



**Annual
Socio-Legal
LECTURE**

**13 June 2023
at 5.00 PM**

**The Buttery
WOLFSON
COLLEGE,
UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD**



PROFESSOR DES MANDERSON

**ANU, COLLEGES OF LAW AND OF ARTS & SOCIAL
SCIENCES**

POSSESSION ISLAND: QUEERING ART, QUEERING LAW

Before his untimely death in 2014, not yet aged sixty, Gordon Bennett produced a body of work that must surely count among the most careful and comprehensive reflections on colonial law undertaken by an Australian artist. His paintings unpack the complex temporal logic that underpinned Australian colonialism, focusing on the central role played by images in the tropes and myths that perform vital work in colonialism's construction and legitimation. *Possession Island* is such a work. Bennett turns his attention to nothing less than the foundation and constitution of the Australian state, while at the same time asking his viewers the truly radical question of whether, through art, we might reconstitute the state otherwise. Following Derrida, Professor Manderson describe this double gesture as 'fabulous retroactivity', a term that connects a central feature of Bennett's art to the very idea of constitution-making itself. Indeed, Manderson argues that Bennett's work does more than unsettle the visual imaginary of settler colonial Australia. The strange multiplicity of associations he creates also unsettles its art and its legal history in equally radical ways—queering art, queering law.