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JULY 22 2017

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# The Maiwar Performance: The subversive CityCat art you've never heard of

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It is an artistic performance so subversive, some of those involved may not even know they are taking part.

But, for Brisbane's Indigenous community, it is an important acknowledgement of their enduring ties to the land and a symbol of empowerment for the region's first inhabitants.



Maiwar Performance, 2006, viewed from the end of Boundary Street. Photo: Carl Warner

The brainchild of local Aboriginal activist Sam Watson and American artist Dave Hullfish Bailey, the Maiwar Performance sees CityCats execute unannounced manoeuvres near sites of Aboriginal significance.

The CityCat would slow and veer towards the land, acknowledging the Aboriginal people gathered on the shore, before resuming its journey.



Sam Watson on Boundary Street, West End. Photo: Michelle Smith

A book recording the collaboration, *CityCat Project 2006-2016*, was launched by the banks of the Brisbane River on Saturday.

It was there, at the small park at the southern end of Boundary Street at West End, that Maiwar Performance was first observed in 2006.

It has since occurred on three additional occasions, in 2009, 2012 and 2016, each time without warning to the passengers.

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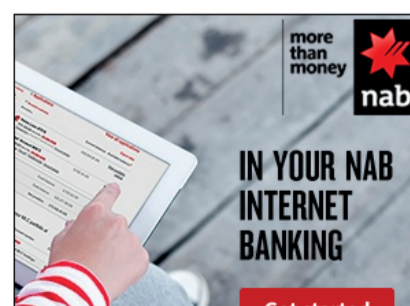
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"There were a number of different elements that I wanted to explore as an Aboriginal person and I thought this was the ideal location," Mr Watson said at the launch.

"We had thought initially about further down the river, around New Farm, Hamilton, those sorts of places, but when we thought about the logistics and other aspects, I thought this was ideal.

"This is the end of Boundary Street and Boundary Street, back in the 1800s, of course, was the demarcation line.

"Aboriginal people would be driven across Boundary Street from the white encampment, on the western side, back into this country."

Mr Watson said he spent decades looking for "ways and means of reasserting Aboriginal connection to both sides of Boundary Street".

"The proposition of having a boat travelling down a river and then being drawn into a point, ostensibly by Aboriginal presence, is something that really attracted me," he said.

Mr Watson designated the event a modern "Dreaming", which meant it should be periodically repeated.

Curator David Pestorius, who contributed to the book, said it could be a bewildering experience for CityCat passengers.

"The point is, they don't announce it," he said.

"So you're on board and the CityCat going to the university all of a sudden veers off course and looks like it's going to run aground and you're there going 'what's going on?'," he said.

"It's not like there's an announcement that, 'folks, in a few minutes' time we're going to do this art performance,' in which case you go, 'well, that's going to be boring'.

"You don't know it's coming and by the time you're asking the question about what's going on, it's already back on its way to the university.

"It's only explained if you go to the attendant and ask what just happened."

Mr Pestorius said Lord Mayor Graham Quirk had been an enthusiastic supporter of the concept and paved the way for the CityCats' involvement.

Maiwar is the local traditional word used to describe the Brisbane River.

The next Maiwar Performance, as always, will be unannounced.

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**John Fox** Brisbane, Jul 23 2017 at 6:09am

It's all very nice, but why is \*our\* money being spent on this?

**ian** Jul 23 2017 at 6:04pm

Our money? What is your money John?

**William Posters** Jul 23 2017 at 7:12am

What a cool idea. Would love to experience it.

**scott patterson** brisbane , Jul 23 2017 at 9:29am

brilliant idea

