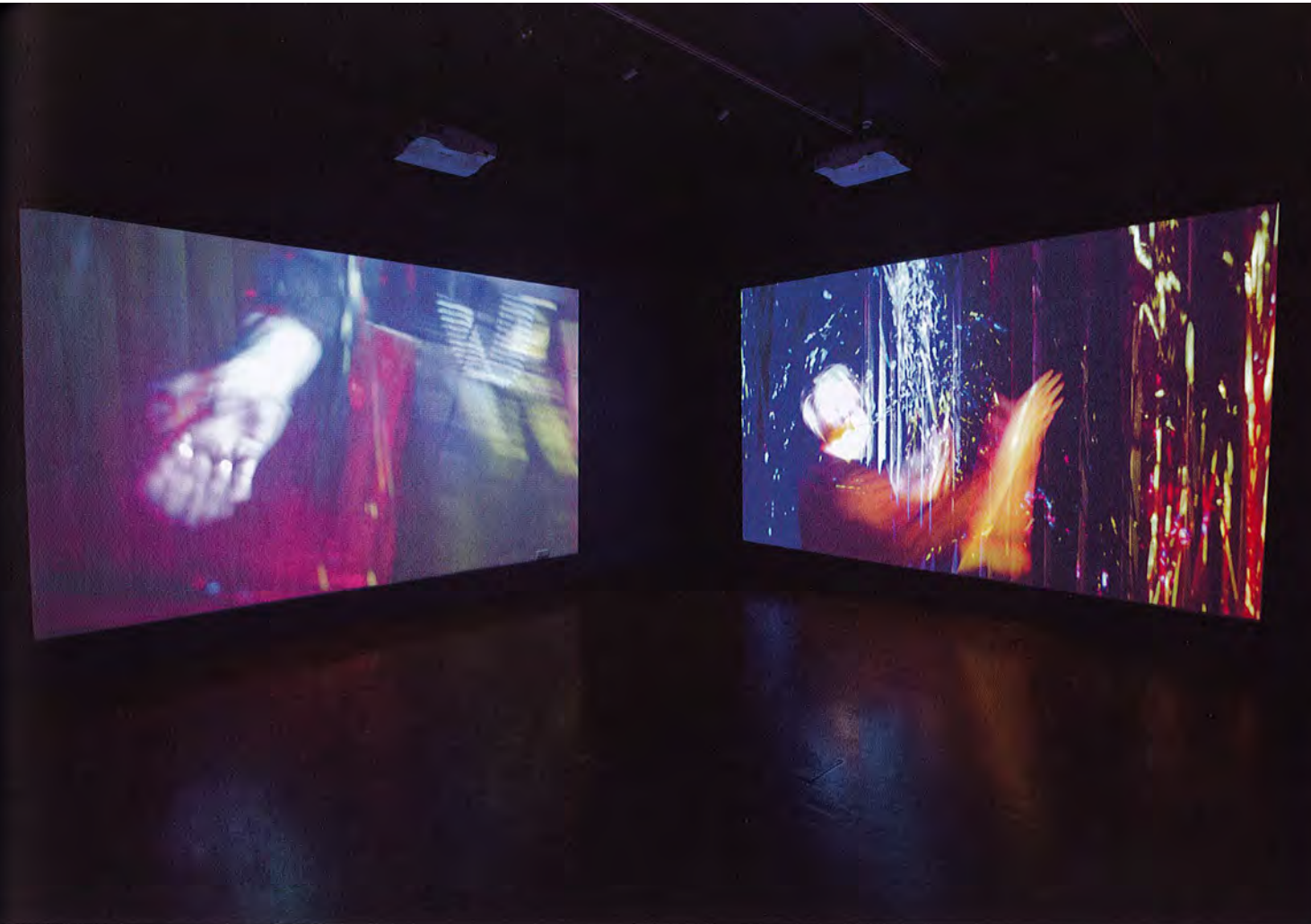
