NAVA: in conversation, Episode Five

[Introduction Music]

Voiceover: The National Association for the Visual Arts is the peak body protecting and promoting the professional interests of the Australian visual arts. NAVA: in conversation is a series exploring the issues and challenges of working in the sector. We speak with artists, curators and administrators to gain insight into the experiences of contemporary practice and seek to propose ideas for change, progress and resilience in both local and global contexts.

[Music]

Blair French: I’m Blair French, I am Director of Curatorial and Digital at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and I’m also one of the co-curators of The National 2017, New Australian Art. Which is a project that’s being developing by the MCA with the Art Gallery of NSW and Carriageworks which is currently on exhibition. The overall idea probably came out of a couple of strands of conversation that we first having at the MCA with the Art Gallery and then quickly with Carriageworks. Around first of all, just how we could work together? What are the benefits of us as organisations working together would be? There are points in our histories where we’ve come together to particular projects and ways in which we have worked together on the Biennale of Sydney for example, that we felt could be built upon and expanded in interesting ways. And the second strand of conversations therefore were, what are our shared interests? Our shared territories? What are the things we perhaps all share an interest in and work towards but in all different ways? And the obvious answer to that was, contemporary Australian art. Also, in our minds at that time was this kind of sense of, I think all the curatorial teams across all the organisations had this, that, we were lacking something in Sydney in particular, and perhaps even in the national landscape, we were lacking a really substantive look at current Australian art. There are instances around the country, there are some key institutions doing great work and one of them that we’re very aware of is the Adelaide Bi-Annual of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia and their other partner venues. But we’re also very conscious that together we could produce something more substantial on scale but critically also for the range of audiences we have here in Sydney. Many of whom, or most of whom would not travel to Adelaide for example to see such an exhibition. There’s also always something lurking in our collected histories which is Australian Perspecta which was a survey exhibition of New Australian art put together by the Art Gallery of NSW from the early 1980s always in the alternate year to the Biennale of Sydney so there’s always a kind of interesting rhythm in the city-wide landscape around the Biennale one year and the Australian Perspecta the next. And in 1997 the Art Gallery opened up Perspecta to other organisations to work with them, it became almost a mini festival model. And out of that event, which I can’t remember how many organisations were involved it was probably seven or eight there was a sort of themed model art and nature. In 1999 we came together and explored that further and widened the collaboration to include artist run initiatives, Radio National and range of partners and it really was a city-wide festival called Australian Perspecta: Art and Politics. But the dispersing across all these spaces and all these voices of that event into something more akin to a festival, it was fantastic but also made it unsustainable for any of us and that event and that exhibition ended in 1999. Anyway, there’s sort of been this gap ever since then, which for many of us arts professionals have been very aware of and I think artists have been very aware of that loss of that opportunity and certainly some audiences as well. And there’s a couple of us as co-curators of The National that were
involved in those last *Perspectas*, so I guess we’re bringing that awareness into the present. So, *The National* evolved in response to all those things and our desire to work together and do something really substantial with artists on new work. Each organisation the Art Gallery, Carriageworks and the MCA probably brings a different flavour or approach to the work of putting together such an exhibition, we’ve referred to it in some of our writings as the DNAs, holdings on to the DNA of each organisation. The Art Gallery has obviously, particularly an acquisitioning and collecting remit a world beyond contemporary Australian art, so in working with new Australian work it’s inserting into that wider paradigm. Carriageworks has a very strong performance element to its program and that comes through the work of *The National*. The MCA, we obviously work with contemporary Australian artists as kind of one of the key elements of our remit but one of the things we wanted to bring to this project is part of our commitment to artists, it’s called mid-career artists with quite a significant career to date. We for some time put together two to three years a group exhibition of mid-career Australian artists as part of recognising the importance of that moment and practice and also the difficulty that often face artists who are a couple of decades into their career. Where opportunities seem to dry up as they’ve had their one show at each of the contemporary art spaces or a certain commercial career or not. So, we wanted to make sure *The National* sat in that place and that program where we were really focused on and looked hard at the conditions of mid-careerism for artists in Australia. The curatorial group is composed of representors of each organisation, we’ve met really closely over the last 18 months, we’ve undertaken our research independently of each other on the whole and then have brought that shared research back to the table to share. Artists visits all over the country, studio visits, etc. We this as really something that is one exhibition in three parts we’ve each taken responsibility for ultimately what’s on in our own spaces, or within our own organisation to hold onto that idea of keeping close to, and intimate to the ways in which the organisations work, not just with artists but also audiences and their spaces. But in many cases, we’ve talked a lot about a particular artists practice might sit within an exhibition, or how it might come across in an exhibition and how it might operate differently whether it be at the Art Gallery or at Carriageworks or here at the MCA, and one of the artists with us today, Alex Garwronksi, actually sits across all three spaces and that’s something we will talk about in a moment. We didn’t set out to create an overarching theme to the exhibition or a thread, we all from very early stages as curators talk about the things we were most interested in currently in Australian practice or identifying key current threads to us and there are remarkable synergies between our approaches and our ideas. So, I think right across the exhibition and all venues, there’s a very strong thread of artists looking at pulling history into the present and using history to interrogate certain cultural, social and aesthetic situations or circumstances that face them today. That perhaps plays out in a certain kind of rethinking of the legacies of recent post colonialism in some situations, there’s a strong element in certain aspects of work that is looking at certain relationship of personal, individual or collective identities, especially here so at the MCA. Here at the MCA I was particularly interested in grasping hold of that idea of an artist at a particular moment in their career and looking at issues of accumulation if you like, what an artist’s accumulates over their career in terms of a set of processes or ideas subjects perhaps, action, images, gestures and how they potentially often return to those again and again, as a kind of rhythm and return that I was interested in looking at, so making that idea of an artist having practiced over a period of time with something with the means to through that means of artists present and practice. The exhibition contains 48 artists across the three organisations and we are looking with *The National* to do this three times 2017, 2019, 2021. We’ve done that quite deliberately, we did not want to set up a recurring bi-annual model that felt like it could potentially become a program vessel to be filled within the organisations rather than a dynamic and sort of generative project. So, it also gives us the potential to look as we move forward to 19 and 21,
although likely with different curatorial groups to approach artists and to start thinking about longer term commissioning processes to actually really bring the relationship of artists to institution together in a really close over sustained periods of time. We’ve done elements of that over the first show but the longer lead time that 19 and 21 affords us will enable that a little more thoroughly. Before I move on and start asking some questions of Alex Garwronksi and Zanny Beg the other artists we have here today, I guess we need to address briefly the title which we tossed around and agonised over at great length as a curatorial group knowing that it would in a sense be provocative potentially, that in some readings it could signal a certain conservatism around ideas of nationhood or being able to identify and see art through the lens nationality, our intention and our desire was always that would be problematised by the title that ideas of nationhood and nationality, boarders, boundaries etc. of exactly those kind of ideas that are complex, difficult and problematic in the current age and we wanted to really address that. We certainly wanted to throw open a kind of question about, can you even think about a National Art, an Australian Art? Rather than use the exhibition as an intent to identify national tendencies. And I think it’s been read in different ways and I think the divergence of readings around the title that are coming from audiences and critics I think reflects that a little bit. We wanted to avoid the word biannual or biennale partly for reasons said before, but also so that the even had a kind of distinctiveness in the landscape and certainly couldn’t be confused with the Sydney Biennale which certainly in many ways received the alternate year model as being a form of partnership more than anything else in terms of the ways in which we present the work to audiences. The writer we invited to write for the catalogue have really deeply thoroughly taken on ideas of nationhood though the title and I think that’s been one of the really important elements of the overall project and program. So that’s a kind of introduction to The National overall and very, very briefly to the work at the MCA, I’m going to throw over to the interesting people in the room, Alex Garwronksi and Zanny Begg. And I guess first of all we should start with Alex, if we may, just to talk about for you, this idea, as you’re one out of only two artists in the exhibition who’s been asked to or pushed to, really addressing this idea of collaboration between the institutions and actually the relationship between the partners in a sense is one of the critical points of your work, that you kind of prod at in an interesting way. Could you maybe describe the work for us and unpack a little bit in that way?

