

Afterimages

Constructing a counter-archive of south Bali
histories through moving image

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Leyla Stevens declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts at the University of Technology Sydney, in the School of International Studies and Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program.

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FORMAT OF THIS THESIS

This practice-led doctoral thesis is comprised of a creative component and a written dissertation. The creative component was realised through three iterations of a moving image project, each framed by the research concerns of this thesis and were the primary contribution to my field of knowledge. The outcome of each iteration was a public exhibition at a Sydney-based art gallery including: *Of Love and Decomposition* (2016) a solo presentation at Firstdraft Gallery; *John Fries Award* (2018) a selective group exhibition at UNSW Galleries; and *Their Sea is Always Hungry* (2019) at UTS ART. The structure of this written dissertation comprises four chapters that move through a theoretical framework, the genealogy to my visual arts practice and analysis of my moving image project.

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ABSTRACT

In the past three decades the archive has been a significant site of engagement internationally for artists questioning how forms of history have been privileged and legitimised. In Indonesia, contemporary artists who engage with contested national histories have generated forms of counter culture against state controlled discourses and have given spaces of representation for marginalised perspectives. This thesis builds upon this questioning of histories within Indonesian contemporary art: extending upon a mode of practice that can be thought of as the counter-archive. It does so by extending the concept of archive to place: considering South Bali and its imaginary and material fragments as a living archive. Reading 'place as archive' is important because it recovers some of the island's hidden histories that have been erased by the mainstream imaginary of Bali as an exotic paradise.

This practice-led thesis constructs a south Bali counter-archive through a multi-channel video installation and an exegesis. The creative component builds upon a genre of lens-based practices that respond to histories of place; but rather than documenting historical events as they happen, it aims attention to their afterimages and traces. The thesis examines two historical trajectories that continue to inform and contest the geography of Bali today. The first trajectory is the troubling legacy of Indonesia's 1965–66 mass killings of alleged communists and the haunting residue of unacknowledged gravesites that lie underneath tourist geography. In the second narrative, the project draws from the romance of the early surf odysseys that occurred in the 1970s. It examines the legacy of this early tourism through the lens of transculturation and considers how surf narratives sanitised geographies of trauma from 1965–66.

This thesis interweaves these two contesting narratives – 1965 memory and surfing stories – through a critical re-reading of Bali's prevailing narratives. Drawing from feminist methodologies of correction and contrapuntal strategies, this thesis posits that we read histories tangentially: connecting disparate narratives as a method of reframing historical knowledge. The findings from the analysis of my creative practice, and the larger context of Indonesian contemporary art, support an expanded approach to what constitutes an archive. It posits that an archive of place, reframed as artworks and creative practices, offers alternative forms of historiography.