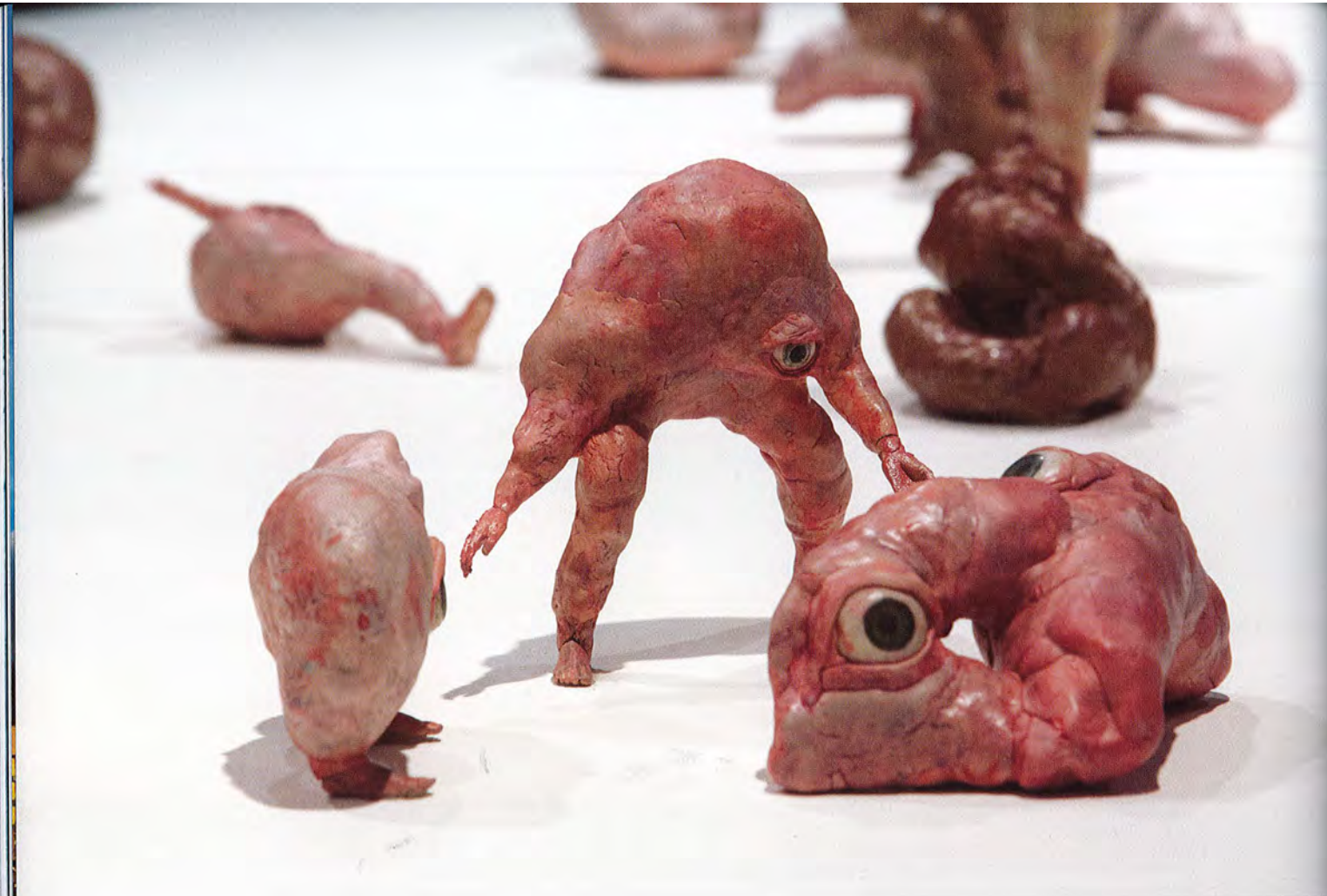




