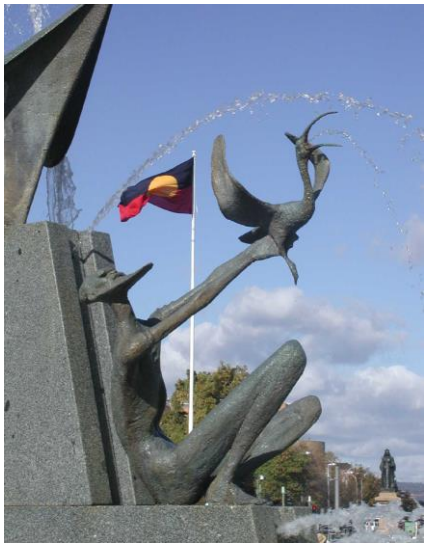
Ways of Belonging

Reconciliation and the Symbolic Value of the Public Space in Adelaide

A photo-documentary exhibition of Adelaide's public space Indigenous Cultural Markers presented as a social narrative of exclusion and inclusion from 1960 to the present through public art, community art, commemorative plaques and memorials.
Produced by visual artist Gavin Malone in partnership with Reconciliation SA and Tandanya, the National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, for the 40th anniversary commemorations of the 1967 Australian referendum on Indigenous issues in May, 2007.



Three Rivers Fountain, Victoria Square
John Dowie 1968

Exhibition Introduction

By Gavin Malone

'Space is colonised by the erection of commemorative structures on the terrain;
power is asserted by the exclusion of the commemorative practices of others.'
(Patrick Hutton, 1993 [i])

Representations of cultural history in public spaces through monuments, memorials, statues and public art, help shape both personal and civic identity. These commemorations also help make spaces into places and give symbolic meaning, as along North Terrace, Adelaide's 'premier cultural boulevard'. Places are where cultures find meaning, and as Angela Martin says 'Identity is formed and continually reinforced…within culturally defined spaces.'[ii] It follows then that when Indigenous people are not represented they become 'invisible' in the symbolic value of the public space, they do not see their cultural identity or even themselves as part of the cultural landscape.

Until 1960, when a small work by John Dowie was placed in the East Parklands, it seems there was no representation of Indigenous people in the public spaces of Adelaide. This reflects what the noted Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner called the 'great Australian silence' [iii] in regard to Indigenous people and issues. Out of sight and out of mind could sum it up. But social change was afoot reflected by the 90% Yes vote in the 1967 referendum on Indigenous issues, an important step in coming to terms with our colonising history. This social mood was reflected in Adelaide's public space as well, as outlined in this exhibition, with the first inclusions of Indigenous culture in the 1960s.

But these markers are not just for Indigenous people, they are for all of us, to also help us gunyas (whitefellas) better understand that we are on Indigenous land, in Adelaide's case, Kaurna people's land. Their traditional landscapes of memory have been dislocated through dispossession and exclusion. Landscape or place has always been a 'memory scape' for Indigenous peoples, reinforcing identity, mythology and their understanding of the world. The urban landscape is overwhelmingly European or Western, with little to connect us with the indigenous nature of place. That is where these markers can also help connect us with the indigenous nature of place, as the land, the Indigenous people and their culture are inseparable. It does not matter if a suburb does not have a high Indigenous population living in the area; the markers are for all of us. They help us recognise our collective history, they are part of us collectively coming to terms with who we are in this place and moving towards a shared identity beyond the binary of Indigenous and non Indigenous. It is part of bringing the old ways into the present, which then helps define a future.

I believe that collectively, with some exceptions, there has been a failure at all levels of governance in addressing the lack of, or inequitable inclusion, of Indigenous peoples in the public space. Much though has been achieved through reconciliation as a people's movement, but it is not enough. A deeper symbolic re-inscription or rewriting of the public space, incorporating an Indigenous cultural affirmation, is appropriate.

This exhibition is both a celebration and an indictment. A celebration and acknowledgment of what has been achieved by many, but also a sharp reminder that there is still much to be done. These markers form part of our social narrative, how we understand ourselves, and as Canadian historian Daniel Francis [iv] has said 'The narratives that we construct about our past produce the language that we use to describe ourselves as a community. If we are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems.'

I look forward to the day when I can walk around my city and my suburb and see a comprehensive and heartfelt connection to Indigenous people, culture and land in our urban landscape, be it through Indigenous cultural markers or a new way of designing and understanding our urban public spaces for all of us.

