Chips Mackinolty

SOCIAL FABRIC
Banners from the Northern Territory 2010-2013

Sydney Trades Hall 11–25 July 2013
Dedicated to the memory of Pippa Duncan 1953–2012
Social fabric: banners from the Bush to the Big Smoke

*Social Fabric*, a splendid installation of banners by Territory artist Chips Mackinolty in the historic Sydney Trades Hall, encourages and cajoles individual action as it claims public space for Aboriginal and alternative cultures, ideas and economies.

Apart from a few scraps in collective shows, this is the first time in over 35 years that Chips has exhibited in Sydney. Welcome home.

How do we in First World Australia talk about social cohesion and human rights abuses while ignoring appalling outcomes in Aboriginal health, housing, employment and the injustice of increasing incarceration rates?

Prompted by the coercive reconciliation policies of the Howard/Rudd/Gillard governments, *Social Fabric* shows the positive side of the battle over access to media. These are artworks that have been produced for clients a long distance from the Murdochs and others who purport to speak for the betterment of Aboriginal Australians. Artists and activists like Chips Mackinolty continue to imagine new actions and models for participation, engagement and opposition.

Chips Mackinolty’s innovative propaganda has flourished for over four decades as he rides the waves of change in technology, writing and cultural politics. *Social Fabric* shows the artist’s commitment to Aboriginal rights as a liberation movement, but reflects other issues besides: anti militarism, trade unionism and the lives of other activists.

Chips has worked in the flourishing art scenes of the 1970s and 1980s. His posters were part of the alternative art movement and the art that promoted the great women’s, Aboriginal, environmental, heritage and gay and lesbian rights social movements. His work is currently part of a retrospective exhibition with Therese Ritchie by Charles Darwin University Gallery touring Australia, *Not dead yet*.

As an artist, journalist and health activist, Chips knows the politics from the grassroots up to the dastardly decision makers. His art remains a beacon of integrity and the power of the creative imagination to sort truth from dross spin.

Jo Holder
The Cross Art Projects Sydney
Social fabric: banners from the Northern Territory

The status of “public art” in the community has always been contested, from the display of State aggrandisement to the anti-government graffitist.

For the State, public art is more often than not architectural: the triumphalist Fascist architecture of Mussolini’s Italy and Stalinist edifices in Warsaw come to mind, as readily as Parliament House in Canberra (old and new) or just about any of Washington’s monuments. They all glorify the State and its power.

And then there are public sculptures of the mythological, rich and famous, something which in the western tradition at least has involved stone, bronze, steel and concrete. The ruins of past cultures and empires are, as often as not, marked by the remnants of these displays.

When some drunks damaged the sculpture of the “explorer” John McDouall Stuart in my home town of Darwin a few years ago it was quickly replaced at public expense: it was part of “our history” after all. Meanwhile there is yet to be a public artwork of similar significance celebrating the Larrakia traditional owners of Darwin—other than a bronze by Koolpinyah Richard Barnes of Chinute Chinute, the Tawny Frogmouth Owl. Public art rarely celebrates those that triumphalist histories regard as the vanquished.

But the State has no monopoly over beauty—let alone truth.

For my part, public art has always been my domain, but one that has always been far more ephemeral than concrete or bronze: from posters, to graffiti, to T-shirts to mural work.

While some of my work, yes, has been produced for galleries and domestic interiors, art for the streets is what has always made the most sense for me.

And so to banners.

Surely they are the most intimate, tactile and vocal of all public art. They are strapped to walls and buildings by hand; they are held by people marching down the street; they are unfurled as backdrops to our events and meetings; they flow with the wind; they speak to us on a wall, or at the vanguard of a movement on the march. In a sense, they are part of public performance and display. They assert to the world: “here we are, and this is what we stand for!”

Marie McMahon first taught me the process of one-off paper stencils...
in creating a large scale banner in the late 1970s for Women Behind Bars. Adorned by her with hand sewn applique, the screen printed The jails are the crime banner is now part of the Australian National Museum collection, after life on the streets of Sydney. For me, this was followed in the ’80s by hand painted banners for the Northern Land Council which served on the streets of Sydney for the 1988 anti-Bicentennial march and, in another context, for the return of Nitmiluk to its Jawoyn Traditional Owners in 1989. After this was work in 2000 for a series of banners with Joanna Barrkman, Mumkurla-nginyima Parrngalinyparla—Out of the Darkness into the light, a collection of banners celebrating the Wave Hill Walk Off.

New times, new technologies.

I rediscovered the banner in 2010 for the Fresh Food Summit in Tennant Creek, organised by my employer, the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory [AMSANT]. That image was followed by the others in this exhibition, for other organisations, for other causes: from the commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk off, to trade unionists’ perspective on the bombing of Darwin, to a Grog Summit held by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, to the marking of the history of the notorious Kahlin Compound last century.

They are no longer hand painted, no longer screen printed. The designs are emailed to Melbourne and are digitally printed, and subject to processes I barely understand such as inkjet printing and dye sublimation. The knowledge and skills so many of us had in the 1970s as designers and printers are long gone in the face of these new technologies, and are now produced by workers with other skills, and other knowledge. I pay tribute to them: they can do things which astonish and delight me.

