

r e a: NATIVE

6 June – 3 August 2024

The interdisciplinary approach of r e a, a descendant of the Gamilaraay, Wailwan and Biripi people, as an artist, curator, activist, researcher and cultural educator, has positioned them as a prominent figure in Australian Indigenous new media theory and practice since the early 1990s.

With a focus on technology-driven works, r e a explores themes of Indigenous identity, representation and the post-colonial experience across mediums, including photography, digital media, film, video and installation. As r e a has said: “One of the most important aspects of digital new media practice for me has been finding new ways to speak.” Working with technology has provided them a space of practice and purpose, existing in what r e a calls “unoccupied space”.

At the heart of this exhibition project *r e a: NATIVE*, are two interrelated installations delving into the historical and colonial archive, a longstanding interest of the artist.

Highlighting the primacy of language in r e a’s overall artistic project, the term “native” is central to these works. This word is seen and understood by r e a as being integrally related to the body.

The artist has stated:

I can’t dictate how people are going to react to the word “native”, but I’m hoping that it’s actually an opportunity for people to feel ... the power of what a word like “native” can do to one’s body physically as much as what it does to the direction of how their life pans out. It’s what you carry in your body, the energy.

Through this exploration of language, and the devastating effects of its loss, there is a reclamation and a generosity in sharing new ways and experiences through technology. This work is being staged during the prestigious 2024 International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) in Brisbane, which brings together scholars, artists and scientists to explore the intersection of art, science and technology.

r e a is the artist and author’s full name. Due to Western and academic naming conventions, some of r e a’s writings have been published under the names r e a Saunders and Dr Regina M. Saunders (Morris). r e a also uses the name r e a noir as a play on the colour black and the French Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Native 2013/24

audiovisual installation: neon sign, sound

Courtesy of the artist

This remastered iteration of a 2013 work, *Native, 2013/24*, incorporates archival sound in a layered installation, intertwining the voices of children reading excerpts of texts sourced from Australian literature, film, songs and political speeches—historically important texts and lyrics that have shaped conversations surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and history. The installation is further enriched by the soft melodies of the Mount Druitt Indigenous Choir singing in Darug/Dharug language, creating a multilayered exploration of Indigenous experiences and narratives.

Native (yugal/song) 2024

audiovisual installation: sensors, sound, three-channel digital video (colour, sound)

Courtesy of the artist

Native (yugal/song), 2024, incorporates video and movement sensors that enable viewers to use their bodies to trigger generative and interactive visualisations. The conceptual and physical touchstone of both installations is the Blacktown Native Institute. Its historical context is acknowledged, as an institution founded in Parramatta in 1815 and relocated to Blacktown in 1823, a place now home to the largest urban population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in New South Wales. However, the project extends beyond this focal point, offering broader reflections on reclaiming Indigenous history and identity.