

drop of governmental failure to honour these accords. These maps and Wampum Belts trace and intertwine regional histories of Anishinaabe resistance and the forced occupation of their land.

The exhibition features photographs of, and personal statements from, George's family and friends, all of whom experienced the fallout of the Ipperwash Crisis. These statements recount individual Anishinaabeg histories associated with the death of George, the imposed exile from their homelands, and the failures of the government in making reparations toward healing intergenerational trauma. A photograph of Stacey "Burger" George—George's sister—depicts her in a protesting stance, her hand clenched and raised in the air. In the accompanying statement, she notes that this photograph was taken without her consent, recalling the invasiveness of cameras and their history as colonial tools of control. Together, this archive centres Anishinaabe people, images, and lands as active sites of resistance.

Although intimate in scale, *Gaawiin Ogiibagidenaawaasiwaawan/They Did Not Let It Go* delivers a powerful critique of colonial apparatuses—

maps, legislation, cameras, policing—that resonates deeply with our contemporary moment. It recalls Wet'suwet'en land defenders in British Columbia protesting the development of the Coastal GasLink pipeline on their unceded territories, and Mi'kmaq fishers who were charged for exercising treaty rights to earn a moderate livelihood in Nova Scotia. Houle underscores the Canadian government's use of coercive tactics to expropriate lands and oppress Indigenous peoples, especially the instrumentalization of the police to uphold colonial conventions of encroachment. At the same time, the exhibition evinces Anishinaabe refusal and resilience against colonial powers that continue to seek control over their territories, bodies, and images.

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**The Gas Imaginary: Rachel O'Reilly  
Or Gallery, Vancouver  
October 2–December 19, 2020**

The signal work of Rachel O'Reilly's exhibition, *The Gas Imaginary* at Or Gallery, is the hour-long single-channel documentary video *INFRACTIONS* (2019), in which the artist interviews Aboriginal anti-fracking activists in the Northern Territory of Australia. Another shorter video, *Drawing Rights* (2018), combines 3-D renderings and drone footage with voice-over narration that pulls on recent research into the Torrens title-of-property registration pioneered in Australia in the 19th century. Nine inkjet prints of computer-rendered diagrams hung along the back wall echo the surreal, axonometric views of *Drawing Rights* and interleave a handwritten commentary between the exploded layers of landscape, boats, figures, stacked turtles, and dugongs. Finally, a large drawing—which had yet to be installed when I visited the show—spans the west wall with a timeline and a map of Australia's mining permits. The works collected here belong to a larger project that gives the exhibition its name. Together they propose to reckon with the "violent dematerialization" at the heart of what O'Reilly calls "settler conceptualism." These phrases, which O'Reilly coins in the works and which are echoed in the show's publicity materials, link her polemic against the extractive logics of settler colonialism in present-day Australia with a withering, ironic assessment of the history of contemporary art.

*INFRACTIONS* poses what might be the central question of the entire show: who decides what happens to the land and how? At the outset of the documentary, Irene Watson (Tanganekald, Meintangk Boandik First Nations), a law professor and co-drafter of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, relates how slippery the paradigm of rights can be. Landmark recognition of Aboriginal title in Australian courts through the 1992 *Mabo* decision, she explains, brought with it the concept of extinguishment, whereby title can also be revoked by the Australian nation-state. Against the backdrop of such legal dis-

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simulation, *INFRACTIONS* follows past and current efforts by Aboriginal activists to determine control over their ancestral homelands. Interviews with Gooreng Gooreng elders Juliri Ingra, Jackie Johnson, and Neola Savage, among others, trace how mining companies ingratiate themselves by retaining influential individuals to acquire Aboriginal community consent for mining, only to shirk responsibility for financial support or environmental consequences. Fighting this exploitation of the Indigenous rights paradigm, then, is what a younger generation of activists face in their ongoing struggle to preserve and care for their land. As Gadrian Hoosan (Garwa, Yanyuwa) puts it, "When you hold money in your hand, you're holding a dead environment and a dead land." Elder artist Jack Green (Garawa, Gudanji) points out the fraught relationship between art and mining companies. He explains that the local art centre began to shy away from his paintings explicitly opposed to mining, which led him to stop working with them altogether.

