

Investigating the Aesthetic Character of Australian Urban Indigenous Art:
A Socio-Political Fusion

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Abstract

Two distinct geographies inform the practice and production of contemporary Australian Indigenous art: one is desert-based and remote; the other is urban-based (including regional centres). Art historically, urban Indigenous art has been overshadowed by the attention given to desert and remote Indigenous art. From the mid to late 1980s, however, urban Indigenous art built in momentum and proliferated, as its artists channelled in their work, to varying degrees, a connection with matters concerning Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations that were socio-political in nature. Artists interrogated Australia's colonial paradigm.

This thesis investigates the development of the urban Indigenous art movement, for a duration of more than thirty years, establishing how the socio-political connection has significantly motivated its aesthetic character. The research questions bring focus to the definition of a socio-political aesthetic, how artists portray it, and why it is central to the movement of urban Indigenous art.

Decolonial theory provides a useful methodological framework for understanding Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous voices that are shown to ideologically underpin this socio-political aesthetic in urban Indigenous art. In employing this theory for analysis, four key objectives guiding artists are evident within the period surveyed: empowerment; defying colonial representation; recovering the Indigenous subject through the analysis of colonialism; and self-determination.

Expressions of the socio-political aesthetic within urban Indigenous art are found to be numerous. For some artists, expression is equivalent to participation within the socio-political field. For others, expression operates on sensate and affective levels. Subversion and resistance

to previous colonial modes of representing Indigeneity feature highly, as do the processes of destabilisation and undermining of colonial knowledge and power systems. Some artists harness key socio-political events and respond to these using autobiography or collective and cultural memory; others recover Indigenous perspectives in order to achieve historical transparency. Critique, criticality and collectivity are also strategies used to execute a socio-political aesthetic, with Indigenisation of the curated space occupying a key role in dissemination.

The thesis contends that not only is a socio-political aesthetic intrinsic to urban Indigenous art, but that such an aesthetic manifests as socio-political agency. Urban Indigenous artists present contemporary art that is authoritative, delivering the message that contemporary Australian Indigenous culture, identity and representation should be managed from a self-determined position that is distinctly Indigenous.

Statement of Originality and Consent

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

I acknowledge that copyright of artworks reproduced within this thesis resides with the copyright holder(s) of those artworks. Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright holders. I apologise should there be any omissions that have occurred.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signed _____ Nerina Dunt _____

Date _____ 22 November 2018 _____

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This thesis refers to many artworks, which in most cases, have been viewed in person, as their inclusion within state and national collections has allowed relatively straightforward access. In some instances, however, works have moved overseas, entered private collections or limited access archives, and sadly, in a few cases, some have been lost altogether. In tracking down works, I thank Access and Client Services Officers Kylie Simpson, Kate Goolongong, Ash Pollock-Harris and Nathan Dukes at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; Aboriginal Emerging Curator and Artist Liaison at the Biennale of Sydney, Chantelle Woods; at the Eora College TAFE, teacher and artist Chico Monks and Lee-Anne Bethel in Collection and Records; Professor Peter Sutton at the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Adelaide & Division of Humanities at the South Australian Museum and Alice Beale, Senior Collection Manager of Anthropology also at the South Australian Museum; Elle Freak, Associate Curator of Australian Paintings, Sculpture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia; Professor Vivien Johnson, University of New South Wales; Librarian Claire Eggleston at the Edmund and Joanna Capon Research Library,

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Obtaining permissions for the reproduction of images within this thesis has been a laborious, but fulfilling task. In most cases, permission from both the copyright holder and the institution in which an artwork is held has been sought. At the institutional level, there are many people to thank including: Nick Nicholson, Rights & Permissions Officer at the National Gallery of Australia; Jude Fowler Smith, Coordinator Image Sales and Licensing and Megan Young, Image Licensing Officer, both at the Art Gallery of New South Wales; Judy Gunning, Information and Publishing Services Manager at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art; Kathleen Hackett at the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences; Emma Collerton, Assistant Curator at the Gold Coast City Gallery; Denis French, Mikhala Harkins and Almaz Berhe, all in Copyright and Production Services at the National Museum of Australia; Sophie Davidson, Copyright and Reproduction Officer at the Art Gallery of Western Australia; Jacqui Ward, Image & Copyright Officer at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery; Rebecca Fisher, Collections Officer – Culture: Australia, at the Australian Museum; Nic Brown, Collections Manager at Flinders University Art Museum; Tracey Dall, Senior Coordinator, Image Services at the Art Gallery of South Australia; Gemma Weston, Curator, Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of

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Note

Members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities are respectfully advised that a number of people mentioned in writing or depicted in photographs within this thesis have passed away.

List of Abbreviations

AAAL	Aboriginal Arts Australia Ltd of the Aboriginal Development Commission
AAB	Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council
AAC	Aboriginal Arts Committee of the Australia Council
AAMA	Aboriginal Arts Management Association
AASEAL	American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land
ABA	Australian Bicentennial Authority
ACCA	Australian Centre of Contemporary Art
AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales
AGSA	Art Gallery of South Australia
AGWA	Art Gallery of Western Australia
ANCAAA	Association of Northern Central Australian Aboriginal Artists
ANKAAA	Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists
ANOP	Australian National Opinion Polls
ANTT	Aboriginal National Theatre Trust
APT	Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
FUAM	Flinders University Art Museum
IMA	Institute of Modern Art, Queensland
MCA	Museum of Contemporary Art
NATSIAC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Committee of the Australia Council
NGA	National Gallery of Australia
NGV	National Gallery of Victoria
NMA	National Museum of Australia
QAG GoMA	Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art
SAM	South Australian Museum
TMAG	Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
UWA	University of Western Australia

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Figure 64: Rea, *Slave*, 1992, from the series *Look Who's Calling the Kettle Black*, Kodak continuous tone XL7700 dye-sublimation print, edition of 10, 20.3 cm x 25.3 cm (image), 22.4 cm x 30.6 cm (sheet), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1988, accession number NGA 98.179.

Figures 65: Rea, *Suitcase of Hope, Books of Empty Words* (detail), 1994, wood, fabric and paper installation, dimensions variable, Collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, purchased 1995, registration number 95/294/1.

Figure 66: Rea, *Suitcase of Hope, Books of Empty Words* (detail), 1994, wood, fabric and paper installation, dimensions variable, purchased 1995, Collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, registration number 95/294/1.

Figure 67: Brenda L Croft, *My mother recognised the man in the little boy*, from the series *In my father's house*, 1998, colour ilfachrome photograph, 49 x 75 cm (sheet), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, gift of the artist 2007, accession number 252.2007.12 © Brenda L Croft / Licensed by Viscopy.

Figure 68: Brenda L Croft, *She Called Him Son*, from the series *Colour B(l)ind*, 1998, colour ilfachrome photograph, 66 x 93 cm, Private Collection.

Figure 69: Julie Dowling, *Her Father's Servant*, 1999, synthetic polymer paint, red ochre and blood on canvas, 100 x 120 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2000, accession number NGA 2000.631 © Julie Dowling / Licensed by Viscopy.

Figure 70: Julie Dowling, *A welcome of tears*, 1999, synthetic polymer, red and white ochre and silver on canvas, 100 x 120 cm, Collection of Karen Hughes.

Figure 71: Bronwyn Bancroft, *Treaty*, 1991, gouache on paper, dimensions unknown, location unknown. Source: Philip John Crosskey Dark & Roger G Rose, *Artistic Heritage in a Changing Pacific*, Crawford House, Bathurst, New South Wales, 1993.

Figure 72: Gordon Bennett, *Possession Island*, 1991, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, (a-b) 162 x 260 cm (overall), Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, purchased 2007 with funds from the Foundation for the Historic Houses Trust, Museum of Sydney Appeal © The Estate of Gordon Bennett.

Figure 73: Gordon Bennett, *A Selector (This Is How Land Ownership Is Determined)*, 1992, oil and synthetic polymer on canvas, 162 x 130 cm, University of Southern Queensland Art Collection, Toowoomba, Queensland © The Estate of Gordon Bennett.

Figure 74: Harry J Wedge, *Captain Cook Con Man*, 1991, synthetic polymer paint on Masonite, 58 x 93 cm, Collection of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Sydney.

Figure 75: Harry J Wedge, *'Mabo Country' Kingsize*, triptych, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, location unknown. Source: Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998.

Figure 76: Richard Bell, *The new one*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 183 cm, Collection of the artist.

Figure 77: Brook Andrew, *Reconstructing more whiteman's kitsch: 1788-?* (detail), 1994, screenprint on cotton, 1 of 200 tea towels, each 47 x 72 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, gift of Christopher Chapman through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2009, accession number 2009.042.

Figure 78: Judy Watson, *Butcher's Apron Series Flag 1*, 1994, synthetic polymer paint and collage on fabric with eyelets, 87 x 150cm, Collection of the artist.

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Figure 80: Gordon Hookey, *Ten point scam*, 1998, oil on canvas, 223 x 178 cm, purchased 2001, Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, accession number 2001-0172.

Figure 81: Sally Morgan, *Citizenship*, 1987, screenprint from one stencil, edition 19/30, 58.6 x 36.4 cm (image), 76.3 x 56.8 cm (sheet), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1988, accession number NGA 88.803.

Figure 82: Robert Campbell Jnr, *Charlie Perkins*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 120 cm, courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney.

Figure 83: Harry J Wedge, *Immaculate Conception – What Hypocrisy!*, 1992, mixed media, figures: synthetic polymer paint on plywood, dimensions variable (installation) 213.5 x 102.8 cm (Man), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased 2006, presented through the NGV Foundation by Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Governor, accession number 2006.224; 203.5 x 100.5 cm (Nun), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased 2006 with funds donated by Supporters and Patrons of Indigenous Art, accession number 2006.223 © The Estate of HJ Wedge. Photo: Greg Weight.

Figure 84: Judy Watson and Gonzalo Mella, *A Brief History of Colonization (detail)*, c.1990, powder pigment, charcoal, scenic paint, oil stick, mediums, enamel and gold leaf on canvas, with rope and eyelets, 280 x 800 cm, location unknown. Source: Hetti Perkins and Liliana E Correa, *Wiyana/Periferia (Periphery): A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by Aboriginal and Latin American Artists*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Sydney, 1992.

Figure 85: Brook Andrew, *I'll Give You Propaganda*, 1995, computer generated text piece, telephones, sound recording, dimensions variable, installation, location unknown. Source: Alex Gawronski, 'Brook Andrew: Seeing Black', in *Globe*, issue 10, 1999, online, <<http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/globe/issue10/ba1it.html>>.

Figure 86: Gordon Bennett, *Notes to Basquiat: (ab)Original*, 1998, synthetic polymer paint on paper, 120 x 80 cm (sheet), Griffith University Art Collection, Nathan, Queensland, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Dr Paul Eliadis, 2011, accession number 002373 © The Estate of Gordon Bennett.

Figure 87: Julie Dowling, *Melbin*, 1999, synthetic polymer paint, red ochre and plastic on canvas, 120 x 100 cm, Collection of Sir James and Lady Cruthers, Perth.

Figure 88: Gordon Hookey, *King hit (for Queen and country)*, 1999, synthetic polymer paint and oil on leather punching bag and gloves with steel swivel and rope noose, bag 96 x 34 cm (dia.), gloves 29 x 16 x 12 cm (each), rope noose 250 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, purchased 2000, Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant, accession number 2000.151a-d.

Figure 89: Clinton Nain, *King dick*, 1999, bleach and beeswax on linen, 91 x 182 cm, location unknown. Source: Brenda L Croft (ed.), *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000.

Figure 90: Richard Bell, *Little Johnny*, 2001, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 240 x 180 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased 2008 through the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists © Richard Bell, courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Figure 91: Tony Albert, *Sorry*, 2008, found kitsch objects applied to vinyl letters, 99 objects: 200 x 510 x 10 cm (installed), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, The James C Sourris, AM Collection, purchased 2008 with funds from James C Sourris through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation, accession number 2008.384a-uuuu.

Figure 92: Bindi Cole Chocka, *I forgive you*, 2012, emu feathers on MDF board, 100 x 800 cm (installed, approx.), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, purchased 2012 Queensland Art Gallery Foundation, accession number 2012.302a-k.

Figure 93: Jennifer Herd, *We Deeply Regret*, 2007, silk organza, bamboo, pearls, tobacco tin and text on tracing paper, 102 x 20 x 22 cm, courtesy of the artist. Photo: Vernon Ah Kee.

Figure 94: Vernon Ah Kee, *Annie Ah Kee/What is an Aborigine?*, 2008, charcoal, crayon and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 180 x 240 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, The James C Sourris, AM Collection, gift of James C Sourris AM through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2012, accession number 2012.503.

Figure 95: Richard Bell, *Free Lex Wotton*, 2009, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 90 x 240 cm, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Figure 96: Richard Bell, *Admit it*, 2007, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 60 x 40 cm, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Figure 97: Richard Bell, *An uppity school girl*, 2008, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 150 x 120 cm, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Figure 98: Gordon Hookey, *Blood on the wattle, blood on the palm*, 2009, oil on linen, 285 x 500 cm, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, The James C Sourris, AM Collection, gift of James C Sourris AM through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2012, accession number 2012.007.

