

**Ittja Ntjarra Many Hands Art in NIRIN Biennale of Sydney until June 8. Information online. Issued out of time due to COVID protocols.**

By The Review Board, April 25 2020

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By ferry & foot, I sought the work of the artist collective Ittja Ntjarra on Cockatoo Island. Known predominantly for their heritage (via Albert Namatjira) & watercolour landscapes, I was keen to see how their practice was developing after enjoying recent political & issues-based work.

The trek was long. Powerful installations, many massive in scale, across the recolonised-colonised island ensured a strong, consistent message. After wandering unsuccessfully, it was necessary to follow the map, & look down. On the ground in an unremarkable corner sat 8 ubiquitous shopping bags each painted with landscapes scenes & handwritten text – “My Home is being Destroyed”, the artist tells me.

I was disappointed. It seemed tiny, too modest, easy to overlook. I checked my pamphlet, Ittja Ntjarra was at every NIRIN site. The next day a return trip to AGNSW to seek them out.

Seek them out you must. Their placement is an essential element of this clever installation for the very reason why it was initially invisible. “My Country Is Still Alive” cries the message underneath Fontana’s 16thC Deposition in perfect juxtaposition. So too at the National Art School, Campbelltown Arts Centre & MCA Australia, the humble bags & their small, sweet windows into Aranda landscape develop a tone of longing. The placard-style text takes on protest. You could walk by without noticing them, as you might have walked by any homeless person with their belongings urgently contained in one bag. As you might have walked by Namatjira himself, famous & homeless, successful & without citizenship, fighting for the right to own a home on his ancestral lands.

By threading across multiple sites in a wonderful piece of curatorial vision by Brook Andrew (Artist) it tells a much bigger story. Research reveals that people who emotionally connect with place understand its value & will fight to protect it. The artists of Ittja Ntjarra know this.

Learn more online & hopefully it will be accessible to visit before its duration end. Commissioned with Foundation OPALE assistance.