



*Modern Mobilities:  
Australian-Transnational  
Writing*

Editors

David Brooks and Elizabeth McMahon

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Marian Drew, *Rainbow Lorikeet on Queensland needlework*, 2009,  
 archival pigment on paper, 112 x 134 cm  
 Courtesy of Artist and dianne tanzer gallery + projects

## AND IN THE LONG Paddock

Our website is <http://www.southerlyjournal.com.au>

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## ELIZABETH DAY

*Liverpool/Liverpool (After The Black)*

Was it the weight of the past in the corridor space beneath the courtroom that made me sick? Did I catch something on the plane maybe? I have to go back to the hotel room. At the base of the steps is the room where the accused sat waiting to ascend the spiral wooden steps and face their charges. If found guilty they would “go down” for it, to another adjacent holding room. The cruelty of the Judge Day is described on the museum placards in the ante-rooms behind the courtroom – he made even the notorious Rip Gang quake with the number of floggings both before a sentence and then again at the end. The relatives I am with, whom I haven’t seen since we left to live in Tasmania in 1963, are also feeling a sense of disgust about the violence of someone with our



View of the dungeon corridor at St Georges Hall with projection

cheekbones. The Flogging Judge was my grandfather's grandfather. He was offered a "Commission" in Queensland in 1842. He refused it. He was doing very well in Liverpool. It was my first knowledge that my generations had even toyed with the idea of Australia.

This place is real, not just a lift-shaft of my imagination in the ruined building. The weight of the past always forces itself on me in the form of these intense emotions. At one point I don't know if I'll get through this malaise. I am really sinking. It isn't like me, I feel seriously ill and go back to the hotel room as soon as I can, exhausted. Everything stacked up to bring me here and make this connection. The walls are still impregnated with urine and pain, in some cases there might have been hope – anything would have looked better than this. This was where many of the accused as well as the convicted were housed whilst they awaited transportation to Plymouth and then onto Australia. It is very strange to be here. I stand in and place my work on the walls of the dungeon cellar at St Georges Hall.

It surprises me that the design of the doors, the shape of the curved ceiling overhead and general proportions are so similar to the ones we saw travelling in Tasmania. It might have been created by the same person's imagination. I am in the place where the earliest decisions



Judge John Charles  
Frederick Sigismund Day  
(National Portrait  
Gallery, London).

were made to remove basically the poor to Australia. Judge Day was the rich who my relatives suspect to have become wealthy in part by the slave trade. He was famous for the severity of his punishments. You would wonder whether he suffered some mental illness, but his son's writing describes someone who loved art and nature and took sufficient interest in those he condemned to go walking in the derelict streets of Liverpool to see how those who became criminals lived. It must have been quite risky as he was a well-known figure. It could have appeared that he cared about those he punished.

Knowing that his illegitimate grandson's face was the one I had looked at on the living room wall as a child, brought me close to him and curious about his influence. The face in the photograph in the Judge's chamber did have my father's cheekbones, chin and ear lobes. It was easy to think that his daughter had sought the company of a more approachable person in the judge's coachman – and the fury of her father on discovering the pregnancy.

Life is too mysterious. Thanks to a letter of introduction from a curator, I didn't just find anywhere to exhibit. I found St Georges. I came to meet the Judge. A statue of mighty Britannia with a cluster of servants stands in front of this monumental building. There is a



Inside St Georges Hall,  
Liverpool, UK.



gigantic bronze Queen Victoria riding high on horseback beside her Prince to the left of the sweeping stepped entrance. Did she never think about the damage she was doing? I try to imagine the supreme belief she must have had in her own righteousness when the sun never set on the Empire.

Later I walked into St Georges off the street near Lime St Station up some stairs go onto the second level where the Law Court is situated below the massive ballroom. The court physically, spatially and symbolically divides the opulent ballroom from the dungeon corridor where my exhibition comprising three projected films is on display. The work that I made is a message to the Hanging Judge Day. It says: *the law is not always just*. I peel back this text cast in grass roots from a plaster cast.

Grass is an approximation to the colonial surface. The British took it everywhere when they came to Australia determined to restore where possible those “green and pleasant lands” they must have missed so badly.

