

STATION

Lyndell Brown/Charles Green & Jon Cattapan

Spook Country: A Collaboration

21st August – 13th September 2014

Stretching across two Melbourne gallery venues, Station and ARC One—*Spook Country* gathers the three year journey of three artists—Jon Cattapan, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green—as the artists encountered the subject-matter of war and peace- looking at the vast globalized networks that support and sustain conflict and, then, at the aftermath of conflict. The three artists share a rare experience as Australian War Artists. In 2007, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green were deployed for six weeks in combat zones and remote military bases (both Australian and U.S. bases) across Iraq, the Gulf and Afghanistan. In 2008, Jon Cattapan was deployed to Timor Leste, as Australia's 63rd Official War Artist, to work on paintings and drawings alongside Australian Defence Force personnel engaged in peacekeeping operations.

All works in the two venues are made together, as part of a long term collaboration between Cattapan and Brown/Green in drawing, painting, photography and combinations of all these. Two of the most commanding and pervasive methodologies in contemporary art over the last decade have been the archival turn and the social turn; both consistently appear in association with artist collaboration. Artist collaborations range from works that look like street demonstrations, all the way to works such as these in *Spook Country*, which are made in a method of discursive and conversational innovation and surprise. For these reasons, the decision to work collaboratively was not 'time out' but was intended to result in major works of art for each artist. They would be continuous with, and would contribute to, each of the three artists' bodies of work.

From 2011 onwards, Jon Cattapan, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green embarked on a three-artist collaboration. This was more than the pooling of resources. The definite and unambiguous intention was that all three would work as a team at sites of conflict where Australians had been involved as combatants or as peacekeepers since Vietnam. In the large paintings on transparent inkjet photographs, soldiers that had been glimpsed on patrol in darkness are subsumed into a bas-relief network of woven gesture and monotype movement.

In their large paintings, they turn the depiction of contemporary events into wreckage, drowning and desolation, both from the memorialization of a historical event (the Iraq war, the Dili unrest) and equally from the recollection of personal events in their own childhoods. From their first sketches to the final paintings, they oppose conscious memory's uncertain and stressed pleasure in fixing remembrance. Instead the three proceed from a different and very fluid shared experience which became stronger and stronger as they walked through rubber plantations at Long Tan and climbed the low hill above the fast-disappearing Australian base at Nui Dat in Vietnam, or ever-so-precariously traversed the potholed mountainside roads above Gleno and stood on the fort at Balibo in Timor Leste.

These experiences—felt by all three—were a fragmentary, glimpsed, bird's-eye viewpoint that underpins the making of obscured, defaced, evocative landscape drawings and night vision photographs. Webs of light, movement and evocation overlay the close-view montage of bodies, literature, and photographic archives. Their documentation of Helmand Province, Long Tan, Maliana, Tallil and Baucau projects the contemporary like a dream screen onto the world of the past, and the reverse. It is no accident, given their long, previous, cosmopolitan careers and the coincidence of their trust in collaborative process as an artistic tool, that they translate so many disparate historical, contemporary and personal images from photographs towards spaces of blackness and twilight that are immediately recognizable as their own individual works as well as collaborative endeavours.