

“Relating to Country”:
Listening, Reflecting and Relating
To
Contemporary
Aboriginal Stories
from
Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and exhibition is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or institution.

(Signed) _____

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The perspective of the writer
is as an
English speaking immigrant (*1982*) coming to terms with a sense of place¹.

Note: All photographs, unless stated otherwise, were taken by Kay Adlem and are a silent component to this topic.

Works of art shown as ‘figure page’ throughout this document are by Kay Adlem. These works are seen after the text acknowledging them and show the research progress towards the exhibition “Relating to Country”.

Note on spelling of place name: Wonnarua; preferred in Maitland area.
Wanaruah; preferred in Singleton area.
Won:aruah; used in title and in main text as first recorded written version.

¹ Ethics clearance H-606-0703 – July 2003

Ethics clearance is a University policy which is a National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. Commonwealth of Australia - June 1999. A letter of support from, ATSIC Commissioner for the NSW North East Zone, Rick Griffiths was included in the application for ethics approval for research involving the Aboriginal community. Participants have signed agreements that their stories can be included in the exegesis (*2004*). Protocol has been followed with individuals where and when needed and often in the form of an oral agreement. This has been stated throughout the exegesis and individuals have been given copies of how the information is used. Where approval was not possible because individuals moved away from the area, then people remain anonymous, unless cited from another source.

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Abstract

The exegesis **“Relating to Country: Listening, Reflecting and Relating to Contemporary Aboriginal stories from Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley”**, is intended to fully acknowledge a unique Aboriginal culture of place.

My objective is to listen to Aboriginal peoples’ views on what it means to live in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia. I choose paper bark and bullock hides as metaphoric materials through which to extend participants’ stories. Participants’ stories comes from a background of European colonization in which Australia is generally considered to be a young culture yet in truth Aboriginal culture is one of the World’s oldest.

The research is significant in acknowledging the presence of ‘other’ stories and social values rather than an acceptance of the imposed colonial model. My interpretation explores a sense of belonging to country by ‘listening’ ‘reflecting’ and ‘relating’ through a fine art discipline to a contemporary Aboriginal culture which respects country. My studio work follows the patterns of ‘active listening’ by testing and investigating the research.

The exhibition **“Relating to Country”** (*figure page 1*) consists of two installations:

Installation I **“Guardians”**, a contemporary cultural
celebration of place

and

Installation II **“In the Belly of the Bull”**, a memorial work
incorporating accepted visual slices of history.

Exhibition “Relating to Country” 2006



Installation I “Guardians”



Installation II “In the Belly of the Bull”