

# FROM THE MARGINS

Installation work by  
Ann-Maree Reaney

Presented with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board  
of the Australia Council



THAT Contemporary Art Space  
Rear 20 Charlotte St., Brisbane City  
October 7th – October 18th, 1986  
12 noon – 6 pm

This project was assisted by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, which enabled the artist to travel to Mornington Island, spending a seven week period on the island, returning to a studio space in Brisbane, resulting in an exhibition of the art work in Brisbane, and the work in progress on Mornington Island.

### **Artist's Statement.**

My sculpture / installation work deals with the symbolic framework of a culture / society.

To paraphrase Marx – Women make themselves and their own history, but they do not make them under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

My work has been influenced by contact with women in North Africa and the Middle Eastern countries and most recently in an Australian context by contact with the women of Mornington Island, in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

"You white people use big words we don't understand, we aboriginals, we speak two languages some people three or five languages . . . . and you understand one."

This statement was said during a conversation with an aboriginal woman on Mornington Island and was for me an important and powerful point in relation to my position as a white Australian on Mornington Island.

"We come to know ourselves through being able to use language. But the language of a particular culture prescribes in advance positions from which to speak; language is not a neutral vehicle for expression of pre-existent meanings but a system of signs, a signifying practice by which meaning is produced by the positioning of a speaker and receiver. Furthermore, language embodies symbolically the laws, relations and divisions of a particular culture. Thus, while language is the means by which we speak ourselves and communicate to others, on a deeper level it also controls what can be said, or even thought, and by whom." (1)

**From the Margins** is as much about women speaking as it is about the community of Mornington Island; as much about the constructs of language as the constructs of relationships between peoples. Mornington Island is a part of the North Wellesley islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Mornington shire is now a community of approximately 850 aboriginal persons and 60 Europeans. The first Shire Council was elected in 1979 before this Mornington Island was an aboriginal reserve managed under the provisions of the Q'L'D Aboriginal Act, by the Uniting Church.

It was my privilege to be acquainted with the community of Mornington Island and in particular some of the women of the Lardil, Yangkal and Kaiadilt tribes who talked with me about their lives and incorporated me into their daily lives by taking me with them camping in the bush – eating from the land, sharing their knowledge of collecting barks, shells, wallaby grass, making string, necklaces, fishing nets, bags, spinning human hair to make their dance hats and belts. The figurative work exhibited in this installation is greatly influenced by these days spent in the bush, with particular reference to aboriginal women's relationship and knowledge of the land.

The entrance / corridor of writing on fabric is an indication ( as a visual analogy) of knowledge gained through reading. My first introduction to aboriginal culture and specifically women of other cultures was through this medium of communication, the audio of some of the women on Mornington Island speaking plays concurrently and works in counterpoint to these walls. This for me is an important aspect of this work. Without contact with aboriginal people one's only knowledge of aboriginal life, culture, is through these other mediums. The audio is important as it works in counterpoint to the idea of the universal, single, essential relationship that everywhere defines woman; and is indicative of each woman's role as a maker of culture in contemporary aboriginal society / culture.

Although I see my work as personal, my intention is to engage the viewer in a process whereby s/he is able to re-evaluate similar associations.

Ann-Maree Reaney

### Bibliography

- (1) Parker, R. and Pollock, G., Old Mistresses, Women Art and Ideology  
Routledge and Kegan Paul  
1981.

### Biographical notes.

- 1959 Born Maryborough, Queensland, Australia.  
1979 Studied Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba, Queensland.  
1980  
1981 Diploma in Visual Arts – D.D.I.A.E.  
Nov., Dec., Jan. 1980 – Greece, Israel, Turkey.  
1982 Travel to Greece, Egypt, Africa, (Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania.)  
Contact with Art College in Khartoum.  
(Khartoum Polytechnic)  
1983 Preliminary Masters in Fine Arts.  
University of Tasmania. (School of Art.)  
1984 Accepted into Masters in Fine Arts programme  
1985 Awarded Masters in Fine Arts Degree – University of Tasmania.  
Part-time employment – Drawing Instructor  
Introductory Drawing – University of Tasmania.  
School of Art.

**FROM THE MARGINS** Installation 1986.

Mixed Media – wax, fabric, dye, bamboo stakes, ochres, glue, henna.

String made by Dulcie Bentick and Molly Walpo

Audio edited by: Douglas Fraser

Women speaking: Ellen Richards

Edna Adams

Netta Loogatha

Dawn Naranatjil

Clara Reid

Hilda Pemble



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the community of Mornington Island, the Mornington Island Shire Council for allowing me the opportunity to realize my project grant.

And the following people, who gave so willingly of their time, support and advice.

- Dr. Paul Memmot – (for his patience, advice and willingness to help me have a glimpse of Mornington Island through his work and knowledge prior to my departure.)
- Dr. Margriet Bonnin – (for her support and encouragement)
- Kate Sutcliffe and Len Davenport – (for their advice and much needed help with regards my stay on Mornington Island.)
- Grace Cochran – (for her friendship and support)
- Douglas Fraser – (for his personal interest, sensitivity and professionalism with regards the editing of the audio.)
- Mario Silvestri – Audio Engineer
- SEQ Television – Audio editing facilities
- Fiona McAlpine – Poster
- Paul Andrews and the members of THAT Contemporary Art Space.
- Vibro Press – Printers
- Da Da – le Tarte – Annette Reaney and Amanda Young

And the following women from Mornington Island who allowed me the great privilege of taking part in their daily lives, of giving me an insight of aboriginal life and culture, and above all who gave so willingly their time, trust, knowledge and friendship.

To these women I am indebted and hope that the work here exhibited shows an awareness of the great responsibility my position has incurred.

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Margaret Hills       | Molly Walpo     |
| Phyllis Hills        | Phoebe Loogatha |
| Lucy Charles         | Fanny Lanley    |
| Ellen Richards       | Robina Evans    |
| Netta Loogatha       | Dot Evans       |
| Dawn Naranatjil      | Robyrtta Felton |
| Doreen Scholes       | Linda Walden    |
| Annie Chong          | Roonga Gulkuri  |
| Clara Reid           | Rhea Loogatha   |
| Marda Violet Gavenor | Roma Kelly      |
| Marcia Williams      | Elsie Roughsey  |
| Edna Adams           | Dulcie Bentick  |
| Hilda Pemble         |                 |

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