



Octopus 24: Ricochet

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15 June – 4 August 2024

Destiny Deacon
Chelsea Farquhar
Dominic Guerrera
Truc Truong
Cosey Fanni Tutti
William Yang

Curated by Patrice Sharkey

Thanks, Sis, for dropping the ‘c’ for us urban blaks

You gave us way to break free of the whitefellas expectations

define our identity on our own terms¹

This booklet has been printed on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners. We pay respect to their ancestors and Elders - past, present and future.

Destiny Deacon, *Waiting For Goddess C*, 1993-03, light jet print from Polaroid original, 60 x 48 cm (image size), edition of 15 + 2 APs. Courtesy the artist's estate and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

**I like to think there is a laugh and
a tear in every picture.** Destiny Deacon

In 2017, artist and musician Cosey Fanni Tutti (1951–) released an autobiography titled *Art Sex Music*. The book covers her early life growing up in Hull in the North of England, her time as a founding member of the performance art collective COUM Transmissions and its influential offshoot, the industrial band Throbbing Gristle—as one half of electronic pioneers Chris and Cosey—and as an artist channeling her experience in pornographic modeling and striptease. As one review described at the time of publishing, “This is the tale of a preternaturally creative individual dedicated to challenging and, where possible, breaking down ideological and social barriers.”⁴

It is almost lore that COUM Transmissions’ exhibition, *Prostitution*, staged at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 1976, caused such widespread outrage it led a conservative MP to declare in the House of Commons that “these people are wreckers of civilization.” The exhibition featured pornographic images of Cosey alongside props from COUM’s performances, ranging from a rusted knife to a jar of Vaseline to bloodied objects such as bandages, tampons, and bottles of blood. Raising questions about the use of the body, representation and exploitation within the media and art world, *Prostitution* deeply challenged and disturbed the moral and aesthetic values of British society at the time.⁵

I read *Art Sex Music* shortly after it was released and was floored by its unfussy, matter-of-fact approach to recounting experiences of hardship and abuse—particularly those featuring Genesis P-Orridge, her former lover and fellow member of COUM and Throbbing Gristle, who sought to devalue and marginalise Fanni Tutti over a sustained period.

Hearteningly, Fanni Tutti’s work on the margins has received increasing recognition in recent years. A notable example was her inclusion in the 2023 Tate Britain survey exhibition, *Women In Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*, which featured work by over one hundred artists previously omitted from the official story of art in Britain. As the



Cossey Fanni Tutti, *Incognito*, 1979–2021, C-type prints, 7 parts, each: 35.5 x 35.5 (detail).
Courtesy the artist and Cabinet Gallery, London.

Cossey Fanni Tutti **My life is my art, my art is my life**

Cossey Fanni Tutti is the personification of self empowerment.²

exhibition's introduction argues, "This is partly because art by women has tended to get less attention than art by men, but far more because this is art with a message...however much the art establishment likes to think it veers towards the radical."⁶ Fanni Tutti's enduring influence across identity, gender, language, and power relations has also been celebrated in the exhibition *A Study in Scarlet* at Frac île-de-france in Paris in 2018, as well as critically unpacked in *Cosey Complex*—a one day event held, again, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 2010. Conceived by writer Maria Fusco, *Cosey Complex* brought together a range of artists, writers and other practitioners, including Gerard Byrne, Chris Kraus, Clunie Read, and Corin Sworn, to enact "Cosey as Methodology."

Driven by an interest in revisionist histories and a commitment to asserting missing voices and incomplete stories into contemporary records of the past, the story of Cosey Fanni Tutti has served as a personal touchstone in the development of *Ricochet*—a project through which I have sought to find a way to express the wide-reaching legacy of artists who fiercely challenged the societal and cultural norms of their time, and who have also pushed outwards to expand the institutional bounds of what constitutes the form that art takes.

Alongside Cosey, Destiny Deacon (1957–2024) and William Yang (1943–) form the foundation of *Ricochet*. Deacon was a descendant of the Kuku and Erub/Mer People from Far North Queensland and Torres Strait, while Yang grew up in northern-Queensland as a third generation Australian of Chinese descent. Deacon, who lived most of her life in Melbourne, trailblazed the contemporary Australian art world with incisive wit, repurposing stereotypes to reclaim Indigenous self-representation. Yang, who belongs to the tradition of private and candid social photography, has been unshrinkingly devoted to documenting hidden subjects in Australian culture, beginning with Sydney's LGBTIQ+ community in the 1970s. Overtime, his diaristic approach to photography has engaged with the impact of HIV/AIDS on his friends, his identity as a Chinese-Australian, and his family history and relationships.