Alex Garwronksi: Sure, sure. So there are three works as Blair mentioned, so essentially what I’ve done, the concept behind the work is to move architectural aspects of each of these institutions into the other institutions. So the work in the vestibule at the Art Gallery is a scale replica of six columns and beam works from Carriageworks which is obviously an old industrial factory. The work at the MCA is again, a scaled version of the iconic ceiling grid from the Art Gallery of NSW, and the work at Carriageworks is a three-quarter scale replica of the original drawing of the MCA. So I think when we first spoke about it, the idea was you know, you asked me about ideas I had in mind at that particular time I said I had this idea I was very interested in where I was looking at the specific architecture of various spaces around the place, in Australia or otherwise and actually replicating aspects of institutional or commercial architecture. And so I think the idea of being able to sort of then talk collectively about the swapping of dimensions of each was actually a really interesting opportunity to have on a number of levels. But I mean I think it’s one of those things, I think it’s like a symptom in a way, in the global age in which we live, is that, essentially despite the differences and they’re obviously incredible differences amongst the institutions around the world, but there is in a sense, a kind of tied-to-ness of all of them in a way. There’s this kind of co-dependence which also comes down to a broadly speaking an economic dependency of
some sort or another. So I think by using an architectural metaphor in a way to speak about
that was something I think was very interesting to me.

