



4A TALKS // Dean Cross
as part of *Dean Cross: Monuments*
13 August - 25 September 2020
Watch the video [HERE](#).

TRANSCRIPT



Bridie Moran: Hi, I'm Bridie Moran. I'm Deputy Director at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. I would like to acknowledge that this video was filmed on the land of the Gadigal People of the Euroa Nation and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge this land was never ceded.

Today, I'm standing in *Monuments* by Dean Cross. This is an installation that is on display at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art until the 1st of October 2020. It's part of the '*Drawn by stones*' curatorial project, of which I'm the curator, which will be a full exhibition project that continues into 2021. If you'd like to find out more about Dean, the exhibition project, or '*Monuments*' you can visit for 4A.com.au.

Dean Cross: Hello, I am Dean Cross and we are here amongst *Monuments* my show at 4A gallery. So *Monuments* is comprised of 232 handfuls of white Ngunnawal/Ngambri ochre and gold leaf. 232 being years since colonisation. The work is designed to grow every two years when I present it biennially and the growth of the work will continue ideally long after I'm gone.

The idea for the work is that it can exist in the world without me. It's an idea, independent of me, as its maker. The genesis of the work was a dismay, I suppose, at a lack of Aboriginal monumentalisation. You can walk down the street here in Sydney and be reminded left, right and centre of our colonial history, but it's much harder. You'll have to work much harder to physically see in the real world Aboriginal monuments, Aboriginal memorials that also lend themselves in the Western kind of cannon. And so this work came about thinking through that problem.

I sort of often tell the same story. We're on our road to where our house is. And where this all came from is a Scar Tree. I've seen this tree my whole life. And then, one day, the tree looked different. And it sort of clicked. I realised, I had this sort of epiphany, I suppose of understanding where the Scar Tree is the monument. They exist everywhere and beyond the people that still exist. There are these physical markers that do tell a history. And so I think really then the challenge is one of perspective, and shifting that perspective, and hopefully the work is part of that conversation to shift and to challenge colonial perspectives or colonial thinking that will allow new vision in the world around us.



Dean Cross: Within *Monuments* there are two elements, two key elements to the work: the white ochre and the gold leaf. The gold leaf that I use serves multiple functions within the work. Initially, one of the thought trains that I went on was about extraction, and thinking through what my own process is of extracting the ochre with my old man, and how that differs to the usual process of mineral extraction in his country, and the values that we place on those two practices.

The ochre that I use is Ngunnawal/Ngambri Ochre. It comes from what was once a really large ochre pit, that was since then turned into a clay quarry for bricks, about 60 kilometres northeast of Canberra. So there's a whole lot of homes in Canberra made with white bricks. Those bricks are made from this ochre.



Monuments has been shown as a part of the Shepparton Indigenous Ceramic Prize and when I submitted my application to show this work as a part of this prize it kind of came with a caveat or a question that I asked that well, at what point does clay, this particular clay, this ochre at what point does it sort of transmute into ceramic? And then there was a conversation around this kind of spectrum of material and there's a kind of dry, boring answer of: "Clay goes into a kiln, ceramics comes out." But I feel that it's more interesting at least, and in the context of this work to sort of think about ceramic as always being Country. This work, like most artworks, it points to the thing. It isn't the thing that it points to. And so whilst it's called *Monuments*, it's titled *Monuments*, I think of the work less in that way, if that makes sense. I don't think that there's a future where it would become sort of permanently installed. I think that I'd be more pleased if somebody else came and saw the work in whatever iteration in the future, and think: "Maybe I can make my own monument." Maybe it's less about the monumentalisation and more about the thinking and the active undoing of untruths that we grew up with here in Australia and that I'd be more pleased to empower somebody to invent their own.

Dean Cross: *Monuments* as an iterative work, has a lifespan hopefully beyond my own. And so, in that, there becomes challenges around custodianship. Ownership is less important. I don't actually feel like I particularly own this work. But I do feel like a custodian of the material. At some point in the future I will need to think through how and who delivers the work and in what ways that can continue into the future. I really think of the work as pointing towards a problem that needs to be fixed.

In that sense, there's perhaps two alternate futures for the work: There's this one where we need to be reminded regularly to think again about where we live, the histories that we all embody and the ways that we remember. But then there might be this alternate reality where we've become sort of progressive maybe or we've worked it out. I don't know if that's ever going to happen. Where this kind of decolonial idea fully blooms and we won't need to be reminded in the same way.

The recorded talk with Dean Cross was conducted on 15 September 2020, as part of Dean Cross: Monuments at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 13 August – 1 October 2020.

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Euroa Nation, the traditional custodians of the Land on which this interview took place.

**#DeanCross #4AAustralia
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Images:

- 1) Dean, *Monuments* (2018 - ongoing indefinitely, 2020 iteration), handfuls of Ngunnawal ochre & gold leaf, dimensions variable; image: Kai Wasikowski for 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian art; courtesy the artist.
- 2) Dean, *Monuments* (2018 - ongoing indefinitely, 2020 iteration) (detail), handfuls of Ngunnawal ochre & gold leaf, dimensions variable; image: Kai Wasikowski for 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian art; courtesy the artist.
- 3) Dean, *Monuments* (2018 - ongoing indefinitely, 2020 iteration) (detail), handfuls of Ngunnawal ochre & gold leaf, dimensions variable; image: Kai Wasikowski for 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian art; courtesy the artist.