

PRESENTED BY TARNANTHI AND VITALSTATISTIX

Natalie Harkin and Collaborators

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA



15TH - 31ST OCTOBER 2021

**SHE LINGERS IN ARCHIVES /
HER TRACE IS MY MEMORY /
WE LABOUR DIG**

**SWEAT BLISTER IMAGINE /
KNOW THEM MORE INTIMATELY /
SO MUCH WORK TO BE DONE TO CLEAN
UP THIS COLONIAL MESS.**

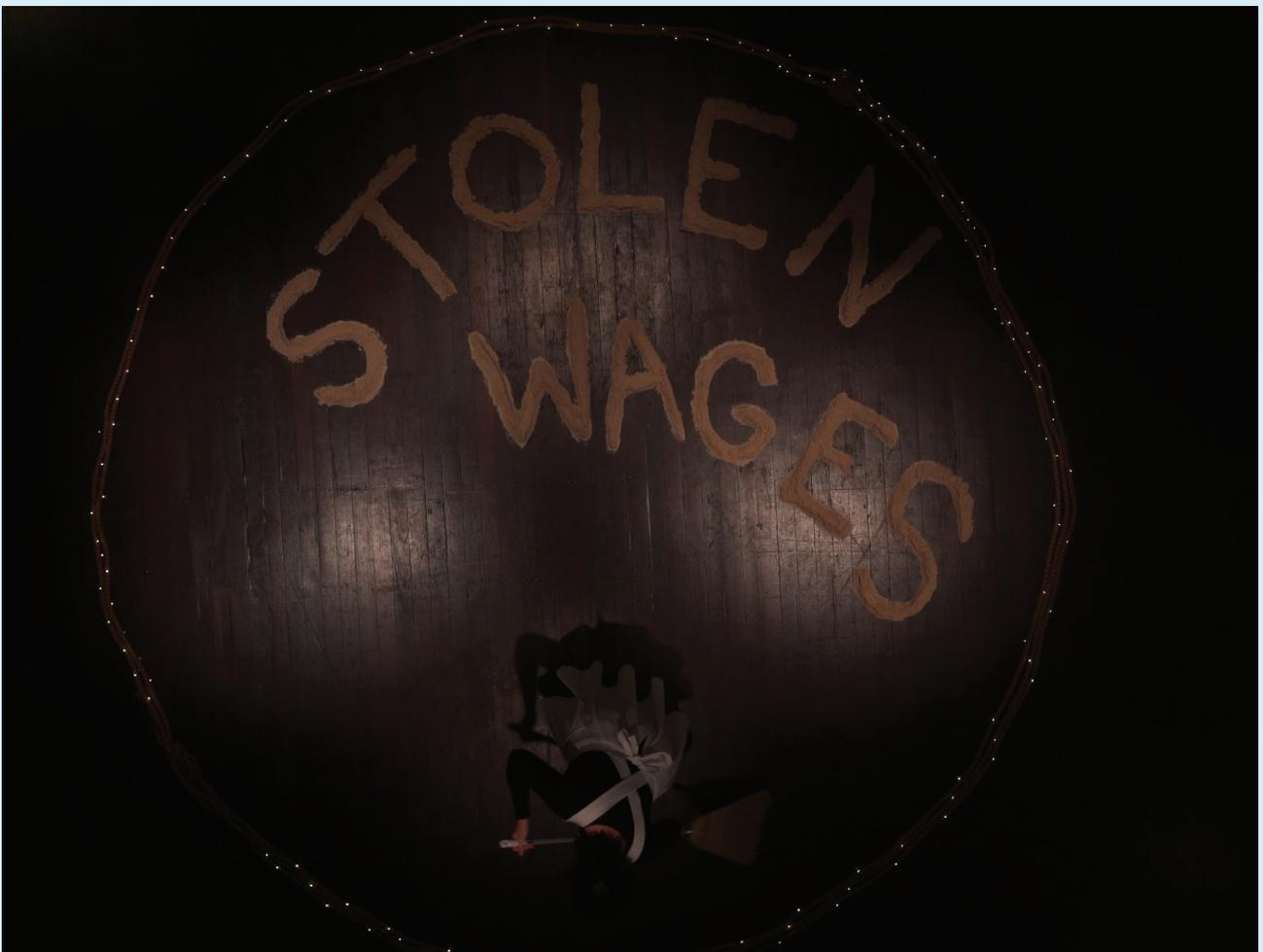


Image credit: Jessica Wallace

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA evokes an embodied reckoning with Aboriginal women's domestic labour and servitude. The work explores the complexity of women's experiences and survival strategies; intergenerational stories that span loss, love, sorrow, solidarity, resistance, and refusal.

