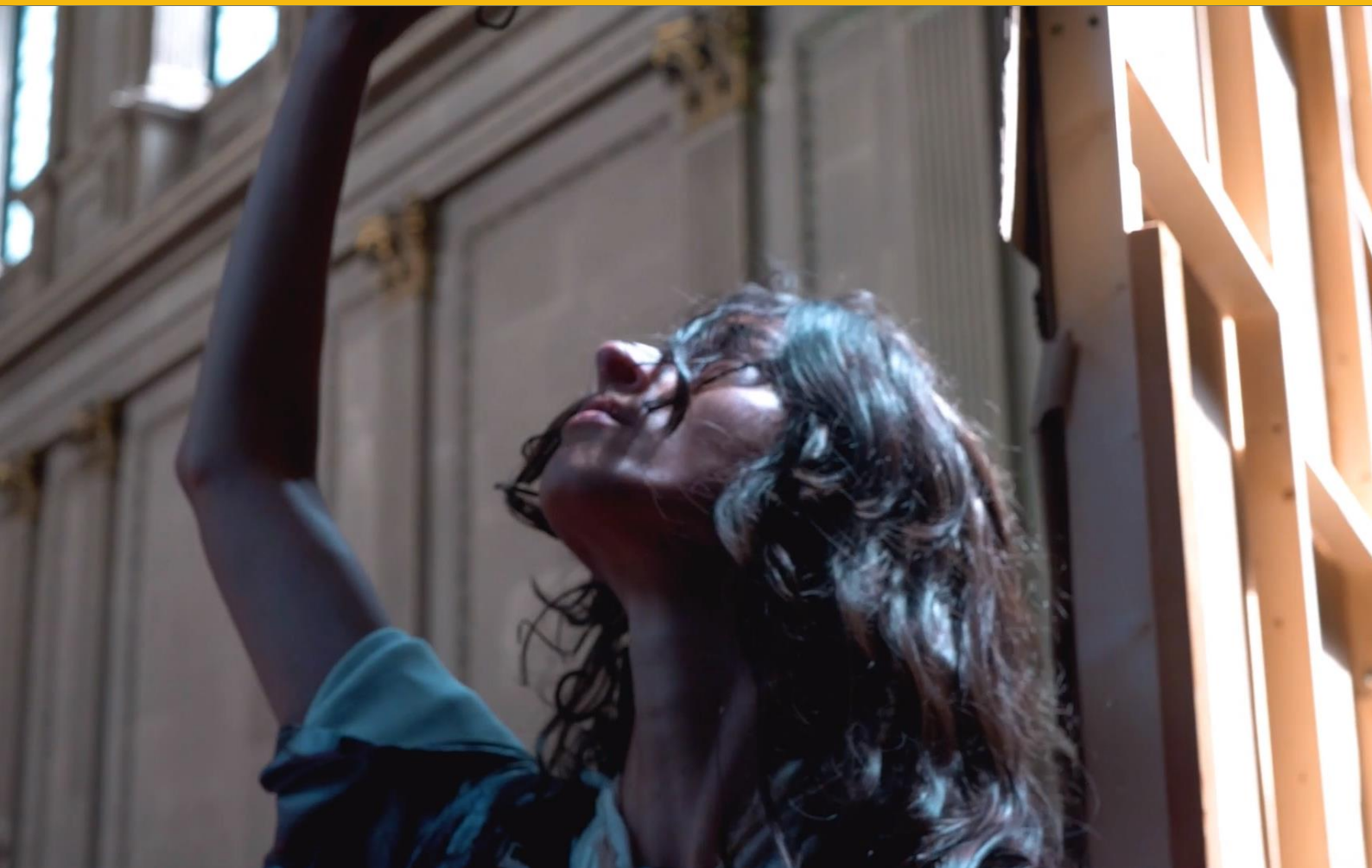


Never at Sea

Dr Kate McMillan (Culture, Media and Creative Industries),
Dr Nicole Mennell (King's Sanctuary),
St Mary le Strand Church (London).



PROJECT SUMMARY

The *Never at Sea* project saw Dr [Kate McMillan](#) (Culture, Media and Creative Industries), Composer, Professor Cat Hope (Visiting scholar KCL/Monash University), Choreographer, Sivan Rubinstein, Percussionist, Dr Louise Devenish (Monash University) devise an immersive exhibition and performance at [St Mary le Strand](#) (London). They worked collectively on an immersive exhibition and performance program that explored the lived experiences of women who have been subjected to forced migration.

