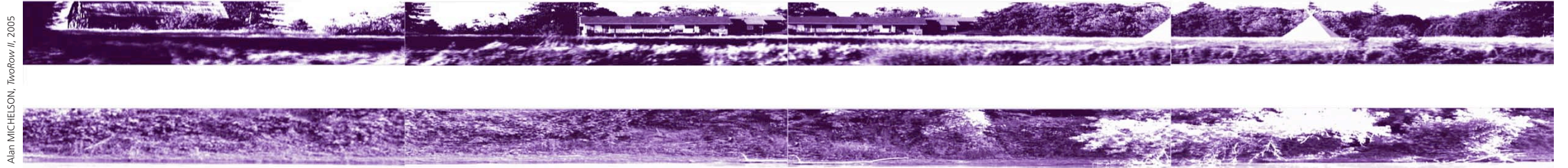
So, why the title of this international Indigenous exhibition project: *Stop(the)Gap: International Indigenous art in motion?* *Stop(the)Gap* reflects on the role of vernacular such as 'stop the gap/ mind the gap/close the gap' and its specific reference to contemporaneous Indigenous culture and politics; part of the general lexicon, the phrase is wielded about as political rhetoric and commonly misconstrued.

On 2 July 2009, the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, issued a press release outlining the Federal Government's determination to 'close the gap' of inequity that has been ever-widening between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia since the first impact of colonisation in the late 18th century. This initiative was allegedly created to build upon the former conservative government's 2007 parting gift to Indigenous people in remote Top End communities: the *Northern Territory Emergency Response*, otherwise known as The Intervention.

In the Intervention, government authorities – the army, in some cases – forcibly entered Indigenous communities to impose restrictions upon the inhabitants. These restrictions included the quarantining of welfare payments, and the compulsory introduction of a Basics Card<sup>6</sup> which enabled recipients to purchase items deemed 'essential' from the local store. For many people, the card was considered nothing but a return to the days of rations and apartheid-like regulations, particularly considering the fact that the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 was temporarily suspended in order for these measures to occur.

How does this recidivist action relate to international Indigenous experience, and what role do visual artists have to play in response?

Indigenous communities around the globe share colonial histories relating to dispossession, injustice, inequity and misrepresentation. Even in the 21st century, contemporary Indigenous art continues to be negatively configured through the historical contexts of Western art; its complex diversities and issues are distilled through Western perspectives of 'authenticity', 'authority', and 'tradition'. Through these practices, the capacity of contemporary Indigenous communities to engage globally, across disciplines and ever-shifting borders, is misconstrued and ignored, arguably intentionally.



Alan MICHELSON, *TwoRow II*, 2005

In *Stop(the)Gap*, individual artists' works vary visually and in content and media, but all address issues of human rights, the continuing impact of colonialism, and cultural identity in a contemporary world.

The emphasis is on both avant-garde moving-image work – as opposed to still imagery or mainstream/traditional Western film constructs which are effectively showcased through existing festivals, and performative practice – as many of the artists are multi-disciplinary in their practice.

**Rebecca Belmore**, of Anishinaabe-Canadian heritage, was born in Upsala, Ontario, and lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The official Canadian representative at the 2005 Venice Biennale, Belmore's *oeuvre* as a multi-disciplinary artist combines moving and digital imagery, as well as performative and new media, grounded upon her experience as a contemporary First Nations woman. *The Named and the Unnamed* (2002) is an installation incorporating her performance *Vigil*, conducted in downtown eastside Vancouver as a testimony to the increasing numbers of vanished First Nations women. Over several decades, more than 500 aboriginal<sup>7</sup> women have disappeared across Canada. The province of British Columbia has the highest concentration, particularly from the inner city and along Highway 16 (also known as The Highway of Tears) in northern B.C. Largely ignored by the authorities in what many consider an officially sanctioned lack of care based on the women's race, low socio-economic status, and supposed expendability, many women have been found murdered, some the victims of serial killer(s).

*The Named and the Unnamed* is Belmore's offering to the silenced ones, invoking their names, scrawled up her arms like tattoos or scarification marks, their lives, their loved ones left behind. Globes of light twinkle like stars in the night sky, one for each of the women from the downtown area. The harsh summer light of the gritty urban setting contrasts with the torn, frayed fabric of Belmore's red dress, nailed again and again to wooden posts like a crucifixion. Water cleanses, refreshes, reflects like tears;

roses are stripped bare by Belmore's teeth as she summons the names of her sisters. The documentation is rough and hand-held, as far removed from the slickness of a *CSI/Law & Order* episode as can be, and, sadly, far more real. Belmore's performative ritual is a cleansing reclamation of victims who continue to be denied equal justice.

**Dana Claxton** is from the Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux nation, and her family reserve is Wood Mountain, Canada. She was born in the mid-western plains region of Saskatchewan, Canada, which adjoins the US border states of Montana and North Dakota, the latter being a reference to Claxton's heritage. Many of the artist's ancestors, including her great-great-grandparents and venerated leader Sitting Bull/Tatanka Iyotaka (1830–1890), were forced from their traditional lands to the South by unceasing colonial injustices, including the mass execution of nearly 40 Dakota men – the largest one-day execution in American history – in Mankato, Minnesota, on 26 December, 1862. This massacre occurred during the US-Dakota War (also known as the Sioux or Dakota Uprising) which resulted from repeated breaches of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux (1851).<sup>8</sup>