Figure 99: Gordon Hookey, *Wrekconin*, 2007, oil on canvas, 168 x 152 cm, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Figure 100: Laurie Nilsen, *Emu*, 2007, barbed wire, steel and aluminium, 158 x 72 x 148 cm, courtesy Fireworks Gallery, Newstead, Queensland.

Figure 101: Megan Cope, *RE FORMATION part 3 (Dubbagullee)*, 2017, Sydney rock oysters, copper slag and hand cast concrete, 500 x 700 x 150 cm (overall, irregular), courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne. Photo: Felicity Jenkins, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Introduction

Australian Indigenous art merges ancient traditions and recent forms of art within a current of contemporary art that art historian Ian McLean explains is bifurcated into two distinct practices – urban and remote.¹ In his most recent publication on the history of Indigenous art, which builds upon the ideas of fellow art historian Terry Smith, McLean also acknowledges that although Indigenous art may be explored within a narrative of transculturation, brought on by colonisation, art historically, much is unknown about its aesthetics in such a context.²

This research project takes up one of those two distinct practices – the urban, prompted by the question of its aesthetic character. In other words, what is the aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art? It is my contention that the aesthetic character is inherently socio-political, and that the internal dynamic of urban Indigenous art is dependent upon that character. Furthermore, I contend that the recurrence of the socio-political aesthetic, which has shaped urban Indigenous art for more than thirty years, has allowed artists to deliver an effective message of Indigenous self-determination in artistic and socio-political fields concurrently.

To elaborate, the term ‘urban’ refers to contemporary Australian Indigenous art that is recognisably alternative to the Australian Indigenous art of remote and desert regions. Rather than the familiar visual tropes found in bark and rock painting from Arnhem Land and the Kimberley, or the dot and line styles of Papunya and its surrounds, urban Indigenous art emerged in city, metropolitan and regional centres, and is aligned primarily with Western traditions in art. My research is motivated by a genuine and ongoing interest in the development

¹ Ian McLean, ‘Introduction’, in *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, Reaktion Books, 2016, p. 9.

² McLean, *ibid.*, p. 7; also Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 203.

of urban Indigenous art over time.³ Although I am not Indigenous, as a researcher of art history I acknowledge that there exists alternative truths and narratives that have been marginalised and concealed by the dominant lens or eclipsed by the historical model that favours Western records. These may be understood in the context of a Foucauldian hierarchy of power, where domination has been the preferred device of Australia's colonial past.⁴

In acknowledgement of this position, a decolonial methodology has been applied to my research. Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a leader in decolonial theory proposes that such a methodology resists accepted notions of history and knowledge, which have been the product of colonial practice.⁵ Alternatively, Indigenous perspectives are highlighted and used as a base for research that sits counter to the projections of Western discourse.⁶ Moreover, within the decolonial model, Indigeneity is acknowledged as both present and continuing; an Indigenous voice is prioritised.⁷ Four key aspects underpin Smith's approach to research, which are presented from the position of the colonised: an awareness of the coloniser; recovery of the Indigenous subject; analysis of colonialism; and a struggle or fight for self-determination.⁸ These four aspects shape Chapter 3 to Chapter 6 of the thesis, which I will return to momentarily.

I have determined a thirty-three year time span for this thesis - 1984 to 2017, which is arranged into three phases that enhance understanding of the engagement of urban Indigenous artists

³ Interest commenced in the early years of the twenty-first century, see Nerina Dunt, *The Rise of Urban Indigenous Art in Response to Colonialism*, MA Thesis, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, 2005. The MA thesis culminated with a national exhibition entitled *Indigenous Responses to Colonialism: Another Story*, Adelaide Festival Centre, 2007, which also included a forum entitled *Colonialism: Persistence and Resistance in Urban Indigenous Art*. The forum was chaired by Dr Christine Nicholls with a panel including Dr Irene Watson, Gordon Hookey, Jared Thomas, Yhonnie Scarce, Nici Cumpston and Nerina Dunt, held at Artspace, Adelaide Festival Centre, 2007.

⁴ See Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 793-795.

⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Introduction', *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2012, p. 2; see also Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 2.

⁶ Smith, *ibid.*

⁷ Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁸ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 8.

with their social, political, cultural, and creative environments. These are: a foundation phase, which in its earliest years, was dependent on developing collectivity amongst its burgeoning artists; a proliferation phase, when exhibitions and production expanded exponentially and the ensuing exposure and institutional responses to this increased activity endorsed artists' endeavours; and a consolidation phase in which the progress made in the previous two phases was supplemented with curatorial influence and exclusive support, recognition, popularity and again collectivity that allowed artists in this latter stage unprecedented freedom in their art practices.

To expand, urban Indigenous art in its foundation phase could not yet be described as a movement, despite curator Vivien Johnson locating it within the broader movement of Australian Aboriginal art.⁹ A commencement point for the phase, however, can be identified as the art that was shown in the 1984 exhibition *Koori Art '84*, (Artspace, Sydney), which was followed closely by *NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* (Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney). The inaugural *Boomalli Au-go-go* exhibition a year later assisted in the establishment in 1987 of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney; this was a precursor of artist collectives that would later develop. From these early exhibitions, and numerous others, a community of urban Indigenous artists was formed in which shared goals and artistic objectives were advanced.¹⁰

⁹ Vivien Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', *Art Network*, no. 15, 1985, p. 56.

¹⁰ Additional exhibition activity is listed in Chapter 2, footnote 218; also, artists' activity can be found across various NGA Collection Management/Artist Files, including: Karen Casey 89/0162; Robert Bropho incorporating Tanya Ellis and Tranby Students 88/0143; Brenda L Croft 99/0153; Fiona Foley 88/0145 and 97/0378; Kevin Gilbert 90/0024; Alice Hinton-Bateup 88/0147; Arone Meeks 08/2029; Trevor Nickolls 81/0576; Lin Onus 90/0123; Byron Pickett 86/0128; Michael Riley 90/0058-01 and 04/0438-02; and Jeffrey Samuels 89/0165, viewed 4 December 2013; and AGSA Artist Files: Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley; Tracey Moffatt; Trevor Nickolls; Lin Onus, viewed 22 January 2014.

It should not be underestimated just how important the social activity taking place in Sydney at the time was in establishing community. Redfern, an inner-city suburb of Sydney, had already been positioned as a centre of Aboriginal activism, with non-government community service organisations also formed.¹¹ The Aboriginal Legal Service was launched in 1971 followed by the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service in response to a belief that Aboriginal needs were being neglected by mainstream organisations.¹² These Aboriginal community-controlled organisations promoted Aboriginal self-determination to the broader community. Meanwhile, three art schools were made accessible to those living in Sydney. From 1977, Sydney's College of Advanced Education offered a visual arts program.¹³ In 1982, the City Art Institute in Paddington offered Visual Arts and Arts Education training.¹⁴ The Eora Centre was established in Chippendale in 1984 for contemporary visual and performing arts and specifically Aboriginal studies.¹⁵ Furthermore, with minimal airtime in 1981, increasing to a regular weekly programme in 1984, Radio Redfern gave a voice to Sydney's Aboriginal community.¹⁶ Also, in and around Paddington, commercial and institutional galleries were supportive of urban Indigenous artists and a number of exhibitions took place.¹⁷ What emerged were the rumblings of an active urban Aboriginal community in Sydney, with legal, health, education, media and art outlets available. Despite this activity, the artists who found themselves exhibiting in *Koori Art '84* together for the

¹¹ See Melinda Hinkson, 'Aboriginal Sydney: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present', 2nd edn, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2010, pp. 71-91.

¹² Linda Briskman, *The Black Grapevine: Aboriginal Activism and the Stolen Generations*, The Federation Press, Sydney, 2003, p. 32.

¹³ The University of Sydney, 'Sydney College of the Arts', The University of Sydney, 2014, viewed 26 May 2017, <<http://sydney.edu.au/sca/about-us/history.shtml>>.

¹⁴ University of New South Wales, 'Agency Details', UNSW University Archives, 2013, viewed 26 May 2017, <<https://www.recordkeeping.unsw.edu.au/documents/A568-AMC.pdf>>.

¹⁵ Barani, 'Eora Centre', Barani, 2013, viewed 26 May 2017, <<http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/eora-centre/>>.

¹⁶ Barani, 'Radio Redfern', Barani, 2013, viewed 26 May 2017, <<http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/radio-redfern/>>.

¹⁷ Examples include *Crosscurrents: A Survey of Traditional and Urban Aboriginal Art* (Coo-ee Aboriginal Art May-Jul 1989); *Tracey Moffatt: Something More* (Australian Centre for Photography Aug-Sep 1989); and *Fiona Foley* (Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery Dec 1989); Records and exhibition ephemera sourced from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection Archive at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

first time, were surprised to find that they shared common objectives in their art practices.¹⁸ Up until then, an urban Aboriginal visual arts community per se, had not been recognised.

Examples of urban Indigenous art in its foundation phase included work that did not fulfil the preconceived notions of what Indigenous art looked like, because its formal basis typically sat within a Western artistic tradition. Throughout this initial phase, artists were concerned with legitimising a new mode of Indigenous art. They were from the city, metropolitan and regional centres and a mode of art was sought that did not subscribe necessarily to the mythological iconographic content, or to the dot and line iconography that had become synonymous with work produced by Indigenous artists in remote and desert regions. Yet, at the centre of this new mode, the expression of cultural identity was paramount. This identity was inherently linked with contemporary experience underpinned by a history of displacement, dislocation and disenfranchisement in the urban environment. Artists interrogated the marginalised position of Indigenous people within a national and collective identity. As such, poignant themes relating to Australia's colonialist past, along with its present socio-political milieu became the focus of artists' attention and agency. Much urban Indigenous art was dominated by overtly politicised content during this early phase of production. Art advisor, curator and writer John Kean describes some of this imagery as a form of 'Indigenous resistance'.¹⁹ Ian McLean concurs, explaining that Indigenous art from the late 1980s exhibits, 'heightened social and political themes'.²⁰ Urban Indigenous art at this time took contemporary political issues as its focus.²¹ It

¹⁸ Anthony Lambert, 'Shattering the Myth that Aboriginal Art Exists Only in Traditional Forms', *Australian Artist*, vol. 1, issue 4, 1984, p. 24.

¹⁹ John Kean uses this term when considering the work of Robert Campbell Jnr. However, it is applicable to works by other urban Indigenous artists who take up similar subject matter, themes and iconography within their work, see John Kean, 'New Regional Aboriginalities and National Narratives - 1993', in Ian McLean (ed.), *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, Brisbane and Sydney, 2011, p. 153. The term 'Indigenous resistance' also reflects more broadly the political activism that was taking place in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in Sydney, which was also documented by non-Indigenous artists, for example Juno Gemes and Elaine Pelot Kitchener, see Catherine De Lorenzo, *Ethnography: Photographic Images of Aboriginal Australians*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1993.

²⁰ McLean (ed.), *ibid*, p. 146.

involved artists who wanted 'to set history straight,' and who held a critical, independent lens to history.²²

Following this foundation phase was a phase of proliferation. This began in 1990, when for the first time, urban Indigenous art was promoted on the international stage in multiple showings - the 44th Venice Biennale the first of four key exhibitions overseas that year.²³ This was a milestone event in which urban Indigenous artist Trevor Nickolls (Ngarrindjeri) and remote Kimberley artist Rover Thomas (Kukatja/Wangkajunga) presented two aesthetically contrasting modes of contemporary Indigenous art. Around this time, specific urban Indigenous artists rose to prominence while others joined in, also producing works that made explicit the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture. It was a time when the dialogue between postcolonial Australia and Indigenous Australia was shifting, as audiences and the reach of political themes broadened internationally. Urban Indigenous artists communicated worldwide their views of colonialism, cultural discrimination and a flawed past. Meanwhile, in Australia, these views came into focus in various key exhibitions.²⁴ Djon Mundine was just one curator who drew out artists' views, crystallising socio-political themes as part of his rationale. He identified 'Terra Nullius' as a means for European colonisers to rationalise slaughter, oppressive welfare

²¹ John Kean, 'Now Who is Being Naïve?', *Artlink*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1993, pp. 49-52.

²² Kean, *ibid*.

²³ The other three key international exhibitions included: *Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Robert Holmes à Court Collection*, which travelled to Massachusetts, Minnesota and Oregon in the USA; *The Australian Summer in Montpellier: 100 Masterpieces of Australian Painting (L'été Australien à Montpellier: 100 chefs-d'œuvre de la peinture australienne)* in Montpellier, France; and finally *Contemporary Aboriginal Art 1990 - from Australia*, the visual art component of the Australian Indigenous festival *Tagari Lia = My Family* held in Glasgow. The role of Australian curated exhibitions in relation to changes in society and the narratives of art history are discussed in Catherine De Lorenzo, Joanna Mendelsohn & Catherine Speck, '1968-2008: Curated Exhibitions and Australian Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, issue 4, 2011, pp. 1-15; see also discussion of the theoretical links between art history and exhibitions and how the 'visual' functions within these two modes in Catherine Speck and Lisa Slade, 'Art History and Exhibitions: Same or Different?', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 141-150.