Narungga poet, artist and academic Dr Natalie Harkin draws from oral history and the State's official record - and her practice of archival-poetics informed by blood-memory, haunting and grandmother stories - to engage with and creatively transform the colonial archive, contributing new understandings to Aboriginal women's labour histories in South Australia. **APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA** is the culmination of this significant process of trace and return through shadows, spectres and paper trails.

OPENING HOURS

Friday 15 2pm – 7pm

Saturday 16 11am – 4pm

Sunday 17 11am – 4pm

Thursday 21 2pm – 7pm

Friday 22 2pm – 7pm

Saturday 23 11am – 4pm

Sunday 24 11am – 4pm

Thursday 28 2pm – 7pm

Friday 29 2pm – 7pm

Saturday 30 11am – 4pm

Sunday 31 11am – 4pm

OPENING EVENT

Saturday 16 5pm – 7pm

ARTIST TALK,

with guest speaker Dr Jackie Huggins, AM FAHA, and Sovereign Tea Tasting

Saturday 30 2pm – 5pm

**WATERSIDE, 11 NILE ST,
PORT ADELAIDE, KAURNA
YERTA**

**FREE ENTRY • QR ON
ENTRY • MASK-WEARING
REQUIRED**

FROM THE ARTIST

apron-folds and pockets *keep secrets*
pinned *tucked* *hidden*
they whisper into linen-shadows *that flicker-float with the sun*
hung
limp on the breeze *they sway*
a rhythmic sorrow

Most Aboriginal families I know in South Australia carry intimate histories of domestic service through living memory and intergenerational blood-memory passed on. These stories of servitude are important, often reluctantly disclosed, and held close to our bodies to leave an indelible imprint for our future. Despite the significance of these stories in the collective memory of Aboriginal South Australians, this government-orchestrated system of indentured labour remains largely hidden and unacknowledged in the state's dominant and official public narrative of history.

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA offers a personal tribute to all those Aboriginal women subjected to state-orchestrated servitude and oppression on the domestic front. This work stems from my PhD thesis, *'I weave back to you': Archival-Poetics for the Record*, followed by an extensive Australia Research Council project, Resistance Poetics and Decolonising the Archive: Aboriginal Domestic Labour Stories from South Australia.

This work interrogates the state's colonial archive as a critical site of memory, conservation, preservation and erasure that continues to resonate as a contemporary repository of social meaning. The State Aboriginal Records' 'Domestic Service' files reveal the unfolding rationale for interdependent policies of child-removal, institutionalisation, and training as important context to the burgeoning Aboriginal domestic service workforce into the twentieth century. Records reveal critical voices from Protectors and mission superintendents, white employers, the parents, and girls and women themselves placed into training or service. These records trigger questions about surveillance, representation, and agency. They are deeply confronting and at the same time, ripe for critique, explication, and response.



This project of honouring has its origins in my family story, and is shaped by many Indigenous artists, poets, writers, and scholars who labour creatively with the contested, racialised colonial archive as a dynamic site of potential strength and renewal, who engage embodied memory and the material archive in their practice, through resistant acts of intervention and radical love.

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA also pays special tribute to the resonating impact of the 1994 landmark exhibition *White Apron, Black Hands* curated by historian Dr Jackie Huggins, AM FAHA, artist Leah King-Smith and archivist Lel Black. Their work provided a compelling exposé of the history and experience of Aboriginal domestic service in Queensland and opened my eyes to the power of the state's archive to reveal just how orchestrated and widespread these labour stories are. Their work ruptured a whitewashed narrative of history and encapsulated the experiences of many Aboriginal women across the country, including South Australia.

This APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA exhibition has been produced in collaboration with many women in my community to give voice to Aboriginal women's labour stories previously excluded from the public narrative, with rupturing and honouring intent. As contemporary agents of memory, there are multiple ways to share the weight of these stories; to collectively move through a decolonising project of poetic refusal, resistance, and memory-making, through and beyond the colonial archive. These critical minor histories are the epic backdrop to everyone's lives, and this work represents just one beginning.