Blair French: Ok, I think I want to come back to a few things in your work but I think we should come introduce Zanny and her work. Zanny you are actually, I don’t know if you know this or if I’ve said this, but I think you were about the first or second artist I visited in the research process in the studio. So talking about an idea that I was immediately excited and enthusiastic about, which was at that stage was this idea of working with a particular text which I will let you describe, with a particular person you wanted to work with, and a particular let’s say, situation, social group, architectural, social, economic, setting that was new to you, which I think was one of the things that really interested me, you were taking methodology, might be a slightly restricting word, where you’ve got a process or a way of approaching a particular group of people to work with in collaboration, and trying to draw something of a story that often plays between the documentary and the dramatised, if you like, and uses and draws out and encourages the projection of the voices of your subject. So, it seemed to me like it was an incredible extension for you practice and therefore absolutely something I wanted in the show. But I’m going to let you describe the work for a little bit for us.

Zanny Begg: So the starting point was as you said an old text which was written in 1402 in Paris and it’s considered the first western text that we know of and it’s called The City of Ladies and it’s quite remarkable. It’s a feminist utopia imagined within Paris so it is a city that is built, populated and governed by women. It was written by Christine de Pizan who was an Italian migrant to Paris and she is also France’s first professional female writer who was kind of forced into that position because her husband and her father died of the black plague in quick succession and she had no means to support her children and kind of remarkably ended up becoming a writer and her first book was this very controversial feminist text which was challenging misogyny that she saw in medieval times. Now, in approaching this book I didn’t want to make a historical piece about medieval France, as interesting though that would be, because there was a lot happening in medieval France as I discovered, through the research of this project it was working with that across time and as you said, to look at the moment in Paris which was really defined by a bunch of things, misogyny being one of them and we started this project before Trump won the election on a global stage, but you know that was still in the air and it was the rise of that alt-right and rise of the virulent kind of misogyny against women, so we kind of wanted to look at that text 800 years later, around those issues. But also, Paris was defined by other things, that being the terrorist attacks that happened shortly before and the state of emergency that Paris has been in for over 8 months by the time I got there where they were closing of civil liberties and social space. And the fear of ‘the other’ so the demonisation of the Islamic other, the demonisation of the migrant. And so, decided to focus on the lens of misogyny but I don’t think you can look at that without looking at colonisation, without looking at other forms of systematic oppression. And so, I collaborated with Elise McLeod who is a childhood friend who is not a visual artist but she’s a film director and had a lot of experience working with actors and so for me, you’re right, it’s been an extension of my practice I got to move from what had been more firmly situated within the documentary type practice and create a fiction which was able to draw the threads together around those issues.

Blair French: I guess one of the things I’ve been wanting to ask you for a while Zanny, as I walk around the show and look at your work, is thinking about the contextualisation of that piece in a show called The National. So not so much necessarily what you’re seeing in the space but also that branding. Because your work problematizes that, not just on being
international but actually what you just talked about in terms of migrants, the demonisation of the other, boundaries, movement of people, all those things of course are things that, the idea of nationhood is almost opposed to, and certainly fearful of, in the way it’s used in political and media powers.

Zanny Begg: Yeah I wasn’t totally keen on the title when you first told it to me, I have to say, but, there is a friction in it that I like, and I think that’s what I chose to do, was to rub up against that. Because it is the limit historically, by which certain forces have played out on the global scale but also obviously I feel like there’s an end game happening here, where we’re at a point where the increasingly violence, the increasingly lack of consent which is the nation is about the taking, you know, One Nation is founded on the taking of someone else land or the taking of someone else space without consent. And I mentioned the election of Trump, but I feel like he’s a president that represents a lack of consent you know the ‘grabbing the pussy’ comment and the whole idea that you can take and you don’t need permission for. I think what we’re seeing is we’ve gotten is a black lash against that, saying that you can’t do that and that there’s a certain end game playing around that. And certainly, from a feminist point of view, the line we end the film with is “if you think history on your side, let me remind you that women didn’t write these books, if they had these stories would have been different.” And I think in a way the whole project that Elise and I did together is about what those stories would be. And in some ways we won’t even know, asking the question and getting to the point of discovering what those stories would be. And if women had not been as annihilated as they were when they were in Europe through the witch trials and the demonisation of female power, female medicine, female technology, female sexuality, and all that sort of misogynistic violence that is kind of like the birth pains of the modern European states or now grouping of states in the EU that we see. I think things would be really different, so in a way even though I didn’t like the title initially, I do think it encapsulates that tension and I think a lot of different artists in different ways, their work is about that friction.