Corporate artwashing is perhaps the most direct, material link O'Reilly makes between the history of extractive industries in Australia and art. One of her tacit theses, however, is that the legal abstractions that have historically been used to legitimize extraction find echoes in the kind of administrative abstractions and logics deployed in post-war art, especially conceptualism. The video *Drawing Rights*, her printed diagrams, and the wall drawing speculate about these more fundamental analogies between extraction and art. The legacy of Conceptual Art is clearly an important touchstone for O'Reilly because it epitomizes art's post-war flight from objects to ideas, which she implicitly compares to the flight of global capital from Fordist production into the abstract realm of finance. The entry for the year 1971 on the timeline in her wall drawing reads "dematerialization of art finance." *Drawing Rights*, in particular, focuses on the Torrens title system invented in Australia in 1858 and later exported globally, which "simplified" settler land grabs

Rachel O'Reilly, installation view from *The Gas Imaginary*, 2020, Or Gallery, Vancouver

by removing the legal requirement to show a documented chain of title. In O'Reilly's timeline, Torrens title ("the first fully fungible capitalist model of landed property in the world," according to the artist) belongs to the same trajectory as the *Mabo* decision in a settler-colonial legal framework that constantly strives to submit increasing amounts of land to value extraction. The concept of registration hastens settler claims to land by substituting a legal-administrative procedure for more material connections to place.

Certain projects by Robert Smithson and the N.E. Thing Co., among others, probably deserve the epithet settler conceptualism. But suggesting that the pernicious legal innovations of 19th-century Australian settlers somehow anticipated Conceptual Art, or that the latter merely mimes the former, is a bold and probably unfair conceit. Still, O'Reilly's comparison brings out a shared affinity for an administrative sleight of hand. Conceptual Art never shied away from inventing systems or structures to serve as guiding fictions to justify improbable ends. Think of John Baldessari's *Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts)* (1973) or Douglas Huebler's tongue-in-cheek intention to "photographically document the existence of everyone alive" for his *Variable Piece #70* (1971–1988). It is also significant that O'Reilly herself makes liberal use of Conceptual Art's formal strategies. Her exhibition incorporates works in series, and the administrative aesthetic of diagrams, maps, and charts. The wall drawing, executed by a hired hand according to the artist's specifications, recalls the method if not the look of a Sol Lewitt. On one hand, O'Reilly invites us to think of the colonist, map-maker, and colonial administrator as "artist." This aspect of her invocation of the "conceptual" highlights how settler-colonial discourse is constructed around land as a concept that is empty and, by association, "there for the taking." On the other hand, she repurposes conceptualist strategies to intervene in the very settler imaginary she so deftly calls up. Rather than rejecting it outright, then, she opts to temper her own participation in the history of conceptualism by reflexively conveying the tension between its "good" and "bad" aspects.

There is an argument to be made that resisting the intensifying abstraction of global capitalism must involve returning fire with its own most effective tools. Given the evidence supplied in *The Gas Imaginary*—and the recent history of Contemporary Art—I am not persuaded that a recuperation of conceptualist techniques can be applied with the same efficiency against the forces of capitalist abstraction as they are in the other direction. Another visual technique, ostensibly aligned with surveillance and official state cartography, which is much more impactful and is repurposed to profound effect in *INFRACTIONS* and *Drawing Rights*, is the activist-produced drone footage of fracking wells. As O'Reilly's narration in the video attests, there is a kind of abstraction in the drone footage itself due to its uncanny smoothing of camera movement and its consequent rendering of space into a kind of Euclidean perfection. It is this material along with O'Reilly's interviews that does justice to her subject matter more fully than the renderings and diagrams. Whereas the exploded views and pink-and-red digital renderings transport us into the eerie virtual space of the gas imaginary, hearing the testimonials of activists like Que Kenny and Ray "Dimakarri" Dixon combined with the drone footage of the affected areas of the Northern Territory returns us to the connection between land and people that the violent dematerializations of settler conceptualism always threaten to sever.

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