

Transcript Brook Andrew

Magnus Rosengarten: Hi, Brook. It's great to have you in Berlin, back in Berlin. I think it's the third time that I'm seeing you here at the Gropius Bau. To the exhibition [YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal] you will be bringing *GABAN*, a theater performance piece, which is tackling many different topics – restitution is a big one. And I was wondering whether you could talk about why you chose to bring it to Berlin, maybe also the genesis of the project. And in the end, you also decided to work with Berlin based performers to realise it here...

Brook Andrew: Well, I mean, I think that *GABAN* – which means “strange” in my mother's language, which is Wiradjuri of western New South Wales (there's about 300 different Aboriginal nations in Australia) – you know, working with source communities, my own communities, but also with museums overseas, you know, the kind of what is left over the mess of colonialism, it's often traumatic for our families to go overseas or to private collections and see our cultural objects, especially ceremonial objects. And so that space is always a really complicated space and it's not something that you can leave at the door. And so, I wanted to create a kind of fantasy, a kind of different space that was in my own terms that wasn't continuously kind of traumatising me or my family and to imbue it with objects, powerful objects. And so, one of the character's name is guulany (tree). And it's a tree, it's a ceremonial tree. And it's very special for my mother's father's side of the family, because my mother's father is Ngunnawal, and I also have Celtic ancestry. They're very important objects for us because today it still continues this referencing of what is missing. And also it brings up ideas of anthropology, authenticity, judging from a European perspective or Western perspective about what is really Indigenous, what is “authentic” Indigenous. And these are all things that we have to kind of have self-care around and healing. And so really the whole play, *GABAN*, it's a strange experience, but it kind of leads up to a restitution and and a return.

Magnus Rosengarten: And what does it mean to you to bring it to Berlin and the Gropius Bau specifically? I know that you've realised it, or it's been realised in Australia and the Australian context, but it's as far as I know, the first time staged in Europe. How do you feel about that and what does it do to you to see it being realised here?

Brook Andrew: Because museums in the context of *GABAN* is such a complicated international experience, like regardless of if you're Indigenous or a Person of Colour or whoever you are, wherever you are, you know, the whole world is coded through power. And there are incredible museums and collections that are coded through wealth and power, etc., and people want to hang on to that, you know, and regardless if they believe in collections or not, that's a really complicated human problem. And we all know that – people want to decolonise, or I use the word yindyamarra gunhanha, which means ongoing respect. And so, people kind of manifest it in different ways. The power of actually bringing it to Berlin is that there are incredible collections here. You know, the Germans, like others, were not only colonisers, but they were explorers, they were collectors and still are. And it has a very powerful position and it's a complex history, not just about colonial histories. And I think that the people who live here reside here, the artists who are attracted to this place, people who want to change things, shift things – it's a really interesting space to do that in. And it's also sharing that with other People of Colour and Indigeneity who have that history

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here in Germany. And I think that's really important because it's the way in which that maybe we can imagine a different kind of future.

Magnus Rosengarten: So you started writing *GABAN* as a as a theater piece, and now it's been evolving into a whole performance piece. Maybe you talk about that process and also working with performers in Australia and now in Germany. How has that been for you?

Brook Andrew: It's been exciting and a bit scary.

Magnus Rosengarten: Why scary?

Brook Andrew: Well, I mean, I think that when you work interdisciplinary like myself, you kind of learning a new tool. I heavily collaborate a lot with different people and communities, and it's often kind of joint processes, not necessarily an outcome. But I think that the reason why that it became a play originally is because I felt like I needed a private space to kind of work out stuff. So, I really didn't even know that this would become an event or a video artwork or a theatre piece or whatever that manifests. But it's true to my own practice, so I'll often have an idea or, a path, and the idea will have many different manifestations, but it's been very exciting. So, with the presentation here at the Gropius Bau, it will be both a video presentation, but also, we'll be doing performances as well. So, they'll be kind of impromptu performances, not like a classical theatre durational piece.

Magnus Rosengarten: So, for the show you've also invited other artists from Australia you've been collaborating with before. I'm thinking about Betty Muffler or Marinka Burton, for example, who are Ngangkari, traditional healers, and I think it would be very interesting to hear more about why you invited these artists and what also your relationship has been to their practice.

Book Andrew: Well, I'm so excited that they're in the show. They're senior women, traditional Aboriginal women, living on their own lands. And so, they're in the APY lands [Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara], as it's called, but they're in the Pitjantjatjara and other surrounding areas, which is the western desert and what kind of south central desert as well. And. Often it is the older people in those important communities because there are very high degree, very respected people that are often the – I suppose in English you call it the artist, right? – but they're more than that. They're Ngangkari, which is a healer and they have very special positions in their community and also wider community. And so, I actually saw Betty the other day in Melbourne at an exhibition and she's just so happy to be able to show her work, which is huge. So, I think the work here is five by three metres. It's huge and they just get so much joy from it. So, that's really exciting and you know, they live in the desert, they live in a very different part of the world, but it does link to other Ngangkari as well in Australia.

Magnus Rosengarten: Maybe you can talk a little bit more about this role of Ngangkari and maybe also the understanding of healing and how it is more embedded into sort of this daily communal life too. How would you describe that practice of Ngangkari?

