

'Who Will Seek to Serve with Conscious Clear'

Megan Fizell goes underground to talk prints, poetry and politics with visiting artist and curator Marshall Weber from the Booklyn Artists Alliance.

As I descend the stairs into the Kings Cross Car Park and approach Alaska Projects, a single row of suspended posters signals my arrival at the *Sydney RE:MXD* pop-up exhibition. The no-rules mentality of such a location carries forth into the guerrilla-style format of the show. In the dim lights of the underground lot, visitors squint up at the graphic posters hung from the ceiling and rifle through loose prints in an open car boot – the principle site of the exhibition. Between the second-hand smoke, stench of urine, and a surreal soundtrack of low chant-like droning courtesy of Keg de Souza's immersive installation *If There's Something Strange in Your Neighbourhood* (2014), I met with New York artist Marshall Weber to discuss the *Occuprint Portfolio*, his current projects, and

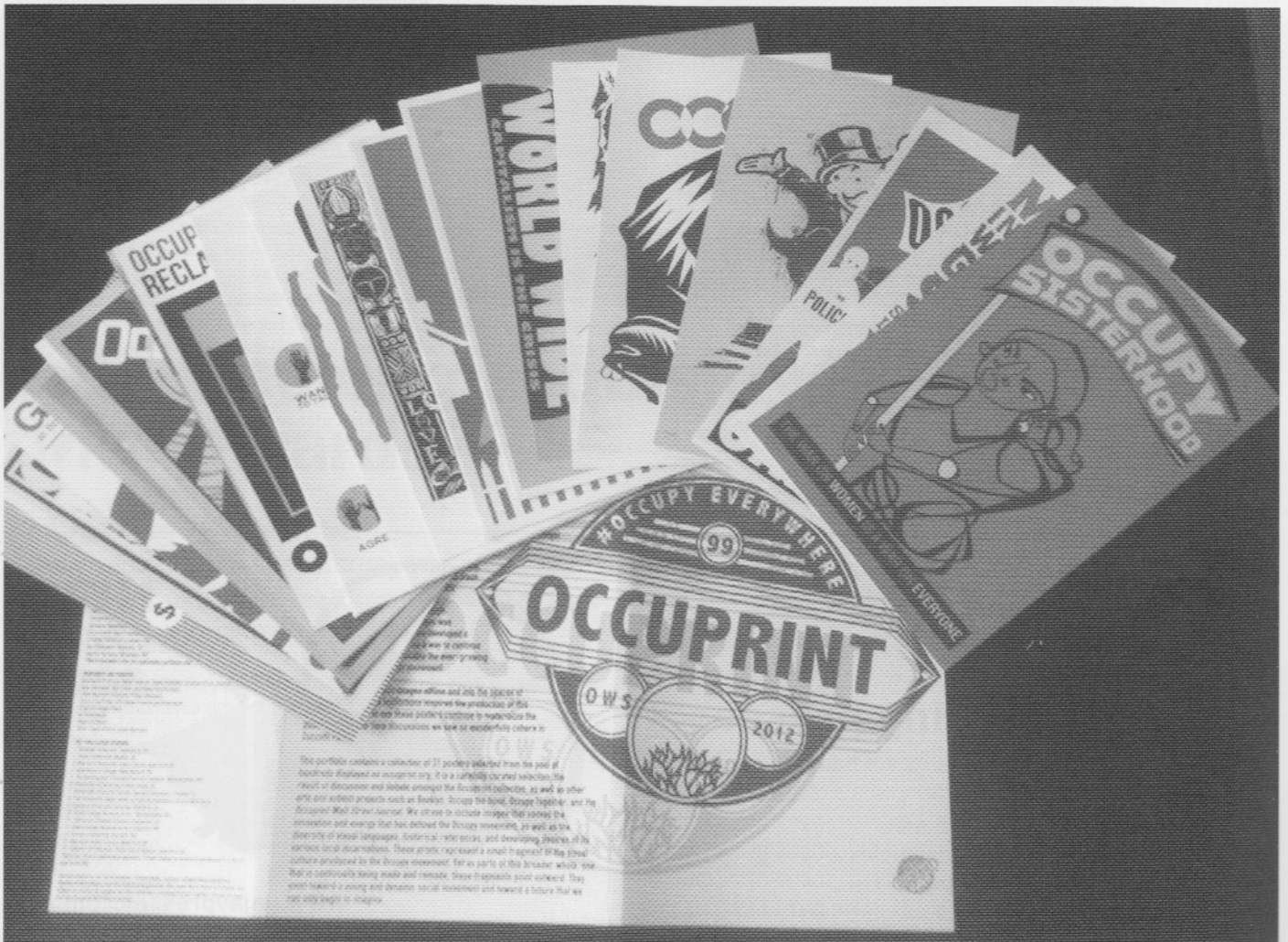
plans for future work evolving from his recent trip around Australia.

