



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Anna Hyland completed a Master of Art Curatorship at the University of Melbourne, graduating as valedictorian in 2014. She works for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, and as a collection management volunteer for the Robin Boyd Foundation. She has co-authored several social policy publications at the Commission. Her research paper exploring public space memorials to Albert Namatjira was recently published in the electronic Melbourne Art Journal. She has a particular interest in the curation of heritage sites, landscape and place.

Set in stone? Exploring significance in western district landscapes

Paper Abstract

The fabric of landscapes is complex and dynamic, composed of physical, symbolic, social and sensory elements. In the Kurtonitj Indigenous Protected Area in the western district of Victoria, Vicki Couzens' and Carmel Wallace's sculpture dry country/wet country (2007) responds to this complex conception of landscape. This paper examines dry country/wet country focusing on the artists' use of stone and how this responds to the surrounding heritage landscape.

This paper contextualises dry country/wet country within the rich heritage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stone building in Victoria's western district. This includes Indigenous stone buildings, colonial homesteads, dry stone walls and nineteenth and twentieth century stone memorials. Stone has a unique range of meanings and values in the western district, and the artists have drawn on this as a resource of techniques, symbolism and historical associations. The artists' use of stone engages directly with the layers of significance in this landscape. By engaging with a broad range of meanings and values of stone, the artists draw together seemingly conflicting stories in a way that resists the urge to contain the site's meaning.

By examining the work of contemporary visual artists and the ways that they engage with landscape, perhaps it might suggest some alternative ways for exploring and engaging with the significance that is embedded in landscapes.