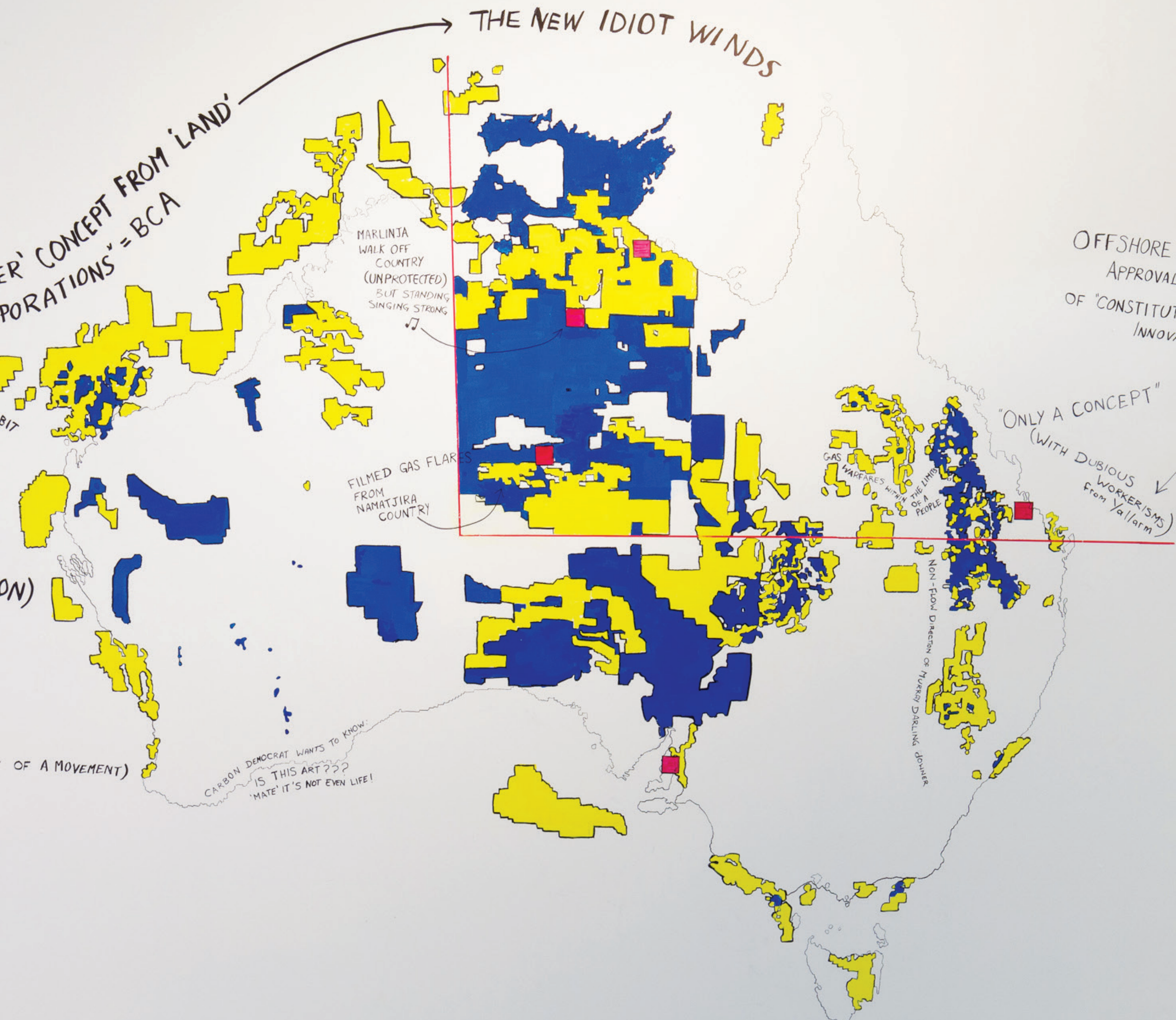


1971
1981
1983
1980s
1992
2007
2009

DEMATERIALIZATION OF ART FINANCE
U.S. CONSULTANTS SUGGEST SPLITTING 'WATER' CONCEPT FROM 'LAND' -> UNION OF CORPORATIONS = BCA
ARTIFICIAL NEW EYEBALL ON LAND
TAX CONVO GETS SEXY ^{GOT} WHEN GOOD ENOUGH PATRIARCHS PUT CORPORATE CRIMS IN JAIL FOR A BIT
MABO = NATIVE TITLE = NO HUMAN RIGHT TO ^(NEOAUSTRALIAN ART OF EXTINGUISHMENT ETHICS) SAY NO
NT INTERVENTION + "NATIONAL WATER MARKETS" (BIGGEST DROUGHT SINCE INVASION)
NEW GAS FICTIONS FOR INLAND SEA 2.0

- GAS PERMITS APPROVED BUT NOT NECESSARILY MINING YET
- GAS PERMITS REQUESTED
- SPEAKER LOCATIONS (SNAPSHOTS OF A MOVEMENT)



SHUT.
IT.
DOWN.

