Appendix
‘Visible/Invisible’
Exegesis Exhibition

Janawirri Forrest

invites you to the opening
Visible/Invisible

Ocean Beach Gallery. 256 West St,
Umina. Feb 10. 6-8pm.
Work current until Feb 28. Gallery
Contact: 0419-785-785.
Walking on water
(Ethic/Aesthetic)

My aim was to produce an artwork of something that belongs culturally from my country and paint it in a way that is contemporary and modern. Here I reflect on becoming an Aboriginal artist from the Western Desert. I have created a surfboard that has a story and symbolic representation of the Kalkurla (bush banana) that uses vibrant modern colours and a flowing motion that aesthetically works with the product. I have combined elements of Western and European urban worlds to produce a piece of work that displays something of my culture but would appeal to an urban market.
This piece displays the guitar head as broken with the strings still detached. Symbolically the strings attached show the relationship that Aboriginal people have with country. The line work is a traditional style from the Western Desert and many Aboriginal people listen to Country and Western music because of its heartbreak ballads and its general popularity in the Australian bush. However, the Jilted Lover refers to the lack of reciprocity as Aboriginal people until recently have not be acknowledged or allowed opportunity to be acknowledged for their relationship to country and hence their contribution to the establishment of modern Australia. The experience of a third space, of creative interaction, occurred as I performed in Paris, France, in 1996, at a nightclub with my Aboriginal colleague, who played guitar to my didjeridu. We played to a packed audience as people crowded to hear our music.
Meeting Mr Myers
(ethical/unethical).

This work shows me living in a contemporary third space (Bhabha: 1990) In this instance I had been invited as a participating artist with the Australian Consular General, New York in 1998. Following the exhibition opening I was also invited to a soiree at the residence of Professor Fred Myers, Professor of Anthropology at New York University. Professor Myers has written widely about Aboriginal Australia and on this instance he asked me a multitude of questions which I later found he had used as an anecdote in a paper. (Myers: 2004) Not only was the anecdote factually incorrect, I question the ethics of interviewing someone without permission at a social gathering for apparent academic gain.
Durack’s Barrup Dreaming  
(representation/misrepresentation)

This is a completely contemporary Aboriginal piece of work that is my expressing how I feel Durack was approaching her painting by misrepresenting herself as a traditional Aboriginal man from the Kimberley region. Durack intentionally exhibited her work with intent to sell under the Barrup non-de-plume by displaying in her daughter’s Broome gallery and went on to be selected for the prestigious Telstra 13th National Aboriginal and Islander award (1997). Durack showed no remorse for her deception once her misrepresentation was revealed. Curator John Mundine, remarked to London’s Independent newspaper: ‘It’s the last thing left you can possibly take away other than our lives or shoot us all.’ (Walsh: 2000).
Durack does Barrup
(ethic/aesthetic)

In this piece I portray Durack coming from her aesthetic as a privileged family member whose ancestors had claimed traditional Aboriginal land as squatters to become cattle Kings and land owners in the Kimberley. This privilege gained after a couple of generations also led to a sense of entitlement for Durack, who went on to create a false identity. This is white aesthetic over ethic and is highly offensive, especially to Aboriginal men as Durack presumed she could claim authority on country, on men’s dreaming grounds. Needless to say the aesthetic means nothing in terms of its meaning to Aboriginal people.
Three ways
(Communication/miscommunication)

This painting represents how I felt flying into Finland, the furthest north in distance and the biggest natural contrast to my Western Desert home. Rather than desert where water is highly prized, this country had no shortage in all its various forms through the seasons in the lakes and fjords and rivers. I was privileged to interact with Indigenous people from that region and communicate in that space of shared interest. The land says a lot about the people and their ancient stories. They were fascinated to meet a First nation man from a completely different continent as I was with them. They gifted me a traditional hat with three notches at the top, to represent east, west and south – no need for north as they were already there!
Mirar
(Visible/Invisible)

Regarding the appearance of the impact of Aboriginal art, it has been a glaringly obvious feature of colonialism NOT to see Aboriginal art, until it became beneficial to do so. Essentially it was convenient to discredit Indigenous art and its aesthetics, to make it invisible as an aesthetic, to miscommunicate its worthiness, in order to complete the process of colonisation. This was in contrast to the visible signature of European culture moving to shape the land with an aesthetic overrule. In this contemporary piece inspired by my Western Desert ancestry, I have used an underlay of letters to display this concept.
Preston’s Bouquet  
(Communication/Miscommunication)

From the Western Desert our paintings have always been a story of communication and the consequence of miscommunication. In an urban European setting I have chosen an artist whom I believe in her visual representation, was miscommunicating Aboriginal culture. In this piece I have taken an iconic piece of work known to have been created by the artist and jumble it so the art has nothing to do with the original expression of what it was communicating. This is a reflection on how traditional Aboriginal iconography has frequently been taken and juxtaposed without any real understanding of its meaning and what it is attempting to communicate.
Palaya Kalya

Nice Emus

(Communcication/Miscommunication)

This is a mashup using the Emu's from my Aboriginal heritage surrounded by the intensity of Preston's Aboriginal landscape. Preston's development as an artist and her misappropriation of Aboriginal motifs, joined together at random and without any real understanding of the cultural context of the works, did create an impact within Australia and an awareness of Indigenous culture existing within the modern nation. But her works also helped to railroad Aboriginal art and its impact to another emerging Australian industry - that of the fledgling tourism industry and the relegation of Aboriginal art to little more than trinkets, to be bought and sold in the form of tea-towels and fake Aboriginal boomerangs. (Kleinert: 2010)
Three Fires
(Communication/miscommunication)

This travel case was sourced in Prague, Czech Republic, 1996, where I was resident. It became a recipient of one of my Western Desert stories, inherited from my old people. Czech Republic had only recently opened its borders and people thought I was a Gypsy because of my dark complexion and long-hair. I was chased out of shops and told ‘Gypsy out!’ Even when I played didjeridu many thought suspiciously it was another Gypsy instrument. This brought back to me the feeling of entrapment which stereotypes produce on a certain section of the community as well as compassion for the Romani.
Enschede

(Ethic/Aesthetic)

This painting represents Enschede, Nederlands, where I saw my three worlds come together whilst visiting my family in Holland. One oval shape represents my indigenous heritage, another oval shape represents my Dutch heritage and the third oval shape represents the other space as me working as an Aboriginal artist/musician. The outer shape represents the ancient hedges that surrounded the village of Enschede, where my mum’s family is from.
While sitting with acclaimed Aboriginal artist Turkey Tolsen, we would often spend time playing cards. The blue here represents the blue tarp spread on the ground where we would sit to play cards. The game we played is very popular and it is about remembering. It is a game to exercise your memory as you have to find pairs by flipping the cards. Memory is vital in our transference of culture and in the painting of our stories. There is a depth of meaning in our paintings, some which are hidden to the gaze of people who have no business seeking this information.
Gaze
(Visible/Invisible)

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Napaltjarri Tjukurrpa
(visible/invisible)

This is a story of how our ancestors were created. This traditional story from my culture talks about love, lust, marriage and ceremonial law. The story is visible to those who know something of it yet other sections of the story are not told in public which gives it the visible/invisible, ethics/aesthetic quality.
Wanambi Kutjarra
(Visible/Invisible)

There are many stories within the Western Desert culture that hold layers of meaning only those who are privy to the knowledge will understand. From the perspective of the Western gaze, the work may be aesthetically pleasing, something which stakeholders in the art world have promoted and made profit from, often without any ethical or fiscal benefit to the artist themselves.

But there is a flip side to visible/invisible – something we as Aboriginal people have always done to survive. In this painting I have produced a work which shows a person from the Western Desert multiple stories yet the main figurative aspect and title of the story would only suggest one theme. The painting represents the story of the two rainbow serpents yet iconography hidden within the painting is visible transference to those who have the cultural understanding, to know what the actual meaning is.