



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Local Creek Walks

Sundays 10am - 3.30pm: Oct 29, Dec 10, Jan 28, and Feb 11.

Join the *Walking Upstream* team for a local creek walk and viewing of the exhibition. Free but bookings essential.

Phone 0405 700 142 or 0423 745 736 or email [info@walking-upstream.net](mailto:info@walking-upstream.net)

More information: [www.walking-upstream.net](http://www.walking-upstream.net)

**Artists' talk** with Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein and Kim Williams.

Wednesday 6 December, 11am - 12 noon. Free, all welcome.

## WALKING UPSTREAM: WATERWAYS OF THE ILLAWARRA | WOLLONGONG ART GALLERY | 28 OCTOBER - 11 FEBRUARY 2018

Images. Front: Vincent Bicego, *Upper Byarong Creek*, digital photograph, 2017.

Back: Vincent Bicego, *Dropping Down to the Creek (Cabbage Tree Creek)*, digital photograph, 2016.

Inside: Lucas Ihlein, *Brandy and Water Creek*, digital photograph, 2017.



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WALKING  
UPSTREAM

WATERWAYS OF  
THE ILLAWARRA

BROGAN BUNT  
LUCAS IHLEIN  
KIM WILLIAMS



FOREWORD

Let’s take a walk. It seems the simplest and most natural thing to do. So much so that we rarely give it a second thought - we just do it. Yet the simple act of walking can have manifest positive impact on both our physical and psychological well-being, while hiking or bush walking can unlock an even deeper sense of spiritual connection and communion with nature.

*Walking Upstream: Waterways of the Illawarra* is an exhibition through which artists Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein and Kim Williams take us on a trek exploring the social, environmental and suburban fabric of our local creeks.

Creeks, streams and waterways form natural pathways through the landscape. Local Aboriginal peoples travelled these conduits telling stories, singing songs, creating culture for thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers.

While some of these waterways are now blocked, changed, covered in asphalt, built over with city and suburban sprawl those histories still remain embedded in the landscape.

The artists, acutely aware of the traces they leave behind on their walks, find the most appropriate ways to record their ideas and experiences: a photograph, a drawing, a map, video or a text work all feeding the imagination. The humblest walk is its own measure, complete at every point along the way. This exhibition invites you to turn your head, focus your attention, breathe in the smells, touch the wind and navigate the waterways.

We would like to thank the artists for letting us accompany them on their walks and sharing their experiences with us. Enjoy the exhibition.

**John Monteleone**, Program Director

WATERWAYS OF THE ILLAWARRA (WOTI)

Conceived by Wollongong artists Kim Williams, Brogan Bunt, and Lucas Ihlein, *Walking Upstream* is an ongoing artistic project focused on people’s interactions with the ‘waterways of the Illawarra’ (WOTI). Their site(s) of fieldwork, and their open-ended, interdisciplinary methodologies, are characteristic of socially-engaged art practices in the age of the Anthropocene, whilst also echoing those of previous avant-garde groups.

The simple act of walking returns WOTI participants to ‘foundations’.<sup>1</sup> This must be recognised in contradistinction to romantic notions of ‘origins’. There is no illusion here about a ‘return to nature’ as it is traditionally conceived, but the act of walking is nonetheless foundational in building knowledge from the ground up. Thus, while all WOTI walks begin with a cartographic chart, an abstract series of cross-references, the objective knowledge of the grid is ultimately rejected in favour of the embodied knowing of the body. Through walking.

The Dadaists, Surrealists, and Situationists, all recognised the powerful potential of play in disrupting the passive existence insisted upon by modernity. For WOTI, this playfulness manifests itself in the ingenuity of following creeks that, although not destroyed, have nonetheless been significantly compromised by urban and industrial sprawl, and are thus no longer easily followed. There are many times when creeks are no longer creeks, but are redirected as drains, channels, aqueducts. Sometimes they disappear altogether and must, when time and inclination afford, be found again. This methodology bears strong similarities to the Situationists’ practise of *dérive* (to drift), and – as the Surrealists, before them, believed – makes possible the “superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations”.<sup>2</sup>

In early 2017, workshops were conducted in conjunction with several walks along Byarong Creek

– exemplary of the Illawarra’s waterways in that it now passes through ‘natural’ ecological zones (the escarpment), highly urbanised terrain (the suburb of Figtree), and areas of heavy industry (the Port Kembla steelworks). The different forms of ‘mapping’ that emerged from these workshops spoke not only of the unique associations made by each participant, but the varied methods they used to evoke/represent those experiences. Some tore up existing cartographic charts, and – similar to the Situationists’ practice of psychogeography – rearranged their now varied parts according to the resonance of particular situations. Some re-enacted their journey through performance – quacking like ducks, tooting like car horns – emphasising space as the social “set of relations between things”.<sup>3</sup> Others constructed installation pieces composed of natural phenomena collected en route – a map that privileged tactility over vision.

