

Hunar: Art/Conflict — A Symposium of Art and Art Practices from Zones of Conflict

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1. Summary of impact

Hunar: Art/Conflict — A Symposium of Art and Art Practices from Zones of Conflict was a series of art-led events hosted by the Hunar Symposia and the UTS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Welcoming artists, academics and public audiences from around the world, this event sought to rewrite public narratives about people and communities affected by conflict, crisis and colonisation using art as the vehicle for change.

The symposium was comprised of three streams of activity: the Art/Conflict conference, the Missing Time gallery exhibition, and a series of creative workshops in which participants contributed to collaborative art projects. Collectively, these activities led to conversations and artistic outputs that revealed new historical and political narratives about the experiences of conflict, crisis and colonisation and the similarities between those experiences across geographical and historical divides.

2. The problem

Mainstream news media outlets often de-personalise stories of international political conflicts and violence, painting migrants as victims and muting their voices and experiences in favour of sensational headlines. Further, media outlets largely fail to draw links between these stories of global conflict and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a result of colonisation in Australia. Centring the voices of those affected by conflict and colonisation in conversations about state-sanctioned violence is crucial to reshaping historical and political narratives and to making meaning from these devastating events.

3. Beneficiaries

The Art/Conflict Symposium provided professional, creative and educational benefits for conference keynotes, artists and collaborators; conference attendees; artists and attendees of the Missing Time exhibition at the UTS Gallery; and participants of the Art/Conflict workshops, including members of the Marrickville community.

4. Approach to impact

Art/Conflict — A Symposium of Art and Art Practices from Zones of Conflict was comprised of three streams of activity:

Art/Conflict conference

This three-day conference featured keynote addresses from Indigenous artists, curators and researchers, and artists from Afghanistan, Brazil, Argentina, Hong Kong and India. In contrast to a traditional academic conference, this event was designed to include artists, activists and community stakeholders alongside academic participants. Conference sessions spanned a vast range of themes, from Indigenous aesthetics through to digital politics, sound arts in conflict zones and art censorship from human rights perspectives.

Participants gained new insights into the relationship between art and conflict in different cultural contexts, as well as an exciting opportunity to rebuild professional, creative and intellectual networks that become dormant during global pandemic

shutdowns. The conference's wide reach and its emphasis on bringing academics, art practitioners and the general public together also demonstrated the value of university conferences to a broader audience.

Missing Time exhibition

Hosted at the UTS Gallery, Missing Time exhibited works from Brazil, Palestine, the Philippines, Argentina, Iraq, Australia and the United States about people who are absent or missing as a result of conflict. It revealed the vital importance of stories, archives and objects that tell stories about, or represent, the lives of those who have disappeared, and drew thematic links between the colonisation experiences of Indigenous Australians and international stories of state violence. Attendees engaged in conversations about different types of art censorship and their impact on art and artists who seek to tell stories of conflict and colonisation.

Artist-led workshops

Three interactive art workshops immersed conference and exhibition participants in the process of making art that spoke to the symposium themes. Workshop participants engaged across languages and cultures, building their understanding of conflict stories from around the world through a series of collaborative art projects.

- Attendees at a participatory painting workshop led by community leader and Kaanju and Biri Wirri Elder Aunty Kathryn Dodd Farrawell produced artworks on the themes of language sustainability and renewal.
- Attendees at a public mural workshop led by Aunty Kathryn Dodd Farrawell and ArtLords, a grassroots artist collective from Afghanistan who promote art for social change, worked together to create a public mural that is now on display at the Addison Road Community Organisation in Marrickville.
- Attendees at a creative activism art workshop led by Sara Nina, a member of Brazilian art and activist collective Aparecidos Politicos, explored post-dictatorship stories from Brazil. They were invited to make and decorate small hanging lanterns similar to those used to memorialise and mourn people who had died or disappeared during this conflict.

5. What has helped you accomplish this work?

This event was supported by Hunar members, as well as by contributions from academic, community and government partners. This included:

- funding support from a UTS Social Impact Grant, as well as from Create NSW, Multicultural NSW and City of Sydney
- in-kind support from Improve Theatre Sydney, UTS Gallery and Art Collection, Addison Road Community Organisation, and Refugee Art Project
- creative partnership support from ArtLords, Aparacedios Politicos, Aunty Kathryn Dodd Farrawell (Scarred Tree Indigenous Ministries), *e/even*, and we are the mainstream
- community support from Greek Atlas League, Australian War Memorial, Red Room poets, artists, academics, independent scholarship and community stakeholders.

6. Challenges

Making the Art/Conflict Symposium accessible to audiences beyond academia was vital to its success. However, broadening the audience resulted in a wide variety of expectations on behalf of event participants, requiring detailed communication from event organisers that would not have been required for a standard academic conference. This additional workload, coupled with the challenges of delivering a multi-part event across numerous physical sites, presented significant logistical and administrative challenges to the organising team.