



Image: Cassandra Tytler, *It will not be pure*, 2024, Video still.

# Soiled|2024

Cassandra TYTLER

Gallery25

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## Acknowledgement of country

Most of the projects in this exhibition were created on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar. A Skin, a Sea, an Island, a Prison was shot on the traditional Country of the Wurundjeri and Jaara People of the Kulin nations. Soils for projects were sourced from disturbed Noongar land. I would like to pay my deep esteem to the Traditional Owners of this land and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge all First Nations people and the importance of their care and continued connection to culture, community and Country. The land we are on and sovereignty to it, was never ceded. Colonial frameworks and policies still exist, and I recognise the enduring challenges faced by First Nations peoples in deconstructing these systems. The ongoing endeavour to confront and reconcile our nation's history is essential for both personal and communal healing. This will always be Aboriginal land.



Images | Cassandra Tytler, *The Earthen Collective*, 2023–2024, 100% cotton buried in five disturbed locations of Noongar Country and sewn into a banner, Dimensions varies.

**In Solidarity, I Eat Dirt**

Tierra Bendita Cookies

1/4 cup sodium bentonite, mixed with other clays of your choosing  
3/4 cup very hot water  
1/2 t salt  
1/2 t baking powder  
1/4 cup white sugar  
1/8 cup powdered sugar

Mix, adding more bentonite if necessary.  
Form small cookies using two teaspoons.  
Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

I made this recipe for a 2009 performance and installation centred around a greenhouse that supported desert conditions. This project created and tasted what I call “fringe foods,” foods that define the edges or limits of food and eating. Fifteen years later, Cassandra Tytler and I started talking about her work with “dirt biscuits” and “speculative documentary.” I dug up this recipe, sent it, and was thrilled to see the biscuits appear in Tytler’s new video work, *It Will Not Be Pure* (2024).

Tytler’s practice understands fringe foods to be increasingly centred and included in present and imagined near future diets. Our narrator has been permitted to leave her protected institution to track informants living outside “the wall” in desert and deserted conditions. There, she learns about and participates in the work arrangements that contribute to this community’s survival. Community survival centres around sharing space around a dining table, and sharing space around a dining table enatis mixing, baking, and eating dirt biscuits. Dirt biscuits emerge as a chant and refrain (“in solidarity, I eat dirt”) and as a material anchor for Tytler’s “speculative documentary” formation.

Approaching foodways from the margins, Tytler's dirt biscuits could be read beside Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's model of "survivance" (survival plus resistance)—that which produces futurity under conditions of occupation (Vizenor 2008). I reach out to survivance to suggest how recent artmaking and scholarship from non-Indigenous creators increasingly grapples with how even the most privileged lives under colonial capitalism, such as the life of Tytler's walled-off researcher narrator, must contend with how colonizer worlds and cultures produce the conditions of their own collapse. First Nations peoples hold knowledges and practices needed for planetary survival: as Lakota historian Nick Estes asserts, "our history is the future" (Estes 2019).

The limits of food are reached through any number of contexts and situations, including but not limited to environmental and economic pressures, the physical capacities of bodies, and cultural taboos around definitions of edibility. In *It Will Not Be Pure*, Tytler's tray of dirt biscuits acts as a "boundary object," "an object which lives in multiple social worlds and which has different identities in each" (Star and Griesemer 1989, 409). Dirt biscuits becomes fringe food and boundary object through shared work and social context, seen in *It Will Not Be Pure* when those living "beyond the wall" work together to prepare biscuits in an improvised kitchen and bake them in the sun. The resulting brown globs are at once "amazing," "healthy," and "so hard."

People consume dirt around the world for many reasons, sometimes as a source of vitamins and minerals, sometimes pathologized as pica, and sometimes as an act of religious devotion. (*Tierra bendita*, practiced in New Mexico where some of my family lives, informed my 2009 biscuits.) We might have sampled soils as infants, or as adults, we might have skipped scrubbing our beets or taken Pepto-Bismol in an effort to solidify loose bowels. We might consume dirt unintentionally, or be forced to, as when the *It Will Not Be Pure* narrator observes how she can "taste the mine tailings in the air" on arrival outside the wall.