In Dharawal cosmology, many of the Illawarra’s waterways were created as a result of Mirrigan’s relentless pursuit of Gurungatch. Like all Dreamings, these beings were essentially human in form but had characteristics of animals: Mirrigan, those of a quoll, or, in some cases, a dingo; Gurugantch, those of a fish, eel, or reptile. As a means of eluding his antagonist, Gurugatch tunnelled deep into the earth, creating a multitude of waterways and subterranean rivers; so as to trap his prey above ground, Mirrigan built formidable geological structures characteristic of the Sydney Basin’s sandstone terrain. While the most detailed anthropological account of this story was recorded amongst the Gundangarra<sup>4</sup>, it is a history also embedded in Dharawal country and continues to inform the worldview of local Aboriginal people.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, histories like Mirrigan and Gurungatch would have informed performative acts of mapping known as songlines. These ensured not only successful navigation of Country but prescribed



specific modes of social and ecological behaviour en route: how certain resources could be utilised, which resources required maintenance.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Western world’s more recent dependence on Cartesian rationalism, which presupposes efficiency through detached objectivity, songlines represent a radically different way of knowing and interacting with the world: here, space is conceived of, enacted, and sustained, as social. Work and leisure are indistinguishable, as is art and pragmatic action.<sup>7</sup>

At a time when more and more Australians are concerned with understanding Indigenous perspectives, the simple ‘repetitive action’ of collective walking, as advocated by WOTI, is arguably a foundational step towards normalising a ‘custodial ethic’ of care.<sup>8</sup> At any one time, the group may consist of ecocritics and ecologists, historians and anthropologists, computer programmers and human geographers. It might also consist of teachers, retired naval officers, social workers, plumbers. And of course artists. By walking the Illawarra’s waterways in an embodied, lived manner, people from an array of different disciplines, who bring their own unique perspectives and life experiences, and show willingness and enthusiasm to engage with the here and now, initiate a coming-into-being of creative space, ripe with socio-ecological potential.

None of this negates the value of ‘artwork’ itself, nor does it render the exhibition of material, tangible things, at odds with WOTI’s methodologies. The works in this exhibition are offered neither as definitive accounts (metanarratives) nor as end pieces (spectacles). Rather, they are ideas, questions, hesitations, in an on-going dialogic process which necessitate the engagement of the ‘spectator’. In this regard they are a vital extension of fieldwork itself.

**Vincent Bicego, October 2017**

*Vincent Bicego completed his PhD on the art practices and art histories of Dharawal country at University of Wollongong in 2017. He is a keen photographer and a regular WOTI walker.*

Notes:  
<sup>1</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, 1991, *The Production of Space*, trans. D Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Melbourne, p.201.  
<sup>2</sup> Breton, André, 2011, *‘Manifesto of Surrealism,’ in A Danchev (ed.), 100 Artists’ Manifestos From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, Penguin, London, p.248.  
<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, 1991, *The Production of Space*, trans. D Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, Melbourne, p.83.  
<sup>4</sup> Mathews, R.H., 2007, ‘Some Mythology of the Gundungurra Tribe, New South Wales’, in M Thomas (ed.), *Culture in Translation: The Anthropological Legacy of R.H. Mathews*, ANU Press, Canberra, pp.133-137.  
<sup>5</sup> Bicego, Vincent, 2015, *‘ReDreaming Dharawal: A transcultural and multi-disciplined approach to the Aboriginal art and landscapes of southern Sydney,’* PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, pp.110-12.  
<sup>6</sup> Gammage, Bill, 2011, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.135.  
<sup>7</sup> Rose, Deborah Bird, 2001, ‘Sacred Site, Ancestral Clearing, and Environmental Ethics’, in A Rumsey & J Weiner (eds.), *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative, and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, p.109.  
<sup>8</sup> Graham, Mary, 1999, ‘Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews’, *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion*, no.3, p.108.