Dr Natalie Harkin, October 2021

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dr Natalie Harkin is a Narungga woman and activist-poet from South Australia. She is a Research Fellow at Flinders University with an interest in decolonising state archives, currently engaging archival-poetic methods to research and document Aboriginal women's domestic service and labour histories in South Australia. Her words have been installed and projected in exhibitions comprising text-object-video projection, including creative-arts research collaboration with the Unbound Collective. She has published widely, including with literary journals *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Southerly*, *Wasafiri* International Contemporary Writing, *TEXT* and *Cordite*. Her first poetry collection, *Dirty Words*, was published by Cordite Books in 2015; and her second *Archival-Poetics*, was published by Vagabond Press in 2019.



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

There are multiple beginnings to this epic story. Every archive has agency, and every prop is alive. The mop and the bucket. The laundry basket and soap. The stove and skillet. The scrubbing brush and broom. The kitchen table is the feature and every teapot the star. A smell, a taste, a smile, a wince. The spectre of white linen aprons imprints every minor history that is lovingly mended and folded. Stitch by stitch. Memory by memory. New threads are spoken to trace and unravel and bind this exquisite rupturing.

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA is an archival-poetic collaboration with Aboriginal women curated to produce a series of video performance works, a tryptic of leadlight windows, twelve personal Memory Stories of domestic servitude unique to South Australia, and interrogations of the State's colonial archives.

This is an invitation to lean in close and bear witness, not only to the oppressive racialised, gendered assimilation-based policies of state, but to the individual and collective power, sorrow, rage, and resilience of Aboriginal women, and above all, enduring love.

There are seven mixed-media elements to this exhibition, including four new video performance projections created with Unbound Collective: Ali Gumillya Baker, Faye Rosas Blanch, Natalie Harkin, and Simone Ulalka Tur.

MEMORY STORIES

Twelve women's Memory Stories are represented in the exhibition, through excerpts of memories and images printed on white linen tea-towels, hung out on hills-hoist clotheslines suspended from the ceiling of the Waterside Workers Hall.

They are our Mothers, Grandmothers, Aunties, Sisters, Cousins, Friends: Pauline O'Brien, Sharon Gollan, Joan Cullen/Chester, Joyleen Thomas, Sharon Meagher, Margaret Brodie, Debra Moyle, Simone Ulalka Tur, Ali Gumillya Baker, Angela Flynn, Auntie Dorothy Fox with Colleen Strangways and Yhonnie Scarce.

These Memory Stories are the heartbeat to this research and exhibition, so generously gifted from Aboriginal women in my community to the world. They represent our blood memory archive, the embodied stories we carry, the lessons we learn, and the triggers we inherit. This is our intergenerational offering, in the spirit of truth-telling and honouring, for the future record.

LEADLIGHT TRYPTIC / SEE HER SHINING IN THE SUN

See Her Shining in the Sun is a commissioned collaboration with leadlight artist and Narungga woman Sharene Vandenbroek (Cullen/Chester). We designed this leadlight window tryptic to the shape and stories of women in our immediate family, and to represent typical domestic duties such as washing linen sheets, serving tea, and cleaning floors. The crisp white apron is a star feature to every story, and the Aboriginal flag is ever-present.

This artwork is also inspired by a series of twenty leadlight panels created by glass artist Stephen Adam in 1878 to adorn the windows of Maryhill Burgh Halls, Glasgow, Scotland. His panels depicted workers in unique trades and industrial situations of the time, an extraordinary time capsule of community life, showcasing working class labour stories as integral to the cultural and economic fabric of the region, and depicted with honour, humanity, and pride. See Her Shining in the Sun also intends to place a shining light on our Aboriginal domestic labour stories through unique transparency, visibility and honouring.

DAYS OF OUR LIVES

Days of Our Lives is a video work created in collaboration with Unbound Collective to represent personal Memory Stories reimagined from histories of domestic servitude in our families. It is a playful nod to the longstanding American daytime television soap opera 'Days of Our Lives'. With all the hallmarks of an indentured life, perhaps this soap opera represents an escape from reality: an endless promise of love, enduring plots for revenge, entrapment, and scandal.

This work represents distinct times of a day in the life of a domestic, from sunrise to sunset and deep into the night. It presents a small window to the embodied archive, as we share what our women endured living under state regimes of surveillance and control via the Aborigines Protection Act. We are washing with the boiling old copper; pegging out the linen; ironing and washing a mountain of dishes; scrubbing floors and sweeping up the dust. Even when we sit down at the end of a back-breaking day with a cup of strong hot tea, we are still working into the night, mending, and sewing. It never ends, and we honour every Aboriginal woman who laboured so hard.

