

Debra Phillips

A talker's echo

6 May — 17 June 2023
The Cross Art Projects

Opening Saturday 6 May, 3 pm
With guest speaker James Gatt, independent curator
Curated by Jasmin Stephens

I hate the word permanent—it's like the statues of colonial monsters in public parks. Let the landscape be permanent; let us humans work out how to be less so. Let nature be able to work on things.

— Julie Gough

From "'We are tearing open that wound': the First Nations artists reclaiming Tasmania", Walter Marsh, *The Guardian*, Thursday 27th January 2022.

A talker's echo emerges as a continuum of the ideas evoked by the public artwork *Viva Voce*, which was located on Gadigal land at the Domain in Sydney from 1999 until its deaccessioning and removal in 2019. Commissioned for the City of Sydney Sculpture Walk, *Viva Voce* was created by Debra Phillips to acknowledge Speakers' Corner as an active site for the public exchange of ideas and opinions. Such activity has been conducted since the 1870s across different locations in the Domain. Diverse cultural stories and distinctive voices from the past, present and future continue to resonate across this site. *A talker's echo* draws on a complex public entanglement of perspectives on history, memory, conflict, politics and sovereignty played out through this civic space. In the exhibition repurposed remnants of the public artwork's fragmented materials augmented by new elements evoke vernacular and municipal histories associated with its creation and disappearance.

GALLERY CLOCKWISE (FROM ENTRANCE):



Webster's ashes
2023
Dye sublimation print on aluminium
29.7 x 42 cm

After he died in Tasmania in 2008, relatives of the orator John Webster wanted his ashes scattered at Speakers' Corner in the Domain. In 2009 Webster's friend the Reverend Bill Crews wrote to The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust with this request, however, he was informed that it was not allowed. The Trust offered to bury the ashes for a donation of \$10,000. Instead, on a rainy night accompanied by an ABC News film crew and a reporter, Bill Crews took the ashes of John Webster down to *Viva Voce* at Speakers' Corner and scattered them around the red ladder. The resulting television news item was uploaded to the internet on 7th February 2010.



Two ladders
1999/2023
stainless steel and wood
variable dimensions

The red ladder was particularly special to my family—my understanding is that my husband was involved in the construction of the artist's design when he worked at BVI Engineering many years ago. We used to visit the ladder in the beautiful location whenever we were in the area. When we were in the city to collect my engagement ring we went for a walk through the Domain and my husband gave me the ring at the ladder (he didn't propose there, just gave me the ring there, I think the analogy was that when he built something it was made to last forever...)

— Renae Geronimo

Email to the City of Sydney, 28th February 2022.



Marble fragments retrieved from the public artwork 'Viva Voce' 1999-2019
2023
Bianco Carrara marble
variable dimensions

*Our forum of marble and grass,
You could change the world from this podium
You could just fall flat on your arse.*

— Sally Whitwell

Conceived as a creative redress to traditional, patriarchal structures in the creative sector and commenced during the 2020 lockdown, the musician Sally Whitwell developed a series of song cycles entitled *Pictures at an exHERbition* in response to works by Australian women artists. *Pictures at an exHERbition 7* is inspired by *Viva Voce*.



Medallion

2023

silver-plated copper, marble fragment
40 mm diameter

In 2011 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which sits adjacent to the Domain, the artist Richard Bell tossed a twenty-cent coin to determine the winner of the Sulman Prize. Reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 24th April, Bell's unorthodox selection method disrupted institutional and public convention.



Bamboo graffiti, The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney

2008/2023

silver gelatin print, selenium toned
90 x 72 cm (frame)

Within the Royal Botanic Garden lies a statutory 'graveyard' fenced-off from public view—a repository of objects vandalised, partially destroyed, or simply removed from outdoor display over the years due to changes in taste, morality, politics and conceptions of historical and public value. The marble feet of the statues *Discobolous* and *Summer* were returned temporarily to public display in Debra Phillips' 1999 installation for the *Swelter* project at the Palm House in the Garden.



Forest Red Gum (Eucalyptus tereticornis)

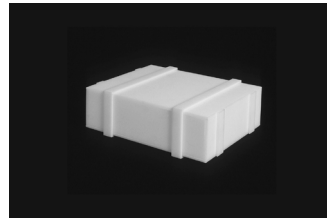
The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney

2008/2023

silver gelatin print, selenium toned
100 x 80 cm (frame)

The tree depicted in the photograph predates European arrival and sits as a witness to voices and stories of Aboriginal community and country; to invasion and

dispossession; and to the development of colonial Sydney. After the tree died in 2008, the trunk was carefully preserved and later carved by Bidjagal men Vic Simms (upper section) and Glen Timbery (lower section) in 2010. *YuraBirong* ('People of this place') was unveiled to the public in 2011 and can be viewed in the Royal Botanic Garden today.



Five soapbox models

1998

acrylic

variable dimensions

Five models for the *Viva Voce Bianco Carrara* marble soapboxes were produced by COG studio in 1998 as part of the City of Sydney Sculpture Walk Stage 2 submission.



Nuclear Disarmament Rally at the Domain, Sydney

1984/2023

dye sublimation print on aluminium

60 x 82 cm

On 15th April 1984 a crowd estimated at over 120,000 people led by anti-uranium campaigner and Federal Minister for Territories, Tom Uren marched through the streets of Sydney to the Domain to listen to keynote speaker, physician and author Dr Helen Caldicott speak against nuclear arms proliferation.

Selected works are available

Debra Phillips is represented by KRONENBERG MAIS WRIGHT Sydney

Special thanks to Jasmin Stephens; The Cross Art Projects: Jo Holder, Belle Blau & Phillip Boulten; Blair French; Ethan French; James Gatt; Reverend Bill Crews; Julian Bickersteth, International Conservation Services; Royal Australian Mint; and the late Sally Coucaud (Curator of the Sydney Sculpture Walk).

We recognise the unceded land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation within which we live and create. We pay respects to the traditional custodians, promising to listen and learn.

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