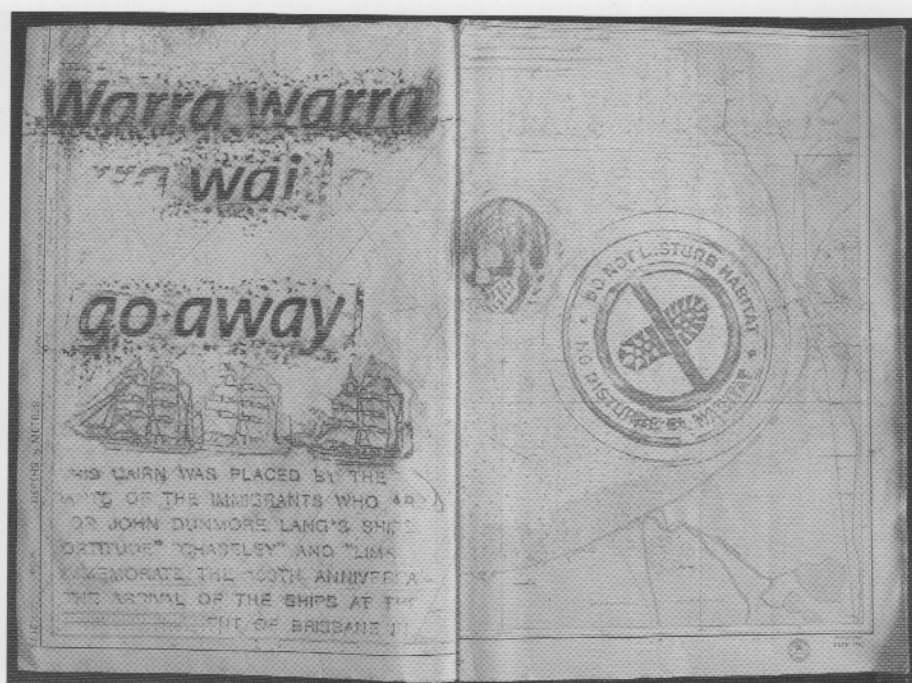
In addition to working on his own professional practice, Weber is the Directing Curator of Booklyn Artists Alliance, an organisation he co-founded in 1999. As described on their website, 'Booklyn's mission is to promote artists' books as art and research material and to assist artists and organizations [sic] in documenting, exhibiting, and distributing their artworks and archives'.¹ One such project is the *Occuprint Portfolio* (2012). Comprised of thirty loose prints, the imagery is drawn from an immense database of crowd-sourced protest posters from the Occupy Wall Street movement. Weber, together with Jessie Goldstein, chose a selection of these images for the *Occuprint Portfolio*.

Their choices sought to represent the spread of geographic locations as well as a variety of aesthetic styles, with Weber listing these as 'old school kind of stuff, infographic stuff, local site-specific stuff, May Day, General Strike, Occupy, and Occupy programs'.² The prints themselves are confident in their design: bold colours, graphic images, and prominent slogans feature heavily throughout. These prints fill the boot of Weber's borrowed car and as visitors sift through the pile, he relays a flood of information about political policies, social injustices, and economic inequality, which form the crux of the protest movement.

