

curated by gallerist David Pestorius, included a number of international and Australian artists and was named after the two tribes that used to inhabit the region before being driven out by British colonists in the early nineteenth century.

On being commissioned to produce a work for the original show, Bailey, who is known for a series of “relational” interventions—such as his temporary repurposing of parts of the Schindler House in Los Angeles for use as a local emergency shelter—began the project in the manner of Robert Smithson, investigating the city’s history, geography, and archaeology. As shown by the working drawings concurrently on view at Pestorius’s gallery, Bailey used nonlinear logic and language games, such as linking the words *Turrbal* and *turbulence*, to arrive at the idea of introducing a small delay, or *clinamen*, into the city’s ferry system.

Having invented this empty action, whose potential local meanings were unknown to him, Bailey then approached local Aboriginal leader Sam Watson, an accomplished playwright and community activist, to see what could be done with the idea. Watson suggested that the ferry take its detour toward the bank opposite the university, which is both the site of an ancient Aboriginal Dreaming (a constantly updated cycle of stories by which an Aboriginal community constitutes itself) and the marker of the boundary that, until relatively recently, kept Aborigines out of the city after dark.

After its first staging in 2006, Watson publicly declared the action itself to be a new Dreaming and authorized it to be periodically repeated. In the 2006 version of the work, Aborigines also rode in each ferry; as a ferry approached its unannounced stop, they moved to the front to face those on the bank. In the 2009 version, there were no Aboriginal performers, but a second deflection occurred farther downstream. Here, a lone Aborigine played a didgeridoo under a large indigenous protest flag Watson had unfurled and strung from the branch of a nearby mangrove tree.

This fusion of Western contemporary art and Aboriginal politics would appear surprising only to those who did not realize that the booming Western Desert painting movement is an entirely modern phenomenon. But sometimes it takes those coming from the outside to see a situation most clearly. In 2008, LA-based artist Sam Durant produced a brilliant intervention in the long-running campaign for Aboriginal land rights at the Biennale of Sydney, appropriating a series of slogans from the American civil rights movement and placing them on the facade of one of the host institution’s buildings. In Bailey’s *CityCat Project*, too, the seeming inevitability of the European occupation of Australia is paused for a moment, allowing us to dream of different outcomes.

—Rex Butler

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Dave Hullfish Bailey

BRISBANE RIVER/DAVID PESTORIUS PROJECTS

It’s a sunny autumn afternoon in Brisbane, Queensland, in the north of Australia. The weather never gets too cold up here; overcoats are rarely worn. The prosperous, up-and-coming city is served by ferries that ply the Brisbane River, which in the steamy summer months can resemble the muddy, slow-flowing Mississippi.

On May 9, between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, the ferries running to the University of Queensland deviated from their path and paused for a moment, facing the opposite bank, where they were greeted by a small group of Aborigines. The action was unannounced and almost indiscernible; for the majority of passengers, unaware of the artistic intention behind it, it might have meant very little. Los Angeles-based artist Dave Hullfish Bailey’s *CityCat Project*, 2003–, was in fact the second time this performance involving Brisbane’s ferries had been staged. Its first iteration was for “Turrbal-Jagera: The University of Queensland Art Projects” (2006) an exhibition in the style of *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, that featured artworks responding to sites scattered across and beyond the university’s extensive grounds. That show,



Dave Hullfish Bailey, *CityCat Project*, 2003–. Performance view, 2009.