I RAISE UP
MY VOICE

HOBART CURRENT: LIBERTY

Late one night, Brigita Ozolins heard an arresting sound. The Hobart resident thought it was a choir singing in the distance. The voices travelled down the streets of Hobart and transformed in Ozolins's home to an otherworldly echo. It had an incredible and unforgettable impact. 'It felt like I was hearing a sound that was very deeply embedded in something beyond our everyday lives,' says Ozolins, one of the artists involved in *Hobart Current*.



Hobart Current: Liberty is a multidisciplinary exploration of freedom that features ten local, interstate and international artists. It is the first instalment of a major biennial program that combines art, education and activities in public spaces.

Ozolins heard the sound again the following night. It was haunting her, so she sought its source. She walked the streets of Hobart at dusk, grabbing at her keys for protection when she came across two men in the darkness. They were harmless. Still following the sound, she made her way to Franklin Square. She had thought she could be experiencing auditory hallucinations. She was not.

The sound Ozolins heard at night can also be heard during the day, but it is masked by a water fountain, the slap of skateboards hitting metal chairs in the square, and the persistent hum of traffic punctuated by accelerating trucks and yelling teens – the workings of a busy city. At night, the chorale rises to meet late-night occupants of the quietening city. What Ozolins heard is *Liberation of Country*, a three-part soundscape created by palawa artist Sinsa Mansell. Its tendrils of sound reach from the park to the courtyard of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and within. *Liberation of Country* is an invitation in

or out of the gallery space, and is one of the ten public works featured in *Hobart Current*, oscillating between deeply personal and global approaches to the theme of liberty.

Suryo Herlambang's plinth of metamorphosing Anglo-flesh-coloured forms is an ode to self-adaptation for survival. Hands, feet and eyes thrust themselves forth from lumps of flesh as they fight for the opportunity to take a new form.

In another room, artist Dexter Rosengrave dances across four projections. Music heavy with bass throbs in the gallery space as the artist appears to flit between screens. It is a celebration and mourning of queer clubs, which Rosengrave describes as places of activism and resistance. 'While it may seem that more mainstream awareness and acceptance of queer culture leads to greater safety, there are new risks that come with increased visibility; namely, the loss of dedicated queer spaces,' says Rosengrave. I watch Rosengrave's expression. I know it well. I am not queer, but I am a Black woman and I've danced with the same intensity to Black music made cool and consumed by the mainstream, in Black spaces overrun by people who think it acceptable to touch my hair or stare at me. A Black friend and I call it our angry dance. It is full of

love, passion, happiness, sadness and rage; a release of objectification in a space that feels safe enough to be who you are, albeit impinged upon. My most joyous moments on the dance floor have been when I am surrounded by Black bodies that do not judge me for dropping low and twerking for freedom.

Storyteller and Bigambul man Uncle Wes Marne's video work and accompanying handcrafted jewellery and handwritten note tell a story of resilience. 'We'll let the world know that our culture is still alive. Let 'em know that we have all survived,' says Marne as he threads culture and history in the form of jewellery made from echidna quills, silver and beads.

As I move through the exhibition I think of my own liberty.

When I became a mother, I felt an almost visceral pull against my identity and freedom. For those of us who have a clumsy relationship with how we move in public spaces, quick shifts can be terrifying. My external presence was strong but I fell apart mentally. My child was born unwell, and our first year together was spent attending a multitude of medical appointments that offered up new complicated and earth-shifting diagnoses.

My child could not breastfeed, but with my dogmatic belief that 'breast is best!' I'd wake every few hours, attach a breast pump and fall asleep exhausted with the pump attached. Hours became weeks in the radius of my breast pump and the hospital, my freedom dictated by the duties of a breastfeeding mother with a sick child who had reflux and required a time-intensive feeding process via nasogastric tube. It was a complicated juggle of mealtimes scheduled around appointments and car travel, which if paired too closely would result in projectile vomit across the backseat and an intense feeling of failure and fear over my underweight child's empty stomach.

Amongst all of this, my Black skin acted as a constant reminder to maintain politeness in a majority white space. People of colour are judged harshly and quickly if we step out of line, even if our world is falling apart.

As an adult I find it therapeutic to stare at the sky to relax my mind. It started in 2014, after a particularly difficult spell, and has continued ever since. In the presence of an open sky, troubles feel surmountable, and I suspect it is a stress response many turn to in times of entanglement.



Nadège Philippe-Janon's *Between arrival and departure* summons the eye upward to this vision of release. A burning sun, created using footage from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory, a mirror and water, pushes us beyond Earth to the centre of the solar system. The sun powers life and is capable of our death and despair. It has a volatile relationship with human existence but is nevertheless a view we associate with freedom.

In the three years since the project's creative director, Rosie Dennis, proposed the liberty theme, the world has changed drastically. Globally, lives and physical movement are dictated by a pandemic that has killed millions. For Dennis, the theme arose following the marriage equality plebiscite and the rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, but even more meanings have emerged during the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and the recent renewed attention to women's rights.

