

Cutting History: Tennant Creek Suite

Dr Kimberley Christen¹[1], writing about the larger, broader version of Cutting History said,

Mixing, splicing, overlaying and randomly placing images of historical and contemporary renditions of life in Australia, Alder's Cutting History challenges viewers to relinquish stereotypes of the Australian landscape and people and the conventional historical narratives of progress and modernity. Using her own life experience as a starting point, Alder builds on the ongoing debate of the History Wars, waged in Australia over the last fifteen years. She includes images which reflect aspects of life in remote towns like Tennant Creek in Australia's Northern Territory where she lived and worked over a long period of time. Whilst living in the Northern Territory Alder found herself confronted not with the stark and desolate Outback presented by iconic Australian artists, Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan, but with the vibrant colors and dynamic sociality of Aboriginal worlds. Working with Aboriginal artists and organizations, Alder began to see through the constructed views and narratives that portray Aboriginal people as remnants of a primitive lifestyle, or failed modern subjects. Rather than project the dejected and dismal lives and landscape of the Outback often portrayed in the media, Alder focuses her eyes on the lived realities of contested sets of histories and politics that shape relations in the shared spaces of Aboriginal communities and white towns alike.

Alder depicts the uneasy togetherness and colliding histories of contemporary Australia through layered renditions of images familiar to an Australian audience. These vignettes prevent us from forming too-quick judgments about the lives they depict. Relying on the iconic images of the past and focusing on images of the seeming ordinariness of daily life, Alder creates a changing, random picture of Australian history. Alder's layered paper-cuts are metaphors for everyday life, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal, mixing tradition and modernity to create a rich palette of sociality and contemporary identities.

The installation and animation exhibited at Artroom5 are a smaller version of Cutting History providing a snapshot relating specifically to Alder's life in Tennant Creek. Alder worked with the Warumungu community researching historical documents and images for the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art & Culture Centre. Prior to that Alder managed Julalikari Women's Arts & Crafts, an Indigenous owned art centre in Tennant Creek. Many of the images in *Cutting History:Tennant Creek Suite* respond to those experiences, mixing both historical and contemporary identities, as did the community itself, when attempting to counter the generally negative stereotypes of a black town presented by the mainstream media.

The work is influenced by the felt board cut-outs used by missionaries to spread the Christian word, often described to Alder by artists at Julalikari Arts. According to the women a small number of felt cut-outs were used to create many different narratives around the central theme of Jesus. Alder continues this idea using images from Russell Drysdale, Baldwin Spencer, outback travel anthologies, newspaper images and her own photography to fit together making new stories – albeit in an abridged version. The work is an ongoing and fluid project, one that changes according to the placement of images and the relationships created by their proximity to each other.

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1[1] Dr Kimberley Christen, Assistant Professor, Comparative Ethnic Studies, Washington State University in Cutting History:1, catalogue, Kala Art Institute, Berkeley California 2010