



BODY OF EVIDENCE

Paul Trinidad

Kelli Trinidad

BHP Billiton Travelling Exhibitions Gallery

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## BODY OF EVIDENCE



In remote bushland just out of Kalgoorlie, the sighting of two policemen's bicycles resting against a spindly tree trunk and a cloud of excited blowflies buzzing around an abandoned mine shaft, signalled to all concerned that the search for two missing police officers was over. Inspector John Walsh and Sergeant Alexander Pitman had been the full compliment of the Western Australian Police Department's Gold Stealing Branch, set up to curtail illegal gold trafficking in the Goldfields. In April 1926, they had surprised two gold thieves at their secret gold treatment plant who promptly shot and killed both officers. Later, with the help of the local publican and his carving knife and handsaw, they dismembered the officers' corpses, burning some body parts in their furnace and dumping what remained down the shaft at Miller's Find.

The brutal murders and mutilation of the bodies made this crime notorious in the history of the Goldfields and of Western Australia. The landscape around the crime scene looks largely unchanged today. The relentless low scrub cut up by dirt tracks, sparsely scattered with abandoned shafts and mullock hills. The rusting junk and the roughly built bushies' humpies used by those in days gone by (and now by those still getting by) take shape as you drive along.

This is Paul Trinidad's stomping ground. Born and bred here with a youth of daytime prospecting and night-time yarns. If there really are only seven great stories, then quest and tragedy are the prospector's tales: tales of hard work and Lady Luck, of the hard won and the hard one. The story of the Pitman and Walsh murders has echoed around the Goldfields for years. But it's hard to separate fact from fiction now as the tale's undoubtedly grown taller. It's the confusion of these two elements in yarns that underpins the ideas behind Paul's work.

Kelli Trinidad is not from the bush but she's heard some stories and has been there time enough to know that it's fairly blokey territory. She asks herself about the work in the mining game and how women might fit the picture. When challenged about the apparent limits of her body in this scenario, she isn't interested in which of those are real and which are presumed as were Feminists before her. Instead, grinning wickedly at the air-conditioned driver's cabs on the Haulpak trucks, Kelli dismisses the question as irrelevant. Instead, she's interested in the psychology of gender and how that plays a role.

Kelli's easy attitude toward gender issues enabled a relaxed collaboration with her father. For these bodies of work, each artist took the story of the Pitman and Walsh murders as a starting point from which to examine masculinity and the old tales and myths in this familiar territory.

Louise Morrison  
Art Consultant  
Artsource

Artist's statement

Kelli Trinidad



My work

There are women and there are men  
digging into the depths of a broken landscape  
Red, like eyes of a broken miner, staring into the depths below.  
His shovel caresses the sand to dig into the ravine.  
Masculinity and the lighting melt his manhood in the soft-lit shaft,  
digging into the hypothetical

And the man became a digger,  
white and feminine, a state of androgyny

as the boy becomes a man.  
Addicted to digging,  
addicted to the discovery of what may be beneath  
the soil.

Androgyny  
men  
digging  
pick shovel  
black and white — man and woman.

Masculine objects softly lit,  
a mission to be,  
climbing into the imagination and the hypothetical.

Climbing out of the hole of addiction, of digging  
brass shovel,  
climbing splinters  
dark spaces  
criminal minds  
gold and fear  
lost,  
looking.



The phrase, 'at work', reminds me of a time in my childhood when you would see road working signs, 'CAUTION MEN AT WORK'. The sign would be represented by a stylized man with a shovel. Men and work can so easily be represented by an image of masculine manual labor: a man with shovel becomes in some unexplained manner dangerous for those outside this category of men. The shovel is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the image, since the labour on roadworks most commonly involves large machinery. But the sign implies traditional manual labor is the most important symbol of work ... perhaps suitable only for men and their muscles with their shovels.

There is no apology for the sometimes bizarre compilations of body, man, woman, and mortality in my work that somehow drums off beat to imaginative speculations and fantasy originating from interpretations of the Pitman and Walsh murder folklore and the masculinized idea of the tough miner bloke stereotype.

*Climbing down a mineshaft in the middle of nowhere is a solitary activity; daunted by your own thoughts and feelings of anxiety.*

*Rain is few and far between. But the thunder rolls in with the smell of burned spinifex and pindan, memories — eroded shadows — longer the edges — disjointed, the horizon — blurred memories, a summer storm belting out sounds that make you want to clamber back into the diggings, where carbide grit and acetylene fumes illuminate the dingy hole you call your office.*

*These life-changing experiences — scratching, scarifying, digging holes in remote landscapes surrounded in crow craws and long silences of mind-numbing solitude — make you want to dream of that one true love. To be deep within her earthy confines ... the kiss of the shovel against roughs, the gravelly sound as the dirt hits the kibble, muted light and dancing shadows, tantalizing recollections of illicit touch, her musty womanly scent, her love, her pleasure.*