Exhibition Essay

By Georgina Yambo Williams, Nangke burka* Senior Woman*, Kaurna and Dr Christine Nicholls, Writer, Academic and Curator

Kaurna/Narrunga landowner and activist, Georgina Williams, spoke with Christine Nicholls April/May 2007. This is an edited version of Georgina Williams's responses to the public spaces project, 'Ways of Belonging'.

Georgina Williams

… To the old people, the ones who taught me everything I know.

I was born an activist! And I still am, on many fronts. But today we're talking about the battles we, the Kaurna, have had over the years to become acknowledged as the local landowners, in and around Adelaide's public spaces.

I remember that in my childhood my family locked horns with the government over the matter of land, over handing our land back to us – which to this day they still haven't done. For us, the effect of the British invasion has been devastating – wiping out many of our people, our institutions, our system of governance, our spiritual beliefs, leaving almost nothing standing. We Kaurna who remain in Adelaide are survivors, like the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who remained after the atomic bomb was dropped on their cities. It's the same kind of thing. We've had to try to rebuild almost from scratch.

When I was a young kid and teenager, I didn't think much about there being no monuments or public art reflecting Kaurna or their achievements, because our reflections came from the land itself, even though a lot of the topography had already been removed - the tractor and the axe were as effective as the atomic bomb in demolishing connections to land, for most of us. But others, including our family, were still able to "read" and interpret the landscape in traditional ways, because of our continuing connection to the land at Skillogalee.[v] Not everyone though.

We used to gather in the open spaces of Adelaide – like Victoria Square. That was our way. In my lifetime we've had to adjust to more and more buildings covering our land. We couldn't own those buildings ourselves, since everything was taken from us. This is a shift, an adjustment that we've had to make. Gradually we realized that the white people were erecting their own memorials, statues and plaques reflecting their achievements but there was nothing being put up that reflected anything of us, the Aboriginal people who were the first ones here. Looking [at those memorials and so forth] we realized that there was nothing of us there! That's what everyone's identity is about – looking and seeing some reflection of yourself there – but when we looked we saw nothing being reflected back to us.

We looked into the eye of the storm, and gradually we began to understand that to survive, our reflections of ourselves would have to be *translated* into the new world that we were now living in…that is something that I began to realize very young. The challenge was how this could actually be done in the new circumstances, when our country had been built over – this was the challenge of translation from the old ways of reading every topographical feature and mark on our land, when it was pretty well all covered over with buildings.

The generation before me used the Church as the gathering place to keep their reflections and their memories of our land alive. The church was their gathering place. In the Bible they looked for the things that related to their own knowledge, their own land.

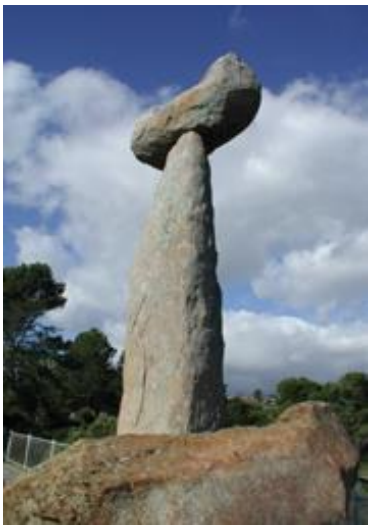
It was also the Christians, the non-Indigenous Christian people, who first started thinking about erecting monuments to local Indigenous people around Adelaide. There were non-Indigenous 'good spirit' people around
like John Dowie[vi] who may or may not have been a Christian - I don't know! – but who was probably influenced by those kinds of beliefs anyway, and who began creating public art that reflected us back to ourselves. John Dowie probably realized that we had been badly done-by, and we felt that with sculptors and artists like him, the spirit of the land itself had spoken to them, and had taken their eye. Remember that at that time most non-Aboriginal people of John Dowie's age group believed that we Kaurna, the local people of the Adelaide Plains, no longer existed!