²⁴ Key exhibitions included, but were not limited to: *A Koori Perspective Tour*, Artspace in Sydney, Campbelltown Bicentennial Art Gallery, Moree Plains Regional Gallery, Dubbo Regional Art Gallery, Broken Hill City Art Gallery, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Bendigo Art Gallery, 1990-1991; *Balance 1990: Views, Visions, Influences*, Queensland Art Gallery, 1990; *Aboriginal Women's Exhibition*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1991; and *Tyerabarrowayau: I Shall Never Become a White Man*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992.

systems, apartheid restrictions, the abduction of children, and Indigenous deaths in custody, as particular subjects explored by artists.²⁵

McLean provides an entry point to understanding what I am calling this proliferation phase, citing the late 1980s through to the late 1990s as a period of 'postcolonial cosmopolitanism' – a counter current expanding to Australia from the British black art scene.²⁶ He explains that this cosmopolitanism, along with essentialism, acted dialectically upon Australian urban Indigenous art, fuelling its development.²⁷ McLean claims that the current also drew in regional artists, but when surveying the sum of works, he finds it a challenge to trace a specific aesthetic.²⁸ While McLean investigates 'the archival impulse of urban Indigenous artists' in this second phase, for instance those who access the archive as a repository of history to respond to issues of Aboriginal identity, he leaves open the route for precise enquiry into the socio-political realm. He says of this phase, '... the proliferation of artists makes it difficult for the art historian to get a sense of the shape and contours that define urban art.'²⁹

As the connection with socio-political subject matter continued to develop throughout the 1990s, a visuality aroused that was concrete and identifiable in its promotion of cultural authority and affirmation. Definitions of a global contemporary art began to shift around this time and a replacement of colonising narratives with assertions of Indigeneity emphasising Indigenous culture and knowledge, began to advance. Urban Indigenous artists employed these revisions to

²⁵ Fiona Foley & Djon Mundine, *Tyerabarrbowaryaou: I Shall Never Become a White Man*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992, p. 4.

²⁶ McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, op. cit., p. 210. The proliferation referred to by the author, has been covered in Nerina Dunt, 'Urban Indigenous Art: The International Intervention of 1990', conference paper, GEOcritical, Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, 5-8 December 2014, Launceston, Tasmania.

²⁷ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁸ McLean, *ibid.*

²⁹ McLean, *ibid.*

further empower the artistic impact of their work.³⁰ Via the artists' collective agenda of Indigenous artistic and cultural visibility and a consistent interrogation of the socio-political milieu, urban Indigenous art as a movement emerged beside the already well-established desert and remote Indigenous art movement, under the banner of Australian contemporary art.

In the years leading up to the turn of the millennium, urban Indigenous art and artists reflected the confidence that came as a result of the movement's success to this point. I refer to this time as the consolidation phase.³¹ Whilst they recognised the inception of artwork from the 1980s and appreciated the labours of the 1990s, urban Indigenous artists now functioned and thrived within an art world that was totally accepting of their movement. It was during this phase that the artist collective proppaNOW was established in Brisbane and, like Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative established nearly twenty years earlier, its members were concerned with art as Indigenous agency.³² Central to this agency, was a commitment to the socio-political subject and its underlying principles. Artists and artist groups or collectives continued to build an aesthetic that subscribed to an activist agenda. Urban Indigenous artists were unremitting in their response to issues and concerns facing Indigenous Australia despite a level of access and participation within contemporary Australian art that had formerly been unrealised.

During this consolidation phase, urban Indigenous artists were well represented in a range of major exhibitions that exemplified their ongoing achievements. Indigenous art triennials such as *Culture Warriors*, *unDisclosed* and *Defying Empire* (National Gallery of Australia 2007, 2012 and 2017), as well as survey exhibitions, for example *Menagerie: Contemporary Indigenous*

³⁰ See discussion in Heather Igloliorte, Brenda L Croft & Steve Loft, *Decolonize Me*, Ottawa Art Gallery and The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Ottawa and Oshawa, Canada, 2012.

³¹ The beginning of this phase overlaps with the proliferation phase as institutions in particular, expanded their support of urban Indigenous art.

³² Margo Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa', *Artlink*, March 2010, pp. 34-39.

Sculpture in Australia and My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia (Object Gallery and Australian Museum 2009, and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art), recognised the most impressive and influential Australian Indigenous artists of the time.³³

The tri-phase history of the urban Indigenous art movement outlined above, exposes a trajectory of activity and development over the years 1984-2017 that is critical to understanding the production of urban Indigenous art and its dissemination. Though the historical scaffold itself is not the focus of this thesis, it has provided a useful way to organise data. Significantly, what it reveals, is an ongoing propensity for urban Indigenous artists to privilege a socio-political aesthetic in their work. The discrete characteristics of this aesthetic and its constancy throughout the movement are investigated in the thesis.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is a review of the field of literature. It begins by looking at terminology and the way the term 'urban', specifically, has been defined and used in the critical literature. The origins of the term and the difficulties that have emerged with its continued usage are considered. Reasons for using the term 'urban' throughout the thesis are justified here. The focus then shifts to urban Indigenous art itself and locates typical modes of reference within literature. Paradoxically, this section commences with the absence of urban Indigenous art, followed by its appearance within

³³ See Deborah Clark & Susan Jenkins (eds), *Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2007; Carly Lane & Franchesca Cubillo (eds), *UnDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2012; Tina Baum, *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2017; Nicole Foreshew & Brian Parkes (eds), *Menagerie: Contemporary Indigenous Sculpture in Australia*, Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design and Australian Museum, Sydney, 2009; Bruce McLean, *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2013.

one of three alternative modes: chronological, anthology-based, or sporadically located critique and discussion.

The historiography of urban Indigenous art is then investigated, beginning with early writing on Indigenous art more generally. This writing is typically anthropological or ethnographic before becoming art historical. Indigenous art is later discussed in terms of its importance in the process of cross-cultural exchange. Finally, decolonisation literature is considered and it is proposed that decolonisation theory provides a useful and original methodology for analysing urban Indigenous art; an approach largely unexplored in scholarship.

Chapter 2, 'Breakthrough, a New Aesthetic and Collectivity', charts the inception of the urban Indigenous art movement and its development through to 1989. It begins with the seminal exhibition *Koori Art '84*, drawing out initial expressions of politics, place, self and identity and the critical reception that ensued. As urban Indigenous artists expressed themselves, the urban setting is acknowledged as a site of separation, and early interrogations into the deeper significance of this position are explored. Examples of works by three key artists illustrate an early aesthetic that appears culturally intuitive as it blends familiar desert or remote iconography with that of Western artistic conventions in ways that begin to distinguish urban Indigenous art from its desert or remote counterpart. The establishment and significance of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Chippendale is covered, with attention given to how it fostered urban Indigenous art in this early phase. The supportive role of university galleries, as well as other collectives and workshops, predominantly focusing on the medium of printmaking is discussed. These networks were critical in shaping and facilitating the socio-political perspectives of urban

Indigenous artists as they emerged. Furthermore, collectivity ultimately cultivated a shared voice of artists, who were at this stage under-represented in the Australian art world.

As outlined earlier in the Introduction, a decolonial methodology is applicable to the investigation of the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art. The remaining substantive chapters, although they are arranged chronologically, employ Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonial model to distinguish four key motivating features of urban Indigenous art that allow a direct line of enquiry into its aesthetic character.

Chapter 3, 'Early Characteristics: Eliciting Empowerment through the Socio-Political Climate', considers how colonisation has understated the position of Australia's First People within the country's consciousness. With an awareness of this colonially determined position, urban Indigenous artists drew upon the socio-political environment and climate in the mid to late 1980s. Art became agency as demonstrated with reference to three socio-political episodes: the visit of Pope John Paul II, Aboriginal Deaths in custody, and Australia's Bicentenary. It is argued that as artists sought national awareness of issues confronting Indigenous people, they seized empowerment.

Chapter 4, 'Defying Colonial Representation: Authentic and Diverse Experience', investigates how colonial constructions of Indigeneity as 'noble savage', 'the dying race', 'cultureless outcasts' and 'other' have been aesthetically analysed by artists. The chapter presents Indigenous views and debate about authenticity and diversity, which are articulated in artworks that proliferated during the 1990s. It is argued that as contemporary Indigenous experience has been an ongoing product of interaction with the colonising culture, the personal and collective

expressions of urban Indigenous artists' are inevitably political. The art presented in this chapter from the last decade of the twentieth century contributed to changes in popular understanding about the aforementioned points of representation, authenticity, diversity and experience as dialogues of inclusiveness grew in prominence.

Chapter 5, 'Recovering the Indigenous Subject: Exposing Colonial Narratives and Practices', focuses on recovering the Indigenous subject, which is inherently connected with understanding narratives and practices of colonialism. It begins with an examination of the concept of 'forgetting', and how origins of excluding the Indigenous subject have provoked in urban Indigenous artists its recovery and reconstruction within dominant Australian narratives. This chapter is set in the 1990s, where the Stolen Generations, sovereignty and Native Title are anchor points for aesthetic investigation.

Chapter 6, 'Control: Indigenising the Curated Space, Critique and Self-Determination', begins by establishing that endorsing urban Indigenous art within the curated space was of paramount importance to the dissemination of its socio-political aesthetic moving toward the twenty-first century. Criticality and urban Indigenous artists' continued critique of the colonial paradigm is analysed and positioned as essential to the movement. The continuation of art that decisively connects with significant socio-political issues and events is anchored in this chapter to the National Apology to Australia's Stolen Generations. Finally, I argue that ProppaNOW, as an artist collective, embodies a self-determined position, which has consolidated the many objectives and intentions evident within urban Indigenous art throughout the thirty-three year focus period.

It is intended that this assessment of the urban Indigenous art movement and analysis of the works produced by urban Indigenous artists, will allow the discrete character of its socio-political aesthetic to be clearly understood. The conclusion to the thesis contains a summary of the findings.

Chapter 1

Surveying the Field of Literature

Introduction

This chapter is composed of four sections that focus on the relevant terminology regarding urban Indigenous art specifically, the modes of reference to urban Indigenous art within critical literature, the historiography of Australian Indigenous art and the relevance of decolonial theory. In the first section of this chapter, literature pertaining to the term 'urban' is assessed. It is a complicated term and perspectives have generally been polarised, contingent upon acceptance or resistance of the term. At times, however, there has also been fluid transition between the two poles, where the term has or has not been employed depending on particular circumstances. These aspects will be unpacked, in order to justify its usage within the thesis.

The second section establishes distinct modes of reference to urban Indigenous art within the literature. Paradoxically, the first of these modes is absence, where an account of the lack of reference to urban Indigenous art is provided. The alternative modes of reference have typically addressed urban Indigenous art, from positions that are chronological, anthology-based or sporadically located. Examples of these categories are presented in order to support the research impetus that urban Indigenous art has received relatively little attention as an exclusive subject.

The third section is a review of how Indigenous art has been written about since the 1920s. Two literary tropes are evident in the historiography of Indigenous art. The first is an anthropological or ethnographic approach, whilst the second is art historical, typically presented within the broader Indigenous art movement, with a dominant focus on the desert or remote locus. Whilst

the literature considered in this section pre-dates the period that this thesis addresses, its objective is to demonstrate that urban Indigenous art has been sidelined in favour of the dominant mode of Indigenous art from desert or remote regions. This section also co-opts literature engaged with the theme of cross-cultural interaction, which was a prominent feature in the development and historiography of Indigenous art.

The final section expands on the impact of exterior influences, taking as its focus politics and broader examples of literature in which Western traditions in art are encountered within the context of urban Indigenous art. Literature in this section underscores the importance of the post-colonial Australian milieu and proposes that decolonial theory is applicable to the current research of urban Indigenous art.³⁴

Terminology

Defining the term 'urban' itself is problematic, as an obvious shift occurred in art historical discourse in the usage of both the term and its derivatives. Curator and Indigenous advisor, Margo Neale, explains that the term:

... carries a whole lot of history. In the 1980s it was associated with activism; and then in the 1990s there was a bit of identity politics thrown in and there was then a sense that it meant lesser ... Then there are others who will say, 'Hang on, that's where we're at. We have our own culture' ... So some claim; some celebrate it; some dispel it; and some couldn't give a stuff.³⁵

³⁴ Note that authors in the field of literature are Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This alludes to both the institutional perspectives of voices in the early phase of the movement, but also a current of diversity as a result of alternative voices, where the latter paralleled the development of urban Indigenous art.

³⁵ Margo Neale, 'Who You Callin' Urban?' Panel 1, *Who You Callin' Urban Forum*, chaired by Michael Aird, National Museum of Australia, 6 July 2007, audio on demand transcript, viewed 20 February 2015, <http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/transcripts/NMA_urban1_20070706.html>.

During the 1980s, the term appeared in language and literature as an identifier to differentiate art and artists whose Indigenous experience was not 'remote', 'desert', 'traditional' or 'classical'. These latter terms commonly existed, and continue to do so, in art historical vocabularies that generally refer to Indigenous art emerging from desert and remote communities that encompass apparent abstraction, and typically portray 'dot and line' iconography connected with spiritual or mythological narratives pertaining to 'Country'.³⁶ In sources from the earliest focus period of this thesis beginning in 1984, the term 'urban', on the other hand, was used in a context that expressed three primary elements simultaneously. Geographically, it referred to Indigenous artists residing in cities and towns, stylistically it asserted Western traditions of art, and socio-politically it portrayed degrees of activism.

