

PORT, POLES & WIRES

Port, Poles and Wires creatively explores in words, images, sculpture and other ways, how privatisation is more than business, industry, or services transferring from public to private ownership and control. Privatisation means selling government land, agencies and operations to for-profit companies. Although it sounds like it could be a good idea, in practice it can have disastrous consequences.

Our creative efforts consider various forms of ownership and custodianship, public and private space, and what

official arrangements determine citizen's rights under public and private entities. We question who profits from privatisation and what social, cultural and political costs can accompany privatisation. Our discussion of privatisation looks at and around government services or government control over public parks, or beaches or the sale of public or government operations such as our water or energy supply, the Commonwealth Bank or national airline. Perhaps it is worth sometimes considering options other than public and private!

Red Point Artists Association, Port Kembla, 10-19 August 2018
100 Wentworth St, with an annex at 179 Wentworth St

<http://srpp.com.au/projects/portpoleswires/>

ARTISTS

Kathryn Orton
Janine Fenton Sager
Kim Shannon
Nikki Main
Richard Mohr
Liz Jeneid
Frances Paterson

WRITERS

Sharon Callaghan
Rachel Bolton
Richard Mohr

FILM MAKERS

Gemma Parsons
Phillip Crawford
Agostino Marcello

Cover: **JANINE FENTON SAGER**

Power Towers No. 3 (detail) acrylic on canvas

Power Towers are never far from our field of vision. They are not only necessary to the functioning of our everyday lives, but are an ever-present and often subconscious reminder of our connectedness. Every person is connected to billions of others within a mindboggling network of associations and common threads of existence. The electricity grid is just one of these.

Fenton Sager tempts us to look again at

the power tower's majesty and startling size as a simple yet potent reminder of our place in human space. Her constructions, prints, paintings and photographs play with the elements of size and aesthetics and bring the everyday power tower into focus.

Shouldn't we, as individuals connected by and reliant on those poles and wires, maintain our rights to say what happens to them?

My written pieces consider our connections to community resources, infrastructure and services. Most particularly how we assert our rights around public, private, and community entities and how we respond when our freedoms are taken away.

In one story the freedom to go to the local pie shop was met with harsh restrictions showing how some people have less access to public places.

You might be lingering but someone could say you are lurking. You might be dawdling but others could accuse you of skulking. Hanging around somehow became loitering and in 1998 on the spot fines of \$110 could be yours under a proposed anti-loitering trial in Port Kembla designed to move certain people out of designated areas.

Community members lobbied, advocated and legally defended those fined under the new laws. Best of all they formed a collective to respond.

They convened ICAPS (Illawarra Community for Public Space) and organised a Loitering Festival to highlight the injustice of targeting specific groups of people via new anti-loitering laws. A mass community loitering event would highlight the unfairness of picking off individuals for being in public places.

The aim was to have lots of different groups in public spaces to loiter and collectively challenge laws designed to push some people out of sight.

Then there is the long proud tradition of marching on International Worker's Day revealing another insight on how privatisation works in public places. Local police facilitate the Illawarra



Poster by Sue Bessell and Valerie Law
(courtesy Illawarra Legal Centre)

parade of workers with their union banners and flags.

In 2017 Police NSW required the Wollongong May Day committee to pay for privately operated traffic management, as police would not be marshalling the worker's parade.

Hundreds of 2017 May Day marchers responded to the news that the police were not showing up by agreeing to be a group of people strolling down town. The 2017 large street stroll was strikingly similar to a May Day march!

When groups claim the public place as their rightful space their efforts protect much more than the right to loiter or collectively stroll the streets.

For a full version of these and other essays on privatisation see Sharon's page at srpp.com.au/projects/portpoleswires



KATHRYN ORTON

above: *Towards Hill 60* (acrylic on board)

below: *Orange chemical carrier at Outer Harbour* (acrylic on board)

I have been working on a series of small en plein air paintings around Port Kembla for a few years. The landscape is changing, both around the harbour and in the suburb, in part related to the long term lease of the port.