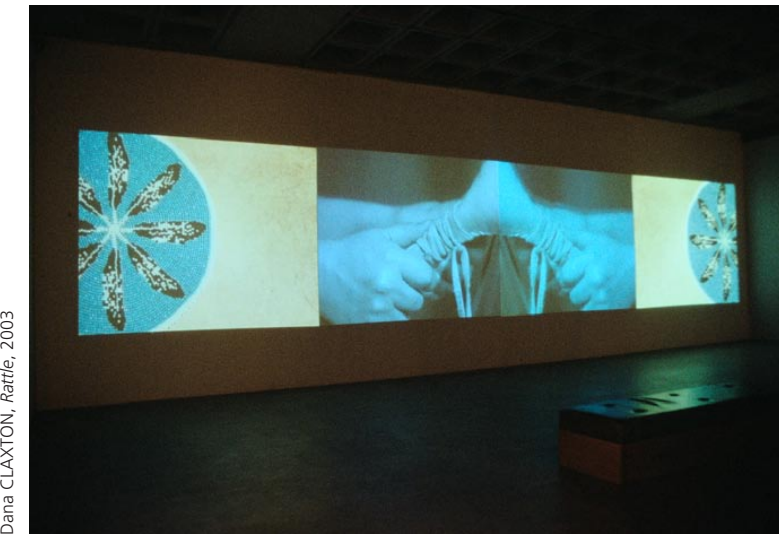
Claxton describes *Rattle* (2003) as being 'a visual prayer attempting to create infinity... [m]uch like a palindrome'; in it, her intent is 'to bring spirit into the gallery space'.<sup>9</sup> The visual and aural quadraphonic sequence of traditional horsehair and beaded rattles, shaken in real time and streamed in slow motion, is mesmerising, melding ancient ceremony and contemporary technology in a 21st century prayer or song cycle. Framed by projections of customary beadwork, the endless resonance of sound and sight entices the viewer to enter into a trance-like meditation.

**Alan Michelson** is a New York City-based Mohawk member of Six Nations<sup>10</sup> of the Grand River (Haudenosaunee or Iroquois). His works address place, memory, and the North American landscape in profound, poetic, multimedia installations. Michelson has articulated his fascination with rivers as natural borders, reflecting on the ongoing colonial impact upon local landscapes and waterways as well as the ecosystems and communities they support.

Michelson's monumental four-channel work, *TwoRow II* (2005), wends its way through southern Ontario, Canada. Following the Grand River, it takes the viewer on a panoramic expedition of the contrast between the Six Nations Reserve and non-Native townships situated on opposite sides of the river. The title and palette refer to the purple and white Two Row Wampum, a traditional belt woven of wampum (clam shell beads), created in 1613 to document a treaty between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch colonists in Haudenosaunee territory (now upstate New York). Its design consists of two rows of purple beads representing the parallel, peaceful courses of two distinct vessels – Haudenosaunee canoe and European sailing ship – alternating with three rows of white beads signifying harmony and alliance.

Michelson has translated the two rows into moving panoramic video footage of the two riverbanks; depicting both Native and non-Native vantage points, the footage is shot with four cameras from a dinner cruise boat. The viewer's gaze is torn, simultaneously drawn from left to right and right to left, following the hypnotic flow of the journeys which are moving in opposite directions. This ocular disjunction is accompanied by a four-channel soundtrack, three channels of which document the non-Native cruise: disembodied voices of passengers, tinkling cutlery, engine noises, and snatches of canned music vie with natural sounds such as the rolling rumble of advancing thunder. Central to the audio, however, is the conflict and contrast between the cruise captain's amplified narration and the voices of Six Nations elders who are speaking about the same geography in both English and Cayuga (a Haudenosaunee language).

Cultural conflict is evident in the visual opposites of the filmed journey – the Native side of the riverbank appears untouched; the other built upon, scarred by deforestation and development, with trailers parked along the edges of the now-polluted river – contamination denied by the self-laudatory non-Native boat captain in his monologic commentary. Michelson reveals the Grand River, as majestic as



Dana CLAXTON, *Rattle*, 2003



Nova PAUL, *This Is Not Dying*, 2010



Lisa REIHANA, *Te Po O Matariki*, 2010

the name intimates, to be a dividing line between neighbours whose conflicts endure in spite of all treaties.

**Nova Paul** is of Te Uri Ro Roi and Te Parawhau/Ngā Puhi descent. Her signature film works use three-colour separation, an early cinematic optical printing process which creates mysterious, visually-layered prismatic images where colour and light play tricks with the viewer's sense of reality, memory and time. She has said of her work: 'Like water that follows well-worn paths along a river, channels of colour trace around significant places to my family.'

*This Is Not Dying* (2010) emanates from daily life around the artist's *marae* (communal or sacred place), Maungarongo<sup>11</sup>, near Whangarei, the northern-most city on the North Island of Aotearoa. Everyday gestures – such as sun-bathing, fixing motorbikes, or setting tables for a meal – and familiar spaces and places to her family and community become 'other' places and spaces of liminality and luminosity, filtered by ethereal immersion in red, green and blue filters. Here, the past, present and future ebb and flow on the screen. The film is entwined with a soundtrack by *kaumātua* (revered Māori elder) and renowned popular performer Ben Tawhiti, whose slide and steel guitar virtuosity acts as a call-and-response to the filmed imagery. Enamoured with colour and the significance of small acts to say who we are and how we determine ourselves, Paul's lyrical works resist measured time. The moving images are like woven vignettes of textiles, layers of gauze, screen and screening, separating the senses, visual and memorial, and conjuring with light.

**Lisa Reihana**, of Ngā Puhi: Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tu descent, is one of Aotearoa/New Zealand's most renowned contemporary artists. Her works have been consistently represented in international biennials and exhibitions since the early 1990s. Reihana references personal and public historical archives, and melds these influences into sophisticated, exquisitely-rendered digital and moving images. In *Te Po O Matariki* (2010), silent film and glamorous days of yore are entwined with traditional *karanga*, the welcome call-and-response by Māori women to those entering the *marae*, as part