In the early period of the 1980s, the term 'urban' was useful in identifying particular artists and communities of artists for the purposes of discourse and exhibition. For example, the exhibition title *Urban Koories* (1986) provided an immediate segue for audiences to recognise that the participating artists were Indigenous and from the 'city'.³⁷ Likewise, another example is found in a review of a slightly earlier exhibition titled *Koori Art '84* (1984), in which the reviewer states that the exhibition 'featured works from 25 country and urban Aboriginal artists'.³⁸ There are many more examples available during this decade, and into the 1990s, which utilise the term in the above classificatory manner.³⁹

³⁶ Nici Cumpston provides insight into an Australian Indigenous definition of 'Country', which likens the concept to a living human relative. See Nici Cumpston & Barry Patton, *Desert Country*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2010, p. 12.

³⁷ Brenda L Croft defines 'Koori' as a generic term used by Aboriginal people from the south-eastern region of Australia in reference to themselves, in Kathryn Favelle (ed.), *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. 160. The participating artists in the exhibition were primarily based in Sydney: see Suhanya Raffel & Chris Watson (eds), *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, Workshop Arts Centre, Glebe, NSW, 1986.

³⁸ Anthony Lambert, 'Shattering the Myth that Aboriginal Art Exists Only in Traditional Forms', *Australian Artist*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1984, p. 24.

³⁹ See for example Michael O'Ferrall's catalogue essay that has a section titled 'Urban Koories', in Michael O'Ferrall, *On the Edge: Five Contemporary Artists*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 1989, pp. 9–11; Brenda L Croft, 'Boomalli', *Artlink*, vol. 10, nos 1 and 2, 1990, p. 108; Roberta Sykes, 'Non-citizens in our Own Country? The Social and Cultural Background of Rural and Urban Aboriginal Artists', *Art Monthly Australia*, special supplement, no. 30, 1990, pp. 4–6; and

Beyond its geographic, stylistic and activism connotations, however, the term 'urban' began to evolve in context as an identifier of 'authenticity' for the artists to whom it referred. It began to function in a similar manner to a prefix, where 'urban' was slotted in before 'Indigenous' with regard to those artists based in the metropolis or regional towns and centres. Its purpose in this sense was to reinforce for audiences that, despite urban artists' works looking 'different' to the stereotypical or mainstream models of desert or remote Indigenous art at the time, the artists were still in fact Indigenous. Awareness of the term and its meaning in its various contexts, including authenticity, thus increased. As a result of this recognition, urban artists were presented with opportunities to establish themselves within the broader context of Australian Indigenous art.

It should be noted here that the term 'urban' was advocated by many of the artists themselves, who used it when writing about their artwork, their identity and their Aboriginality. The term was further reinforced both conceptually and in vocabularies as artists participated in exhibitions where curatorial objectives promoted 'urban' Indigenous art as an alternative to desert and remote examples. Artists such as Fiona Foley (Badtjala), Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara), Gordon Bennett (born Monto, Queensland) and Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta) all participated in exhibitions that subscribed to such terminology during the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s.⁴⁰

Roger Butler's essay that has a section titled 'Urban Koories' in 'From Dreamtime to Machinetime', in Jeffrey Samuels & Chris Watson (eds), *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*, Print Council, West Melbourne, 1987, p. 35.

⁴⁰ For instance Lin Onus in *Urban Aboriginal Art: A Selective View*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Parkside, 1988 and *The Urban Aboriginal*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Nova Scotia, Canada, 1995; Gordon Bennett in *Urban Aboriginal Art*, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, 1990; Fiona Foley in *Urban Koories*, Willoughby Workshop Art Centre, Sydney, 1986 and *Urban Aboriginal Art* at Jan Weiss Gallery, New York, USA, 1993; Brenda L Croft in *Urban Artyfacts*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, Sydney, 1994 and *Urban Focus: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art From the Urban Areas of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1994 (Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley and many others also participated in this latter exhibition).

Difficulties with the term began to emerge, however, as the profiles of urban Indigenous artists increased, and the need to be defined by the stylistic and geographic orientation ascribed by the term 'urban' was no longer necessary. Despite its initial function to differentiate and 'authenticate' Indigenous artists who were not from desert or remote areas, it became regarded as homogenising in its own way. Effectively, all those Indigenous artists based in urban environments and working with Western art traditions were rendered 'urban', irrespective of their geographic location and unique contribution to art. A backlash to the terminology thus ensued and throughout the 1990s it was argued that the very term 'ghettoised' artists.⁴¹ Several Indigenous artists insisted that, although their work reflected Indigenous experience, there was no longer a need to be categorised as 'urban'. Artists Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett took the debate a step further and actively refused to be characterised by the term, and its 'Indigenous' counterpart, by simply avoiding curated exhibitions that advocated such terminology that would pigeonhole them as artists in the categories concerned.⁴²

⁴¹ Hetti Perkins, 'Introduction', in Claire Williamson & Hetti Perkins (eds), *Blakness: Blak City Culture!*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1994, p. 5.

⁴² Ian McLean provides a succinct account of this position taken by Moffatt and Bennett in Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, Reaktion Books, London, 2016, pp. 224-231. See commentary on the artists' positions in primary and secondary sources including Claire Williamson, 'Fax Exchange with Tracey Moffatt: Who Do You Take Me For?', *Eyeline*, 1992, Autumn, n.p., quoted in Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, op. cit., pp. 224-225; Marta Gili, 'An Interview with Tracey Moffatt', in Tracey Moffatt, *Tracey Moffatt*, Centre National de la Photographie, Paris, and Fundació 'la Caixa', Barcelona, c. 1999, p. 106; Sylvia Kleinert & Grace Koch, 'Introduction', in Sylvia Kleinert & Grace Koch (eds), *Urban Representations: Cultural Expression, Identity and Politics*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2013, p. 4; Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2013, p. 462; Gordon Bennett, 'The Non-Sovereign Self (Diaspora Identities)', in Jean Fisher (ed.), *Global Visions: Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Kala Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 1994, p. 128 (120-130); Kelly Gellatly, 'Citizen in the Making: The Art of Gordon Bennett', in Kelly Gellatly et al., *Gordon Bennett*, National Gallery of Victoria, 2007, p. 18; Ian McLean, 'Surviving "The Contemporary": What Indigenous Artists Want, and How to Get It', *Contemporary Visual Art + Culture Broadsheet*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2013, p. 173. Despite the positions taken by Moffatt and Bennett, as contemporary artists their work continues to be institutionally classified within Australia as Indigenous, included within collections of Indigenous art. Similarly, in literature pertaining to histories of Australian art, they are consistently classified as Indigenous artists, though their refutation of this position is often acknowledged. I too acknowledge the position they have taken, however, in both art historical and institutional contexts, their roles within urban Indigenous art cannot be ignored. As artists who are Indigenous, which is also acknowledged by the artists, their work references Indigeneity in multiple ways, and contributes to the discussion of an urban Indigenous art aesthetic. No specific Australian Indigenous language group will be noted when referring to Moffatt and Bennett within the substantive text.

Thus a shift in usage of the term is identified, primarily based on artists' concerns, from acceptance to opposition. It should be noted, however, that not all 'urban' Indigenous artists rejected the 'branding'. Whilst some artists were at odds with the term, its recognition as an identifier of Indigeneity among other artists continued. The term, and what it characterised, assisted with increasing opportunities for urban Indigenous artists, notably through exhibitions that expressed Indigenous art as diverse.

This exposure of an alternative mode of Indigenous art, led to the increased understanding about the fact that Indigenous artists practising outside desert and remote regions, whether they be city based, or from regional centres, were no less authentic. This had been a response to a belief that spiritual connectedness intrinsic to desert and remote artworks was a measure of cultural authenticity, and that examples of 'primitive' art displayed authenticity more deeply, than the art of those whom had been culturally displaced.⁴³ Neale, cites the 1990s in particular as a time in which the distinctions of authenticity between traditional and urban art practice became less necessary.⁴⁴ She acknowledged that collaborative practice, whether between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, artists working with alternative media or across multiple geographic locations, posed Indigenous art as fluid, both culturally and creatively.⁴⁵ Djon Mundine has summarised this position most succinctly, stating, 'Aboriginal art is made by Aborigines. It is part of a seamless yet different strand of a multiplicity of worldwide contemporary art expressions'.⁴⁶

⁴³ See specific discussion in Howard Morphy, 'Contemporary Developments: Aboriginal Art and the Avant-Garde', in *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press Limited, London & New York, 1998, pp. 375-378; also Gordon Bennett, 'The Non-Sovereign Self (Diaspora Identities)', *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126; also Gillian Cowlishaw, 'Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History', in Bain Attwood & John Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992, pp. 20-31.

⁴⁴ Margo Neale, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, 2000, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p. 274.

⁴⁵ Neale, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Djon Mundine, 'Aboriginal Art – It's a White Thing', in Fiona Foley (ed.) *The Art of Politics: The Politics of Art: The Place of Indigenous Contemporary Art*, Keeaira Press, Southport, Queensland, 2006, p. 57.

The publication *Urban Representations: Cultural Expression, Identity and Politics*, edited by art historian Sylvia Kleinert and research scholar Grace Koch, addresses the status of the term, taking into account historical and interpretative frameworks of its usage in the art world.⁴⁷ They explore perceptions about Indigenous culture within a broad frame of how the 'urban' has been represented.⁴⁸ The pair brings together several essays that address histories and contemporary changes to the subject of urban representation. Furthermore, they acknowledge that the term 'urban' remains contested, typically as a result of its binary positioning to desert and remote art, despite the culturally insightful contribution that urban Indigenous art makes to contemporary art discourse.⁴⁹

The decision, therefore, to use the term 'urban' throughout this thesis has been made with much deliberation as to its appropriateness. It is legitimated by its art historical origin and perpetuity in literature from the mid-1980s.⁵⁰ It is a dual identifier of Indigenous artists' geographic positioning in cities or towns and centres, both metropolitan and regional, and their stylistic associations with Western artistic traditions and the implication that these two aspects are not mutually exclusive.

As is further investigated in the final section of this chapter, understanding the relationship between Australia's post-colonial milieu and Indigenous communities and artists, reveals an alternative context with which to consider the term 'urban'. It is imperative to recognise that many urban Indigenous artists identify with particular Indigenous language groups and the associated geographic regions of these groups. It is critical to the understanding of the term 'urban', that historically, through the colonisation of these regions, communities became displaced peoples.

⁴⁷ Kleinert & Koch (eds), *Urban Representations: Cultural Expression, Identity and Politics*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Kleinert & Koch (eds), *Urban Representations: Cultural Expression, Identity and Politics*, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Kleinert & Koch, *ibid.*, pp. 1, 11.

⁵⁰ In his most recent text that surveys the history of Australian Indigenous art, art historian Ian McLean continues to use the term 'urban' to identify artists, see specifically Chapter 7, Ian McLean, 'Post-Identity: Urban Indigenous Art, 1987-2015', in *Rattling the Spears: A History of Australian Indigenous Art*, op. cit., pp. 209-245.

The result of this displacement, in essence, has forced many communities and artists into urban settings. Throughout the thesis, where an artist is introduced for the first time in each chapter, their language group will be identified, in acknowledgment of their heritage that predates colonisation. This identification contributes to a larger dialogue about geographies of colonisation, and provokes reflection on whether the term 'urban' remains either accurate or categorically effective. For ease and consistency, the term will stand throughout this thesis.

Modes of Reference

Transcending Absence

It comes as no surprise that, compared to desert or remote Indigenous art, there is far less literature available on the urban Indigenous art movement per se. There are several reasons for this. The main cause appears to be that, as a mode of Indigenous art, urban art characteristically displays Western conventions and therefore does not 'live up' to the perception of what Indigenous art stereotypically looks like, therefore it requires less attention, less explanation and less criticism. Several key texts address this misconception of authenticity, where commentators highlight desert-based Indigenous art as perceivably more 'real' in Indigeneity; truer in meaning and process than its urban counterpart.⁵¹

Whereas in the popular imagination desert and remote Indigenous art is considered to fulfil a cultural continuum since its pre-contact era, culture for urban Indigenous artists, is thought to be

⁵¹ See Brenda L Croft, 'A Very Brief Bit of an Overview of the Aboriginal Arts/Cultural Industry by a Sort of Renegade or the Cultural Correctness of Certain Issues', *Art Monthly Australia*, supplement, 1992–93, pp. 20–22; Heti Perkins, 'Seeing and Seaming: Contemporary Aboriginal Art', in Michelle Grossman (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 97–103; Sibyl Fisher, 'Fluent in Venice: Curating Australian Indigenous Art Beyond the "Urban/Desert" Paradigm', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonialism*, vol. 17, no. 6, 2015, p. 805, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2014.999816.

lost.⁵² In this sense, urban Indigenous art fails to make clear those visual links epitomised by desert and remote artists in their symbols and iconography that appear in the paintings on rock walls from earlier generations, and in bark paintings and canvases of the modern day. Perceptions of this continuum sit in contrast to the reality of those Indigenous communities who reside in cities and towns or in regional centres.⁵³ The political content of much urban Indigenous art, particularly during its foundation phase, contributed to this distinction, which also discouraged art critics' attention.⁵⁴ Vivien Johnson concurs, arguing that mainstream society's insufficient understanding of inherent Aboriginality, despite the agency with which urban Indigenous communities sought to express this, had initially thwarted accepted urban representations.⁵⁵

Susan Kennedy Zeller, curator of Native American art, looks more precisely at some of the issues outlined above in her art historical thesis *Contemporary Aboriginal Art 1948–2000: Constructing the Canon*.⁵⁶ Here she reflects on the reception of the Australian Indigenous art movement as it attempted to penetrate the art market in the United States of America. Zeller considers how the canon of Australian Indigenous art comprises invented definitions of authenticity and that such definitions fail to include urban Indigenous art.⁵⁷ Zeller claims that, in the shadow of the success of the dominant desert-based Indigenous art, urban Indigenous art may be characterised by eclecticism due to a lack of overarching cultural parameters and the

⁵² See Annette Hamilton, 'Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asia and the National Imaginary', *Australian Cultural History*, no. 9, 1990, pp. 14–35; Wally Caruana, 'Artists in the Town and City', in *Aboriginal Art*, 3rd edn, Thames and Hudson, London, 2012, pp. 194.