As a keen observer, attracted to the vernacular, I like to record places as they are now, noting the details that make them interesting to me. I'll have new subjects to work on as the place develops and the changes settle in.



KIM SHANNON



These images have been painted in response to increasing private property development of rural and public lands throughout the Southern Highlands with little regard to the natural beauty of the

landscape around the towns and villages. This inevitably involves the indiscriminate destruction of trees and the reshaping of the land, replaced by roads, poles and wires - the priority of infrastructure over the natural environment.



top: Oxley Drive 2576
bottom: Queen Street 2576
(oil on board)

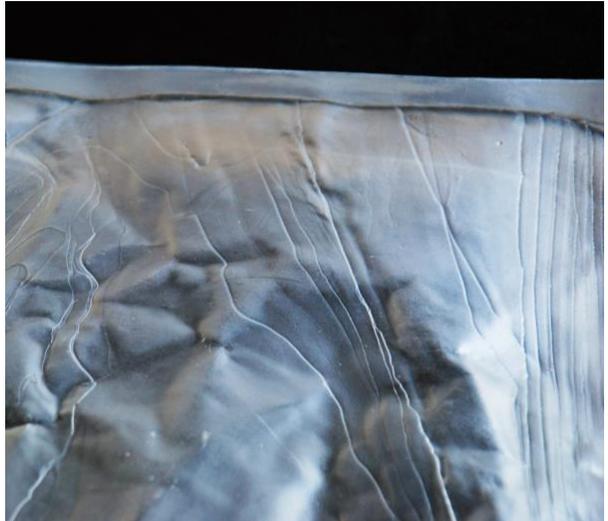
FORGOTTEN PROMISE

Nikki Main's glass piece, *Forgotten Promise*, hints at an official paper document, folding itself into a parcel of land. The glass represents the form of official promises, paper documents, and how these documents shape who has rights to land under the common law system of NSW.

Our two pieces – the glasswork and an essay – explore how public ownership can be exclusionary. We want to remember a forgotten promise made by a Department of Defence official in 1942: that the people living at Hill 60 could return home after the end of the war.

Hill 60 was first transformed into private property by a promise of land made by Governor Macquarie to David Allan in 1817. In 1900, the NSW government resumed 500 acres of that land for construction of the port, turning part of Hill 60 into public property for the first time. In 1909 a portion of that same land was acquired by the Commonwealth government for defence purposes.

Alongside these changes to land title, given form by paper documents of the NSW common law system, Aboriginal people continued to live on Hill 60, fighting for protection of pre-existing land rights. In 1942, Ray Burns wrote to the Australian Army:



Above and facing page:
Forgotten Promise (two details)
by Nikki Main (cast glass)

“The Officer in charge there gave us six days to move from Hill 60 and he informed me that if I left my place there it would be cared for and I could return to it after the war. ... Now sir, they are burning some of the places left on Hill 60.”

After the war, people removed from Hill 60 could not return.

NIKKI MAIN and RACHEL BOLTON

The Commonwealth government offered that same land up for private sale in 2006. A local real estate agency ran a newspaper ad 'on behalf of the Department of Defence', offering the land

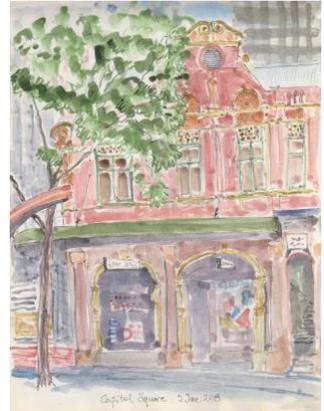
for sale as a 'prime development' site. Community outrage ensued, which eventually halted the planned sale. Instead, Wollongong City Council purchased the land for \$1.00.



Forgotten promise reminds us that notions of public property can also exclude. Although the land remains in public ownership, this does not address the forgotten promise: the promise of being able to return home.

