

The detail of each emotional state and experiences of trauma are conveyed in an amorphous connected mass, this transforms through different states to finally reveal the pearlescent and hopeful underlayer. When talking to April and the team you feel the complexity of the perhaps invisible processes that have created this work over a span of four years.

Body Place urges us to relate to a First Nations femme experience in a gaming and tech industry that is typically led and dominated by the male gaze. Reproductive lifeways are the bodies holding the world 'rematriating' the land through the curves and canals, the player is birthed into new relationships with place. April brings to the experimental gaming form an intuitive emotional framework, a moment to escape into parallel worlds of the now with the purpose of healing the audience, and in turn, Country.

April leads an impressive team, with collaborators Pat Younis and Jordan East responding to this intuitive and felt way of approaching the world. The sound elements also gather and shape ritual and ceremony in moments throughout the work. Warren Foster Jnr calls out in Yuin Djiringanj language and breathwork of traditional dance to bring good energy into the space, grounding audiences and reminding them to be present in their journey through the world. The words "come here/let's go/look out over mother/the earth" are a direct call to action asking players to be responsible to Country and understand its capacity to heal us.

The Companion spirit movements were mapped out in a Mocap suit (motion capture)

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with Warren Jnr who enlivened the figure with mannerisms and steps familiar to cultural dancing from the east coast.

April's methodology is to imagine and care for all cultural belongings in the world of *Body Place* as much as our physical ancestral belongings. These objects such as the cleansing bundle are captured by a photogrammetry process of taking hundreds of images and then 'cleaned up', painstakingly patching layers over inadvertent 'holes', so the object is whole and held safely.

These processes have led to deep thinking for licensing, ICIP, digital keeping spaces and giving 3D models to community in acts of reciprocity. If we consider digital practices that engage with stolen cultural belongings, such as tools that sit in museum archives, the possibilities of care are limited. In *p/re-occupied*, 2022, Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough 3D printed up to 100 Tasmanian stone tools held in the Australian Museum collections to demonstrate the possibilities available if only the artist was in possession of the actual ancestral tools. The lack and limits of technologies in repatriating facsimiles of stolen cultural belongings that are yearning to return home sits in a stark contrast to the abundance of possibilities that *Body Place* gifts through new realities. In this space April is self-determining these processes for objects and belongings without the institutional interruption of the museum.

Body Place firmly grounds itself in futurist rebuilding practices to repair the harmful interventions of colonial violence on our bodies, minds, and spirits. This work blooms with multiple viewings.



Preface

Dr Jessica Olivieri
Co-Artistic Director Utp

Body Place began as a conversation with Wiradjuri-Scottish artist, April Phillips, four years ago. It has been a privilege to work alongside April with the Utp team to realise the incredible work we now stand before.

Over these four years we have seen many important sector and organisation changes, from a national Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property framework (ICIP) to First Nations representation at all levels of Utp. This project would not have been possible without Co-Artistic Director Hannah Donnelly, Creative Producer Jane Wade and Board member Shannon Williams, who have all been part of a culturally safer realisation of *Body Place*.

The first presentation of *Body Place* on Dharug land comes as Utp poses the provocation – What would this world look like if First Nations people had the first and last word? *Body Place* reaches simultaneously into the past, present and future to find one of the many responses to this question.

The Companion sky spirit takes the audience for a virtual walk on Country – from the depths of subterranean soils to a ground-level play space, then ascending to meet the celestial skies.

— April Phillips

Leveraging boundary-pushing technologies, *Body Place* combines real-time tracking, virtual clay forms and motion capture. The audience explores this expansive world on an illuminated 14-metre screen, in Utp's purpose-built space in Bankstown, Western Sydney.

April is a digital creator in her own right, awarded in 2023 as the *Emerging Star of The Year, Women in Digital, 2023*. Her commitment to digital practice asserts her skills in digital literacy, computer logic and poetic computation. April's creative direction has propelled amazing results with her team who have roots in Western Sydney and Regional NSW. Digital artists Jordan East and Pat Younis have returned from abroad to work on the 3-week sprint phase as the final push to realise the work. Alvin Zhong has assisted with 3D assets, and the talented sound team pushed the world sonically with care and innovation. First Nations contributions have enriched the work, including Warren Foster Jnr. aka Prodikal-1, Warren Ngarrae Foster Snr. Joel Spring (with Genevieve Murray / Future Method) and Madison Shakespeare. Throughout the process of *Body Place* April has worked in conversation with Wiradjuri, Yuin and Dharug knowledge holders.

Body Place is a collective act of First Nations world building that centres a femme Wiradjuri experience. An experience not usually centred in the digital or material world. Our built worlds are complicit in the attempted erasure of First Nations knowledges and trauma. Regardless, First Nations cultures continue, with generosity and with rage. *Body Place* allows for a collective imagining of a world rebuilt on justice and First Nations care for Country.

Creative Team: April Phillips (Wiradjuri-Scottish), Pat Younis (Lebanese-Australian), Jordan East, Warren Foster Jnr. aka Prodikal-1 (Yuin Djiringanj), Warren Ngarrae Foster Snr. (Yuin Djiringanj), Mark Leahy, Jack Prest, Alvin Zhong (Chinese-Australian), Yousofzay + Hart



re/building worlds beyond form

Hannah Donnelly
Co-Artistic Director Utp

Body Place by Wiradjuri-Scottish artist April Phillips poses an escape into a healthy world and asks us to imagine a future of healing habits that transform our potential for processing intergenerational trauma. Layered within the world April has envisioned are beings of creation stories. April places these stories at a distance to respect the vulnerability of sharing language names for ancestor spirits in the 'speculative now'. Indigenous Futurisms are always concerned with ancestors, and there is a strong resonance between *Body Place* and recent digital works by contemporary Aboriginal artists that are drawing on these cultural stories of creation. In the animated work *Message in My Dreams, 2023* by Yuwi, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander artist Dylan Mooney, the viewer experiences the timelessness of dreaming as a place for communication with ancestral guides. In *Body Place* the players (audience members) manifest life forces that engage the Companion spirit who guides us through the three realms of Country.

Indigenous Futurisms prioritise rebuilding relationships that have been eroded by settler-colonialism. This experimental and gamified work asks us to renew our ideas of form that many contemporary Indigenous Futurisms work have applied. Upon entering the site, the reflective panoramic is reminiscent of the moving image in Lisa Reihana's seminal works such as *GROUNDLOOP, 2022* an imagining of the Pacific Ocean superhighway and its relations. *Body Place* moves outside a cinematic experience with real-time body tracking sensors, the viewer is the player whose movement has cause and effect. Longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates are plotted so the stars we arrive at in the work are situated from right here: Bankstown, Dharug Sky.

The visual language of *Body Place* is transcendent. The interplay between hyper-real detail of analogue Country mashed with April's distinctive wobbly virtual clay assets, is both familiar and uncanny. This hybridisation of digital techniques makes a significant contribution to the form of contemporary computer art aesthetics.