⁵³ Neville T Bonner, 'Araṅjara: Opening Address', in Dieter Riemenschneider and Geoffrey V Davis (eds), *Araṅjara: Aboriginal Culture and Literature in Australia*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1997, p. 5; Lorraine Gibson, 'Art, Culture and Ambiguity in Wilcannia, New South Wales', *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2008, pp. 119–28; Vivien Johnson, 'Poetic Justice', *Art & Text*, no. 42, 1992, pp. 34–37.

⁵⁴ Roger Benjamin, 'The Brush with Words: Criticism and Aboriginal Art', in Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* op. cit., p. 469.

⁵⁵ Vivien Johnson, 'Poetic Justice', op. cit. See also Catherine De Lorenzo, 'Redfern Resistance', in Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2009, pp. 713–717.

⁵⁶ Susan Kennedy Zeller, *Contemporary Aboriginal Art 1948–2000: Constructing the Canon*, PhD thesis, Columbia University, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2002.

⁵⁷ Zeller, *ibid.*, pp. 209–210.

presence of individualistic styles.⁵⁸ She concludes that only exceptional urban Indigenous artists might constitute an urban Indigenous art canon.⁵⁹ However, the definition or measure of such exceptionality is problematic.

Zeller's research of Australian Indigenous art from 1948 to 2000, comes with a bias and a limitation – in that it essentially draws on the influence and inroads made within a United States art market. Consequently, the influence of urban Indigenous art within such an environment was found to be minimal. However, if the filter of location is removed, it is evident that in the focus period of 1984 to 2017, urban Indigenous art expanded broadly within the international art world. It gained exposure first in Portsmouth in 1987, followed by Venice, Montpellier, Glasgow and Massachusetts in 1990, and escalated to include a host of countries throughout the last decade of the twentieth century. The engagement of urban Indigenous art within the global art economy greatly increased following the millennium as the movement consolidated.

A shift in the visibility of urban Indigenous art occurred most notably as it was included within the supporting literature to exhibitions, namely in the form of exhibition catalogues and reviews of exhibitions. When viewed retrospectively, it is evident that the importance of this literature is that it documents the transition of the urban Indigenous art movement from its restricted genesis, understood in contradistinction to the evolution of desert and remote Indigenous art, into the broad spectrum that is contemporary art today. Additionally, exhibitions are also often complemented by significant literature on specific artists and their work. However, just how exhibition catalogues contribute to understanding the development of urban Indigenous art in aesthetic terms specifically, may best be assessed by considering them within each of the

⁵⁸ Zeller, *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁵⁹ Zeller, *ibid.*

chapters that follow. This way the critical literature can be considered in conjunction with specific examples of artworks, exhibition literature will be reviewed in each of the substantive chapters as appropriate.

Chronology, Anthology and Sporadically Located

The survey of the available literature specific to urban Indigenous art exposes a pattern in which key texts appear to follow one of three structures. The first is chronological, whereby urban Indigenous art is *always* positioned at the end of 'the story', encouraging the perception that it is merely an addendum to a 'real' Indigenous art that spans millennia. A good example of this structure is Howard Morphy's *Aboriginal Art*, published in 1998. It offers a final chapter titled 'Contemporary Developments: Aboriginal Art and the Avant-Garde', which includes discussion of how various urban artists such as Trevor Nickolls (Ngarindjeri), Judy Watson (Waanyi), Gordon Bennett and Fiona Foley (Badjara) slot into a contemporary frame of reference.⁶⁰ The author's qualitative examples of urban Indigenous art support his view that Aboriginal art sits outside avant-garde, modernist and primitive paradigms, as he considers authenticity, location, identity, style, politics and history as the measures of contemporaneity. Whilst Morphy's data is informative, it is, however, brief.

Another example is *Aboriginal Art*, written by Wally Caruana and published in 2012. His chapter 'Artists in the Town and City' comes at the end of a publication devoted to the major sites of Indigenous art production around Australia. After discussion of Arnhem Land, the desert, the Kimberley, North Queensland and the Torres Strait, it seems natural for Caruana to turn his attention to the 'towns and cities'. Like Morphy's, Caruana's account of urban art is qualitative;

⁶⁰ Howard Morphy, 'Contemporary Developments: Aboriginal Art and the Avant-Garde', in *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, pp. 369–420.

however, his approach is perhaps more general, providing an overview of the movement. He says, 'by implicitly questioning and challenging contemporary attitudes, [the artists] articulate the concerns and aspirations of Aboriginal people in modern society'.⁶¹ The chapter does, however, highlight a socio-political element rather than a contemporary current, promoting the idea that urban Indigenous art is subversive in nature, and that it challenges and questions in a way that articulates Indigenous experience.⁶²

Susan McCulloch's 2008 edition of *Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guide* follows a similar format with a final chapter titled 'Into the New: City-Based and New Media Art', in which she offers a brief chronological description of the development of urban Indigenous art, followed by a long, ineffectual alphabetical list of its artists.⁶³ Again the chronological format is found in Sasha Grishin's seemingly extensive *Australian Art: A History*. In the very last section of the monumental publication, four half pages convey the history of the emergence of urban Indigenous art.⁶⁴ Grishin intersperses this history with biography and the description of a number of individual achievements and works. While it does provide a brief outline of those artists associated with the movement, it is positioned within the category of 'Postmodern and Postcolonial Australia', and the author fails to reconcile the passage critically with the context of the section.

Ian McLean's more recently published *Rattling Spears: A History of Australian Indigenous Art*, subscribes to this chronological format also, with 'Post-Identity: Urban Indigenous Art, 1987-

⁶¹ Caruana, 'Artists in the Town and City', op. cit., p. 222.

⁶² Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, op. cit., pp. 194–222.

⁶³ Susan McCulloch & Emily McCulloch Childs, *McCulloch's Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guide*, new edn, McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, Fitzroy, Victoria, 2008.

⁶⁴ Sasha Grishin, 'Indigenous Art from Arnhem Land and Urban Australia', in *Australian Art: A History*, op. cit., pp. 264–267.

2015' positioned as the final chapter in his art historical account of Australian Indigenous art.⁶⁵ The chapter follows a well-established pattern, and McLean's contribution does pay specific attention to the aesthetic side of those urban Indigenous artists he includes. He offers some valuable insight to their styles and conceptual motivations that reflect at times on historical and biographical influences. With the inclusion of visual examples, McLean establishes the shared 'strong historical consciousness' of urban Indigenous artists as the distinguishing feature informing their art.⁶⁶ This he uses to position urban Indigenous art within a context of contemporary art, which he explains was accessible from the late 1980s, due to an ascending equality extended to non-Western artists for the first time in Australia.⁶⁷ McLean goes on to consider various media, subjects and ideas, yet contrary to the function of the chapter itself, concludes that no boundaries secure urban Indigenous art; that it 'defies categorization'.⁶⁸

In each instance, the chronological approach to literature provides a degree of insight, in that urban Indigenous art is always positioned in relation to desert and remote Indigenous art. This perpetuates its dependence on the dominant mode. Also, authors appear to address some of the key motivating features of urban Indigenous art, but again, due to its position within the literature, these are consistently contrasted to its desert and remote counterpart.

The second structure that texts tend to follow is anthology-based, whereby a collection of urban Indigenous art texts are grouped together under a thematic banner within a much larger text, ultimately limiting the breadth of the movement itself. An example is the eminent anthology *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, edited by Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale,

⁶⁵ Ian McLean, 'Post-Identity: Urban Indigenous Art, 1975-2015', op. cit., pp. 209-245.

⁶⁶ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 211.

⁶⁷ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 209.

⁶⁸ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 245.

published in 2000.⁶⁹ It provides some critical primary and secondary sources, and contextualises urban Indigenous art under the banner of 'Renegotiating Tradition'. This section is partly devoted to a chronology of urban Indigenous art, and partly devoted to highlighting the main concerns of urban Indigenous artists and the themes that inform their work that are alternative in nature to those of desert artists, implied by the title. Margo Neale's essay, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas' charts the community movement of artists and subsequent provocations toward self-representation.⁷⁰ However, this focus on urban Indigenous art equates to approximately six per cent of the book's content, and the thirty pages of text are a minute portion of its total 491 pages.⁷¹ In addition to Neale's contribution to this chapter, its focus is limited to genres of political art, photography, poster making and sexuality. The chapter is historically comprehensive, but little is revealed about the specific aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art.

Another example is the art historical text by Ian McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*. Whilst this is an important resource intrinsic to understanding Indigenous art as a contemporary art phenomenon, its anthology-based structure places the topic of urban Indigenous art itself in a small section titled 'Urban Australia' under the subheading 'Zones of Engagement'.⁷² Here McLean presents eight short extracts from a range of artists, writers and critics who 'consider the reception of Aboriginal art in relation to broad but distinct zones', urban Australia being one of them.⁷³ Whilst the multi-author extracts comprise a mere ten and a half pages of text out of an approximate 342 in total, McLean does, however, expose readers to the central ideas that: urban art recognises diversification between art and the Aboriginal experience;

⁶⁹ Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Margo Neale, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas', op. cit., pp. 267–277.

⁷¹ This text is divided into two sections: the first is chapter based (491 pages), whilst the second section is a dictionary of Indigenous art.

⁷² Ian Mclean (ed.), 'Zones of Engagement', in *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, Brisbane & Sydney, 2011, pp. 146-159.

⁷³ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 115.

that representations of Aboriginality should be controlled by Aboriginal people; and that Aboriginal art is relevant to the discourse of national identity.⁷⁴ The aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art is not referenced in relation to these ideas, however.

The third example of how urban Indigenous art is structured textually is in the form of scattered literature. This is when urban Indigenous art is sporadically referred to within a text, making it difficult to ascertain a cohesive picture of the movement. Relevant sporadic content is most prevalent in periodicals or journals. Both Michael O'Ferrall and Ian McLean briefly discuss the contribution art journals have made through articles containing urban Indigenous art content, agreeing that *Artlink*, *Art Network*, *Art and Text* and *Praxis M.* most consistently promoted the urban Indigenous art movement, particularly throughout the 1990s.⁷⁵ Whilst O'Ferrall and McLean spotlight such publications that contributed to the discourse of urban Indigenous art, what is found is a field of relevant literature that is irregularly located across a broad time frame.

One of the earliest examples of a journal article pertaining to urban Indigenous art is Vivien Johnson's review of the exhibition she assisted in coordinating, *Koori Art '84* held at Artspace in Sydney, published in *Art Network* in 1985.⁷⁶ Johnson's review extended concepts raised in the original exhibition's catalogue essays surrounding politics, experience, the impact of European artistic traditions within art school education taken by urban Indigenous artists, as well as Aboriginality and identity. She proposed that, following *Koori Art '84*, the local art world was on the verge of an aesthetic revolution in which Aboriginality had been unmasked.⁷⁷ Johnson referenced an imminent change in Indigenous aesthetics, but little critical commentary followed,

⁷⁴ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷⁵ O'Ferrall, *On the Edge: Five Contemporary Artists*, *op. cit.*, p. 8; McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

⁷⁶ Vivien Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', *Art Network*, no. 15, 1985, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *ibid.*

as limited journal articles on urban indigenous art appeared in the second half of the 1980s. As the number increased during the 1990s, there appeared to be some support as urban Indigenous art production proliferated.⁷⁸ However, to assume that an increase in available literature would result in a categorical understanding of the movement is premature, because what is found instead is a large miscellany of contexts in which such journal-based literature materialised, rather than any cohesive discourse regarding the mode and aesthetic of urban Indigenous art.

To indicate the contextual diversity inherent in this type of literature, several examples are drawn on. For instance, in consecutive issues of *Art & Text*, whilst John Neylon reviews an Ian Abdulla (Ngarrindjeri) exhibition at Tandanya during mid-1991, juxtaposing Abdulla's biography with a discussion of his style, Johnson elaborates on the theme of Aboriginality with a social emphasis in her article 'Poetic Justice' that affirms visibility through action.⁷⁹ Another example reveals a reflective Brenda L Croft in her article 'A Postcard from Sydney', in which she considers education and exhibition opportunities available to herself and fellow artists based in Sydney as a means of profile building.⁸⁰ After preliminary discussion surrounding the issue of 'authenticity', she contemplates support networks within the arts and questions what the future might hold for urban-based Indigenous artists.⁸¹ However, the article 'Learning to Understand: Art Helps to Dispel Ignorance', in the same volume of *Artlink*, could not be more contrary, where urban Indigenous artist Bronwyn Bancroft shares her personal thoughts on the issue of AIDS awareness and discusses a series of works she created on this topic.⁸² The subject of the

⁷⁸ Ian McLean considers briefly, statistics from the 1990s, in which urban Indigenous artworks appeared in Australian art journals, see Ian McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Artworld', in *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁷⁹ John Neylon, 'Ian Abdulla', *Art & Text*, no. 41, 1992, p. 94; Johnson, 'Poetic Justice', *Art & Text*, no. 42, 1992, pp. 34-37.