When I was working as an art teacher in a colonial prison in Australia I had found the segment below on a disused electricity manhole cover. A mower had turned it over and it sat there on the cut grass it seemed,



ELECT was discovered on a man-hole cover in the grounds of an Australian prison where I was working. Grass roots have taken the form of the metal cast.

at that moment of excitement, waiting to be found. To say what it had to say. The tendrils of grass roots had, sensing the limitations of the hard metal, set themselves into the form of the cast metal which had once spelled ELECTRICITY. Now it said ELECT. ELECT what? I picked up the word and put it on my wall to think about.

This is when the cast came about. I made a long stretch of plaster embedded with large slightly unruly letters cut out of cardboard and pressed into the wet fluid plaster until it heated and set hard enough for the planting to replicate ELECT's description of the underneath. The meeting of the new roots on the earth, that is a new junction of language and the ancient past where the gaol now sits.

The courtroom, which was where the fate of the poor was finally decided, is a bright wooden chamber beneath a stained glass hemisphere depicting St George slaying the dragon in red and blue and emerald green. For the first time in my life I feel identified with power. We always thought of ourselves as working class. My grandfather was a truck driver. We moved to Australia and became market gardeners. I wonder if this experience will improve my self-esteem. I might become successful. It might have done more for me if he hadn't been so extreme, so cruel. I am ashamed. I am torn between pride and shame. I was never presumptuous enough to succeed. I sat in the Hanging Judge's throne wanting to understand how such a person thought and felt towards those he judged. He was so feared. Known for a particular gesture of the eyebrow when he was about to deliver a verdict. He would appear to be sleeping until a lid was raised and his decree delivered. To my left are the pews where the jury sat. To the right viewers and witnesses of the public could watch in rows. Almost in front of me at the top of a spiral staircase is the dock where the accused was brought to sit.

Liverpool is a passionate and historically fraught city where the slaves were brought from Africa en route to the cotton fields in the Southern states of the United States. Some stayed. Many Lancastrians prospered as the cotton came back from the southern states to Manchester where the thread was spun and woven. Feverish industry and much grief gave us bed linen, towels, fancy tablecloths and a fine array of garments.

Writing *The Black* several months earlier and then coming here I recognise what I can only describe as a cellular knowledge. It was something waiting to be known. The dreadful and more recent incarceration of my grandmother was also present in this place. Another learned gentleman sent her “down”. Judgements of the powerful and their counterpart shame come together in this work. Thinking of the gluggish quality of Rauschenberg’s bitumen paint, I want it all off me. I tried to find compassion in gardening with the judged twelve thousand miles away and 200 years on.

The *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden* comes back to me, still incomplete as I write. This imagery revolves around my steadying a barrage of confusion. I will continue this work for some time to come. The white knitted lines in the landscape of sludge-like materials are like my mother who is loved for her gentleness who has always tried to quieten me. “t was a long time ago,” she said. Yet the past did not go away in my case. She silences me with her reticence and I fear I will not be able to share this story. I could become sick with my own imprisonment in words that cannot be spoken.



*Drawing of the Map of the Dillwynia Garden* (2000–), work on hessian with bitumen, latex, baby wool, nails, seeds, washers, sequins, balloons, etc.

Smithson produced work about his place in history, and his role in its intervention. I have been trying to find my own origins in this search for my own bearings as well as the dark places that are subconscious and formative and a place where history can begin to be re-written.

More immediate history was unravelled by my discovery of the Judge. From Sydney I wrote to an aunt, Mary Anderson who gave me a photograph of the Judge's daughter,

Mary Day was her great grandmother. She was banished from the family of her stern and punishing father. Arthur, the son rebelled against his maniacally dispassionate Catholic father by becoming a Baptist, and also he refused a sizeable inheritance calling it "filthy money". He wrote a book about the life and times of the Judge that sits in the Library in Dublin. I would like to find out more.

I walked around the building filming the giant edifice, its columns, the lions besides the queen. Wide steps reach up to the entrance of a great ballroom where the privileged danced.

*Colour images of the artwork and Ann Finegan's catalogue essay for Liverpool/Liverpool project are online at [www.southerlyjournal.com.au](http://www.southerlyjournal.com.au)*