FOR ALL OUR WOMEN OF THE SUN

For all Our Women of the Sun is a video work created in collaboration with Unbound Collective. It pays direct homage to the acclaimed four-part drama series, Women of the Sun, 1981, written by Yorta Yorta woman Hyllus Marris and Sonia Borg. This landmark series, made for Australian Broadcasting Commission, depicts four distinct stories at different points in history from the point of first colonial contact to the 1980s. It was considered ground-breaking for its authentic representation of Aboriginal women's stories, and celebrated for being scripted and cast by Aboriginal women for the first time in Australian television.

We acknowledge the representation and truth-telling of this series to be powerful and important, not just for its time over forty years ago, but for its resonating impact and relevance still today. We thank all the women for their stories, their writing, their directing, their activism, and creativity, and inspiring so much of what we do. We stand tall and proud against the setting sun with the Aboriginal flag flying high.

DOMESTIC WALTZ

Domestic Waltz is a video work created in collaboration with Unbound Collective. We wear our archives on our bodies; hundreds of carefully chosen records copied and pasted onto a calico sheath that slips over a colonial framed skirts to rock and sway as we circle and glide together. We wear our sovereign love poetry and our songs; our personal family archives and the governments State Aboriginal Record files and reports.

We scrub and sweep and mop our way through the world. We promenade back and forward through time to reveal our labour and our worth. We take a slow dance with history and waltz on memories of grandmothers. Stolen wages are swept into visibility, because we know this history is yet to be reckoned with in South Australia. The song 'My Tjamu' is sung by Simone Ulalka Tur in harmony with Lou Bennett, in Yankunytjatjara language; a haunting tribute to Simone's mother, Mona Ngitji-Ngitji Tur who was a domestic, and who wrote the original poem.

SOVEREIGN TEA

Sovereign Tea is a video work created in collaboration with Unbound Collective. We are sisters and friends. We are mothers and grandmothers. We are daughters and granddaughters. We are wearing our white linen aprons that symbolise domestic servitude. and we are weary and ready to debrief. This work is inspired by the insightful song Inside My Kitchen, written by Lou Bennett with Tiddas in 1992, and reimagined by Katie Inawantji Morrison playing violin, and sung by Simone Ulalka Tur. We are grateful to Lou Bennett for trusting us with this song which is our touchstone familiar, and the anthem to our lives.

The kitchen table is a symbol of safety and sanctuary. We sit down together and rest, even for just a moment, to love, laugh, cry, and support each other through the daily grind and all the dramas that we navigate and structures we must negotiate. This story conveys the sovereign power of Aboriginal sisterhood, the desire and need for collective wise counsel and friendship, and the healing potential of a strong hot cup of tea.

STATE ABORIGINAL RECORDS 'DOMESTIC SERVICE' FILES

This is the hidden record: a series of excerpts from the State's domestic service files reveal significant voices from the colonial archive, such as correspondence letters, surveillance documents and related file notes. The main voices arising from these records include: key agents of state, such as the Protector of Aborigines or Mission Superintendents; white employers from city homes or rural farming properties; parents and family members of the girls and women being placed into service; and the girls themselves.

These file note excerpts have been selected for their potency and potential to affect the audience/reader; whitewashed and hung on the hills hoist in full view. When such potent records are shared and made transparent to reveal the violence of colonialism, the audience or reader must engage in some kind of embodied reckoning.

The stories of Aboriginal women domestic servants cannot be told enough. They illuminate a deeply-rooted racist facet of Australia's history. They tell of the trials, tribulations and triumphs amidst the backdrop of oppression.

- Dr Jackie Huggins, AM FAHA

SOVEREIGN TEA BLEND | STIR WITH INTENT

Unbound Collective has made a one-of-a-kind blend of tea for this exhibition APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA, in partnership with Brewed by Belinda, that is strong, earthy, nurturing and beautiful.

Our Sovereign Tea is made with love to honour and respect all Aboriginal women who were indentured to domestic service across Australia. All Sovereign Tea profits are made to an Aboriginal women's shelter, with special thanks to Vitalstatistix, Flinders University, and Tarnanthi Festival 2021 of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

We acknowledge that our tea is made on Kurna Yarta using local and imported ingredients: Daintree black tea, malted whipstick wattle seed, and organic red rose petals. As the label instructs: We live, labour, love, agitate and drink tea on the unceded lands of Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains, and we acknowledge all our Kurna community – past, present, and future. So... put the kettle on, steep your brew, savour the blend, and stir with intent.

This tea can be purchased at the Art Gallery of South Australia, and 100% of proceeds goes to an Aboriginal women's shelter.