⁸⁰ Brenda L Croft, 'A Postcard from Sydney', *Artlink*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1994, pp. 47-51.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Bronwyn Bancroft, 'Learning to Understand: Art Helps to Dispel Ignorance', *Artlink*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1994, pp. 22-23.

articles is dissimilar, but each directly relates to aspects of urban Indigenous art and its producers. It is evident, therefore, that between 1984 and 2017, as the quantity in literature pertaining to the urban Indigenous art movement increased, so too did its scope.

Since 2010, *Artlink* has released a dedicated 'Indigenous' issue once a year, with an emphasis on contemporary Indigenous art, comprising a wide range of topics pertinent to the movement.⁸³ The dedicated issues cover the breadth of Australian Indigenous art, as well as Indigenous art from other regions. However, as they assist in building an urban Indigenous art-based literature, specific articles remain disconnected in terms of art historical, theoretical and critical subjects, challenging any clear understanding of aesthetic character as a result of the sporadic threads of exclusively urban Indigenous art content. Despite the sporadic content, journals and periodicals are significant for several key reasons. First, they provide clear insight into whom the actors within the urban Indigenous art movement were and are. Second, like exhibition catalogues, they double as both primary and secondary sources. Third, they contribute to retrospective reviews of content. These aspects are all relevant to the process of investigating the aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art.

It is also worth noting here that a recent pause in the Indigenous art market has been attributed to a lack of quality criticism. Nicolas Rothwell draws attention to a market flooded with Indigenous art that has occurred in spite of itself.⁸⁴ He attributes an unease in the marketplace to

⁸³ Daniel Browning (ed.), *Artlink: Blak on Blak*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010; Daniel Browning & Stephanie Radok (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Beauty and Terror*, vol. 31, no. 2, mega issue, 2011; Daniel Browning & Stephanie Radok (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Indignation*, vol. 32, no. 2, mega issue, 2012; Daniel Browning & Stephanie Radok (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Re-Visions*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2013; Carly Lane & Glenn Iseger-Pilkington (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Blackground*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2014; Daniel Browning & Djon Mundine (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Global*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2015; Margo Neale (ed.), *Artlink: Indigenous: Trans Cultural*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2017; Clothilde Bullen & James Tylor (eds), *Artlink: Indigenous: Kanarr Wangkiny Wanggandi Karlto: Speaking from Inside*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2018

⁸⁴ Nicolas Rothwell, 'Aboriginal Art in Decline as Critics and Judges Hold Back', *The Australian*, 4 May 2015, pp. 1–9, viewed 23 July 2015, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/aboriginal-art-in-decline-as-critics-and-judges-hold-back/story-fn9n8gph-1227328653938>>.

a failed critical appraisal of all Indigenous art of which there was no formal or technical grounding regarding quality.⁸⁵ Arts researcher and sociologist, Laura Fisher, concurs, arguing that the lack of quality criticism of Indigenous art is a result of writers not investing in research into Indigenous art and artists, and not reconciling aesthetics and practice, but instead relying on accepted critical language.⁸⁶ With reference to this study, Fisher's observation is apposite.

Besides the articles in periodicals and journals, urban Indigenous art content is also sporadically located within institutional publications. These types of publications are dedicated to promoting works held in institution collections, such as the Queensland Art Gallery's *Brought to Light II: Contemporary Australian Art 1996–2006* or more recently, *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*.⁸⁷ A further example is *Aboriginal Art Collections: Highlights from Australia's Public Museums and Galleries*, which draws on several urban Indigenous works held in various institutional collections from around the country.⁸⁸ These types of publications document key information regarding acquisition and collection trends, but they fail to account for the reasons behind such trends.

The field of literature pertinent to the movement of urban Indigenous art is irregular. This is due to an initial lack of interest in urban Indigenous art, the difficulty to categorise its alternative mode, and then its inclusion within a broad Indigenous art context, and a current of Australian contemporary art. This irregularity has been compounded by a historiography of Indigenous art that has endowed much emphasis and value on its desert and remote counterpart.

⁸⁵ Rothwell, *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Laura Fisher, 'The Art/Ethnography Binary: Post-Colonial Tensions within the Field of Australian Aboriginal Art', *Cultural Sociology*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2012, pp. 263–264.

⁸⁷ Lynne Seear & Julie Ewington (eds), *Brought to Light: Australian Art 1850–1965*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 1998; Miranda Wallace (ed.), *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2010.

⁸⁸ Susan Cochrane (ed.), *Aboriginal Art Collections: Highlights from Australia's Public Museums and Galleries*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 2001.

Understanding the historiography of Indigenous art assists in accounting for the position in literature occupied by urban Indigenous art, which I shall turn to now.

Historiography

From Anthropology and Ethnography to Art History

Early historiography of Indigenous art begins with the writing of Baldwin Spencer, who was interested in what he perceived to be the 'primitive' nature of Australian Indigenous peoples and its associated visual expression.⁸⁹ Spencer's examination of the iconography of rock and bark paintings in the Arnhem Land region propelled ethnographic interest in Indigenous culture, and this in turn paved the way for explorations by other Western researchers, such as AP Elkin and Frederick McCarthy. The result is a historiography dominated largely by ethnographic or anthropological writing, in which Norman B Tindale and Charles P Mountford, for example, are prominent. Individually and collaboratively, their fieldwork centred on Indigenous art and culture and yields a body of literature that spans in excess of sixty years.⁹⁰ Anthropological interest in Australian Indigenous art continued with Fred R Myers's fieldwork with the Pintupi,⁹¹ Howard Morphy's fieldwork with the Yolngu⁹² and Françoise Dussart's fieldwork with the Warlpiri.⁹³

⁸⁹ Baldwin Spencer published various texts on Australian Indigenous culture that drew on art forms including Baldwin Spencer, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1914, viewed 5 March 2016, <<https://ia601408.us.archive.org/18/items/cu31924028623076/cu31924028623076.pdf>>; Baldwin Spencer, *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, Macmillan, London, 1928. See also discussion in Luke Taylor, 'Rock Art as Inspiration in Western Arnhem Land', in Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 113–114.

⁹⁰ Early anthropological/archaeological texts can be traced back to Herbert M Hale & Norman B Tindale, 'Observations on Aborigines of the Flinders Ranges and Records of Rock Carvings and Paintings', *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1925, pp. 61–102; and later Norman B Tindale, 'Kariara Views on Some Rock Engravings at Port Hedland, Western Australia', in South Australian Museum, *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol. 21, 1987, pp. 43–63. Note the span of Charles P Mountford's literary contribution with one of his earliest published texts, Charles P Mountford, *Aboriginal Crayon Drawings: Relating to Totemic Places Belonging to the Northern Aranda Tribe of Central Australia*, Royal Society of South Australia, Adelaide, 1937; and much later Charles P Mountford, *Dreamtime Stories for Children*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1983.

⁹¹ Documented in Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002.

⁹² See Howard Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991; Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008.

⁹³ See Françoise Dussart, 'Canvassing Identities: Reflecting on the Acrylic Art Movement in an Australian Aboriginal Settlement', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 30, 2006, pp. 156–168.

Between the years of Spencer's first encounters in Central Australia and those of his twenty-first-century contemporaries, the trajectory of the historiography of Indigenous art altered. This was most notable with the Art Gallery of New South Wales's acquisition of Tiwi and Yolngu artworks in 1959.⁹⁴ In making this acquisition, Tony Tuckson, Deputy Director of the AGNSW at the time, assisted in displacing the anthropological paradigm that had dominated Indigenous art for so long.⁹⁵

The subsequent shift in focus of Indigenous material culture from anthropology to art is well documented, particularly in how the exhibition of such has evolved.⁹⁶ The literature communicates various entry points to Indigenous art made by public art museums and galleries, as distinctions between art and artefact were strengthened throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Also during this period, opinions circulated regarding the genre of art to which Indigenous art specifically belonged. Continuing in the tradition pioneered by Spencer, the idea that it belonged to primitivism tended to prevail.⁹⁷

In stark opposition to primitivism, through the 1980s and 1990s, theories regarding the categorisation of Indigenous art evolved. In his anthology *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of*

⁹⁴ See Howard Morphy, 'Placing Indigenous Art in the Gallery', in *Becoming Art*, op. cit., p. 181.

⁹⁵ Morphy, *ibid.*; see also Michael O'Ferrall, 'From Primitive Art to ...? A Changing Aesthetic', in *On the Edge: Five Contemporary Artists*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁹⁶ See Catherine De Lorenzo, Joanna Mendelssohn & Catherine Speck, '1968–2008: Curated Exhibitions and Australian Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 4, 2011, pp. 11–14, viewed 10 August 2015, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/de-lorenzo-et-al_paper-ed.pdf>; Ron Radford, 'Acquiring and Presenting Aboriginal Art in Art Museums: My First 30 Years' as part of 'Sharing Our Common Wealth: Cultural Institutions: 41st Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 4, 2011, pp. 1–11, viewed 10 August 2015, <<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/radford-document1.pdf>>; Philip Jones, 'Art and Manufactures: Inventing Aboriginal Craft', in Norris Ioannou (ed.), *Craft in Society: An Anthology of Perspectives*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, Western Australia, 1992, pp. 131–152.

⁹⁷ A concise history of how primitivism was ascribed to Australian Aboriginal art is covered in Philip Jones, 'Perceptions of Aboriginal Art: A History', in Peter Sutton (ed.), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, The Asia Society Galleries, USA, 1988, pp. 143–179; Howard Morphy, 'Cross-Cultural Categories and the Inclusion of Aboriginal Art', in *Becoming Art*, op. cit., pp. 1–21; Ian McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Artworld', op. cit., p. 18; Wally Caruana, 'Black Art on White Walls? Institutional Responses to Indigenous Australian Art', in Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., p. 455.

Contemporary Art in 2011, McLean argues that the rise of Aboriginal art occurred independently of the evolution of art in terms of Western understanding.⁹⁸ McLean attributes Papunya as the place where Australia's Aboriginal contemporary art revolution began, and cites the influence of schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon as pivotal to the commencement of the movement.⁹⁹ McLean's text succinctly documents forty years of historiography since the 1971 events at Papunya, supporting the idea that Indigenous art can only be conceived of as contemporary art, dispelling any pejorative modernist ideas of Indigenous art as primitive.

The major artistic innovation to materialise at Papunya was the practice of designs that were traditionally rendered upon the ground or the body, applied instead with acrylic paints to wooden boards and inevitably to canvas. Papunya's significance as the inaugural site of 'the acrylic age' is discussed in Peter Sutton's *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*.¹⁰⁰ In fact, since 1971, art historical literature pertaining to Australian Indigenous art has been effectively dominated by Indigenous art produced in the desert and remote regions of Australia, as alluded to already within the chapter. As a result, several landmark publications dedicated to desert art seek to illustrate and extrapolate the art historical and cultural phenomenon, including Sutton's eminent publication mentioned. Geoff Bardon's *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, published in 1979, was the first of several titles that he later expanded upon in collaboration with other authors.¹⁰¹ This text and *Papunya Tula: Art of the Western Desert* with diagrams by Judith Ryan, published in 1991, introduce readers to a variety of cultural and spiritual aspects affecting the art from this region, including the importance of Dreaming narratives and landscape features, and the role of

⁹⁸ These concepts are examined throughout McLean, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, op. cit.; however, in his final chapter of the text, titled the same as the book, pp. 333–342, McLean considers these concepts within the parameters of a concise essay.

⁹⁹ McLean, *ibid.*, p. 5 and within the sub-chapter 'Apostles', in *ibid.*, pp. 84–87.

¹⁰⁰ See specifically Christopher Anderson & Françoise Dussart, 'Dreamings in Acrylic: Western Desert Art', in Peter Sutton (ed.), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, The Asia Society Galleries, USA, 1988, pp. 89-142.

¹⁰¹ Later Bardon authored works under his full first name Geoffrey.

kinship systems.¹⁰² Meanwhile, Bardon's magnum opus *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, with James Bardon, historically documents how the community of Papunya artists was formed, replete with anecdotes and stories by Bardon and others. Expanding on the subjects of his earlier texts, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story* explains how meaning and structure presented in the works produced by the Papunya artists.¹⁰³ Dispersed between Bardon's contributions are myriad texts that contribute to the art historical discourse of the desert-based art phenomenon. *Dot & Circle: A Retrospective Survey of the Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings of Central Australia*, which accompanied an exhibition at RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, and also showed at Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide, is an early example.¹⁰⁴ It traces the formative Papunya years and various outcomes, providing a range of visual reproductions with iconographic analyses. Judith Ryan's *Mythsapes: Aboriginal Art of the Desert*, is another, presenting a chronology of the art beginning at Papunya and then expanding out to various other desert regions with a focus upon their respective regional styles.¹⁰⁵

As noted earlier in this chapter, the exhibition catalogue has persisted as both a primary and secondary source in the sphere of art history regarding Indigenous art. Two important desert art exhibition catalogues are the collaborative publications by Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink, *Papunya Tula: Genesis & Genius*, and *Tjukurrjtjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, by Judith Ryan and Philip Batty.¹⁰⁶ The former supported an exhibition shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2000, and presents a range of essays that provide a comprehensive history of

¹⁰² Geoff Bardon, *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1979; Geoffrey Bardon, *Papunya Tula: Art of the Western Desert*, Gecko Books, Marleston, South Australia, 1991.