Elsewhere I have called dirt eaters "geophagiacs," combining geophagy, or eating earth, with the suffix -iac (Kelley 2020). I follow Amelie Hastie when I append -iac. She reads cookbooks, literature, and memoir to assert that she is not just anosmic (not able to smell), she is an anosmiac: the -iac "offers a maniacal quality to my new identity" (Hastie 2013, 64). Hastie and I challenge the pathologizing of lived experience by adding embodied, resistant, agential 'mania' to diagnoses. Geophagiacs are everywhere in *It Will Not Be Pure*. Enthusiastic dirt biscuit eaters chant the politics of their diet: "In solidarity, I eat dirt." At the end of the loop, the narrator researcher at first whispers and then boldly declares that she too eats dirt in solidarity. A dusty horizon captured with handheld embodied camerawork offers the undetermined, both nascent and collapsing, recalling

Jose Esteban Muñoz's assertion that "queerness is always in the horizon" (Muñoz et al. 2019, 11). Having been invited to stay in the community beyond the wall, the narrator's chant either cements her choice to stay, or returns with her to "the institution." Whether she stays or returns, she has acquired the mania of the geophagiatic. Ingestion allows her to understand how fringe foods, to return to Star and Griesemer, define "a common boundary between worlds by inhabiting them both simultaneously" (1989, 412). Through the work of baking, consuming, and politicizing dirt biscuits, Tytler's speculative documentary format centres the fringes and suggests how marginal or boundary objects, recipes, and foods might create infrastructures for feminist futures.

Associate Professor Lindsay Kelley  
Australian National University

## References

Estes, Nick. 2019. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

Hastie, Amelie. 2013. "Senseless Eating." *Parallax* 19 (1): 64–73.

Kelley, Lindsay. 2020. "Geophagiatic: Art, Food, Dirt." In *Thinking with Soils: Material Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Anna Krzywoszynska, Céline Granjou, Juan Francisco Salazar, Manuel Tironi, and Matthew Kearnes, 191–211. London: Bloomsbury.

Muñoz, Jose Esteban, Ann Pellegrini, Tavia Amolo Ochieng' Nyong'o, and Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson. 2019. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

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# Cassandra TYTLER

## Exhibition Statement

*Soiled* is a series of artworks that incorporate video art with performance, speculative documentary practice, and sculptural assemblages. The artworks function as a series of 'soil acts' that foster understanding of the complex interrelationships between humans, soil, and dirt. It examines how social narratives of what is soiled and what is pure reinforce hierarchies of race, gender, and society. In this tapestry of soil relations, an evolving narrative is created, where time, place, politics, and bodies intertwine with the substance of the ground.

*Soiled* takes a critical approach to an essentialist idea of 'nature' that is disconnected and divided from humans. It looks to digital art as a resistant and speculative tool that challenges externalising classification practices alongside the human/non-human binary. Instead of viewing the environment as a resource for extracting life and capital from, the artworks in *Soiled* seek to expand the idea of soil and dirt as part of an ecology of being.

To quote Mary Douglas, dirt is "matter out of place" (1966) that is socially and culturally constructed. Those who do not live within normative socially sanctioned confines are dirty and therefore out of place and a threat to the status quo. Within our social structures of ordering and discarding, some groups are dirtier than others due to hierarchies of classification. Following this thinking, Max Liboiron tells us that "where there is a system of power, there are necessarily rejected elements (or dirt), and one way to investigate systems is by studying what they reject, abject, and oppress" (2019). The artworks within *Soiled* wrestle with the problematics of this politics of purity and by extension, our separation from the environment, which helps contribute to the climate emergency that we now face.

