

**TITLE OF WORK:** A Children's Book of War

**ARTIST:** Sumugan Sivanesan

**YEAR PRODUCED:** 2010

**MEDIUM:** Video Animation

**DURATION:** 1 min, 45 sec

*A Children's Book of War* made its fortuitous entrance into the MOMENTUM Collection while curator Rachel Rits-Volloch was in the process of organizing Sivanesan's video retrospective at MOMENTUM. After spending the day with Sivanesan reviewing his videos, Rits-Volloch asked him to play a neglected yellow icon on his desktop. While Sivanesan insisted that the work was merely a short animation, quite different from his other works, Rits-Volloch immediately registered the impact of the work.

The immediate impact of *A Children's Book of War* lies, perhaps, in its jarring conjunction of war, sovereignty, and violence with a format usually reserved for much more lighthearted topics. With its dominant color palette of black and bright yellow, *A Children's Book of War* incorporates iconography as diverse as Julian Assange, the Sydney Opera House, and the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In the accompanying text to the work, Sivanesan draws upon Giorgio Agamben's notion of the "state of exception" to discuss 9/11, Australia entering the Iraq War in 2003, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the first fateful contact that Captain Cook made in Australia. The "state of exception," in short, is the temporary suspension of the rule of law in the name of a greater force - whether that be a defense against insurrectionary forces or the preservation of the very constitution of a sovereignty. With its haunting last paragraph, Sivanesan reminds us that the sovereignty of Australia rests on the suspension of indigenous rights - indeed, that everywhere in the Western world our lives are made possible by suspensions that are felt and suffered always elsewhere:

*"When Captain Cook first made contact, 18 years before Governor Phillip and the First Fleet arrived an act of violence pre-empted the war that was to follow.*

*It's a war that a lack of recognition of Indigenous Sovereignty helps to perpetuate.*

*A war that the civic revolt at Redfern revealed. A war not likely to end any time soon."*

- Jenny Tang

## ARTIST'S CV

Sumugan Sivanesan is a self-described 'anti-disciplinary' artist and a transcultural radical. His eclectic practice is concerned with the legacies of colonialism, the experience of cultural difference, and diaspora. Sivanesan often engages with the theory of 'necropolitics' coined by the Cameroonian philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe. Building upon and going beyond the Foucauldian notion of biopower, the domain of life over which power has taken control, 'necropolitics' asserts that contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death has reconfigured the relationships between resistance, sacrifice, and terror.

Sivanesan's first collaboration with MOMENTUM was during MOMENTUM Sydney in 2010, where he performed "What's Eating Gilberto Gil" (2010), a performance/lecture exploring our common history of cannibalism and its contemporary legacies. In February 2012, Sivanesan proposed to perform a new work, "The Anticolonials" (2012) at MOMENTUM Berlin. "The Anticolonials" traced the past and present of anti-colonial politics. Along with his new performance/lecture, MOMENTUM exhibited a retrospective of Sivanesan's video works.

## UPCOMING

### 2013 **Clubhouse - Death Knocks Supper Club** **Performance Lecture Series (March 7th, 2013)**

The Ethics and Politics of Hunger is a curated conversation in which participants will be asked to consider hunger as a political act as well as a means of population control.  
Carriageworks, Australia

## EXHIBITION HISTORY

### 2012 **GREENSCAPE: Green Shake Bar and Observation Deck** **with Tessa Zettel**

An ongoing experiment in radical banquet aesthetics and survivalist pedagogy.  
Free Fall 2012 - Curated by Sari TM Kivinen in partnership with Oxford Art Factory and Chalk Horse.  
Oxford Art Gallery, Sidney

### **The Digger You Love To Hate**

#### ***Performance Lecture***

Exploring a constellation of thoughts regarding race, death, class, war and diggers in Australian culture.

Serial Space, Sidney

### **A Children's Book of War**

#### ***Mixed Media***

*A Children's Book of War* addresses the issue of contesting sovereignties in Australia.

Images Festival, Toronto

### **The Anticolonials**

#### ***Performance Lecture (February 2012)***

A thread of anti-colonial anti-politics through history and into the present, offering a patchwork reading from scraps of material culture and glimpses of contemporary mediated life.