– Rachel Bolton

Quotes from Michael Organ, *The Fight to Save Illowra (Hill 60)* available at <https://www.uow.edu.au/~morgan/hill60.htm>



My ink drawings celebrate public transport and the special views of *spaces and places* that it gives us. From a train the landscape rushes past, until we reach our destination. When we get out we are in another place: each place different from the last. The Inner West light rail line project selects a view from near each of the 23 stations from Dulwich Hill to Central. The South Coast railway album represents the line from Stanwell Park to Port Kembla from multiple viewpoints. The character of places change from quiet suburbia to the bustle of Darling Harbour, from Port Kembla's industrial landscape to the magical escarpment and National Park.

I like the *publicness* of public transport. We meet people we know and we see people we'll never meet. It has this character even when it's privately operated, like the Wollongong buses or the Inner West light rail. What might be lost in privatising services like Sydney's Inner West buses?

Most of all, I want to be treated as a *passenger*, someone who is there to get from place to place: not a customer, who pays money for goods.

In exploring the public, the private and the common, let's be aware of the *experience* of each: how it *feels* to be a citizen, an owner or customer, or a member of a community. It really does matter who owns or cares for the land we walk on, or the services we use. Are we customers of a huge profit-making bank, or members of a credit union or cooperative bank? Are we in a public park? Or a shopping mall? Aren't we always on Aboriginal land? And who takes care of it now?

If they turn us from passengers into customers we lose part of our attachment to those services, to the places they go and the drivers who take us there. This is part of a centuries-old story of the appropriation of the common (the seas, air, land that we share), first to be public (in the custody of the state), and then to be privatised: now sold off by neo-liberal politicians to their greedy mates.

We need public housing, shared resources, cooperative ventures and places to gather. We need to care for the land and for each other.

PUBLIC HOUSING

Is housing a necessity or a commodity for investment? As land and housing are increasingly used to make money, we need to go back to the basics of public housing.

Originally built in the Illawarra to house workers needed at the steelworks, there are still homes in good locations. But as the needs increase relative to supply, only the neediest end up in public housing.

Meanwhile the NSW government is selling off all public housing in the Rocks, a century-old working class community. Will Wollongong be next?

Old concerns about workers' access to housing are coming up again, as cities get too expensive for essential shift workers, like nurses.

Let's get together, workers, public housing residents and others, to come up with fresh ideas and head off any more privatisation of homes.

Housing is a right: it's not a privilege, not an investment!

Protection and *This is Sirius* will be screened at Red Point at 4pm on Saturday 11 August followed by a panel discussion on public housing.

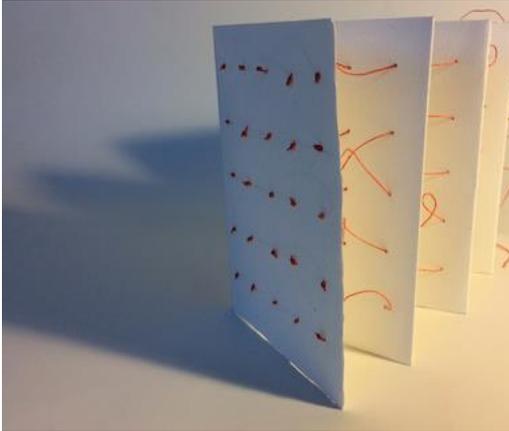


Protection is a film by children and young people living in public housing around Port Kembla. Produced by Beyond Empathy and directed, with the kids, by Phillip Crawford, and Gemma Parsons, *Protection* is a beautiful and enlightening insight into their world.



This is Sirius documents the battle to save the Sirius building and other public housing in the Rocks, going back to the BLF's green bans of the 1970s. Filmmaker Agostino Marcello introduces us to Myra Demetriou, a blind resident battling to stay in her home.

LIZ JENEID



above and bottom of page:
Facebook (Poles and wired) (mixed media)

I am always amazed and slightly terrified of the so called connectedness of social media – partly due to the fact that privacy seems to be increasingly hard to maintain and also because I am really bad at putting up images or text on a facebook page or other media that goes out to – well who? Having had my Facebook account hacked makes me even more reluctant to use it.

