



## Touch this earth lightly

Bridget Nicholson

Everywhere you go there are signs:  
'stop the gas' 'no dams' 'farms not factories'  
'no more mines' 'save our forests' 'save our rivers'

save our souls.

## People are the art

*Touch this earth lightly* is an art project designed to collect people's stories about their relationship to place, land, the environment; how they see themselves as part of the world we live in.

Clay is used in the creation of a pair of personalised shoes. Clay is wrapped around and moulded to the foot, capturing the individuality of each person. Whilst doing this, the person is engaged in conversation about the nature and sensibility of their relationship to land and the natural world. The conversation is recorded.

Places/people have been targeted where the use of land is contested: places where the environment may be particularly fragile or vulnerable, communities where the people/land relationship are noticeably shaped by work and history, or where events may have taken place that challenge or change that relationship.

People from different backgrounds have been sought: first peoples', migrants, city dwellers and those living in regional and isolated places. People are 15 + years of age.

## The process

The process takes 15 minutes. The participant's feet are oiled, wrapped in gauze, and then clay. The clay firms and the shoes/skins are taken off. The person paints their name and postcode on the inside of the shoes. The shoes are taken away to be fired and glazed.

Whilst working with the clay, we talk about the way in which the person sees themselves in relation to their environment, their place, home, how they see themselves as part of the natural world, or not, and in what ways this all affects their lives.

What has been revealed through this process is the effect of clay on the feet and the person. The sensorial triggering memories and eliciting deep feelings conveyed through intimate conversations, revealing layers of associations and meaning that cross cultural, spiritual and political spheres.



## The outcome

The purpose is to produce a collection of stories represented through these ceramic shoes, and to present them as an installation/ exhibition, as a portrait: a portrait of a collective rather than an individual, and a portrait of a relationship, rather than of an entity.

The project is evolving, installations have occurred along the way especially in places where remoteness makes access to contemporary art limited, and in places where a large number of the community have been involved. These are chapters in a book each installation evoking a sense of its place and community. To complete the project a final installation will be about bringing all these stories together in a place and format that speaks to about an Australian experience of land and place.



## To date

Over 860 people have participated ( June 2014)

**Places visited:** Hunter Valley NSW  
Gloucester NSW  
Liverpool Plains NSW  
Tennant Creek, NT  
Alice Springs NT  
Titjikala NT  
Kalkarindji NT  
Canberra ACT  
South Gippsland VIC  
Perth, WA  
Western South Australia and the Coorong SA  
Melbourne VIC

**Awaiting:** Tasmania

**Installations:** The Incinerator, Melbourne VIC 2014  
Immigration Museum Melbourne, VIC 2014  
Abbottsford Convent, Melbourne VIC 2013  
Central TAFE Shopfront, Perth WA 2012  
Gunnedah Creative Arts Centre NSW 2011  
Araluen, Alice Springs NT 2011  
Cessnock Regional Gallery NSW 2011  
Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney NSW 2010  
Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre NSW 2009

## Bridget Nicholson

Born in Noumea, New Caledonia to Australian parents. As a child my family moved country every two years. As an adult I took up this pattern in Australia and have lived in Melbourne, Geelong, the Latrobe Valley, Darwin, Alice Springs, Canberra, Scone, Gunnedah, Dungog, returning to Melbourne in 2012.

I studied Architecture, worked in nurseries and ended up in Urban Design. What I enjoy most is public space. I worked for 15 years in Urban Design on streetscapes, parks and playgrounds. I particularly enjoy interpretation, working in places where there is the potential to tell stories about land through people and their relationship with that land. I went back to study, this time in the visual arts, with a desire to explore and express through other mediums. the stories of people and land.

As an artist my work has developed into conceptual installations. I like to take over a space and make an atmosphere/experience which draws people in, inviting them to explore the ideas and relationships that direct who we are, through the senses. It is about people and place/land/nature.



[www.touchthisearthlightly.com](http://www.touchthisearthlightly.com)

[bridgetnicholson@iinet.net.au](mailto:bridgetnicholson@iinet.net.au)

0459 212 118

03 9029 9643