SHUT. IT. DOWN.

At stake in ‘INFRACTIONS’ and across ‘The Gas Imaginary’ as a body of work, is the mediation of a disastrous fossil energy transition, formatted entirely by the logics of settler colonialism. The unconventional oil and gas fracking industry was developed in the post-war US—with parallel experiments conducted in remote Australia—and accelerated in the wake of the 1973 US oil embargo. The US Energy Act 2005 enabled the use of fracking injection fluids to avoid oversight by major US environment acts, and this deregulation has been a precedent wherever the industry has crossed borders to be installed. In 2009 just two years after the Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention, the ‘unconventional’ (coal seam gas) approvals process in Queensland set up Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plants and export infrastructure on the harbour of Yallarm (Gladstone), and thousands of wells across Western Queensland. Presently, the Condamine River, renowned for pan-Aboriginal guerrilla blockades against pastoral invasion during the land-fracturing frontier wars (entirely unmentioned in early anti-fracking films), is now bubbling, unstoppably, with methane.

When the Queensland approvals process was whistleblown in 2013, this set in motion temporary moratoriums in most Australian states. Still, a precedent had been set that LNG companies are able to extract unlimited water for free from the Great Artesian Basin, while there is no domestic reserve policy in Eastern states, nor any feasible plan to dispose of the industry’s massive piles of toxic waste. Most gas is going overseas, creating false scarcity in the Australian market. It is through the fiction of this gas shortage on the East Coast, now being coupled to Covid-19 economic ‘recovery’ narratives, that all Australian states are being pressured to frack their gas reserves by the Federal Government. If extracted, these reserves will equal approximately three times the world’s annual emissions of greenhouse gases. Fossil gas is a proven contributor to increased global warming and methane spikes in the last decades. The current scope of new LNG infrastructure planned globally, including import hubs planned across the European Union to import fracked gas from the settler colonies, risks – *if built* – emissions ‘lock-ins’ that far exceed UN temperature goals for habitability.

It is difficult to find a better example of the now-global consequences of Western capitalist law’s ‘productive’ inattention to the varied, chthonic (earth-bound) laws of First Nations peoples. It is important, at the same time, to emphasise that there is contingency in this picture, for anyone interested in an otherwise. As the coronavirus has destabilised the global economy, investments in fossil energy amidst global oversupply have never been riskier even *within* the myopic economic imagination of fossil capitalism. This raises major questions, including for respected energy market analysts, about the extreme (sur)’realism’ of current gas plans.

‘INFRACTIONS’ documents an interconnected moving image of the precise situation and challenges facing an inspirational First Nations-led anti-fracking campaign in the Northern Territory of Australia, where 90% of the population rely on groundwater. A colonial geography of the North (of which Gladstone was once planned as a capital) persists in explaining the presence—before fracking arrives—of toxic water and unregulated mine trailings. It is both devastating and mobilising to be informed that in places like Marlinja community and Wave Hill, where victorious pastoral industry walk-offs paved the way for the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* (NT), First Nations have only Native Title rights that do not enable a right of veto over mine proposals. These frontline justice claims are further framed by internationally renowned Indigenous legal theorist Professor Irene Watson, whose own country in South Australia is also threatened.

‘INFRACTIONS’ is a feature-length video installation platforming the struggles of frontline Indigenous cultural workers against threats to more than 50% of the Northern Territory from shale gas fracking. As Australia becomes the leading exporter of planet-warming fossil fuels globally, and Asia and the EU plan to increase fracked gas imports, pressure on this region has intensified, threatening hard-won Aboriginal land rights and homelands. It is the final work of ‘The Gas Imaginary’ (2013–19), a project by artist, writer and curator Rachel O’Reilly that has used poetry, drawing, moving images and lecture formats to explain the legal, aesthetic and technical conceits of ‘unconventional’ gas, in ongoing dialogue with Gooreng Gooreng elders and women environmental activists.

Dir: Rachel O’Reilly, 2019, 1:03:00, HD video, split screen with text, Dolby 5.1

FEATURING (in order of appearance of country):

Jack Green, community leader and Telstra Award finalist (Garawa, Gudanji)

Gadrian Hoosan, musician and community leader (Garrwa, Yanyuwa)

Robert O’Keefe, ranger (Wambaya)

The Sandridge Band from Borroloola

Cassie Williams, musician (Western Arrarnta)

Que Kenny, community worker and law student (Western Arrarnta)

Juliri Ingra, artist (Gooreng Gooreng)

Jackie Johnson, educator (Gooreng Gooreng)

Neola Savage, educator (Gooreng Gooreng)

Dimakarri ‘Ray’ Dixon, musician and community leader (Mudburra)