Blair French: Yes, I would agree, in terms of the ways in which an artist may have responded to the concept of the show, it is the most overt and prevalent way throughout the exhibition, is that kind of idea that the complexity and problem of the title. I’m also watching the work, constantly drawn to the extraordinary presence and not just the intellect of the women involved with the project, but the way in which they are able to articulate that, and the degree to which it’s through things that seem to have emerged themselves and also that kind of helping hand or that kind of context of collectivity that the film itself helps to create. I mean you brought people together in a certain way and the people you brought to working with those women and texts. The figure of Joan of Arc for example, I’m going into film at that particular moment and the sequences that deal with that sort of figure keep coming up whenever I’m in there, and the way in which the women both identify with and problematise her.

Zanny Beg: Yep, just firstly on the collectivity, I think that’s an interesting point because we opted for a non-linear structure, which I’ve talked about at a bunch of different times in different ways, but I think collectivity is another way of thinking about that because it could never be a one women story. 500 women applied to be in the film and we interviewed 30 and chose the seven that we did, if we had a larger budget we would have loved to have chosen more because I think feminism is complex, it’s feminisms so you need to have that sense of it being about individual stories leading into collective stories. And so, in a way, we could never really disentangle one woman from all the others, they’re always a group, and I think that collectivity was really central to the project. Jeanne d’Arc is really interesting and Marine Le
Pen nearly won the French election and that was a very nervous moment for all of us, and as people may or may not know as an Australian audience, she actually launched her policy at the foot of the Jeanne d’Arc sculpture. So the far right has taken on Jeanne d’Arc as their symbol as the Catholic Church has taken on Jeanne d’Arc as their symbol. So she’s being taught in schools in France as being a saint. Which is, kind of hypocritical and ironic because actually the Catholic church has never actually apologised for what they did to Jeanne d’Arc, they burnt her alive for wearing men’s clothes. I mean, let’s just call a spade a spade. But they also killed 40,000 other women which they have never apologised for across Europe, this is not just in France, and so in a way, she has kind of, has been recuperated into a national project which is recuperated into an idea of ‘The Nation’, the French nation, and recuperated into this idea of the saint, this pure virginal character. When actually she was a rebel, a gender rebel and she was a warrior and I think that complexity allows a lot of discussion around Jeanne d’Arc. I mean one of the things we posed in the film was, could there be a black Jeanne d’Arc? Because of the seven women from a diversity of backgrounds and that also raises all sorts of things with the other girls is, but she’s a symbol of the National Front you know, so there’s this whole, complexity about what these heroines and these female symbols that we kind of rise up in an essentially misogynist society that was wanted to unpick a little bit.

Blair French: Alex, slightly different line of questioning, when I was presenting a selection of artists’ works to various groups and museums as we were working on the show and of course in many cases, in fact most cases, showing work from previous projects, I was showing a group of your works and I was thinking a lot of how they, some of the things I’d chosen to show were looking at the way in which you were dealing with the space of the gallery as a kind of highly controlling space. So the art institution or the gallery, you created a space of judgement, as space for incarceration, as space of very structured labour, so a lot of it implicitly seems to be about the figure of the artist, what are the kinds of mechanisms of the art world and the art economy in particular, of which we’re all a part of, and how it dictates the function of an artist’s behaviour almost. And I’m interested in this piece as it seems that in many ways that it’s an insertion of institutions into institutions to sort of think about the histories of those places and also, as you’ve just talked about, the way they are subject to sort of conformity of conditions and operations. But it seems to me this piece also really operates on a way in which institutions condition the experience of audiences perhaps more than artists. It’s an uncanny experience for an art gallery audience to enter a relationship with each of your pieces in the show. It seems to be about trying to draw the way in which audiences are kind of controlled by, or shuffled through, or given a kind of set of conventions of how to deal with the spaces of the MCA, what they expect when they come here, the space at the Art Gallery and what they expect to be in the vestibule as opposed to what you put in it etc. So how much did you have that in mind?