But people like John Dowie felt strongly about doing something for the Aboriginal people, and maybe they went to a place, sat in a place, or went walking by themselves and were inspired by that place…they might have had a slight

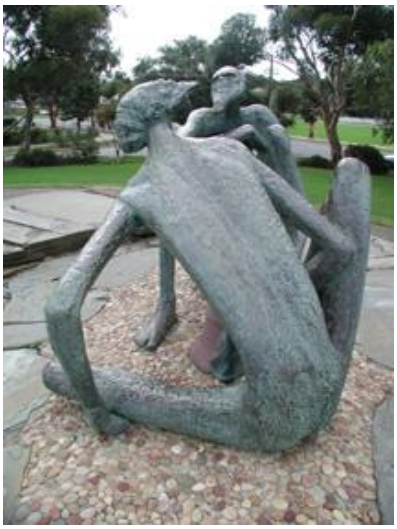
element of [being] do-gooders as well, but most importantly, they had a kind of spiritual awakening brought about by the land itself, and by the voices of that land. I attribute that to the power of our Ancestors, human, animal, insect and vegetable. So there was no negativity towards people like John Dowie commemorating us in their public art – we appreciated people like him. John Dowie does beautiful work.

We do have some reservations though about Aboriginal people from other places coming to Adelaide, thinking that nobody's here, nobody's left, and making artworks that are put up in public places on our land, without properly acknowledging us and our traditional ownership of this country. My preferred model for anyone making public art in someone else's country is that they should seek permission of the traditional owners and work *with* us - this needs to be done in the proper way. The relationship needs to be properly conducted, cultural way. As *nganki burka* (senior Kaurna woman), I believe that a conceptual framework needs to be put in place for this to happen – adapting the old Law of the Dreaming. Spiritual renewal through cultural action is the framework that we all need to activate.

And so nowadays, we ask people [who are working on contemporary public art projects reflecting Indigenous presence] like Gavin [Malone] and Greg [Johns] that they give a slice of themselves back to us in exchange, to create a deeper understanding so that we can *all* be acknowledged in our humanity. They need to make connections with the people of the land, not just make artwork! And they are doing that. The non-Indigenous artists need to be prepared to work together with Kaurna people, forming relationships with them and passing on the benefit of their skills, wherever possible. This is the kind of transfer and exchange that needs to happen, and it is happening these days. We need to be recognized as separate but equal, free to make our own decisions as well as to walk freely around our land. In the past, it's been like living under a dictatorship.



Tjilbruke Monument Kingston Park
1972, John Dowie



The Rainmakers, O'Sullivan Beach
1965, Geoffrey Shedley

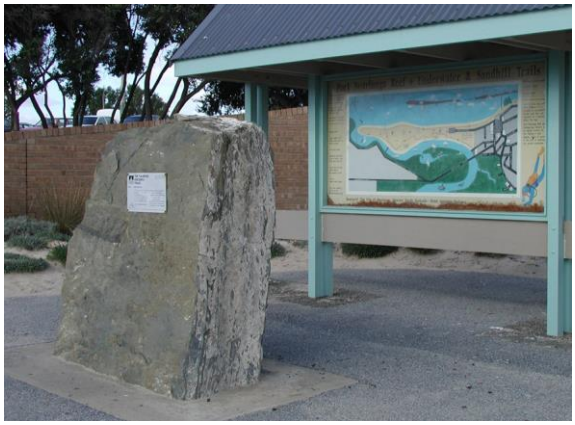
One of the big achievements of my life has been the public memorialisation of the Tjilbruke track – by placing plaques connecting the significant sites that Tjilbruke walked over…The idea of 'walking the country' came to me first in the 1970s, from making a fire. I sat in front of that fire at night. It was behind my house in Old Noarlunga. It happened when I was sitting in front of that fire in Old Noarlunga – that's where the spirit first came home to me, when my kids were with me. Later, we (myself and the kids) went to the Aldinga Scrub – and fire was part of our life, come rain or shine.

The idea to establish the Tjilbruke plaques, along the Tjilbruke trail to the south of Adelaide came later; it came from actually walking my country. It wasn't so hard because I got a lot of support from a lot of good people. To begin, I asserted my authority as custodian by asking people not to use sites like the Red Ochre Cove [an important Tjilbruke site] – I told them to use the other sides of the beach…I would stand there naked, and just tell them to leave! I got known for that. I kept that up for a long time…after all, we were the original 'nature people' so that's how I cleared the beach of unwanted people – I was a one-woman vigilante squad! And eventually the police came to invade my space, talking about 'that black gin over there', so I told *them* to clear off. But one of them became interested and asked me questions about what I was doing and why…