CREDITS AND THANKS

APRON-SORROW / SOVERIEGN-TEA is a collective project, and artistic credits extend to many. To the sovereign women who shared their Memory Stories for the record with generosity, candour, trust, and care: Aunty Pauline O'Brien, Aunty Sharon Gollan, Aunty Dolly (Joan Cullen/Chester), Aunty Joyleen Thomas, Sharon Meagher, Margaret Brodie, Debra Moyle, Simone Ulalka Tur, Ali Gumillya Baker, Angela Flynn, Aunty Dorothy Fox with Colleen Strangways and Yhonnie Scarce. To Sharene Vandebroek whose extraordinary leadlight gifts enriched this project with our family story, and to Peter Vandebroek for window installation and Robin Mather for design template support.

To my Unbound Collective sisters Ali Gumillya Baker, Simone Ulalka Tur and Faye Rosas Blanch for constant inspiration, love, laughter and warrior-woman collaboration making video-projections, and to: Jessica Wallace, Fishtale Films for video production, editing and soundscape; Freddy Komp, video projection consultant; Kris Keogh, audio mix for all videos, and acoustic guitar playing 'Lamp Lighting Time in the Valley' in video 'Days of Our Lives' with copyright permission through Warner-Chappell; Frankie Films crew Benno Thiel, Todd Pursche and Rachel Jesse for camera and editing support; Lou Bennett and Simone Ulalka Tur singing Declaration Song, original poem by Mona Ngitji Ngitji Tur, 1974, and composed by Nancy Bates and Simone Ulalka Tur for the Unbound Collective exhibition 'Bound and Unbound: decolonising methodologies of the Lived and Unspoken', 2014; Karina Lester, Yankunytjatjara language consultant for Declaration Song in Domestic Waltz video; Simone Ulalka Tur, River Lullaby song composed by Lou Bennett with Unbound Collective for Sovereign Acts | REFUSE, 2019; Lou Bennett, copyright permission to interpret the song 'Inside My Kitchen' for video Sovereign Tea video with Simone Ulalka Tur, and Katie Inawintji Morrison on violin; Bob Weiss, Producer, for copyright approval for Women of the Sun Series 3 soundscape; National Film and Sound Archives, audio support for 'All our Women of the Sun' video.

To Belinda Hellyer, Brewed by Belinda, for masterclass and bespoke blend of 'Sovereign-Tea'. To Andrew Wilson, Senior Aboriginal Access Officer at State Aboriginal Records, for guidance and support over many years, including access to the state's Domestic Service files.

To Dr Jackie Huggins, AM FAHA for support throughout the project and participating in the exhibition public forum on indentured labour and stolen wages.

Memory Story tea towels sewn by Séana O'Brien and screen printed by Jake Holmes.

This project is made possible through the Australia Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE180100559), with expert Reference Group support from Jude Elton, Cameron Raynes, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Margaret Allen, Julie Gough and Simone Ulalka Tur, and archival research assistance by Denise Noack. Special thanks to to Nici Cumpston (Tarnanthi and AGSA), Fiona Salmon (FUMA), and Emma Webb (Vitalstatistix) for creative concept endorsement in the original ARC DECRA application, 2017. This exhibition is possible thanks to your enduring support.

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA is proudly presented by Tarnanthi and Vitalstatistix.

APRON-SORROW / SOVEREIGN-TEA also features in a sister exhibition curated by Ali Gumillya Baker in partnership with Flinders University Museum of Art in 2021-22

THE VITALSTATISTIX TEAM

Director:

Emma Webb

Executive Producer:

Jennifer Greer Holmes

Production Manager:

Emma O'Neill

Operations Manager:

Toby Nevill

Program & Communications

Coordinator:

Isobel Moore

Graphic Design:

Freerange Future

Board of Management:

Angela Flynn (Chair)

Peta-Anne Louth (Deputy Chair)

Amanda Macri (Treasurer)

Elizabeth Dooley

Jayne Boase

Peta-Anne Louth

Rosie Riggir

Roz Hervey

Steph Lyall

VITALSTATISTIX

More info about Vitalstatistix at
vitalstatistix.com.au

AGSA tarnanthi

More info about Tarnanthi at
agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/tarnanthi/

VITALSTATISTIX

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BHP

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MUSEUM OF ART

 **Government of South Australia**
Arts South Australia

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Australia Council for the Arts 

 **CITY OF Port Adelaide Enfield**

 **Freerange Future**

 **MAD Promo**