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, Victoria, 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Janet Maughan & Jenny Zimmer (eds), *Dot & Circle: A Retrospective Survey of the Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings of Central Australia*, Communication Services Unit, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, 1986.

¹⁰⁵ Judith Ryan, *Mythsapes: Aboriginal Art of the Desert*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1989.

¹⁰⁶ Hetti Perkins & Hannah Fink (eds), *Papunya Tula: Genesis & Genius*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2000; Judith Ryan & Philip Batty (eds), *Tjukurrjtjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2011.

Papunya's emergence as an art centre, the impact of the artists and administrators involved in building and contributing to an art market, and insight into the relationship between cultural and visual material.¹⁰⁷ The latter publication supported the 2011 exhibition shown at the National Gallery of Victoria, which toured to France's Musée du quai Branly in Paris in late 2012. In it, Phillip Batty describes how Indigenous art operated within a Western art world in which mediators such as dealers, curators and anthropologists, for example, were responsible for navigating the work between the producers and consumers who represented radically different cultures.¹⁰⁸ Both exhibitions were major retrospectives of Papunya artworks and their catalogues approach the subject of Indigenous art from a position of hindsight, serving to reinforce the contemporary significance of the artists and their work.

Just as Albert Namatjira and other Hermannsburg artists had established unique styles of watercolour in spite of tourist markets and ethnographic appraisals, so too did Papunya artists develop and disseminate contemporary art that was not delimited by such constraints. Other remote communities followed suit. Yuendumu, Utopia, the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and more recently the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands all made significant headway in their development as desert or remote contemporary art centres. From each of these communities, many artists have achieved success and have been the subject of much art historical and critical literature.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Perkins & Fink, *Papunya Tula: Genesis & Genius*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Philip Batty, 'Anxious Objects: Searching for the Origins of the Early Papunya Paintings', in Ryan & Batty, *Tjukurrjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art*, op. cit., pp. 64–65.

¹⁰⁹ One need only consider the record auction sales of artists such as Rover Thomas, Emily Kame Ngwarreye and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, along with large-scale monographs such as *Emily Ngwarreye Paintings*, *Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri*, and *Rover Thomas: I Want to Paint* in order to glimpse an image of their success in terms of economic power, celebration and genius. Auction prices are discussed in Paul Bibby, 'Meet the Million-Dollar Man', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 May 2007, viewed 13 June 2012, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/meet-the-million-dollar-man/2007/05/24/1179601579351.html>>; Stuart Rintoul, 'Clifford Possum Artwork Sells for Record Price', *news.com.au*, 25 July 2007, viewed 13 June 2012, <<http://www.news.com.au/top-stories/clifford-possum-art-sells-for-24m-record/story-e6frfkp9-1111114031762>>.

Cross-Cultural Exchange

The literature discussed above is largely historical and it privileges desert or remote communities as sites of creativity. In doing so, it confers artists' roles in the Indigenous art market, as an aesthetic relationship between iconography, symbolism and autobiography is expressed. It also invites consideration of Papunya as a recent example of artistic and cultural exchange between Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous agents. However, in terms of exchange, Papunya did not set a precedent. Exchange is documented as early as the late-nineteenth century, however, it was the mid-twentieth century points of contact that emerged between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, which impacted on the historiography that eventually formally recognised Indigenous art as art. Notable were the crayon drawings by artists at Yirrkala, commissioned by anthropologist Ronald Berndt in 1947 to portray stories, documented in separate publications by Gillian Hutcherson and John E Stanton.¹¹⁰ Margo Neale refers to the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land (AASEAL), during which time Charles Mountford and his team collected around 500 commissioned artworks with the very decisive objective that the works be considered artistic rather than ethnographic.¹¹¹ Barks from this collection were gifted to various state gallery institutions and ultimately pioneered some of the first art historical perspectives on artistic output that had, up until this time, been exclusively ethnographic.¹¹²

Punctuating ethnographic discourse in the preceding decade was the development of the Hermannsburg School of watercolour. Alison French's monograph *Seeing the Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira, 1902–1959* illuminates the influence and cultural exchange between Western

¹¹⁰ Gillian Hutcherson, *Djalkiri waṅga = The Land is My Foundation: 50 Years of Aboriginal Art from Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land*, University of Western Australia and Berndt Museum of Anthropology, Nedlands, Western Australia, 1995; John E Stanton, 'Singing the Land: the Crayon Drawings on Brown Paper Collected by Ronald M and Catherine H Berndt', in Margie West (ed.), *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang'kawu*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2008, pp. 116–137.

¹¹¹ Margo Neale, 'Charles Mountford and the "Bastard Barks": A Gift from the American-Australian Expedition to Arnhem Land, 1948: Mountford Expedition Works', in Seear & Ewington (eds), *Brought to Light: Australian Art 1850–1965*, op. cit., pp. 210–217.

¹¹² Mountford pledged 144 barks to Australia's six state galleries at the time. See Neale, *ibid.*, p. 210.

artist Rex Battarbee and Indigenous artist Albert Namatjira.¹¹³ Namatjira's success with the medium of watercolour inspired various other Indigenous artists to follow his lead in the tradition of Western watercolour painting.

A much earlier example of art and exchange is the toas of Killalpaninna, a collection of 400 painted sculptural works made of wood, gypsum and various other media.¹¹⁴ Philip Jones's publication *Art and Land: Aboriginal Sculptures of the Lake Eyre Region* considers the circumstances under which the toas were produced and questions the influence of emerging ethnographer Pastor Johann Georg Reuther, a missionary at the time who amassed the collection of toas in 1907.¹¹⁵ The toas are currently held in the Aboriginal Material Culture Collection at the South Australian Museum (SAM) and, like many other items in the collection, generate perceptions of their meaning that oscillate between artistic and ethnographic. They are aesthetic works, yet are accorded an ethnographic context, both in their collection in 1907 and their role in the museum's current display. This duality is also reflected in the *Yuendumu Doors*, a collection of thirty doors painted with mythological imagery by a number of Indigenous artists in the settlement of Yuendumu in 1983–1984, also held in the SAM. Anthropologist Eric Michaels explains that the doors are more than just the product of a cultural exercise, however. He argues in *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons*, that they exhibited issues and images being negotiated within postmodern discourse in Western cultural centres.¹¹⁶ Whilst their distinct Warlpiri designs related ceremonially and geographically to the Yuendumu community, he explains that they were also a statement about the juxtaposition of contemporary

¹¹³ Alison French, *Seeing the Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira 1902–1959*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002.

¹¹⁴ Philip Jones, 'The Toas of Killalpaninna', in Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 254–255.

¹¹⁵ Jones, *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Eric Michaels cites Sydney, Cologne and New York in Eric Michaels, 'Western Desert Sandpaintings and Postmodernism', in *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994, pp. 48–60. See also Warlukurlangu Artists, *Kuruwarri: Yuendumu Doors*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1987.

and traditional art in society.¹¹⁷ The doors, though they were composed of Warlpiri iconography, their painterly technique, material and application aligned them with early contemporary art, particularly neo and abstract expressionism where meaningfulness was observed yet not translated.¹¹⁸

In reviewing the historiography of Indigenous art, it has been established that the literature privileges the changing classification of Indigenous art from an anthropological or ethnographic context, to one of art. The literature also acknowledges the importance of authorship with regard to the visual expression of culture and how professional and cultural exchange has contributed to Indigenous art production. Notably, this has involved the engagement between ethnographer and Indigenous artist. Anthropologist, Howard Morphy, summarises the overall shift in classification as one that reflects the 'changes in Western conceptions of what art is.'¹¹⁹ Morphy's assertion is underpinned by inclusivity, a product that he contends is a result of intrinsic factors of critique, classification as well as commodification that have changed.¹²⁰ Moreover, he claims that it precisely from this position that the agency of Indigenous artists has ultimately been enabled.¹²¹ Urban Indigenous art has typically remained in the shadows of its desert and remote predecessor, yet Morphy's argument applies to both modes of Indigenous art.

Politics and Decolonisation

The pattern of focus that positions urban Indigenous art chronologically, as emerging *after* the rise of desert or remote Indigenous art, as a feature of anthology, or sporadically, predominantly

¹¹⁷ Michaels, *ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹⁸ Michaels, *ibid.*, p. 57. The *Yuendumu Doors* are also considered further in the context Michaels describes by Wendy Brady, 'Framing Aboriginal Art at the Museum of Sydney', in Lynda Jessup & Shannon Bagg (eds), *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, as part of the Mercury Series: Canadian Ethnology Service: Paper 135, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Quebec, 2002, pp. 27–36.

¹¹⁹ Howard Morphy, 'Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery', *Humanities Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2001, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Morphy, *ibid.*, p. 37.

¹²¹ Morphy, *ibid.*, p. 38.

within art journals, offers limited insight to the aesthetic specificity of the urban Indigenous art movement. However, when the focus is shifted from art historiography to subject, in particular the socio-political subject, the spectrum of sources relevant to understanding urban Indigenous art and its aesthetic becomes much richer. Consequently, by acknowledging the prioritisation of a socio-political subject, the field of literature expands.

Within this new field of literature, two clear, but not mutually exclusive threads are evident. On the one hand, the locus of socio-political art is firmly within the Western canon of art, discernible first in the avant-garde of the mid-nineteenth century and continuing to the present day. For example, Realism, Modernism, Constructivism and various other movements, despite their aesthetic differences and alternative objectives, have each been engendered by the socio-political subject. These movements have often been motivated by pivotal moments in history, such as revolution and war, but also by more nuanced aspects such as social inequality, machine-age developments and industrialisation, racism, communism and disillusionment. In short, there has consistently been an abundance of socio-political art that responds to the environment of the time, the momentum of which has continued into the twenty-first century.

Curator, Pedro Alonzo, has provided a comprehensive art historical summary of the various socio-political influences on art in Western society, underscoring just how profound these have been.¹²² This convergence highlights the function of socio-political art as agency, a concept that is addressed throughout the anthology *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism*. In the context of socio-political art, the role of a contemporary artist is interchangeable with that of an activist.¹²³ Designer and writer, Liz McQuiston, has extended this idea, looking specifically at how art and

¹²² Pedro Alonzo, 'Anger is Energy', in Robert Klanten et al., *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism*, Gestalten, Berlin, 2011, p. 217.

¹²³ Klanten et al., *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism*, *ibid.*

design in the twenty-first century have propelled socio-political change. Contemporary artists, she claims, have responded to certainties, actions and aggressions such as collapsed economies, political chaos, global terrorism and ill-conceived wars, which all blur the boundaries between art and activism.¹²⁴ Dissent is located as a key position within contemporary art, which is frequently engendered by the socio-political subject.

Given the historical, social and cultural hierarchies within art, the other thread, however, while also related to position, is one of exclusion. Australian urban Indigenous art has been typically omitted from, or relegated to, the sidelines of the Western canon of art. It has tended to reside here, along with its desert or remote counterpart, Indigenous art of other nations, art of diasporic cultures and other marginalised groups.¹²⁵ Artist and writer Rasheed Araeen explains this positioning of these artists as dependent on how they are viewed or understood in relation to 'the society in which they are located, and whether or not their historical role or what constitutes agency is recognised within the society's mainstream transformational processes.'¹²⁶ In other words, the relegated position of urban Indigenous artists reflects an equally relegated social situation of the Indigenous person, which has been determined by the dominant group, despite the transformative professional practice of art. Art critic, Jean Fisher, has considered this position in relation to Native American Art, contending that when the Native artist speaks as author, knowledges assigned to the colonised destabilise those who have assigned it.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Liz McQuiston, 'Creative Dissent in Context: Technology and Change', in *Visual Impact: Creative Dissent in the 21st Century*, Phaidon Press Limited, London & New York, 2015, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Though an arthistorical canon of Western art exists in a traditional sense in which art produced by the groups outlined is typically excluded, new Art History contends that the canon is constantly under construction. This is a position explored by Hubert Locher, who explains that beyond those genuine works of artists, schools and periods, accepted and endorsed by connoisseurs as exemplary within a tradition of Western art, a canon ultimately remains a system of reference produced in a certain cultural context. See Hubert Locher, 'The Idea of the Canon and Canon Formation in Art History', in Matthew Rampley, et al., *History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, Brill, Leiden & Boston, 2012, pp. 29-40.

¹²⁶ Rasheed Araeen, 'Art and Postcolonial Society', in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Massachusetts & Oxford, United Kingdom, 2011, p. 365.

¹²⁷ Jean Fisher, 'In Search of the "Inauthentic"', in Kymberly N Pinder (ed.), *Race-ing Art History*, Routledge, New York & London, 2002, p. 331.