Through a speculative imaginary, the aim of *Soiled* is to present hope, critique, and warning. These works aim to pull the viewer otherwise, on a different trajectory.

## References

Douglas, M. (1966/2000). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Routledge. (p. 36).

Liboiron, M. (2019, September 9). Waste is not "matter out of place". *Discard Studies*.  
<https://discardstudies.com/2019/09/09/waste-is-not-matter-out-of-place/>

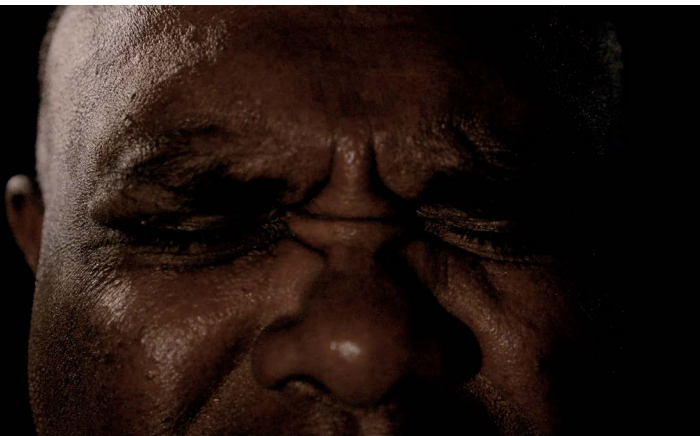
Cassandra Tytler is a video artist and researcher with a particular focus on performance practices. She works across single channel video, performance, site, and installation. Her research interests lie in the performance of video and its encounter within place, to create a relational and aware politics of resistance to normalising narratives of exclusion. In making site-based creative research, Tytler aims to pull people, other beings, and places together to foster an intertwining of relations so that participants experience the work beyond their individual selves. She hopes that through these speculative art actions that people feel a part of larger ecosystems and therefore realise their responsibility to them.

Tytler's work combines an unsettling, wry humour with a playful sensibility. It is an ongoing examination of the mechanics of audio-visual performance, both onscreen and by the hand of the artist. She works from a feminist, queer, and anti-colonialist position.

She completed her practice-led PhD within the Faculty of Art (Theatre Performance) at Monash University, Naarm/Melbourne in 2021. Originally from Naarm/Melbourne, she moved to Boorloo/Perth in April 2023 as a Forrest Creative & Performance Fellow. During her fellowship she is situated with the Centre for People, Place, and Planet and working across the School of Education and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University.

Tytler has exhibited, screened and performed work nationally and internationally. She has received support and fellowships from numerous organizations such as the Forrest Research Foundation, City of Stirling, Monash Academy of Performing Arts, The Camargo Foundation, Cassis, France, The Cité des Internationales, Paris, The Australia Council, The Ian Potter Cultural Trust and the Dame Joan Sutherland Fund, American Australian Association, NYC. Tytler has exhibited in galleries such as The Torrance Art Museum, L.A.; F.A.C.T. Liverpool; Gallery Titanik, Turku, Finland; Harold Golen Gallery, Miami; MARS Gallery; The Counihan Gallery; Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne; Metro Arts, Brisbane.

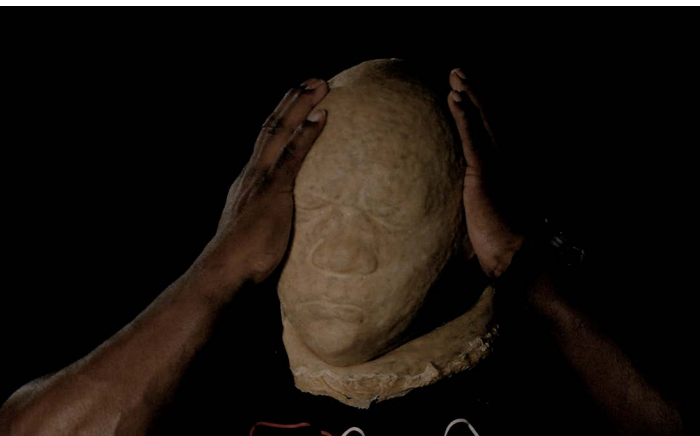
## Voiceless Mask



Trembling within side myself my eyes start to scorch  
As my heart skips a beat and some more  
While the emotions twirl with anger  
Why me... I don't need anymore