*... I called it love, she called it service.*

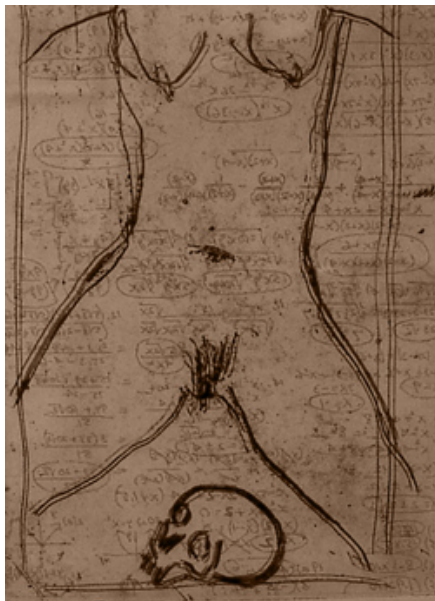
## Artist's statement

Paul Trinidad



It has been good to work with Kelli –

We have had a lot of fun with this project, but it has been hard work too, and there are some hard issues. Since Feminism, mixed-gender collaborations on issues of the body have often been enigmatic and difficult country for a bloke to navigate. After all the various situations I have found myself in over the years, it is a great relief to finally work with a strong woman with whom I can share head space, ideas and territory, propriety. We have worked together domestically, in the bush, and in the academic setting at the University of Western Australia and the Central Metropolitan College. We have *played art* together for at least twenty years, toured Europe to see the great art expos, and spoken Art and Life from the beginning. We have exhibited together many times over the years, but this is our first major project/collaboration.



Although in this exhibition, *Body of Evidence*, I have not confronted women's issues directly, I want to mention that representation of the female form by male artists is fraught, let alone dabbling with concepts of fantasy and other personal 'scapes. It's downright risky. Here it is nigh-on impossible to gain consent through correct political process and any boundary riding, necessarily is staged and often includes clauses that pre-empt inevitable backlashes, or cries of exploitation.

In this exhibition, it is a relief to posit myself alongside Kelli's developing discourse as we pursue separate issues with the backwash of each of our working processes and images blurring boundaries along the way. I am aware, in this vein, that it seems inappropriate to stimulate discourse while at the same time dismissing it.

Top: CAUTION woman at work, performance, Ancient Rock Studio  
Byford October 2008  
Below: *After Equations*. Etching 250 x 190 mm from *About of Body*  
exhibition 2007

At the same time, this contradictory thinking is the realm and often the way of communication for *real blokes*, particularly with idiosyncratic male fantasy, which often includes macho and *violent* enactments. It is with this disparity in mind that I mention the crux of the matter: that *little concern*, where Feminism was conceived of as being universal and gender exclusive. Is the philosophy useful here?



Kelli and I have tried not to complicate matters, we are not competing. The positive ideals of female sexuality Kelli explores are post-Feminist by definition, but the working ideas are not restricted by some of the larger structures of sexism and hetero-normative implications. There are serious issues relating to perception of women and work, self-image and love.

The other boundary that I ride with my work is that of the real events, the actual murder of two policemen in 1926, or more particularly, the folklore that emerged from those events.<sup>1</sup>

Kelli exercises her right as a young woman of self-determination to make self-representations. The performance, or the documentation here that she chose to exhibit, invites correspondence, raises new questions beyond simple echoes of de-politicised reflections from a feminist past. The ideal of strength and integrity with female sexuality is imbedded into codes of post-Feminism and the sexual agency of this work. The work does, at the same time, reflect potential for becoming normative, and corresponds definitely with those sexist conditions that saw Kelli's ideas develop from childhood memories of roadside signs that still resemble the political landscape young women deal with today.

Kelli's work confronts the invisibility of the feminine; her stage here a mining town, her script not only post-Feminist but influenced by the heritage issues in her prospecting bloodline.<sup>2</sup> Either way, through story telling within the narratives of her work, she rejects the refinements of the female inner life in an attempt to subvert value systems that diminish female perspectives. By working at deeply personal level, the language of post-Feminist conceptualism is subverted by her blokey, *spit in the eye of the devil* attitude which is often idiosyncratically a male tendency.

How does this fit with my *masculinised* works which tell of unthinkable violence and death fantasy?

The ease with which Kelli navigates ideas and image as priority has been liberating in the development of my work on this project. I am painfully aware of the reality and due respect that I must accord to the memory of the victims of this crime. Self-consciousness!



Top: CAUTION woman at work  
Below: Kelli painting





Kelli shrugs at those *destructive ideas* coinciding with post-Feminism that confuse definitions and political and social goals. As a male, I find some of those premises disempowering and somehow reductive. But Kelli's ability to access the philosophies of post-Feminism to empower herself and to act confidently, assertively and without necessarily wanting to be labeled as an activist is in itself, a considerable portion of the integrity of her work.

