

Bone Library (2010-present)

Bone Library (2010-ongoing) is a long-durational performance and a generative sculptural installation which considers the uneasy relationship between artefact, culture and colonial anthropology.

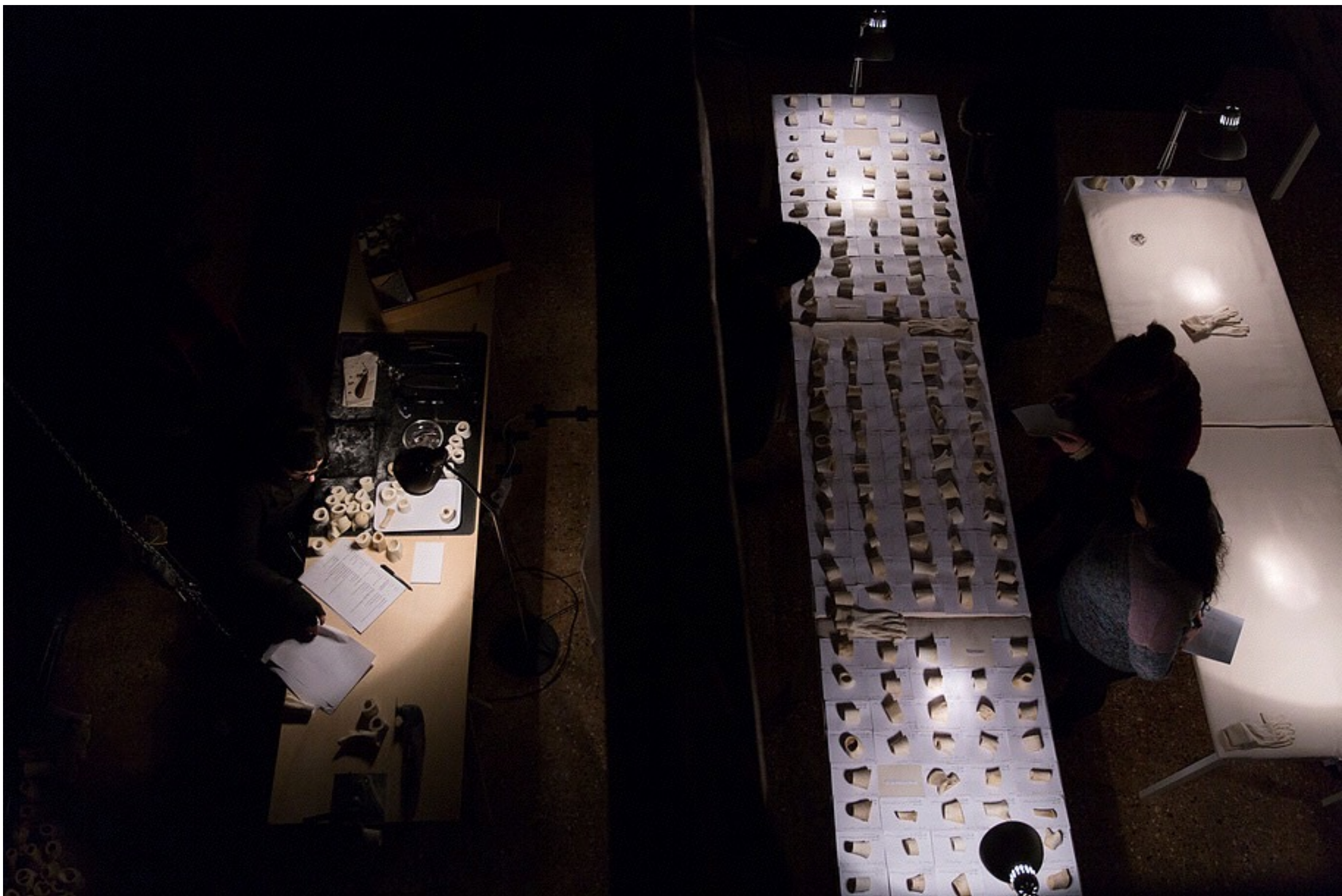
This work sees the artist installed in a darkened space which might variously recall a reading room, an archaeological dig, or a morgue. They co-occupy this space with a large quantity of prepared animal bones- specifically the bones of beef cattle and sheep- that have been cleaned and specially treated for carving. Working for 8 hours per day over the course of a week long duration, Norman methodically engraves and catalogues the bones with single words from south-eastern Aboriginal languages which have been classified as “extinct” onto the bones. The resulting objects are arranged and displayed in a manner that recalls taxonomical specimens. Audiences witness the progression of this task over the course of many hours and days. At the conclusion of the live inscription, the amassed collection of engraved bones is dispersed into the collective trusteeship of the audience: those who have borne witness to the live transcription are invited, with the permission of living language Custodians, to take a single bone to hold in their temporary care, until such time as the complete collection is recalled.

Norman’s gesture seeks to disrupt the prevailing notion of “extinction” as it relates to Aboriginal languages, and elucidate the violent tensions that exist between Aboriginal and colonial knowledge systems. By appropriating the aesthetics of the collecting institution, Norman references the theft of ancestral artefacts. By inscribing the words onto the bones of sheep and cattle, the totemic beasts of colonial pastoralism, Norman makes a direct link between the dispossession of language and the degradation of Country. By choosing to utilise the act of inscription itself, which remains so central to the codes of official “memorial”, Norman illuminates the painful lacuna that exists in the culture at large around the destruction of Aboriginal knowledge.











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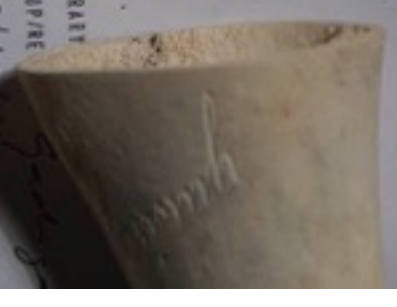
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CERTIFICATE OF TRUSTERSHIP

This document is to acknowledge that ownership of objects has been placed in your care. This object is the ultimate possession of an individual. In receiving this object from its origin, you are agreeing to keep it under your guardianship until such time when it should again enter the public collection. This agreement is non-transferable and non-renewable.

It is your prerogative as the Trustee of this object to keep and display it as well as to loan it to other individuals or institutions. It is your responsibility to ensure that the object and the cultural material with which it is associated is treated with respect.

Caring for your home

The home of those objects that have been carefully preserved in the past is a place of great importance. It is a place where the objects are kept safe and where they are cared for with the utmost respect.

Some homes have many small rooms of various sizes. The objects are kept in these rooms and are not allowed to move. If your home has many small rooms, you should keep the objects in the same room as they were when they were first received. This is the best way to ensure that the objects are kept safe and are not damaged.

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Bone Library was first presented on the unceded lands of the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, as part of Next Wave 2010.

The development of this work was supported by Performance Space, Sydney, City of Melbourne and the Australia Council for the Arts.

This work as been presented at: Next Wave Festival, Venice International Performance Art Week and Spill Festival of Live Art, London.

Image credits: Guido Mencari