While undertaking my own research into their practices for *Ricochet*, I wasn't surprised to learn that both Deacon and Yang had been announced as participating artists in the 2024 edition of the Biennale of Sydney, *Ten Thousand Suns*. Included alongside other prescient Australian artists and collectives who emerged between the 1970s to 1990s—Juan Davila, Bonita Ely, Tracey Moffatt, r e a and VNS Matrix—the Biennale's Artistic Directors Cosmin Costinaş and Inti Guerrero promoted the exhibition as "inspired by legacies of collective resistance and coming together to thrive in the face of injustice."⁷ This declaration affirmed what I had also felt over my sustained engagement with Deacon and Yang's

practices in terms of their work's political drive to make the lives of those who have been socially marginalised visible.

An early 2004 exhibition curated by Natalie King notwithstanding (*Destiny Deacon: Walk and don't look blak*, first presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney), major retrospectives of Deacon or Yang have only occurred in recent years. *DESTINY*, curated by Myles Russell-Cook, was presented at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in 2020, while *William Yang: Seeing & Being Seen*, curated by Rosie Hays, was presented at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, in 2021.

Ricochet presents a range of historic works by Fanni Tutti, Deacon, and Yang that demonstrate the artist's unique abilities to blend autobiography and performativity; through reckoning with the power of representation, they have each contributed to broadening critical spaces around lived experience. In recognition of their legacy and influence, *Ricochet* includes new commissions by Chelsea Farquhar, Dominic Guerrera (Kurna, Ngarrindjeri), and Truc Truong that—made today, using their own methods and forms—continue to interrogate and self-affirm ideas of identity, sexuality, community, friendship, family, activism, and power.

Essay by Patrice Sharkey

Printed by Stray Pages
Edition of 100
Design by Tyrone Ormsby

1. Ellen van Neerven, 'Portrait of Destiny', *Throat*, University of Queensland Press, 2020.
2. Sasha Grey quoted in Cosey Fanni Tutti, *Art Sex Music* (Faber & Faber Social, London, 2017).
3. Benjamin Law, 'Bearing Witness in the Church of William Yang', *William Yang: Seeing and Being Seen*, Queensland Art Gallery, 2022.

Thank you to all the exhibition artists and their gallery representatives, the Gertrude team, Tyrone Ormsby, Eleanor Scicchitano, Kate Bohunnis, Louise Dunn, Anne Sharkey, Janina Harding, Natalie King and Yhonnie Scarce.

The Octopus exhibition series is generously supported by Proclaim.

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4. Fiona Sturges, 'Art Sex Music by Cosey Fanni Tutti review – elder stateswoman of the avant garde', *The Guardian*, 30 March 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/30/art-sex-music-cosey-fanni-tutti-review> [accessed 4 June 2024].
5. Melanie Coles, 'Prostitution Revisited: What went on at the ICA's most controversial exhibition', *ICA Bulletin*, 26 October 2016: <https://archive.ica.art/bulletin/prostitution-revisited/index.html> [accessed 4 June 2024].
6. *Women In Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*, curated by Linsey Young, Tate Britain, London, 8 November 2023 – 7 April 2024, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/women-in-revolt> [accessed 4 June 2024].
7. 24th Biennale of Sydney: *Ten Thousand Suns*, artistic direction led by Cosmin Costinaş and Inti Guerrero, 9 March – 10 June 2024: <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibitions/24th-biennale-of-sydney/> [accessed 5 June 2024].



*I have left these places, and I have changed. These places still hold me, but I move around these hills like a ghost. It is the land from where I came, which formed and nourished me, but to which I can never return.
"William at Thornborough." William Yang, assisted by Ivo Klarich. 2006. 1/2x.*

**There will always be people
who are biased against you,
but it is important
to be who you are
in a public way.** William Yang

William Yang's work makes me feel seen, and reminds me that I exist. It tells me I was part of a community before I even knew it was out there waiting for me, ready to hold me... William Yang introduced me to my own world, as well as its history—a passing of the torch to the next generation.³

William Yang, *William At Thornborough (2006)*, 2006/2009, inkjet print on fine art paper, 69 x 85 cm. Courtesy the artist.