Ozolins's contribution, titled *My Voice*, stands tall above Hobart. The words 'I Raise Up My Voice' emblazon the top five floors of an eleven-storey building in the heart of Hobart. They are the words of Pakistani education activist Malala

Yousafzai, who at the age of 15 was shot in the head by Taliban gunmen for campaigning for female education. Less than a year later, the activist gave a speech at the United Nations Youth Takeover and spoke the sentence that now towers above a city that in recent times has been consumed by conversations about gendered sexual violence in Australia. The artwork has taken on new connotations in response to the times, but still centres on the dynamics of power and freedom.

Ozolins will watch as her artwork is removed at the conclusion of the first instalment of *Hobart Current*. I ask how it will feel to see the vinyl stickers stripped from the eleven-storey pedestal. 'So many people have said to me that it should stay there forever, that it's such a stamp on the city. It does put a marker upon Hobart; like, wow, this is a city where you can raise your voice – but the longer it is up, the less visible it will become,' says Ozolins.

I think of the focus of *Hobart Current* artist James Newitt's piece *From the Sea, Freedom*. Newitt tells the story of Sealand, an abandoned offshore World War II gun tower, occupied by a British family since the 1960s. The platform has been used as a pirate radio station and, in more recent years, a data haven.



Through Newitt's speculative storytelling, we learn of the sometimes-desperate measures taken by the family to stay relevant and remembered. No matter how absurd, Sealand is forgotten.

I return to *Liberation of Country*. It's the constancy of the calling that makes me return – the way it continues, like a foundational layer, beneath the noise of contemporary life. It occupies the space as each layer of daytime activity is applied; and, as they are stripped back, it remains the last voice in the night, calling across a city built upon attempted extermination. Artist Sinsa Mansell describes the sound triptych as a reclamation of spaces and an acknowledgment of the sound of this place, lutruwita/Tasmania, before colonisation. Although it is a chorus of human voices, there is something organic in its delivery. It sounds as if it is coming from nature, and singing for it. A chance to stop, listen, and acknowledge the spirit of the country nupaluna.

Will the voices still sing after *Hobart Current: Liberty* finishes? Yes, of course. Listen carefully. Liberty is there, underneath the noise. It is there. ▼

— 'Liberty' by Lucille Cutting

Lucille Cutting is a radio producer and presenter, and co-creator of *The Pin*, a platform dedicated to conversations about identity and culture in Australia. She would prefer that dancing in public be embraced as an everyday activity.

Images

p 36: Brigita Ozolins's *My Voice*, installed shot from the Council Centre; photograph by Andrew Wilson, courtesy of the City of Hobart

p 38: installed work by Suryo Herlambang in the *Hobart Current* exhibition in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG); image courtesy of TMAG

p 39: installed work by Dexter Rosengrave in the *Hobart Current* exhibition in TMAG; image courtesy of TMAG

p 40: installed work by Nadège Philippe-Janon in the *Hobart Current* exhibition in TMAG; image courtesy of TMAG

p 41: installed work by Jacob Leary in the *Hobart Current* exhibition in TMAG; image courtesy of TMAG

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Cover image: Sally Rees, *Gateway for the Witness* (video still), 2020

CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS ANDREWS
MICHAYE BOULTER
JUDITH BISHOP
VERITY BORTHWICK
MEGAN CLEMENT
STUART COOKE
KATERINA COSGROVE
LUCILLE CUTTING
EMMA DOOLAN
JAMES DRYBURGH
ZENOBIA FROST
JILL JONES
DAVID KEELING
JOHN KINSELLA
DANI KIRBY
ŠIME KNEŽEVIĆ
MARIA KUNDA
RACHEL LEARY
GREG LEHMAN
DEBBIE LIM
ANDREA MACLEOD
NICOLE MELANSON
MURRAY MIDDLETON
MARJON MOSSAMMAPARAST
LOUISE OXLEY
BRIGITA OZOLINS
NAOMI PARRY
LAL PERERA
SALLY REES
MADELEINE ROJAHN
HEATHER ROSE
PETER ROSE
RICHARD WASTELL
RAE WHITE
SEAN WILSON
DANIELLE WOOD
HELEN WRIGHT



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