But we still have the banners, however created: alive, up front, in your face.

And blowin’ in the wind.

Chips Mackinolty
Darwin June 2013

1 And it was Marie who came up with the name “Social Fabric” that titles this exhibition, and formerly the name of a design and printing company established in the 1980s by her and Jan Mackay.
The Northern Territory’s Senior Health Worker Network and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory [AMSANT] declared 1 Jul 2011–30 June 2012 the Year of the Aboriginal Health Worker in recognition of the work carried out by this critical part of the

Year of the Aboriginal Health Worker

Mackinolty, Year of the Aboriginal Health Worker, 2010, 133 x 400 cm

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Aboriginal comprehensive primary health care workforce.

Over a period of a year or so, a number of images were produced for this period of celebration.

The work was transformed from banners and posters, to T-shirts, bags, tickets and awards, DVD covers, newspaper advertisements and stories.

The banners above, printed on polyester, were distributed to AMSANT Members services and government clinics throughout the Northern Territory.

Larger banners (1.33 x 400cm) were used at meetings, as well as in a historic march by Aboriginal Health Workers and their supporters leading Darwin’s May Day March in 2012.

The banner and print designs were created in Beirut in January 2011.
A summit staged by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory [APO NT], made up of the Central and Northern land councils, the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory.

The Summit called for, among other things, the implementation of population level supply reduction measures as a “circuit breaker” for problems in Aboriginal communities; significant new resources into early childhood programs as an absolute priority; and the expansion of government support for community-based recovery strategies.
An APO NT Summit that attracted 300 Aboriginal people from across the Territory.

The meeting was designed to tackle the challenges and common barriers to achieving greater governance control for Aboriginal people and to work towards solutions that address these challenges, including understanding skills, resources and capacities that people and their communities, regions, clans, and nations need for greater decision making control.

Who makes the decisions?

Mackinolty, *Who makes the decisions?*, 2013, 178.5 x 397cm
The modern land rights movement began as an industrial dispute when the Gurindji people—and others—walked off Wave Hill Station. In one characterisation, the Gurindji walked off the stock camps into the pages of history. And that history was one of a demand for land rights, a demand which reverberates to this day.

These images were reproduced as T-shirts and banners for the celebration of the 45th anniversary of the Walk Off. The images represent three “takes” on the event: those who walked off; those who still hold the Law; and those who honour the event, and echo the words to the Kev Carmody/Paul Kelly song, From little things, big things grow.

The three versions of the image refer to those who walked off Wave Hill, their descendants, and their supporters.
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Chips Mackinolty
On 19 February each year, Darwin marks the Bombing of Darwin in World War II.

The “main” ceremony is held with the military and the bigwigs up on the Esplanade. Each year, wharfies, seafarers and other unionists hold a ceremony down on the wharf where many workers died on that day. This was created for the MUA to mark the 70th anniversary of the Bombing. On that day Tiwi Island dancers joined unionists and their supporters with a performance of the “Bombing of Darwin” dance.
For a quarter of a century until 1938, Aboriginal people in and around Darwin were trapped by a legal system that locked people up and enforced a curfew on them.

In 2013 those days are being commemorated by a handful of survivors and their families.
The Fresh Food Summit drew 250 Aboriginal people from across the Northern Territory and interstate to discuss and workshop the vital issue of food security with the philosophy of “not just food for thought, but for action”. The Summit, held at the Tennant Creek Showground also included a strong cultural component with bush tucker displays and workshops with women from Anyinginyi Aboriginal Health, dancers from Alekarenge and Aboriginal bands and visual artists coordinated through Barkly Regional Arts and Winanjjikari Music Centre.

Client: Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory.


Fresh Food Summit, originally a planographic print with sponsors’ logos, 27 x 84cm, print run 300.

Street Banner on polyester, 49 x 133cm, 80 copies.

Limited edition print (30) on 300gsm German etching paper 32.5 x 100cm.
Pippa spent 30 years working in Aboriginal health in central Australia as a midwife, psych nurse and peace activist, as well as being a strong supporter of the struggles in Timor Leste and Kanaky.

The architect who designed the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress health service’s new buildings, Jane Dillon, remembers she asked Congress staff what colour to paint the doors. Duncan said: “Chinese red, of course”. And so all the external doors at Congress remain a reminder of Duncan’s famous saying “Any colour, as long as it’s red.”


Image drawn from Jenny Green photo.
Artists against the war machine

The late Michael Callaghan was developing an exhibition at Damien Minton Gallery on the arms industry, with an emphasis on its role in the Middle East. This image was produced for his memorial exhibition in November 2012.

The image was produced in partnership with an Aboriginal woman with Pashtun heritage; a Lebanese woman who helped do some linguistic wrangling, and a Jordanian woman who did the final translation and calligraphy.
Mackinolty, *Artists against the war machine*, 2012, 100 x 395cm

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40 years for Aboriginal Justice

Under various names, NAAJA has defended Aboriginal legal rights—and access to justice—for four decades. This banner celebrates the achievements of an organisation that has survived to deliver services, along with its sister organisation in Alice Springs, CAALAS, across the Territory.
Acknowledgements

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