Professor Irene Watson, contributor to the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 1990-1994 (Tanganekald, Meintangk Bunganditj)

Creative Credits:

Director/Research/Camera/Sound: Rachel O’Reilly

Producer: Mason Leaver-Yap

Editor/Visual Research: Sebastian Bodirsky

Camera: Tibor Hegedis, Colleen Raven (Nharla Photography)

Sound mastering: Jochen Jezussek

Map visuals: Valle Medina, Benjamin Reynolds (Pa.LaC.E)

Subtitles: Katharina Habibi

Film Thanks:

Stories from the Frontline: Artists on Climate and Cultural Change, Katherine Regional Arts Centre 2018, Watch This Space (Mparntwe), Gastivists (Berlin), Prof. Irene Watson, Lindsay and Richard Johnson, Lauren Mellor, Alex Read, Billee McGinley, Sarah Keenan, Diana McArty, Kirsty Howey, David Nixon, Caro McDonald, Jo Holden/ Evans, Lisa Stefanoff, Lloyd Beck, Marion Caris, Alex Kelly, Carmen Anseldo, Bong Ramilo, Cheryl Watson, Mimi Catterns, Beth Sometimes, Phil and Rick, Sonja Hornung, Manuela Kolke, Lindy Nolan, Carol Matthews, Karen Auty, Joe Collins, Zowie Douglas Kinghorn, Sumu Sivanesan, Nathan Gray, Jacklyn O’Reilly, Lawrence O’Reilly, Jonathan Oxlade, Anike Joyce Sadiq, Katja George, Regina Sarreiter, the PhD roundtable of the Centre for Research Architecture Goldsmiths, and the *Extracted Bodies / Corporeal Grounds* group of women artists in Berlin.

Commissioned by KW Berlin Production Series, dedicated to artists’ moving image (supported by the Julia Stoschek Collection and OUTSET Germany–Switzerland). Additional support: Australia Council for the Arts

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act was delivered in 1976 at the start of an inexorable mining boom, and the Mereenie and Palm Valley gas fields, flaring from Que Kenny’s phone in the night sky above Ntaria (Hermannsburg), were the first royalty agreements of the new era. The 1970s land rights moment also marked the beginning of the most extractive five decades – globally – in the history of fossil capitalism. Central Desert landscapes most familiar to art audiences as the country of Albert Namatjira are now connected by a private pipeline to the Gladstone port.

In 2011, the NT land councils were neither mandated nor resourced to cater to the rush of gas speculators accessing the ‘first in first served’ logic of the NT Petroleum Act. In just one year, 85% of the NT was covered in exploration permit requests. Only in 2014 was the policy changed to release set tracts of land possible for fracking, rather than making the whole state a free for all. Today, 25% of the NT is covered with *approved* exploration permits, while current laws allow for *possible* exploration over 51% of the NT.

The Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of 2018 (referenced in the film) explicitly acknowledged that First Nations community submissions “almost universally expressed deep concern about, and strong opposition to, the developing of any onshore shale gas industry on their country”. The Jumamba Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at UTS released a comprehensive literature review of both recent NT fracking Inquiries that summarised: “Most if not all expiration permits issued in the Northern Territory for unconventional gas have been issued in the absence of free, prior and informed consent”.

In Gulf Country, the sovereign music and film experiments of the people of Borroloola—who also feature in the SEED campaign film, *Water is Life*—feed regional solidarities and intergenerational strength in this new era of mining refusals. Stepping up are esteemed musicians, painters and community leaders on the frontline of overwhelming industry plans that threaten hard-won homelands and the ancient connectivity of underground waters.

Industrial society’s frantic use of resources goes hand in hand with accelerating processes of dematerialised image production, as corporations have taken over more of the media landscape. It is not a coincidence that artists are playing a role in resisting these upscaled investments in fossil infrastructure around the world. ‘INFRACTIONS’ gives only a snapshot, across a small number of sites, of a much larger intersectional First Nations-led movement for climate justice. Their connections are international, begin and end with sovereignty, and actively organise (most often without pay) around interconnected housing rights, water and renewable energy at every level of government. Between familiar driving routes and ancient waterways, two kinds of cameras assess the surrealism of fracking infrastructure and cultural resistance to such. One is ominously surveillant; while through the main camera, from the ground of country, we sit with people, and are led by what community organisers prefer to film. At one point the surveillant camera gets turned back upon the banality, and strangeness, of socially licensed fossil community security; ‘divestment’ thus appears here also in an aesthetic register.

This is less a film about ‘bad sponsors’ or even ‘two’ laws as it is about incommensurable powers, authors, and agencies that either commit to strained interconnected lifeworlds, or simply double-down on destruction. Song-lines, resistance histories, and politics of experience help to frame for a non-Indigenous audience how settler recognition concepts, and laws of irresponsibility incorporated, smother the integrity of First Nations in ways that threaten all cultural futures. Step it up.

Rachel O’Reilly, September 2020