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Brook Andrew: So, Betty does talk about the way in which that she knows when people are sick. So, in the West you might call it intuition or astral traveling. But I think it's important to say that people shouldn't get confused with the kind of Western methodology of a kind of a form of hippieism and spiritualism. I mean, it might be similar, but I think it's important to say that it's a very serious practice. It does work, it's recognised by the Australian Government through the Indigenous medical centres and also through the Australian medical practice as well. So, it's not just a side thing, it's very central and radicalised through visibility, I suppose. And so yeah, they are a very important network of Ngangkari, both men and women, and depending on where you come from, you have connections to the land and you'll either work through water – which is what Betty does – like what are the ideas of water. But the way that she visits the people who are sick is through her ego totem. But it's yeah, it's a very strong community. You can even go to Alice Springs, which is a big centre near Uluru in Central Australia and there are three Ngangkari centres there. So, people, tourists and other people go and get a healing as well.

Magnus Rosengarten: And would you say that there is like a combination of a sort of like Western medicine and Ngangkari in Australia? Like, do these two sorts of disciplines work together sometimes? Is there communication, or how does that look like?

Brook Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. So, there are nurses and doctors who acknowledge that in those communities and vice versa, because it's also spiritual, psychological, but also very physical as well. Because as we know that someone to be unhealthy can be caused by psychology or other forms of the mind or the body.

Magnus Rosengarten: Another association you're also inviting to the Gropius Bau is the Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association with a video piece called *YOYI*. What does that mean or how will you translate that into?

Brook Andrew: Well, it's always a big conversation, because when I was talking with some of the members of Jilamara Arts & Crafts, like Pedro Wonaeamirri, you know, it's like the *YOYI* is the call to ceremony or the call to place. And so hence the name of the exhibition, starting with *YOYI* for here at the Gropius Bau. And so it is really a call to that place. And so the artwork is a series of different videos of the different artists or community members as a collective calling, so doing the *YOYI*. And sometimes it's near the water, sometimes it's not near the water, it's like in the bush. And they're from the Tiwi Islands, so they're in the top part of Australia on the equator, so very close to Indonesia. And yeah, it's definitely a call.

Magnus Rosengarten: A call to action, a call to dance, is something you said earlier – something to embody.

Brook Andrew: Yeah. It's all of those things. It's like Ngangkari. I mean, it's like Aboriginal words and language can be many things and it's not just one meaning. Like I suppose other languages as well – it depends on the context.

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Magnus Rosengarten: And during this week you're basically shooting *GABAN* with Berlin based performers and maybe in the end, you can also talk about how you envision this work with people that are based in Berlin and why you also chose to work with people who basically live here temporarily or who are practicing from Berlin.

Brook Andrew: I just think it's really exciting to empower other practitioners like artists, creatives and in a very kind of fluid way and to share the script and see how they interpret it. Because I think that otherwise for me in the way in which and the reasons why I made the script, it needs to have someone who's deeply connected to it. So, it's not your kind of classical Western script, like: Here you go, your character "B", for example, memorise that and bring all your Western, you know, acting practice, which is of course just as important. And many of the actors and performers who are in *GABAN* are also trained in that way, but they're also trained in other ways. You know, it's a kind of, or trying to open up a different agenda. And it's not "just" for people who are BIPOC people, it is about kind of the broader spectrum as well of interaction, of change.

But also, I think to kind of get into the basis of some of those characters like *Photo*, for example, which is really the personification of the millions of ethnographic photographs that were taken by explorers or anthropologists. They're often quite violent images. They are for me in my research around trauma sites and also war photography very similar, because it is documenting the so-called inverted commas, "the dying species", the way Darwinism and other anthropologists have often talked about during the colonial period and even during enlightenment. And I think that legacy is incredibly powerful and it's a legacy of racism, and a legacy of shame from all aspects. It's not one against the other. I think that generally that whole mess I called the Colonial Wuba – Wuba is a Wiradjuri word meaning hole. And I'm quite playful with that too. It could be a black hole, or it could be an orifice, but it's basically, you know, a space that's complicated.

Magnus Rosengarten: So, why or how is YOYI like used in this whole context of care, repair and healing, or how would you describe it or define it?

Brook Andrew: Well, I think for starters: it's an Indigenous language from the Asia-Pacific region. And the linguicide that's happened internationally, so the death of languages, not just through colonialism, but through environmental shifts, etc., political, is being quite extreme. And so there's a lot of urgency around the visibility of language. And so the YOYI is the call to ceremony or to place. So, it's the call to care, repair and healing. And the curatorial group reflected on what the name of this show should be for many, many, many, many, many, many months. And it was a very in-depth, very, I would say, considered, importantly complex conversation, because what is it that really the show is about?

But I think care, repair and healing is in Indigenous cultures in Australia, it's everyday life, it's yindyamarra, which I use, which is basically living life with care and respect, slowly. It

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challenges time as well, the kind of European idea of what time is. It's a very challenging space to be in – European time or Western time – because within Indigenous life and cultures, especially if we're talking about healing, there is a very different sense of time. So, you don't give someone a pill and say this was going to work in five hours. You know, healing might mean you go on country like, you know, in your traditional lands for three days and you do a certain ceremony. You know, the classic thing that people say about Aboriginal culture is: "Oh, they've gone walkabout." You know this is a very kind of derogatory term, but we use it very sincerely. So, it's about, I suppose, people going on meditation retreats or something like that. So, the whole thing about the call of YOYI to care, repair and healing and how it kind of resonates throughout the other works within the exhibition is trying to relate them all but have a kind of a vibration. And in some ways, you know, bringing the word YOYI and also these Indigenous artists within this context, it's also normalising and trying to get rid of the kind of tropes or the kind of leftover ignorance about anthropology or separation of: "Oh, these people are so different". I think that this kind of fantasy or this kind of romanticism, it needs to be really shifted. And there's incredible medicine, architecture, design, engineering, etc. within Indigenous and other cultures as well. So repair and healing is not just about medicine, I suppose, it's also about your relationship to things, how you get to places, what is the process of getting somewhere...so if someone needs to get medicine somewhere, how are you going to get there?