The ethos of I’ll work for you, if you work me too, reveals a preparedness to meet in the middle, but also highlights the often-unacknowledged one-sided transaction between Indigenous artists, knowledges, epistemologies, and the art world. Currently we are observing a worldwide obsession with Indigenous voices and voices of colour, and an extraction and representation of their cultural capital for gallery spaces. While this new diversity model of programming is often masked with good intentions, we know that the inclusion of darker-skinned artists does not change the very white infrastructures and power systems that the art system is based on. And the bigger question has to be asked, what happens when art becomes no longer interested in ‘identity politics’, will they toss us out as fast as they invited us in?

There is something absurd about an adorned working wind turbine within a gallery space. It is foreign and exotic, luring the audience in to consider its intrigue. This concept of intrigue questions the potential to be powered with a significant expel of energy from the audience. Considering this it becomes easy to argue that San Gorgonio Pass Wind Farm provides a one-directional energy transfer, where native peoples pay the price. This site was the location for a recorded performance series by artist Chantal Fraser (Sāmoa) in 2012. As curator Léuli Eshrāghi (Sāmoa, Irānzamin, Guangdong) has previously written, “The way the forceful winds combine with the fluctuating drumming sounds of a native drumming circle, and the aural and visual disruptions all serves to reorient and disorient the viewer.” According to Eshrāghi, Fraser intervenes in the landscape, “only so much as challenging the winds, whose shifting, contradicting silhouettes act as vignettes of diverse cultures, genders, pleasures, discomforts and displacements.”

Six years on Fraser, re-interrogates the rich and paradoxical site of San Gorgonio Pass Wind Farm—and more specifically the wind turbine form itself—for the new commission. She sees Chantal Fraser stretch, drape, cover, tighten and suspend a thin fabric adornment above and around her head-dresses and the like. In saying that, however the festival makes up just one part of the new-found recreational use of the area.

On unceded Cahuilla land sits the San Gorgonio Pass Wind Farm. Dedicated to renewable energy this area provides a significant amount of power to Southern California. Located just outside of Palm Springs, this place is a site of significance for many Indigenous peoples so it is ironic that it is also a site you of more than just spectacle. Acutely aware of the cultural capital that both the wind turbine and the components for the imperial project globally. Adopting humanist ideologies, nature was objectified and understood as passive (and of lesser value than people), leading to devastating resource profiteering that went hand in hand with the global expansion of capitalism. For Indigenous peoples whose land and resources were exploitation from the imperial project, this further exemplifies the racist and classist underpinnings of colonialist ideologies.

The current quest for ecological and renewable solutions to revert the damage caused by resource deprivation, pollution, and urban development then also becomes somewhat ironic. In the case of San Gorgonio Pass Wind Farm, the green energy solutions it provides for Southern California comes with the unsanctioned occupation of Indigenous land. In Queensland, Australia, the three largest coal power plants are powered by internationally sourced coal and sit on unceded Wiradjuri land. These plants and others like them, are producing an average of 94 million tonnes of CO₂ and leading to the construction of climate-displaced communities, where the health and well-being of the Indigenous peoples is not just a concern, but a necessity.

The Way Vai Niu Wai Niu Coconut Water

The Commute

Chantal Fraser

The Institute of Modern Art

Rattlesnakes and Rubbish #2

Prosperity

Upcoming Events

29 September Queer Pride: Closing Symposium & Celebration
4 October First Thursdays, Carol McGregor
6 October Book Launch, Ryan Presley: Prosperity

The Commute

Chantal Fraser

The Institute of Modern Art

22 September–22 December 2018

The current quest for ecological and renewable solutions to revert the damage caused by resource deprivation, pollution, and urban development then also becomes somewhat ironic. In the case of San Gorgonio Pass Wind Farm, the green energy solutions it provides for Southern California comes with the unsanctioned occupation of Indigenous land. In Queensland, Australia, the three largest coal power plants are powered by internationally sourced coal and sit on unceded Wiradjuri land. These plants and others like them, are producing an average of 94 million tonnes of CO₂ and leading to the construction of climate-displaced communities, where the health and well-being of the Indigenous peoples is not just a concern, but a necessity.
other. The shifting of environments for the wind turbine serves as a metaphor for the lack of context Indigenous art and artists often face when they are transplanted into environments where they become context-less.

The art worlds recent interest with Indigenous knowledge and practices mirrors a worldwide interest for Indigenous knowledge and technology. Influenced by factors external to art itself, this sudden obsession with embodied knowledge often feels like nothing more than a tick box exercise or a clever conceptual idea, in which the Indigenous artist and curator is positioned to be in response to something else. It is possible to view The Commute at the Institute of Modern Art as being strategically programmed to align with the Asia Pacific Triennial and its tri-yearly wheeling out of Asian and Pacific art in Meanjin Brisbane is itself as an exercise in this.

Ultimately, The Way turns The Commute on its own head, interrogating what, as an artist, one has to benefit from in an art market currently obsessed with markers of identity, diversity, and difference. Opting not to be a passively consumed other, Fraser asks of the contemporary art world, its audiences, its institutions, and its curators for a multidirectional transfer of energy.

Chantal Fraser (Sāmoa) is an interdisciplinary artist interested in the binary and ternary connotations of adornment and silhouette when presented in varying artistic contexts. Her work questions reader relevance by subverting the perpetual cultural and anthropological interpretations of the objects made.

Lana Lopesi (Sāmoa) is an art critic and writer based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. Lana is currently the Editor-in-Chief for The Pantograph Punch, Editor for Design Assembly and founding editor of #500words.