MOMENTUM | Berlin

### **Crisis Complex**

#### ***(14 september - 13 october)***

An exhibition and program of events concerned with 'crisis' as a psychological state as well as a complex of social, political and planetary forces.

Co-curated with Laura McLean and recipient of the Tin Sheds Gallery's Innovate Curate grant 2012.

### **2011 Dos Sicarios...**

#### ***Audio/Video***

A clip posted on the notorious true crime blog 'El Blog del Narco' is subject to a series of sound treatments.

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.

Curator: Olivier Krischer

### **El Beso Negro (The Black Kiss)**

#### ***Performance/Social Media Event***

In which two teenage hitmen who have had their faces tattooed in prison, in turn have their faces tattooed on the ass

of a contemporary art collector.  
Yautepec gallery Mexico City

**2010 A Children's Book of War**

Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship Finalists Exhibition,  
Artspace Sydney

**Koongarra, theweathergroup\_U**  
**with Susan Norrie and David Mackenzie**  
**Video Installation**

Documentary video installation made in collaboration  
with Jeffrey Lee, the sole senior custodian of Koongarra, a  
projected mining lease enclosed within Kakadu National Park.  
In the Balance: Art For a Changing World  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney  
Curator: Rachel Kent

**What's Eating Gilberto Gil?**

**Lecture/Performance**

Investigates the cannibal trope from its colonial beginnings to  
its current resonances in art and popular culture.  
Momentum International Forum for Contemporary Video Art,  
New Media and Performance  
Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney

**Jump Ship**

**with WT Norbert**

**Endurance/Performance**

The tattooing tradition of sailors is deployed to recount a  
history of South Asians at sea. The performance marked the  
decolonizing role of 'Lascars' in Australia and the effect of  
Indian dissent on the European imagination.  
Gaffa, Sydney

**2009 Nice Dreams**

**with Gustavo Böke**

**Mixed Media**

Nice Dreams employs a macabre humour to illustrate what  
many consider to be the first act of terrorism in Australia –  
the Battle of Broken Hill, 1915 – and its contemporary resonances.

Made whilst in residence at Black & Blue Gallery, Sydney  
and the Broken Hill Art Exchange.

**The Trouble with TJ**

**Illustrations by James Hancock**

**Mixed Media**

A multi-faceted research project that recounts the  
circumstances surrounding the death of Aboriginal teenager  
Thomas “TJ” Hickey in February 2004, and the subsequent “Redfern Riots”.

GRANTPIRRIE|Window, Sydney  
FraserStudios Residency, Sydney  
NG Art Gallery, Sydney

**Boat-people.org**

**Retrospective installation**

**Mixed Media**

*Terra Nullius: Contemporary Art from Australia*

Curators: Frank Motz (Germany) and Deborah Kelly (Australia)  
ACC Galerie Weimar, Germany  
Halle 14 Leipzig, Germany

**2008 theweathergroup\_U**

**with Susan Norrie, David Mackenzie, Dr Jeremy Walker, Bryce Anbinis-King,  
Will Tinapple and Danielle Green.**

**Mixed Media**

An experimental collective formed for the Biennale of Sydney,  
2008. [www.theweathergroup.org](http://www.theweathergroup.org)  
Biennale Artistic Director: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev  
[www.bos2008.com](http://www.bos2008.com)

**2007 Sounds Unusual 07**

**with Robert Curgenvin**

**Performance**

Alice Spings & Darwin Australia

**2004 An Equal and Opposite Force**

**with Brendan Phelan**

**Manipulated documentation of a performance experiment**

Loosely exploring (anti) social engagement,  
archetypes, and role playing within the public sphere.



King St, Newtown

**A scenario of non-simultaneous and only partially overlapping  
with *Brendan Phelan***

***Manipulated documentation of a performance experiment***

In A Scenario of Non-Simultaneous and Only Partially Overlapping

Transformative Events Phelan's sporadic appearances

are in time to a soundtrack of surfed radio signals,

from talkback to the hits of the 70's, 80's and 90's.

Victoria Park, Chippendale, Australia