So it is with this ethos that my *masculinised* fantasies became paintings, objects upon which a layer of conversation can be had. Here, I learn from Kelli and I appreciate her unabashed enthusiasm and excitement about conveying an idea into a form, a form into visual literature.

Together, we have worked openly, trusting one another's intuitive logic, to revel in an *ungendered playground*, which facilitated our offbeat, darkly humorous approach to the subject matter, and the making at hand.

My father used to say, 'You don't have to be mad to be a prospector — but it helps.'<sup>3</sup> There is a rhythm to the offbeat approach. Our best hopes with this body of work are to generate thought, and maybe invite challenges to lines of thought associated with stereotyped concepts of female/male in the workplace, in mining, in folklore, in legend. We want the work to be accessible through un-prescribed routes, to be easily read on the one hand and thought provoking on the other.

My obsession with the human skull in this and other recent bodies of work is as a metaphor for male fantasy. The work is necessarily roughly hewn. Bush imaginings tend to be raw, often embellished by pre-sleep campfire sessions, often lubricated with a couple of beers but never refined.

I am interested in that point where a piece of fiction, a figment of the imagination, an exuberant act, becomes an irreversible reality, a homicide? It's quite a hoot for a *hoon* doing a burnout ... until it all goes horribly wrong.

The murderers in this tale were cited as bragging they would never be taken by the Gold Stealing Detectives.<sup>4</sup> After all, gold stealing was then, and remained for many years afterwards, a rite of passage for the miners at Kalgoorlie.

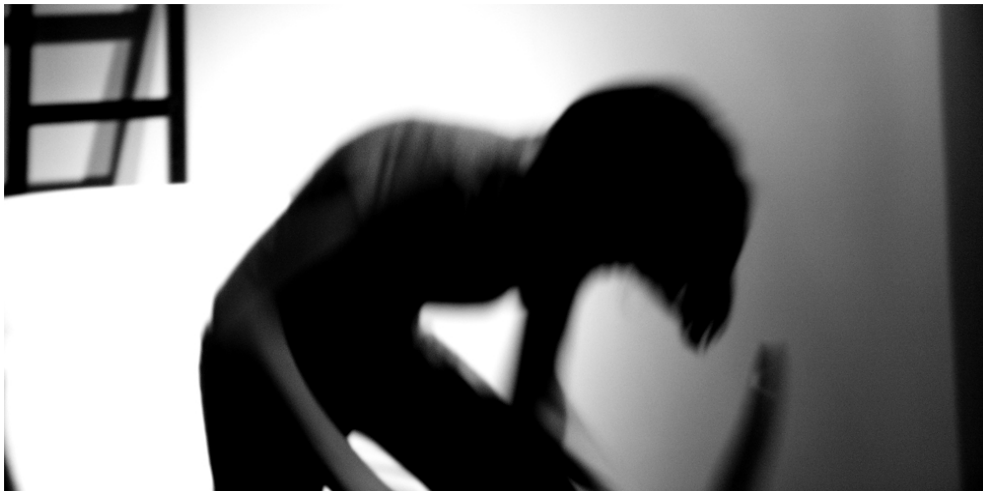
The Pitman and Walsh murders are listed among the most callous and notorious in the annals of Western Australian crime history.<sup>5</sup> But how are they described within the framework of male fantasy? I am not proposing the murders were accidents, but I do believe testosterone, bravado,



Top: Champion Shot  
Below: at work

ignorance and the preparation or mental recitals of this dangerous cocktail played a role. Questions are still asked, and the television campaigns warning of drugs and crazy behaviour resonate and develop ever more in their sophistication. However, in many ways, it still comes down to the same thing: did the murderers, Treffene and Coulter, give us a lesson in 1926 that is still relevant today? Why is it that in relation to violence, men feel somehow their masculinity is impugned because they haven't defended themselves and they haven't behaved 'like a man'? 6

In my wild bushy days, I saw a lot of open violence that was taken for granted. Now in my more urbane setting, I notice it is still alive and well. Sadly, in a male-oriented society, violence is here to stay. Perhaps even more sadly, the evolving sexually-assertive female is showing increased tendencies of violence and aggression in other day-to-day matters. 7 So ...it's back to the lesson at hand.