Alex Garwronksi: Well I think it structures a lot of what I’ve done over the years, as well as being something I think about a lot because I think the presumption is always is that regardless of all the writing and all the critique that’s happened around the notion of the white cube etc. and beyond that as well, that the space of art is always inherently neutral, or the space of art is always inherently free, so we have other institutions that confine us but when you’re within the space of art we somehow have this you know, additional freedom which is, in some ways is true, to an extent we probably pay for that in some aspects as well because it is a very precarious thing to be involved in, in its own way. So I think challenging those sort of presumptions, I think you know, a space is never a space, it’s always something else and it always speaks about everything else which is encoded into that space. Whether it’s about the collection, whether it’s about the audience, whether it’s about its specific
history. I mean one of the things that interested me about historically the connection between Carriageworks and the Art Gallery when you think about it is that, even though they present themselves in polar opposite ways, one was a large factory and actually I think at the time it was the second largest railway manufacturing site in the world and the largest one in the southern hemisphere, and then the Art Gallery of NSW which was this neo classical dimension which was obviously all the de rigueur at the time. But historically they were constructed almost contemporaneously, they’re not from vastly different historical periods and I think that connection is really interesting because the division between the space of labour and the space of culture was so firmly established. I mean these conditioned the background of what modern art was really as well, and in many ways what contemporary art is also, in the sense if we think about aspects of labour and manufacturing most of it has just gone to so called peripheral nations where it’s much cheaper to pay for it. But I think it’s also interesting for me in terms of some people’s experiences of the works or experiences that had been related to me from other people where people just totally do not see the work at all. I mean even the one at the Art Gallery of NSW which physically is like 6 and a half by 15 metres, that in some respects can also be invisible to some extent which something I think is fascinating.

Blair French: Yes, I found it that way, it sort of passes in the space in a really interesting way.

Alex Garwronksi: Yeah, and I think part of the idea, a part of using this idea in the title Threshold as well, is about that threshold and the threshold of visibility as well. Between when is something an artwork and when is something not an artwork? I mean to me that’s still a very interesting question, I mean the whole post-Duchampian thing, I mean I’ve been writing again recently about Marcel Broodthaers as well where he actually used found objects, notion to actually speak about the museum as a cultural found object as well. So I think those kind of ideas still have a lot of precedence and in some ways, I think, there’s always the presumption that you know what you see in an art gallery is ’art’, you go in there and then there it is. But in a sense how do you know? There are some very specific conditions that make that possible. I mean again, this has been spoken about a lot, but I think the way it functions visibly and physically is still something which a lot of people don’t consider. So, I wanted to draw those sorts of issues into context.

Blair French: I hadn’t really thought about until you were describing it just then, but I mean across the three works you kind of have the traditions of sculpture on the floor and you have the work on the wall as we talked about from Carriageworks, but the work on the ceiling or as a ceiling is particularly unusual for an audience for example. As you encounter at the MCA, I have no doubt many people have walked through that work unaware, I’m sure they have. On the flip side I’ve had people come up to me and go “that was such an extraordinarily strange experience because for this moment I thought I was at the Art Gallery”.

Zanny Beg: Very uncanny.

Blair French: Particularly Art Gallery staff that come to the show, they’re completely…it completely freaks them out.

[Laughter]

Alex Garwronksi: Well I mean again, I think it’s an interesting thing internally as well because, I think, and this relates to any space, we all go places, we all have jobs and we go to the same place every day more or less, generally speaking. How this in a sense, renders
Blair French: That’s a good way of putting it. Now could I ask both of you really about, I guess, the importance of, if there is one, as artists of being in a show like this. I think we internally, and as curators are talking about the relationship to the Biennale for example, and the relationship to the way in which Australian artists might be positioned within the Biennale. And often it’s talked about and I think to a degree rightly so, it’s this great international opportunity, an international opportunity at home. But sometimes when I look at the Biennale I also get this sense of Australian artists’ work somehow, appearing to need to, or some desire placed on it, maybe that’s just from me, that it acts as a host to the rest of the show, somehow buttons down, fixes down certain coordinates, cultural coordinates for the show, and so there’s a lot placed on it as work, there’s an awful lot sometimes placed on it. This is the work that will give you the entry to the place through which to read all the rest. Maybe I’m taking that too far, because I wonder what’s different about that in relationship to being in a national, to use that word, survey. Where the kind of framing devices is in a sense pointing to your relationship both in a sense professional and personal, but also to the work of your peers and what value that is in that for you, apart from getting to see everyone and having a great party.

