

BLUE INTO GOLD

As a place, the Gold Coast is built on the public display of natural and artificial wonders

Out to see

The Gold Coast is set within two key coordinates: the famed 55km of sandy beaches, and the Coral Sea. Snaking beside these is the continuous strip of the Gold Coast Highway, a north-south dividing line to rival the QLD-NSW border some 18km to our south. To that highway's east, the primest of all real estate - the dearly-coveted, tightly-held, hotly-traded, ever-appreciating waterview blocks. To its west, the rest.

The Walls is situated west of the GC Highway. Since 2013, our activities have taken place in the suburb of Miami, postcode 4220, Mountain View Ave, in the aluminium shed with the blue rollerdoor next door to the mechanics' shop, where we mount exhibitions, host artist residencies, performances, talks and dialogue about contemporary art and ideas. Our artistic program brings together artists from our community, and those from further climes, in a space that's grounded in feminist thinking and encourages experimental processing, as well as the exhibition.

We at The Walls are working with Traditional Owners from the Yugambah Language Group (the Kombumerri People of the Gold Coast Area, on whose ancestral lands our Mountain View gallery is placed, and with the Ngugi People (who describe themselves as Yulu-Burri-ba - People of the sand and seas) of the Quandamooka (Moreton Bay), whose sea country receives the flows of fresh waters from the hinterland ranges. Through ongoing collaborations with Indigenous artists, leaders and organisations, we strive to share the privilege of our position as white curators to pay respect to First Nations people and proceed with greater awareness of the Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices embedded forever in country. Through specific projects, including HEAD LAND (2014), FMX (2015) and ENTER THE MAP (2017) featuring Libby Harward, and FOUNDING FATHERS (2017), featuring Archie Moore, we are learning how to sensitise our process to indigenous ways of knowing and doing in the context of a contemporary art space on the Gold Coast today. We are committed to supporting indigenous artists to explore conceptual approaches to making art in a framework of trust, reflection and critical dialogue, and proud to be presenting this work to the world.

Sunny Faces, Shady Times

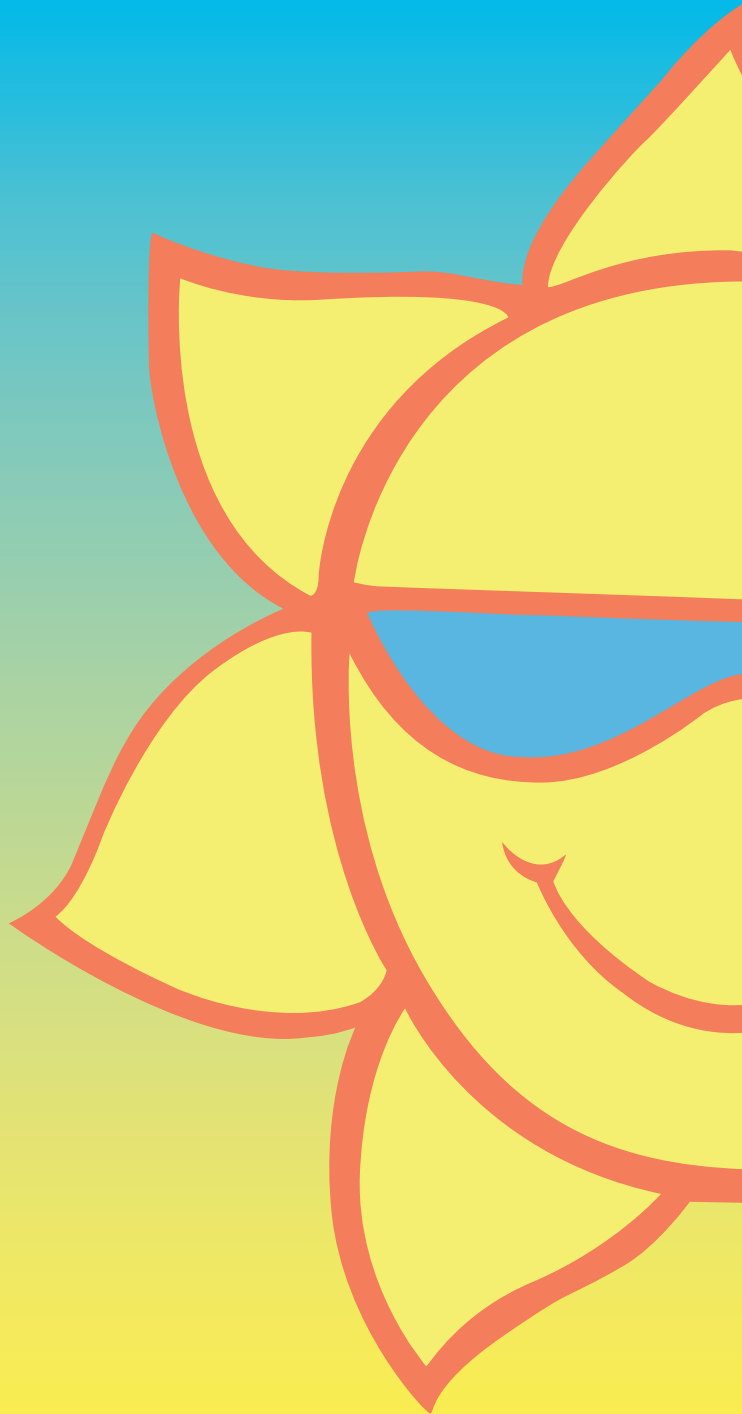
These magnets adorning the exterior walls of the Testing Grounds space, our contribution to the exhibition, are by Coolangatta-based artist Byron Coathup. We work with Byron often - he designed our 2017 Program, and in October 2017 will show with us. In these magnets, Byron explains,

