

DYLAN BOLGER

LEAF SZN

The Macaranga:

Kingdom: Plantae

Division: Magnoliophyta

Class: Magnoliopsida

Order: Malpighiales

Family: Euphorbiaceae

Subfamily: Acalyphoides

Tribe: Acalypheae

Subtribe: Macaranginae

*Genus: Macaranga*¹

A pioneer species. Quick growing and attractive. Rapidly colonises (or re-colonises) gaps or margins in well-developed rainforests. It is among the first plants to grow after environmental devastation.

In *Leaf SZN*, Dylan Bolger is occupying the space of CARPARK Gallery.

The gallery is on Montague Road, just 500 metres from Boundary Street, a site with historical significance to Aboriginal people. From 1829 to 1940, Boundary Streets in Brisbane served as instruments of exclusion and segregation, delineating the outer city limits for Aboriginal people, who were permitted to enter the city during daylight hours, but by 4 pm Monday to Saturday, they were forcibly removed, and entry was entirely prohibited on Sundays. Marked by wooden posts, these boundary lines exemplified the systemic segregation and oppressive policing practices of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Bolger's occupation of CARPARK continues his work *Leaf SZN*; a re-colonising project working with the *macaranga* leaf as a symbol for Aboriginal people, growing after colonial devastation and the enduring legacies of dispossession of land and sovereignty. For the exhibition, Bolger exhibits numbers *Ninety-one* to *Ninety-nine* of his series *Leaf SZN*, some periphery tests, and number *Zero* - the first botanical dye of the leaf impression done at the First Nations Artist Camp on the Gold Coast during a workshop with Norton Fredericks, facilitated by Megan Cope. Bolger has been working with the *macaranga* leaf since 3 November 2021 – 1,123 days - until the opening of his exhibition at CARPARK on 30 November 2024. The series of 100 manipulations and interpretations of the *macaranga* leaf are tracked and recorded on a map where every work from the series can be understood topologically, colonising the city of Brisbane with the leaf.

¹ Joseph, J. M. (2014). Phytochemistry and pharmacology of the genus *Macaranga*: A review. *Journal of Medicinal Plant Research*, 8(12), 489–503. <https://doi.org/10.5897/JMPR2014.5396>

His use of maps is deeply rooted in his architectural background and understanding of urban planning. This perspective informs his constant examination of architecture and town planning, tools often used to define and control the spaces where he has lived and worked.

Having grown up in Logan and Brisbane, Dylan's concept of "home" is inherently complex. For many, "home" might be a singular place to return to—a city or country of origin where one might feel a sense of belonging. However, for Indigenous peoples, this notion is complicated by the ongoing colonial occupation of place. In this context, maps become powerful allegories for colonisation and destruction.

Dylan's reflections on Highgate Hill and West End highlight how these areas have become less visibly Indigenous. He grapples with how he identifies with these spaces and the cultural crossover that has occurred within them. In his lifetime, he has witnessed transformations where spaces once deemed inaccessible—whether as metaphors or physical realities—have been reimagined and represent a significant shift in representation and opportunity, outcomes that once felt impossible in his youth. His use of historical maps as artifacts connects to the socio-political hardships placed upon Indigenous peoples. Property ownership remains a critical measure of wealth and intergenerational sustainability in contemporary Australia. The lack of access to property and the inability to build wealth over generations has disproportionately affected Aboriginal communities.

Entering ROOM 2, with the ambiguous permission of an open door but no invigilation, moving through the homely bric-a-brac and drop-cloth bedding to enter Bolger's workspace, is meant to be uncomfortable. While the space is comfortable for him, it is deliberately unsettling for you: to disrupt settler colonial narratives and to encourage the viewer to think and feel beyond established colonial logic², with the transformation from homely to unhomely, and the evocation of unease, discomfort and non-overt fear.³

Dylan shares, 'When the making stops, the art stops'. The works on the gallery's walls are the performance's artefact; the residue is left behind on the canvas, paper, and board. This re-colonization of CARPARK will extend beyond the exhibition dates, with work *Ninety-six* permanently painted on the column at the entrance—a lasting mark made by Bolger on this location.

This gallery occupation by Bolger follows his residency at the Museum of Brisbane, which took place from 8 October to 17 November 2024. The 100th and final work of the series can be viewed at the museum until April 2025.

Text by Georgia Boe

² Yoon-Ramirez, I., & Ramirez, B. W. (2021). Unsettling Settler Colonial Feelings Through Contemporary Indigenous Art Practice. *Studies in Art Education*, 62(2), 114–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.1896416>

³ Gordon, E. (2020) Drawing the foreboding¹. *Scope: (Art and Design)*, 20, 70-74. doi:10.34074/scop.1020005