You must hurt more and more and more  
Throw those tears aside... humble one  
As your rage shall be kept simmering from within  
Just keep on hurting and hurting, unforgiven one

Why, why me, why my people?  
Why do I, we have to pretend anymore  
These thoughts are torturous  
We just want our voice, to be heard



Why is this so wrong  
To struggle as a man for so long  
Where can I find answers before I am gone  
Because hatred doesn't belong

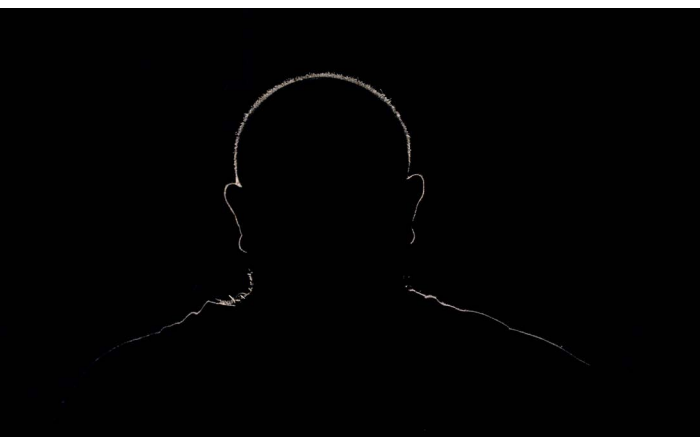
Give me hope for my bloodline to be lifelong  
So, we can come together as a race that belongs  
Why do we have to hurt one another brother  
Just because of our race and colour

Why should you have a voice  
Flora and fauna, stereotypical dog exploit  
Trying to bring your wisdom with that lame coit  
Go along now voiceless muted one

Before that head of yours becomes bronzes  
Sitting on a mantel piece  
Of your choice of colour... of course  
Where I shall admire your thoughts

Why do people see our race as trophies  
Hanging in Museums behind closed doors  
One part here and another over there  
As the taxidermist stuffs his art without a fear

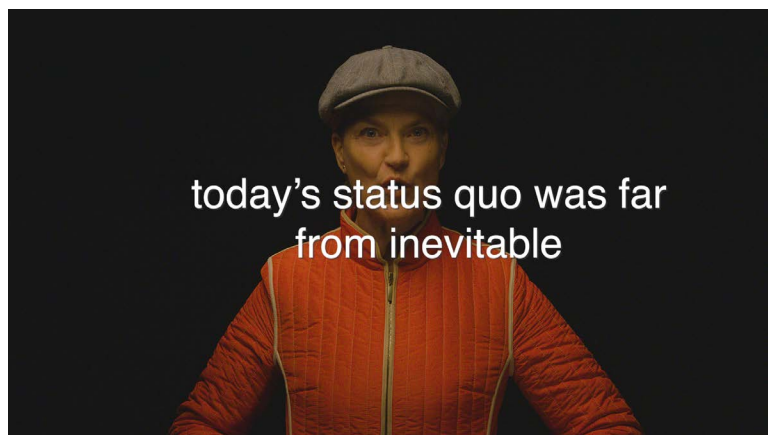
We just want a voice that can be heard  
No more voiceless statues behind hidden doors  
Our people need their own voices to be heard  
Right amongst our communities where it shall not be deferred







but imperialism  
and ongoing  
(settler)  
colonialisms



today's status quo was far  
from inevitable









Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled*, Installation.



Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled*, Installation.



Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled*, Installation.