"our city's visual archetypes (sun, sand and surf motto) are appropriated in order to build a hyper-sense of the ultimate holiday playground via the form of the souvenir. As small, common and useful objects, the tourist magnet that you might find on your hotel reception desk or at the corner store is typically then used by you to display images of such a destination, such as in postcards".

everyone's made a spectacle of themselves at some point

We make our place in a city as indexed by tourism as it is chronically unburdened by planning regulations. This is a dangerous landscape if you don't know the currents, the undertows, the hidden rips and holes, the tides, the storms, the seasons. Even if you do, it's easy to underestimate - the shifting, glittering surface can still blind you to the implacable force beneath. It'll sweep you away before you know it.

It's fun and it's seductive and we are all here for a good time, but in a town of 660,000 residents welcoming 12million guests a year, that's usually a short time. Things on the GC need to be big, bold and bright to make an impact, to have that wow factor, to leave an impression.





The image of the Gold Coast - the one you probably remember from your childhood, the beach-holiday-theme-park-meter-maids-highrises montage in your head - should confirm this. This is both because those memories are true, but also because they have been put there by our city; or, more precisely, its operatives, the delegates and envoys who craft its brand message, design talking points, select hero images, control its message. What looks like a superficial culture of display is actually a highly managed system of discursive agents maintaining the conversation, keeping the party going, ensuring that everyone's Gold Coast*, Australia's favourite playground*, is always Famous for Fun*.

Among whom - slowly, the realisation is dawning - among whom, as hosts, we also number.

Like many art spaces in this country, we are doubly implicated in questions of white possession: we occupy stolen lands, and our activities invariably contribute to the gentrification that continues to dispossess, marginalise and bleach our landscape for the powerful few to control and enjoy at the expense of culture and memory. For us, mapped over the spectral spaces of stolen land is a peculiar fantasy edifice, a flickering special-effects landscape that reshapes the present as it consumes the past in its projection of promised pleasure. The thief has become the exhibitionist.

Instead of rehabilitation, however, or resignation, we think collaboration: One of the possible ways in which we might resist the dominant leisure discourse - both the here and in our sector at large - is by instigating active remembering through our work and listening in our processes. We invite artists to join us on experimental projects that start by diving in together, to observe and question and share what we find beneath the surface. To do that, we have to be prepared to hold our breath, duck beneath the froth, and open our eyes to the greenwater beyond.

We like Byron's version of this image, and his idea of the souvenir as a useful object that calls to one place from another place. To us, its appealing, sunny grin refers to the professional smiling face that is hospitality, and the complex, paradoxical and possibly impossible conditions underlying the dynamics of "host" and "guest" in any situation, but especially here. Its basic form speaks to the cheapened, unconsidered, unironic short-form of tourist vernacular - but then again, stylisation is also a local tradition, simplified doesn't necessarily mean simple, and to us it shines with a very GC approach to condensing and concentrating the iconicity of leisure for maximum effect. The sun is wearing sunnies, after all.

Also: this is image is an archive. The sunnies-wearing sunny sun is an image from a building, the much-loved Miami Ice iceworks, which, despite public opposition, was torn down in 2013 to make space for a new high-end residential development. It's a much-loved image from a much-loved place, which, like its neighbour Magic Mountain, lives on now only in memories, and fetishised consumer objects - mementos like these souvenir magnets, and their elite cousins.

-- Danni Zuvella & Rebecca Ross, THE WALLS, 2017

*All slogans of Gold Coast tourist agencies, or the Lord Mayor

Centre-Fold: BYRON COATHUP, Culture Sculpture (Miami Ice Sun) (detail) [2016]