

The Line of Lode and Death of Charlie Day.

While looking for general information about Broken Hill, I turned to Google's Streetview, an internet service that stores street-level images of our cities in an attempt to visually map the world. I was ashamed to find that the van that takes these images had made it to Broken Hill before me, circuiting through Mica, Sulphide, Chloride, Cobalt and Bromide Streets and then heading out of town in every direction. By clicking on arrows, I could see the afternoon sun shifting behind the mound of earth displaced by mining. My internet excursion ended with a journey out of town, as streetview limped down the flat stretch of Nine Mile Road, halting at a cattle grate marking the beginning of the "Unincorporated Area, Western Division." There is something disturbing about Google's persistent photography of each square metre of land, from Broken Hill to Brooklyn, New York, without pause or emphasis. But while Google might have shown me the geography of Broken Hill, Angelica Mesiti's video work, *The Line of Lode* transported me there.

It is difficult as a city-dweller to develop an understanding of the Australian landscape that is not influenced by advertising, film and folklore. The Australian identity may be framed around the vastness of its interior, yet the majority of urban Australians have very little direct connection with this identity. Mesiti's work asks how a visitor might begin to develop a more personal understanding of the landscape that ventures beyond stereotypical visions of the outback. The video speaks to the depth of one region's history and acknowledges that as a visiting artist, the best approach is to listen to the people of the area and let them tell their stories. Her response has been to offer a story *about* stories, reflecting on how different histories intersect and overlap.

Mesiti uses video to play with the conventions of cinematic and folkloric storytelling, but never completely gives the game away. The title, *The Line of Lode and the Death of Charlie Day*, is a promise to tell a story of the Broken Hill area. (Locals would know that the line of lode is the mound of earth, displaced by mining, that cradles the town.) Her use of cinematic conventions continues with long shots of the journey by road into Broken Hill. These images are from the perspective of the driver and Mesiti uses them to let us know that she is a visitor to the area. In a further gesture towards folkloric introduction, images of the drive into town are coupled with a just audible self-authored country ballad that also carries the promise of a story:

*"There's an old man
He tells a story
In the best way
That he knows*

*Of a hill
In the desert
Where he can
No longer go"*

The drive into town is an overture for the sound and images to follow, but this is where the unfolding story shatters into symbolic fragments – the wild pigeon, the feral goat and the hotel interior. These symbols represent the three intersecting histories that form the backbone of Mesiti's video work: local Indigenous understanding of the land, the development of mining in the area including its link to the foundation of Broken Hill, and the story of Mario's Palace Hotel.

The symbolic key is the Marnpi dreaming story of the bronze-winged pigeon. This knowledge is shared by Aboriginal people across the region from Wilcannia, through Broken Hill and west into South Australia. During her Broken Hill residency, Mesiti organised a visit with Mr William Brian Bates (better known as Badger Bates), a Paakantji storyteller authorised to tell the Marnpi story of the bronze-winged pigeon. He told the story with the aid of one of his prints:

"There are three hills out here called The Pinnacles. That's where the pigeon landed. A fella tried to catch a flock of bronze-winged pigeons with a net but one pigeon escape, and when he escape he was throwing boomerangs at it and he wounded it. As it was circling around Broken Hill, the blood and the feathers were falling onto the ground and forming all the minerals in the ground. That's why a lot of the minerals today, what you get from the mine, if you look at them and you look at a bronze-winged pigeon, you see the colours in the pigeon's feathers. So this pigeon was flying around and it landed at three places, what they call The Pinnacles. So then, when it landed, it was sitting there and it was looking around and it didn't know which way to go because it was scared and it was dying. So then it flew from Broken Hill towards Tibooburra and it died, at a place called Mount Brown, near Milparinka, and that's where it died. And that's where the pigeon spirit went on and up into Mt Isa into Queensland."

The story of the bronze-winged pigeon and its flight across the landscape is echoed in the discovery of silver, lead and zinc deposits in the area. In the video, the image of the pigeon can be seen in the metallic bird-wing coats of the bike riders, the taxidermy creations in the hotel and the birds in flight across the sky. Mesiti is interested in how this Indigenous knowledge intersects with the history of commercial mining in the area. Badger Bates acknowledged the importance of mining to the region but also spoke of how The Pinnacles

act as an important landmark for all travellers returning to Broken Hill. He pointed out that mining activity had led to difficulties accessing The Pinnacles, and that the relationship of the Marnpi story to the land had been disrupted.

Mesiti draws another thread into the work through the images of Mario's Palace Hotel. The images of the hotel are atmospheric, creating a link with the mine and the story of Marnpi. The air is laden with glittering particles of silver and zinc caught in reflected light through the window. Mario's Palace is representative of the kind of boom economy that mining brings to a region. Mario Celotto, an Italian immigrant who lived in Broken Hill, became interested in property development and purchased the colonial-era hotel that became the site for his flamboyant sense of design. Mario hired a local Aboriginal artist, Gordon Waye, whose only known credit for the creation of the paintings that decorate the hotel is through the misnomer, "Charlie Day". The Italianate treatment of interiors is an indication of the way that design taste is imported by immigrants, with sometimes fascinating and bizarre outcomes. The hotel's interior has been designed in such a way as to claim a space within a landscape which is inviting and reassuring, with green pastures and running water. These interior landscapes are a combat mechanism to the unfamiliar outback exterior. The presence of the goat on the stairway marks its transformation from wild local pest to a symbol for all kinds of introduced activity. The goat pauses in front of one of the wall paintings, the animal's image uniting with these false vistas as though in some abstract sense, it has been returned to its natural environment.

When we visit a new town, we often respond to places we discover through the stories told to us by local residents and the specific sites that fascinate us with their mystery. Mesiti told me that "the initial catalyst for the work came haphazardly," over a series of visits to Broken Hill, and through the workshop programme managed by the Broken Hill Art Exchange. The resulting work has been gracefully constructed in much the same irregular way we develop an understanding of a new place.

But how do you tell a story about stories, and why choose video to do so? A function of video art is that it allows simultaneous readings where many voices can be heard. It is sympathetic when dealing with complex histories of place and community. Film, with its dependence on scriptwriting and its insistence on a beginning, middle and end, is less suited to juggling different voices. Video places itself at odds with cinema's role as the structured storyteller. Images can loop, repeat or pause. It uses symbolic imagery to speculate on the way experience resides in a place, in its people and in the landscape.

Mesiti's work reflects on how experiences of a region converge and overlap. She is interested in how these histories carry weight in daily life. The after school ritual of local kids riding

their bikes is transformed into a lyrical image of eternal flight. The choreography of their movements suggest a non-verbal understanding of place. These poetic images note that the nurturing of shared histories and care for the land resides with them. *The Line of Lode* reflects on how stories are carried by people through generations, and that they are not so much histories set in the past, as an enduring set of relationships between land and people.

Melody Willis

Angelica Mesiti first visited Broken Hill in 2002 on a workshop organised by dLux Media Arts when the organisation had just begun to build a connection with the Broken Hill Art Exchange(BHAE). It was during this time that Angelica first heard the story of the bronze-winged pigeon. She returned in 2007, after making contact with Susan Thomas, who organises the Broken Hill Art Exchange. Artists who visit the Broken Hill Art Exchange are chartered to work with the community in workshops. The costumes and choreography for the last sequence in the "Line of Lode" video were worked out in PCYC community workshops facilitated by Susan Thomas. She also introduced Angelica to various members of the Broken Hill community who were of assistance in the resulting work.

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