In spring 2023, a series of arts-based workshops were held at *Science Gallery London* focused on engaging women with experiences of forced migration to explore their journey through sound and expressive movement. The experiential explorations arising from the workshops formed the basis for the final creative work. The workshops were designed in collaboration with [Nicole Mennell](#) (King's Sanctuary) and the Lewisham Refugee Resettlement Program, Refugee Council.

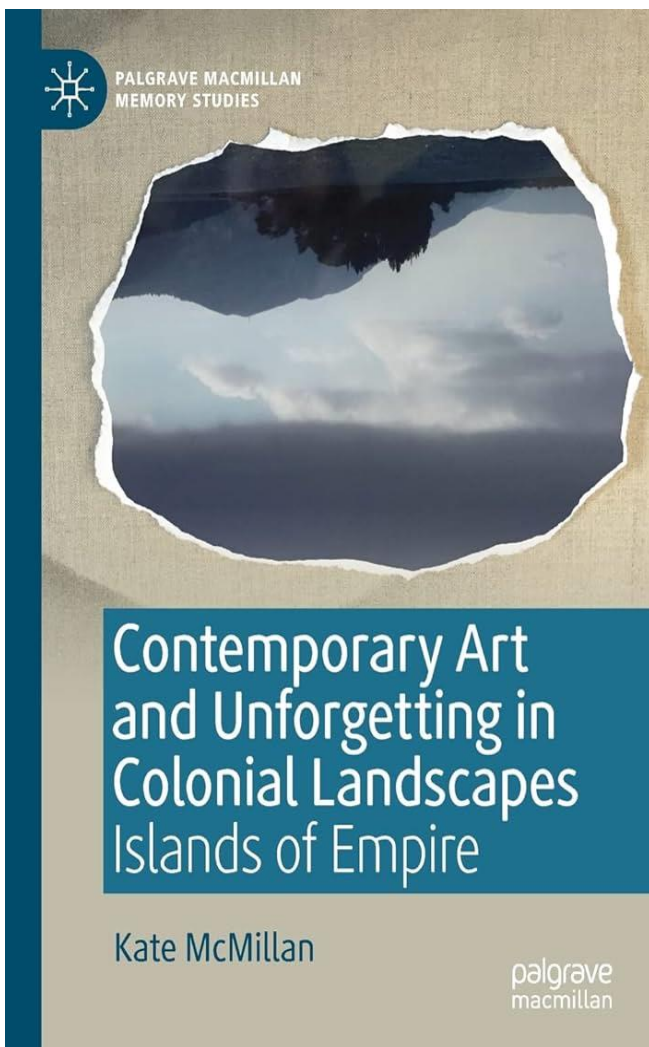
Following the exhibition, a symposium dedicated to examining the distinct ways that creative practice can address climate change and forced migration took place at King's College London. The event attracted a diverse range of attendees, including those with personal experiences of migration, refugee activists, arts organisations and academics.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

Kate, an artist and specialist in the theory of creative practice, often investigates the ways in which arts-based initiatives can contribute to the development of empathic and nuanced discussions about social injustice in the contemporary world. One area of specific interest to her, considered at length in her monograph *Contemporary Art and Unforgetting in Colonial Landscapes: Islands of Empire*, is the agency of female artists in the Global South. In particular, Kate is fascinated by the manner in which creative practices defy colonial amnesia. Historical colonial injustices of the global south are increasingly being recognised through current impacts in the global north such as climate change and migration.

Expanding upon these research interests and prompted by the challenging conditions that accompany forced migrants' journeys, Kate developed the idea of developing an impact project that would highlight personal experiences of displacement.

A further potential benefit of *Never at Sea* was to engage and include a wide range of communities into the development, and presentation of the work. The accompanying public program (talks, performances and symposium), provided space to discuss and reflect on the issues contained within the work, as well as the capacity of creative practice to be a space of healing and reflection.



WHAT HAPPENED?