Alex Garwronski: [laughs] Well I mean I think it is a particular opportunity and experience I mean, on the one hand to actually have the opportunity to work in this scale across the three institutions as well as develop works in that way was very important to me to be able to sort of see that type of project realised. I think also, I’ve written about this and I think about it a lot, you know we can talk about the cultural cringe and that’s all over etc. we live in a global world and everyone’s on the internet and everyone’s connected at all times, and to some extent that is obviously true, and for other people as well that’s also obviously an issue, the resurgence of nationalism around the world is kind of a reaction against this kind of interconnectedness. But the reality is still, talking to a curator the other week as well and she was saying “Oh well Australia is a long way away” and it’s like, well it is a long way away still in many ways. I think there is still this geographic division between what is considered the rest of the world or the rest of the art-world as it’s traditionally framed, and Australia. Even though, there’s obviously work occurring across any side of the world, but I do think that’s a reality. And I think as someone who has worked and established artist run spaces for a number of years as well, I do have a very localised sense of the things I can do within my own sort of terrain with the people I’m connected to, and I think in order to extend that in an institutional way for me was actually really interesting, so it does condition the experience of the works in a sense of, being the artist, of how that world comes about because you already
know to some extent the people you’re talking to because it’s coming out of an existing practice. And I think it’s also one of those things as well were certain media travel much easier than others and I think if you’re engaged in sort of building and creating very spatial works there is a sightedness to them always and so there’s a rootedness in the institutions, in the spaces that you’ve already experienced many times before. So, I think it’s very conditioning and I think it’s very interesting for me.

Zanny Begg: Um, it’s hard to answer that I feel a little bit. I guess I’ve always had a very international way of working, and I think particularly when I first started working, the people who inspired me and the opportunities I had and the people I found I could work with were often quite far away. So, I had to pick up and travel and I spent quite a bit of time travelling. So for me, in a way, it was really nice to come home and it was nice to have a project in a big institution in Australia and it was probably actually one of my first and to find that audience here, I found that really inspiring actually, and to connect with my local because you know, however global you go, the local is always your heart, it’s always your heartland. So, to be able to actually do something that I felt was a work I was proud of in my own local for me was personally very gratifying. I don’t think it actually affected the work I made at all, I think the work is, well it was made in Paris, and it’s about really international issues, if I had of made that work in Australia about feminism I’m not sure it would have been as, perhaps, I’ve got some very positive feedback, I’m not sure people would have as instantly liked it as much here because it had that kind of distancing, even though the issues the women were talking about you could apply all of them to Australia, all of them, around the beauty myth, sexual violence, around domestic labour, around islamophobia, even around terrorism. I mean though Australia isn’t in the same kind of, it’s further back along the continuum than Paris is, but we still have the same curtailing of civil liberties, we still have the same drumming of the fear drum and all that sort of stuff driving politics. But, I guess that didn’t affect how it made the work, it’s just an observation after it being made.

[Music]

Zanny Begg: Obviously, a lot more people have seen the work than I know what they think about it, but the people who have taken the time to contact me about the work has been really I guess gratifying. When Elise and I were making this work, we had this idea that you know, because of its non-linear structure people would go and they’d see it and get a different experience and perhaps they’d talk about it later and so you know they’d have different influences within the work depending on what point they caught it at. And that’s certainly been fed back that people are talking about kind of the different films that they saw and then you hear a little conversation going “Oh but I thought I saw this one…” and I think that’s sort of what we wanted to create this idea of the multiplicity of feminisms and so I think that been interesting. One of the highlights for me was that the Marrickville School of Economics has chosen a feminist stream and they took their class into the work and we had a discussion afterwards and there were quite a large number of women who had done some reading of Silvia Frederici who was one of the people we had interviewed in the work and we had a really, really engaged conversation about misogyny and the witch trials and it’s lineages in terms to contemporary situations for women and that’s how I’d love the work to be used that way. It’s both an aesthetic experience, it’s a contemplative experience but potentially also it can be a piece of public knowledge that people can come and access an archive of a certain moment of thinking about feminism that is obviously incomplete as any archive is, but that people could use it that way to kind of, as the discussion started, for me, was a really beautiful moment.
Voice over: Head to our website visualarts.net.au for more information on NAVA’s advocacy and campaigns for improving the working environment for Australian artists and arts organisations.