My two works represent *Facebook* and *Twitter* – threads connect the pages, twisting and penetrating the paper to end up in a chaotic mass at the end of the 'book'.



FRANCES PATERSON



Breakwater Battery at Port Kembla is a museum and public reserve. The museum and my work reflect in different ways on the area's social history dating back to the fear of Japanese invasion.

above: *Breakwater Battery No. 1* (detail)
below: *Breakwater Battery No.2* (detail)
(gouache on card)



CAMPAIGNS

How our supporters work to protect the public interest

Maritime Union of Australia members joined the Port Kembla community to protest the Port's privatisation. Since the Port was making money for the government, why should that go to big business?

And how did the NSW government spend its windfall? Its biggest infrastructure project is the WestConnex road project strangling Sydney.

Australian Services Union members led campaigns to keep Sydney Water in public hands. Who controls necessities?

NO PROFIT
FROM RAPE

ASU members have led the *No Profit From Rape* campaign, in response to the government advertising for tender the national telephone and online counselling service for women, men and children experiencing domestic or sexual violence. Because no one should ever profit from domestic and sexual violence.

The NSW Nurses & Midwives' Association won the campaign to 'keep NSW in a healthy state', against privatisation of hospitals at Shellharbour/Port Kembla, Wyong, Maitland, Bowral and Goulburn.

Now they are campaigning for better, more transparent nurse-to-patient ratios. There simply aren't enough nurses and midwives and that's putting patients' lives at risk. Safe ratios are a priority for everyone. Learn more at

<http://www.nswnma.asn.au/ratioslifeordeath/>

Ratios It's a matter of **LIFE or DEATH**

Who profits?

How are essential services protected?

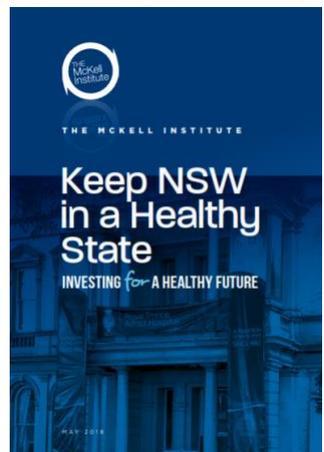
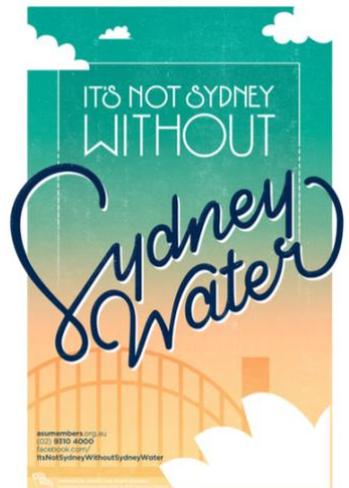
How should governments raise revenue?

What should they spend it on?

OUR PORT - OUR FUTURE

Residents were concerned that any funds raised should go to schools and hospitals for future generations.

(logo above from a Wollongong City Council flyer)



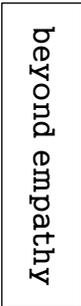
FOR JUSTICE, RESPECT & SOLIDARITY

Port, Poles & Wires brings artists, unionists, writers, filmmakers, and activists together to consider forms of ownership and public and private space. Justice, respect and conviviality must accompany all our interactions at work, in public places, in the home.

Join us at 12 noon on Saturday 18 August to share ideas about how to promote public ownership and community control. We will discuss and highlight relevant campaigns, through displays of campaign materials: posters, postcards, pamphlets. BYO favourite poster or campaign!

The project has been supported by unions and others who are working on these issues: strengthening communities, raising up voices that are too often silenced, standing up for workers, finding practical solutions to people's needs.

THANK YOU!



The workers' voice



Printed by the NSW Nurses & Midwives Association