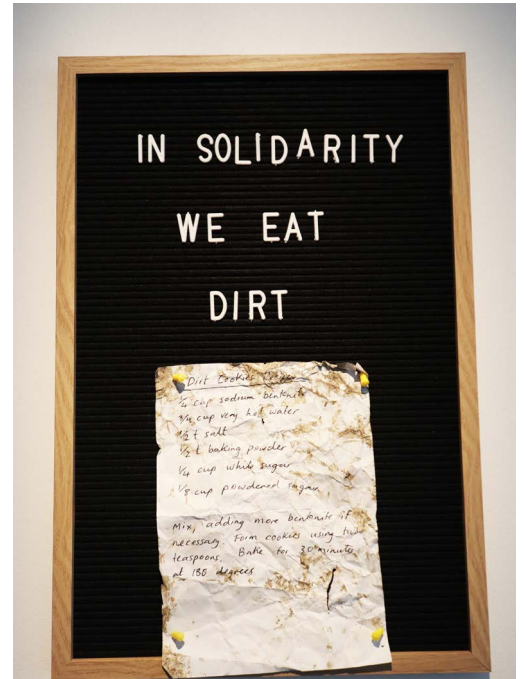


Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled*, Installation.



Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled*, Installation.

Image | Cassandra Tytler, *Soiled, Installation*.





Cassandra TYTLER **It Will Not Be Pure**, 2024, Video installation , 15'58”.

**Actors** | Donita Cruz (Jamie), Jacq Fairfax (Eve – Soil Revolutionary), Tina Fielding (Maria – Soil Revolutionary), Julia Hales (Stella - Dirt biscuit chef), Ella Hetherington (Sam), Jennifer Mackenzie (Donna – Soil Revolutionary), Kara Perrin (Holly – Youtuber), Sam Ren (Val – Soil Revolutionary), and Julie Tighe (Bruno – Soil Revolutionary)

**Cinematographer** | Fionn Mulholland

**Sound Design** | Tracy Redhead

**2nd camera (locker scene)** | Cameron Purdy

**Intern Production Manager** | Fiona Dent

**Intern Art Director** | Blanche Deards\

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McWhorter, L. (2009). *Racism and sexual oppression in anglo-america: A genealogy*. Indiana University Press. (Direct quote: pp.295,296)

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Cassandra TYTLER & Trevor RYAN **Voiceless Mask**, 2024, Projection, 02'40".

**Poem and performance** | Trevor Ryan

**Music** | Cassandra Edwards

Cassandra TYTLER **A Skin, a Sea, an Island, a Prison**, 2024, Video, 04'15".

**Actors** | Steven Christo, Heidi Lupprian, Joanne Nguyen, Kathy Starvaggi, Francesco Di Tacchio and Harlene Hercules

**Lighting Assistant** | Jie Wang

**Sound Recording Assistant** | Joseph Zhao

**Additional Sound Effects** | Gregor Quendel, SoundsForYou and Pixabay.

Cassandra TYTLER **The soil inquiry**, 2024, Soil in jars, sculptural assemblage, Dimensions varied.

**Scholar** | Professor Mindy Blaise

**Research Project** | Creative soil inquiry of child-collected soil samples around Noongar Boodjar.





# Soiled|2024

Cassandra **TYTLER**

## Gallery25

Officially opened by Dr **Renée NEWMAN**

The development of this work was supported by the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts Studio Program.

Dr Cassandra Tytler is a Creative and Performance fellow at the Forrest Research Foundation

Dr Tytler is a member of The Centre for People, Place & Planet, whose scholars have contributed to this transdisciplinary creative practice research. Dr Tytler is based at ECU School of Education and WAAPA.

Opening: Thursday 14 March 2024 5pm–7pm

Exhibition dates: 15 March to 17 April

Floor talk: Wednesday 20 March 12:30pm–1:30pm

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am–4pm

Building 10, 2 Bradford St, Mount Lawley

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