The real treasure of the pop-up exhibition is an artists' book by Organik, an artist collective of which Weber is a member, displayed inconspicuously on the roof of the car.

Josh MacPhee, Roger Peet, Favianna Rodriguez, Art Hazelwood, Imnop, *Occuprint, Occuprint Portfolio*, 2012, silkscreen, letterpress, 45.7 x 40.6 x 2.5 cm, edition of 100.





above left
Marshall Weber with visitors at
Sydney RE:MXD, Alaska Projects,
12 March 2015.

above
Organik art collaborative,
Warra Warra Wai (Go Away), 2015, collage, rubbing
and painted book,
24 pages, 50.8 x 35.5 cm, unique.

right
Akky van Ogtrop viewing *Occuprint* posters
in a car boot at Sydney RE:MXD
at Alaska Projects, 12 March 2015.



Beginning with a found book of vintage maps, the pages are overlaid with rubbings of war memorial plaques, gravestones, and public monuments. The book, titled *Warra Warra Wai (Go Away)* (2015), began in California and Weber completed the majority of the initial rubbings as he travelled through LA and San Francisco, collecting text and images from historic sites. The book has evolved to include rubbings from important Australian memorials he visited in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane during his trip. As explained by Weber, Organik's objective is to attempt to 'rectify the truth-slippage between conventional Euro-centric colonial constructions of history and indigenous and post-colonial realities'.³ As he flipped through the pages of the book, Weber pointed out an M16 he rubbed off a Vietnam Veteran's sculpture at the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane, a plaque from Botany Bay where Captain Cook landed, and fossils from the rocks outside Parliament House in Melbourne. The rubbings do not reproduce the text as it appears on the public monuments; instead Weber chops, changes, rearranges and reinterprets the words to form what he calls 'poetry concrete'. An example of such a phrase is 'Who will seek to serve with conscious

clear', a phrase Weber compiled from words he found inscribed in the Sydney CBD.

Poetry plays an important role in Weber's performance art as well. In *Streetopia Poetry Crawl* (2012), Weber completed a prolonged performance lasting 72 hours non-stop in which he recited poetry and dragged a cart over a distance of 37 kilometres. Many of his performance pieces are endurance works, testing the limits of his physical and mental boundaries. In preparation for these monumental tasks, he trains in yoga, meditation, and voice practice.

In 2016, Weber has plans to return to Australia to perform a marathon reading of the book *True History of the Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey. Ned Kelly is a widely recognised figure in Australian arts, specifically in relation to Sidney Nolan's pivotal series of paintings. For the catalogue of the first exhibition of the suite in 1948, Nolan drew on quotations from Kelly's 'Jerilderie Letter', a recitation of objections that blended both 'poetry and political engagement'.⁴ In this context, it feels appropriate that Weber, who combines poetics and politics within his own work, found a muse in Kelly for future performances. Weber anticipates the recitation will take upwards of

30 hours and plans to couple his performance with an exhibition of more artists' books with crowd-sourced content.

Through conversing with Weber at Sydney RE:MXD, the importance books play in his practice is clear. They are used as the basis of his endurance recitations, as the words contained within Homer's *Odyssey*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and William S. Burroughs's *The Nova Trilogy* are read aloud in public spaces. As physical objects, books play an even more important role: as vehicles for Weber's collaborations with other artists and organisations. As demonstrated by the eclectic assortment of work selected for exhibition at Alaska Projects, Weber's practice is also about examining the boundaries of recorded information, about unearthing and commemorating forgotten stories in an effort to map our shared histories. •

1. Brooklyn Artists Alliance, 'Mission Statement', accessed 2 June 2015, <http://brooklyn.org/info/about/>.
2. Marshall Weber, interview by Megan Fizell, Alaska Projects, 12 March 2015.
3. Marshall Weber, email message to author, 7 April 2015.
4. Andrew Sayers, 'The Ned Kelly Series', *The National Gallery of Australia*, accessed 2 June 2015, <http://nga.gov.au/Nolan/Index.cfm>.