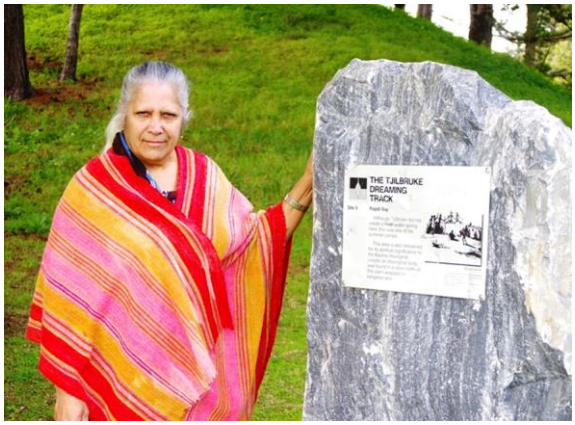
John Dowie had already done something relating to Tjilbruke at Kingston Park, and there were ideas for others to create more Tjilbruke memorials…but I said "*No – if we are going to do this we need to put markers down for all parts of the Tjilbruke story, so that everybody will know that this belongs to us*". So we recreated the Dreaming tracks of Tjilbruke, by mapping the country, showing the connections, telling the story for education purposes, both for our own people and for white people. A book was done too, showing the land relationships. This was done as part of the 150 Years Jubilee celebrations of South Australia in 1986. This was the first genuine acknowledgment of Kaurna people's history as *history* by the South Australian Parliament, through the visionary Minister Suzanne Lenehan.

I believe that this Tjilbruke Track is probably the most subversive public art in and around Adelaide, because it shows Land-Law relationships, whereas the others tend to be visual images, statues, murals etc, without the accompanying stories. There are now Tjilbruke plaques linking Warriparinga to Kingston Park, to Hallett Cove, to Port Noarlunga to Red Ochre Cove, to Port Willunga, and also cairns at Rapid Bay and Cape Jervis, all representing different parts of Tjilbruke's journey.

All of the municipal Councils involved were very co-operative – it all just fell into place. Fred Kelly, the project worker at DOSA[vii] at the time, was great – I wouldn't have been able to do it without him. There were others too, including John Moriarty, Suzi Hutchins and the fabulous team who were on the Tjilbruke committee – it was a very cooperative thing. When I say it has been one of the greatest triumphs of my life, this was not just for me personally, but for everybody. I had the job, but I wish that someone else had the job of bringing Tjilbruke home, because it took two decades or more - years of my life - from the first awakening until it was completed!



Tjilbruke Dreaming Track Marker, Port Noarlunga, 1986



Georgina Williams, Tjilbruke Marker, Rapid Bay, 2007

But now the work needs to be revisited and the descriptions need to be maintained. There's still a lot of work to be done about governance, about retaining and upholding the Peace Law of the clans, and relationships between different Aboriginal peoples, in an in-clusive, rather than ex-clusive way.

My major disappointment is that the stories accompanying the artworks are still not being done in a disciplined enough way, to give a real understanding about land relationships, relationships to country. We need more people to come forward to help us go on renewing ourselves – the next big challenge is the *interpretation* of the art. It's the interpretive side that needs urgent attention, now.

40 years since the referendum and what have we achieved? Where is *our* inheritance?

This is an edited version of Georgina Williams (born 8/2/40), talking about her life and times, and public art that reflects the Indigenous presence in and around Adelaide. This is a transcript of an interview recorded and edited by Christine Nicholls, May 2007.

Ways of Belonging' Exhibition Program

Tandanya	25th May to 22 July 2007
City of Onkaparinga	October – December 2007
City of Charles Sturt	January – November 2008
City of Unley	May – June 2010

TANDANYA NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CULTURAL INSTITUTE INC.

Reconciliation South Australia Inc.

City of Onkaparinga

CITY OF CHARLES STURT

[i] *Hutton, Patrick (1993) History as an Art of Memory* University of Vermont, Hanover

[ii] Martin, Angela (1997) *The Practice of identity and an Irish sense of place* Gender, Place and Culture, 4 (1). 89 -114

[iii] Stanner, W.E.H. (1979) *Whiteman Got no Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973* ANU Press, Canberra

[iv] Francis (1998*) Myth and History* Queen's Quarterly Vol 105 No 3 p475

[v] Skilogalee is an area of land near Clare, which had been reserved for Aboriginal people, which was granted to Kaurna woman Kudnarto, one of Georgina's ancestors. She and her husband Tom Adams, were the first Aboriginal and non – Aboriginal marriage in SA in January, 1848. The land was lost when Kudnarto died and not passed on to their children.

[vi] See photographs of John Dowie's works from as early as the 1960s in this exhibition.

[vii] DAA (Department of Aboriginal Affairs) at that time.