## End Notes

- [1] Policing in Australia Since 1788 — In the Line of Duty:  
Detective Inspector Walsh, Officer in Charge, and his partner, Sergeant Pitman, of the Gold Stealing Detection Staff, often worked in secrecy and they were frequently absent for days. When the 2 men had not been seen for 14 days an extensive police search developed. On the morning of 12 May 2 men driving a sulky through the bush were attracted to an abandoned mineshaft (Miller's Find) by a cloud of blowflies. The decomposing, dismembered, and half-burned bodies of the missing officers were at the foot of the shaft. Subsequently it was found that the Police officers had surprised 2 men, Coulter and Treffene, smelting gold-bearing ore in a furnace. The Police officers were killed with a shotgun; each offender shooting one of the officers. Both were hanged for their part in the gruesome crime.
- [2] The Trinidad family have been prospecting in Australia since the Gold Rush in Ballarat circa 1851
- [3] Prospecting/mining at the British King GML, Lake Darlot, 1976
- [4] See Brian Purdue's The Gold Stealers
- [5] See: Heritage Council of Western Australia REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES — ASSESSMENT
- [6] Relationships Australia executive director Ian MacDonald
- [7] Susan L. Miller Victims as Offenders



Paul Trinidad is an academic at the University of Western Australia Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual arts. He teaches art and cultural programs.



Kelli Trinidad

Body of Evidence  
List of works

1. Lonely lover  
Acrylic on plywood  
1085x400x40  
\$500
  2. Position eighteen  
Acrylic on plywood  
  
590x450x40  
\$350
  3. The winz(?) sinker's wife  
Acrylic on plywood  
585x460x40  
\$200
  4. Dream depth  
Acrylic on plywood  
335x680x40  
\$350
  5. Dreaming of a broken heart  
Acrylic on plywood  
650x530x40  
\$450
  6. Position sixteen  
Acrylic on plywood  
630x460x40  
\$350
  7. Position fifteen  
Acrylic on plywood  
435x720x40  
\$350
  8. Position twenty one  
Acrylic on plywood  
455x765x40  
\$350
  9. Caution women at work  
Acrylic on canvas  
3035x1200  
\$1500
  10. Women's work #1  
Acrylic on plywood  
630x1220x40  
\$600
  11. Women's work #2  
Acrylic on plywood  
630x1220x40  
\$600
  12. Women's work #3  
Acrylic on plywood  
630x1220x40
  13. You and her love pattern  
Acrylic on plywood  
890x1120x35  
\$800
  15. Self-portrait, part A  
Acrylic on plywood  
370x590x30  
Figure twenty-two, part B  
Acrylic on plywood  
370x590x30  
\$500 pair
  16. Love labour  
Acrylic on canvas  
820x1050  
\$600
- Documentation of performance:  
CAUTION "Women at work"  
250x200  
\$80each

Paul Trinidad  
Body of Evidence  
List of works

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Campfire yarn<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>520x610x40<br>\$1500            | 10. Teddy's memory #1<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>1150x1350x40<br>\$4000                       | 27. Nowhere man<br>Etching<br>150x215<br>\$400   |
| 2. Tall tales and true<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>530x665x40<br>\$1800      | 11. Teddy's memory #2<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>1150x1350x40<br>\$4000                       | 28. Champion shot II<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>1650x1780<br>\$5000                             |
| 3. Tall tales<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>710x565x40<br>\$1800               | 12. Shot and burn #1<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>1150x1350x40<br>\$4000                        | 29. Millers Find #3<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>870x1000<br>\$2500                               |
| 4. In the line of fire<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>515x515x40<br>\$1500      | 13. Shot and burn #2<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>1150x1350x40<br>\$4000                        | 30. Millers Find #4<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>870x1000<br>\$2500                               |
| 5. How did it happen?<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>530x565x40<br>\$1800       | 14. Champion shot<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>3035x1200<br>\$5000                               | 31. Death row chair I<br>Burned wood, cast resin<br>Dimensions variable<br>\$500             |
| 6. It happened so fast<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>430x595x40<br>\$1500      | 15. Millers Find #1<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>870x1000<br>\$2500                              | 32. Death row chair II<br>Burned wood, cast resin<br>Dimensions variable<br>\$500            |
| 7. It happened like this<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>515x510x40<br>\$1800    | 16. Millers Find #2<br>Acrylic on canvas<br>870x1000<br>\$2500                              | 33. Death row chair III<br>Burned wood, cast resin<br>Dimensions variable<br>\$500           |
| 8. I took his gun<br>Acrylic plywood<br>620x620x40<br>\$1800              | 17.18.19.20.21.22.<br>Death row series 1-6<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>165x210x40<br>\$400each | 34. Death row chair IV<br>Burned wood, cast resin<br>Dimensions variable<br>\$500            |
| 9. He asked me not to shoot<br>Acrylic on plywood<br>620x620x40<br>\$1800 | 23.24.25.26<br>Chair series (#4 #3 #1)<br>Stone lithographic prints<br>150x215<br>\$400each | 35. Remains of the day<br>Cast bronze skull<br>Dimensions variable<br>Edition of 10<br>\$500 |