Production for the creative project began in early 2022 during the first filming off the coast of Western Australia in Perth/Boorloo, the first site of invasion by the British in 1829. The gathering of this footage (see image below) from Boorloo enabled the dialogue about who might be considered 'unwanted migrants' to be disrupted. A rough series of edits from this first shoot were then given to the choreographer (Sivan Rubenstein) and composer, Cat Hope to begin devising and responding to these images. In January 2023, the first score of the sound was performed in the Brunel Tunnel by the musical groups *Decibel Ensemble* and *Ruthless Jabiru Orchestra*. In April 2023, a series of creative workshops based on these concepts, footage, and recordings were developed. These workshops were aimed at engaging women who have experienced forced migration took place at the Science Gallery London. In collaboration with Myriam Reys, a facilitator, and Sivan Rubenstein, Kate McMillan and participants explored their migration journey's using sound, 'memory objects', and dance/movement. The participants also responded to the score and the footage. Their responses then informed the final edit of the film, adaptations to the score and the final performance.

Under the creative direction of Kate McMillan, a team of practitioners contributed to the production of *Never at Sea* which involved a two-channel film projection, sound and sculptural interventions into the church. This exhibition was on display for a week at St Mary le Strand Church, and was punctuated by a series of performances which included the dancer Lydia Clark, vocalist, Marcia Lemke-Kern and percussionist, Louise Devenish.

The exhibition was part of a broader cultural programme that accompanied the pedestrianisation of the Strand/Aldwych, including featured talks, and a symposium. This was held at King's College London, and focused on the unique ways that creative practice can address climate change and forced migration. The symposium attracted speakers from organisations including the charity *Art Refuge*, the *Phosphoros Theatre Company*, and Salisbury Cathedral, as well as researchers, migrants themselves, and advocates for refugee rights. A commissioned essay by Dr Kate Pickering (Department of Art, Goldsmiths), offered as a response to the exhibition, can be read [here](#).



A still from Kate McMillan's video [trailer](#) for the *Never at Sea* exhibition

“A humanitarian exploration of some of the most pressing questions of our time...reminding us of the importance of situated belonging, [and] of embodied and spiritual understandings of home”.

— Kate Milligan, writing in an article for *Resonate Magazine*.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The initiative achieved a number of valuable outcomes.

The exhibition at St Mary le Strand captured the imagination of the visiting public, attracting over 1000 visitors during the week that it was open. One attendee at the live performance remarked upon the striking manner in which the performance juxtaposed ‘dreamlike gentleness with the utter horror and reality of drowning’. Another reflected that they felt the program underscored ‘the essential role of creativity in responding to global challenges’. Kate Milligan, reviewing the project for *Resonate Magazine*, reflected that the exhibition offered ‘a humanitarian exploration of some of the most pressing questions of our time...reminding us of the importance of situated belonging, [and] of embodied and spiritual understandings of home’.

The project has further positive impacts on the refugee women who participated in the workshops. Firstly, these events gave attendees the opportunity to engage with creative methodologies well placed to help them explore past experiences of forced migration. Secondly, the development of a creative project inspired by their experiences, hosted by a UK university and attended by the wider public, affirmed the significance of personal migration experiences in broader institutional and social contexts.

The symposium helped to deepen the impact of the exhibition and creative program, inviting expansive reflection on the role that creative practice can play in informing responses to pressing contemporary challenges which face humans today. It was particularly valuable in offering its diverse participants a space to explore the different ways that arts-based approaches, climate change, and forced migration intersect.

Work on the project continues. Recently, the film ‘Never at Sea’, developed during the project, was presented at COP28. Furthermore, the exhibition is now being developed for an international tour, and there are plans to hold a further performance in Salisbury Cathedral in 2025.

A prayer cushion specially designed for the *Never at Sea* exhibition held at St Mary le Strand Church.



KATE'S TOP 3 TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. If you want to gain media traction for an exhibition, make sure that it runs for an extended period. Media publications do not tend to report on an exhibition unless it is running for a good amount of time.
2. Seek out others who share your goals and are willing to work alongside you. Shouldering the burden of a big impact project alone can be very taxing and is tricky to balance with a full academic schedule.
3. Liaise with your university to ensure that there is a robust evaluation process in place for your project. If you want to rigorously evaluate your impact work, it is advisable to hire an assessor from the start.

FURTHER READING

Kate McMillan, *Contemporary Art and Unforgetting in Colonial Landscapes: Islands of Empire* (2019).

Patrick Duggan, Lisa Peschel (eds.), *Performing (for) Survival: Theatre, Crisis, Extremity* (London, 2016).

Tony Kushner, *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys 1685 to the Present* (Manchester, 2012).

Anne Ring Petersen, *Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-Making in a Globalised World* (Manchester, 2017).

Gianfranco Rosi, *Fire at Sea* (Documentary Film), 01 Distribution, 2016.



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For further information:
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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact