



The Purple Shall Govern

**FOOTSCRAY
COMMUNITY
ARTS**

Presented as part of

who's afraid of _____

**PUBLIC
SPACE?**

acca.melbourne

We acknowledge that we work, live and create on the unceded sovereign lands of the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation. We offer our respects to the Elders of these traditional lands and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.



The Purple Shall Govern

20 January - 27 March
Footscray Community Arts

Roberta Joy Rich

Presented as part of *Who's Afraid of Public Space?* in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Photo Courtesy of UCT Libraries' Special Collections and Archives. The artist has applied a purple hue to the original monochrome archival image.

What are the conditions of power in public spaces?

How do they inform our ontologies, presence and permissions of movement today?

The Purple Shall Govern is a new major work that aims to reveal the slippery nature of borders and their embedded presences, inviting us to navigate and consider our relationships with histories that have residually informed the ways in which we move within public spaces.

Roberta Joy Rich presents a series of new installation works that hopes to act as a catalyst for recognition, reflection, resistance, and release. Through a process of reframing moments, affirming stories and anarchiving materials. *The Purple Shall Govern* considers the duality of boundaries that have informed resilience and the unyielding nature of people and publics.

Elders' Message

The Purple Shall Govern allows us to think critically about segregation creating a lens to empower the intersection between resistance and cultural practices. It is a space to affirm who we are, still within Colonial-imposed borders, and acknowledge the relationship between physical spaces and painful histories but also having a moment to focus on strength, not accepting things as a deficit model and looking to build a platform for stronger healing processes. As a survivor under the two state acts of Victoria (Aborigines Protection Act and Assimilation Policy), that was to erase the existence of our ancestors through denial of culture and rights to practice language. It's taken generations to find the right path to claim our identity, our polity of society, and say who we are. I am N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs of the Yalukit Weelum clan of the Boon Wurrung language group.

N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM

The Purple Shall Govern will create a space to challenge historic accounts, allow reflection on the White Australia and various Protection and Assimilation policies and who they impacted and the unaddressed trauma of the prison colony of convicts and the violence experienced by First Nations People. It will be a space where the sounds of resistance in public space are honoured and a chance perhaps to have moments of reflection about what not only went wrong but about what went right.

Uncle Larry Walsh



N'arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM and Uncle Larry Walsh at Wominjeka Festival 2019. Photography by Gianna Rizzo.



"The police water cannon moves in to disperse a demonstration, protest in Burg Street outside the National Party Offices, this time the cannon fired a purple dye."

©Obed Zilwa/Trace Images. Source: Trace Images. The South African History Archive is the custodian of this media.

Artist Statement

When posed the question, “Who is afraid of public space?” I am immediately drawn to think about the publics that I have experienced from my positionality as a daughter of migrants, a diaspora “South African”, a “Coloured” descendent, a Brown and Black woman and a first-generation settler within the imposition of the nation state that is ‘Australia’.

Motivated by an Anti-Apartheid protest in Cape Town in 1989, informally known as “The Purple Rain Protest”, I was very much drawn to this moment of collective resistance in public space, and whether such a moment could be re-framed to act as a catalyst. I lean on my family and peer southern African communities’ orality, and re-present sound, video and archival provocations, with hope for a timely interrogation, recognition and reflection of histories that encourage us to consider our present.

The publics I have experienced on Wathaurong/ Wadawurrung country around the peninsula, and the Wurundjeri Baluk of the Woiwurrung language group and the Yalukit Weelum of the Boonwurrung language group (inner east and inner west Melbourne) all possess differing communities, amazing stories and complex dynamics in their public spaces. It was unanimous to me, within all of these regions, that the most pronounced position has consistently been dominated by a Western episteme; be it the education taught in schools, the leadership in employment, or public social environments.

First Nations peoples, Black migrants and communities of Colour have thrived and exist in these public spaces although are not always *pronounced*. There is an abundance of oral stories, textual histories, archives and present day narratives that reflect Bla(c)k resilience, strength and excellence. My experiences in the public arena of settler nation Australia, has led me to interrogate and question my position, my accountability, my identity and delve into my own histories. I engage with this process to learn and understand what informs my own privileges to navigate public spaces, their shifting nature, and my existence in this place.

I have the privilege of telling my family’s stories through my arts practice, and I hope these stories can ignite reflections about the publics we inhabit and inform an understanding of one’s presence. I draw upon my southern African families’ narratives and experiences, living and growing up in the Apartheid regime. In 1960 and 1985, under the Nationalist Party government, South Africa’s nation was under siege. During 1985, in response to civil unrest, President P.W. Botha declared a State of Emergency. This enabled police and defence forces to increase power and unfettered abilities to restrict political resistance and censor reportage. Almost 15 years prior, Queensland State Premier Joh Bjelke-Peterson granted similar powers through a month long State of Emergency, as a response to demonstrations taking place during the South African Springbok Rugby Tour. These histories are significant because they symbolise and remind us of the unspoken and systematic forces of oppression endured by First Nations and People of Colour by colonial governments.

Footscray Community Arts is illuminated with purple light. *The Purple Shall Govern* architectural installation showers purple over a collection of works that present oral stories, media excerpts and former government documents. Sitting within the

exhibition, we hear the voice of Peter Abrahams; a friend and a peer southern African. There is a beautiful synchronicity in learning and presenting Peter’s story as a 14 year old boy arrested at the 1989 “Purple Rain” protest. Beneath the floor of the gallery’s foundation, a window reveals and reminds us of the monstrous policies, laws and their makers, that have influenced a legislation of publics in both South Africa and Australia nation states. Matching the silence of their voices, is a re-framed media archive from the *Foley Collection*—journalist footage from Nelson Mandela’s visit to Australia in 1990—but the only voices we hear are those of Bla(c)k people. With headphones, I invite you to join my younger self in a decade old memory, visiting my motherland and listening to my elders educate and share with me the experience of growing up in Cape Town and District 6. With the research, consultations with First Nations Elders, conversations with my parents, re-visiting memories and the provocations presented, I hope to encourage a duality of vexation and empower necessary conversations about public space and who it is for.

The colonial impositions and histories of racial segregation referenced in this exhibition inherently parallel with settler nation Australia’s imposition on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their land, practice, history, law, epistemology and connection to Country. As a Black settler on stolen lands it is important to me, when reflecting on and creating artwork that explores histories of racial segregation, land and Bla(c)k history, to address and acknowledge First Nations histories via permissions, guidance, and consultations with First Nations Elders and community.

Interwoven within such histories are significant moments of collective resistance that can offer sites of empowerment. That can subvert an idea of who publics are for, and can serve to create public spaces that foster togetherness, sharing, contemplation and a collective practice that defies colonial modalities. In the development of *The Purple Shall Govern*, I am extremely privileged by the generous wisdom, stories, insights, rigour and offerings shared by N’Arweet Carolyn Briggs AM and Uncle Larry Walsh to guide my work to appropriately speak about colonial histories with the hope to challenge and affirm an experience of publics. I am grateful to be encouraged and guided by N’Arweet of the importance of telling stories, and acknowledging the pain and difficulty that is inherent in this process. I am inspired by Uncle Larry’s important observations – we sometimes focus too much on what went wrong, but what about what went right?

Water-cannon police rout protesters in Cape streets

DEMO CHAOS 1000 HELD

6 TIMES/FINAL 3 SEP 1989

By **HAMISH McINDOE**, KURT SWART and ALLAN DUGGAN

IN a massive show of force, police yesterday cracked down on pre-election demonstrators in the biggest urban disturbance since the state of emergency was imposed three years ago.

Riot police fired water-cannons at protesters in Cape Town's city centre, drenching them in purple dye.

Police said last night that 500 people had been arrested. Most were freed after being brought before a temporary court on charges of illegal gathering and breaking the emergency laws.

Last night police announced that a further 500 had been arrested since Friday night in unrest related incidents in other centres, bringing the total to 1 000.

SA Police liaison officer Lieutenant-Colonel J H Labuschagne said these included about 300 arrested at the University of Natal on Friday night.

In Cape Town 52 foreign and local newsmen were detained and "removed from the scene", a police spokesman said last night. "All is quiet and the SAP have withdrawn."

INSTITUUT VIR EIE TYDSE GESKIEDENIS
Die Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat



Bron nr 1,0174	Datum 8.9.09.14.25.7	Onderwerp nr 159	Knipsel nr 4552
WEEKLY MAIL			Jg. 5 Nr. 35 P. 7
			Dat. 1.4.9.1989

7 JUL

GRAFFITI artists were quick to respond to Saturday's events in the heart of Cape Town. An Observatory wall now bears the legends: "The purple shall govern."

But Democratic Party workers were even quicker. In a deserted Burg Street, its mauve-tinted buildings testimony to the panic which had prevailed only hours before, they hoisted posters saying: "Nat policies cause conflict. Vote DP!"

I did not see the police water-cannon, pumping powerful jets of purple water, inch its way down Burg Street towards defiant figures kneeling in its path.

I had been arrested minutes before, after watching police plunge, whips and batons flailing, into a column of several hundred marchers making their way past St George's Cathedral.

Along with the 51 other journalists, television crew members and photographers eventually rounded up by police that morning, I spent the several hours in a police recreation hall.

As journalists were brought in, they gave eye-witness accounts of events.

Power to the purples in the watery wars

He described how a young white protester leapt atop the water-cannon and directed the nozzle away from the marchers, drenching instead the building housing the National Party's headquarters.

We learned how police had first dispersed a group of marchers making their way from District Six before taking action against those marching past St George's Cathedral and those in Burg Street, two blocks away.

Later we heard how, after the Burg Street rout, people fled for the sanctuary of St George's Cathedral where Archbishop Desmond Tutu led a service.

When he asked worshippers to show

- TREFWOOR
- 1 Davis, G
 - 2 Slagboom
 - 3 Poliso
 - 4 Waterka

"Power to the purples in the watery wars," newspaper article originally published in *The Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 8-14 September, 1989. © The Mail and Guardian. The South African History Archive is the custodian of this media.



Image of artists' family from personal archives, taken in Cape Town, South Africa, date unknown.



Image of artists' family from personal archives, taken on Hoerikwaggo (Table Mountain), Cape Town, South Africa, date unknown.

About the Artist

Roberta Joy Rich is a multi-disciplinary artist who seeks to re-frame archives of African identity and histories, responding to constructs of “race” and gender identity. Often referencing her own diaspora southern African identity and experiences, she utilises language, archives and sometimes satire, in her video, performance, installation and mixed media projects. Rich draws from various socio-political, historical and popular culture epistemologies, to engage with notions of “authenticity”, with the aim of deconstructing colonial modalities and proposals of self-determination within her arts practice.

Since completing her Master of Fine Arts at Monash University, Rich has exhibited projects in Melbourne, interstate and across Johannesburg and Cape Town. Recent exhibitions include, *Deny/Denial/Denied*; Blak Dot Gallery, Melbourne (2017), *One Colour at a Time: Contemporary Screen Prints*; Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg (2017), *M/other Land*;

Arts House (2018), *Transmissions*; Gallery MOMO Cape Town, (2018), *The Fairest Cape? An account of a Coloured*; Bus Projects, Melbourne (2018), *Firstdraft*, Sydney (2019), *WE KOPPEL, WE DALA*; Metro Arts, Brisbane, *Incinerator Art Award*; Incinerator Gallery (2020), and Stimulus Package as part of Darebin City Council’s FUSE Festival (2020). An alumni of FCAC’s Emerging Creative Leaders Program (2017), her residencies in South Africa have been supported by NAVA, The Freedman Foundation and Australia Council for the Arts. She is the 2020 recipient of the Debra Porch Award for an upcoming residency at the Cemeti Institute for Art and Society, Yogyakarta, Indonesia and recently received a Creative Development Grant for a new moving image work supported by ACMI and the Ian Potter Cultural Trust.

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Footscray Community Arts is supported by



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