Morphy offers a solution to remedy the unequal standing of Indigenous art when compared with Western art – that both its history and significance is made accessible for viewers.¹²⁸ Luke Taylor, citing the aesthetics of Australian Indigenous toas, advises that one way this might be achieved, is by making sure aesthetic forms are not dissociated from their social context.¹²⁹ He claims that it is within the aesthetic forms themselves that social values are crystallised.¹³⁰ This notion is extended by art historian and curator Nigel Lendon, who in the context of understanding and appreciating Arnhem Land barks, states, ‘... we expect both the viewer and the artist to bring to the exchange a prior knowledge of the social and mythic space of the narrative, or at least a recognition of the wider reality to which the image refers.’¹³¹ Thus, the implication highlighted by Lendon, is that for Indigenous art to be completely released from any previous preconceptions that deem it ‘other’ (‘primitive’ or ‘exotic’), analytical and interpretative processes must acknowledge its intrinsic histories, social and aesthetic values, and referential realities.¹³² Whereas Morphy, Taylor and Lendon emphasise accessibility, viewing and interpretation as the means to deliver equality, Araeen takes this one step further. He says that it is ‘... fundamentally important that nonwhite artists challenge this white privilege as part of their artistic endeavors.’¹³³ This, Araeen sees as a necessary intervention. It is with such agency that urban Indigenous artists may overcome the canonical space to which they have been denied, due to the forces of ‘othering’.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Morphy, ‘Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery’, op. cit., p. 43.

¹²⁹ Luke Taylor, ‘The Aesthetics of Toas: A Cross-Cultural Conundrum’, *Canberra Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1988, p. 96; see also Morphy, *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³⁰ Taylor, *ibid.*

¹³¹ Nigel Lendon, ‘Visual Evidence: Space, Place and Innovation in Bark Paintings of Central Arnhem Land’, in ‘Colonising the Country’, special issue of *Australian Journal of Art*, vol. 12, 1994-1995, p. 60, quoted in Morphy, ‘Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery’, op. cit., p. 43.

¹³² Lendon, *ibid.*; For comparative international literature, see Steven Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art Media and Identity*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1998; Jennifer Yee, ‘French Theory and the Exotic’, in Charles Forsdick & David Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2009, pp. 185-194; Kimberly N Pinder (ed.), *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, op. cit., 2002; Kirstin Hastrup (ed.), *Other Histories*, Routledge, New York & London, 1992.

¹³³ Araeen, ‘Art and Postcolonial Society’, op. cit.

¹³⁴ Araeen, *ibid.*

These 'othering' forces are the reason why the socio-political subject of urban Indigenous art cannot be evaluated solely with the same dominant lens that has prescribed evaluation of this subject within the Western model of art. The socio-political subject of urban Indigenous art, and Indigenous art more broadly, must be assessed from a position that acknowledges contact histories and colonisation as precisely those forces that have marginalised and 'othered'. Furthermore, it must be recognised that such forces have also contributed to the responses taken up by Indigenous artists in which socio-political subjects dominate. In this regard, decolonial theory provides an appropriate lens with which to assess the socio-political aesthetic that arises in urban Indigenous art.

As a leader in theorising decolonial discourse and methodologies, Maori Education Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges Edward Said's post-colonial discourse on the 'Other'. She notes in particular his rationale regarding the 'construction of ideas about the Orient', in which an interchange between Western scholarly knowledge and an imaginative counterpart has occurred.¹³⁵ Smith protests the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous peoples has been the product of a perpetual imperialist collective memory engendered by collection, classification and representation practices and processes undertaken by and for the West and then reflected back upon the colonised.¹³⁶ In response to Indigenous peoples having been constituted by the West as 'Other', Smith offers decolonial theory as an alternative theory that resists an accepted history of knowledge amassed in the pursuit of 'imperial and colonial practices'.¹³⁷ It is one in which the lacuna of Indigenous histories, specifically from the perspective of the colonised, is highlighted,

¹³⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Introduction', *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2012, p. 2 (1-19); see also Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 1

¹³⁷ Smith, *ibid.*

while at the same time positioning Indigenous histories as a base for research and knowledge that is resistant to and counter to the product of Western discourse.¹³⁸

Both decolonial and post-colonial theories function in a period of post-colonisation, however, the former differs from the latter in so far as it is more than just a deconstruction of meaning in Western scholarship.¹³⁹ Rather, Indigenous presence is privileged in decolonial theory, which not only acknowledges Indigeneity as continuing, but makes audible the Indigenous voice: it reveals, shares, and repeats it.¹⁴⁰ Instead of exclusion, as in being excluded from the Western canon of art, according to decolonial theory, colonised Indigenous populations belong to a global community of peoples in which a collective voice is enabled.¹⁴¹ Smith explains that this collectivity allows colonised communities to transcend 'their own colonised contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages.'¹⁴² *Artlink*, the themed journal on art and culture in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region has in recent years acknowledged this global context. The stated aim of its dedicated 'Indigenous: Trans-cultural' issue, 2017, is 'to explore relations between Indigenous contemporary artists across the world'.¹⁴³ In terms of an art historical trajectory, Neale locates the recent concept of 'multiple modernism' as one that decentres accepted Western modernism and instead projects 'transcultural relations' including those of Indigenous cultures, as engaging with modernity.¹⁴⁴ The publication's previous dedicated Indigenous edition, 'Indigenous: Global', released two years earlier, made the initial step toward this acknowledgement, in which editor Daniel Browning claimed the issue was:

¹³⁸ Smith, *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴² Smith, *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Margo Neale, 'Editorial', *Artlink: Indigenous: Trans Cultural*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁴ Neale, *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

... driven by the need to widen the reach, the retinal surface, the eyeline, of the magazine to include investigations into the largely undocumented recent history of cultural exchange between Indigenous populations here and overseas, of intercultural dialogues about colonialism and the global environment, the 'reframing' of world culture to include Indigenous perspectives and the transnationalism that underpins so much artistic production today.¹⁴⁵

In enveloping international artists in collectivity, global and transcultural experience allows Australian Indigenous artists a platform and access to add Australian Indigenous experience to the shared narrative. Badtjala artist Fiona Foley has stated, 'It's a common history that Aboriginal people are aware of ... Art provides us with an opportunity to talk about our own history ... We're all talking about similar histories.'¹⁴⁶ These shared experiences, and histories, are informed by the subjection to colonisation of lands and culture that have taken place, the denial of sovereignty, and a non-Indigenous society that has determined the status and nature of Indigenous peoples, despite the imperial project having come to a close in many cases.¹⁴⁷

For Smith, decolonial theory involves working from the position of the colonised to take account of the key aspects of: an awareness of the coloniser; recovery of the Indigenous subject; analysis of colonialism; and a struggle or fight for self-determination.¹⁴⁸ These are the hallmarks of decolonial theory and in terms of the production of contemporary art, writer-researcher Rebecca Close, explains that for the last fifteen years, decoloniality has become a tool for more and more artists and thinkers to create the subject of their work.¹⁴⁹ As part of *Diásporas Críticas*, based in Spain and *ArtAsiaPacific*, Close has expanded upon Moroccan philosopher Abdelkébir Khatibi's writing on imperial discourse, Orientalism and postcoloniality, arguing that the subject of decoloniality is one in which an individual, who has been historically constituted, 'de-identifies

¹⁴⁵ Daniel Browning, 'Editorial: Perceiving the Distant', *Artlink: Indigenous: Global*, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ Fiona Foley in 'Fiona Foley: Interviewed by Catriona Moore, May 1992' in Catriona Moore (ed.), *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-90*, Allen & Unwin in association with Artspace, St Leonards and Woolloomooloo, NSW, 1994, p. 207.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, 'Introduction', op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Rebecca Close, 'Constructing Decolonial Subjects', *Art Asia Pacific*, issue 90, 2014, p. 65.

with all dominant political and discursive positions.¹⁵⁰ Instead, she argues that artists explore how representations of colonial histories impact on and determine how the present is experienced.¹⁵¹ Visual culture theorist Irit Rogoff also argues that experience of the present integrates critique. She explains that this is a model of criticality, incorporating awareness of the very thing that has impacted on the present, as the present is taking place and unfolding.¹⁵² In an Australian context, urban Indigenous artists have a propensity to critique history. In this way, creative intervention becomes a practice in which the tenets of colonialism are investigated by artists.¹⁵³

It should not be underestimated how the past is creatively explored and critiqued, contributing to the experience of the present. Artistic intervention with the past is part of a larger maturation of approaching history, and in the Australian context, Professor Marcia Langton affirms the importance of 'alternative views enter[ing] the fray.'¹⁵⁴ These are important for decolonisation, particularly in Australia as it was heading into the 21st century and accepted national myths of peaceful colonial settlement began to be contested and replaced by a narrative of invasion and devastation.¹⁵⁵ Professor Anna Haebich describes how, through counter-histories, various national debates such as Native Title, have provoked crises in both Australia's national consciousness and its identity.¹⁵⁶ Motivating such debate are the new and different

¹⁵⁰ Close, *ibid.*; see also Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Maghreb Pluriel*, Denoël, Paris, 1983; Alison Rice, 'Translating Plurality: Abdelkébir Khatibi and Postcolonial Writing in French from the Maghreb', in Charles Forsdick & David Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2009, pp. 115-125.

¹⁵¹ Close, *ibid.*, p. 66. See also Heather Igliortte, Brenda L Croft & Steve Loft, *Decolonize Me*, Ottawa Art Gallery and The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Ottawa and Oshawa, Canada, 2012.

¹⁵² Irit Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', in *European Institute of Progressive Cultural Policies*, January 2003, viewed 11 April 2018, <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>>.

¹⁵³ Close, 'Constructing Decolonial Subjects', *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁴ Steve Kinnane paraphrases Marcia Langton in 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', in Kaye Price (ed.), *Knowledge of Life: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria, 2015, p. 7 (1-25); see also Marcia Langton, 'Prologue', in Rachel Perkins & Marcia Langton, *First Australians: An Illustrated History*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2008, pp. xxiv-ix.

¹⁵⁵ Anna Haebich, 'The Battlefields of Aboriginal History', in Martyn Lyons & Penny Russell (eds), *Australia's History: Themes and Debates*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2005, p. x.

¹⁵⁶ Haebich, *ibid.*, noted in Kinnane, *op. cit.*

understandings of the past that do not fulfil prescribed colonial narratives. It is in this non-prescriptive space that we also find the artist – an unlikely agent of decolonisation.

While postcolonialism is geared toward recognising the effects that colonisation has had on various cultures and societies, decolonisation on the other hand, is concerned more thoroughly with revealing and dismantling various forms of colonialism.¹⁵⁷ Scrutiny of the latter focuses on exposing the concealed institutional and cultural forces that have continued as markers and makers of colonial power and ideology, despite the achievement of political independence in colonised nations.¹⁵⁸ In defining key concepts within postcolonial studies, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin acknowledge that ironically, the very institutions that sought to resist colonial hegemony, were initially appropriated from the very culture that was colonising.¹⁵⁹ So while postcolonial studies identify how and why this is problematic, it is the project of decolonisation that seeks to change this position and ultimately empower the colonised.

In more recent times, and in relation to contemporary art, institutional vicissitudes provide an illustration of this shift. Yamatji writer and curator Stephen Gilchrist explains in his text, 'Indigenising Curatorial Practice', that while art museums favoured Western art at the expense of devalued bodies of Indigenous knowledge, Western paradigms in collection and display are changing.¹⁶⁰ He points out that, '... in the last two decades shifts in the balance of cultural power have compelled many museums to critically reflect on the way that Indigenous collections are

¹⁵⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3rd edn, Routledge, Oxon, United Kingdom & New York, 2013, pp. 204 & 73.

¹⁵⁸ Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Gilchrist, 'Indigenising Curatorial Practice' in Quentin Sprague, *The World is not a Foreign Land*. Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2014, p. 55 (55-59); see also Christina Kreps, 'Indigenous Curation, Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage' in Laurajane Smith & Natsuko Akagawa (eds), *Intangible Heritage*, Routledge, Oxon, 2008, pp. 316-344.

stored, handled, interpreted and displayed.¹⁶¹ Gilchrist describes how this change reflects a methodological shift from 'cultural preservation to cultural activation', in which Indigenous curators in particular are empowered to protect and promote creativity as their curatorial responsibilities go beyond institutional walls into the communities with whom they seek to engage.¹⁶²

In spite of a postcolonial strategy that has sought, over the last thirty years, to employ and endorse Indigenous curator roles within institutions, Gilchrist suggests that paradoxically, there is a level of strategic essentialism attached to this.¹⁶³ Instead, he advocates for a model in which 'the politics of inclusion through intercultural arrangements of reciprocity and exchange' are incorporated, allowing for the advent of improved discursivity.¹⁶⁴ Paradoxically, this means that while institutions may be Indigenised via internal staff curatorial roles, the art made visible within the institution is nevertheless indicative of a people whose political and economic rights are the result of a legacy of colonialism. In other words, what Gilchrist is suggesting is that the space for discursiveness is an active one premised on curatorial practice that engages artists and communities and in which Indigenous perspectives external to the institution are promoted. Gilchrist believes this will contribute to an Indigenisation of the institution, where alternative zones of autonomy are created.¹⁶⁵ Thus institutions, curators, artists and communities may all potentially become active participants in the process of reframing and re-presentation – and of decolonising.

¹⁶¹ Gilchrist, *ibid.*

¹⁶² Gilchrist, *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Gilchrist, *ibid.*, p. 56; see also Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, op. cit., pp. 96-98.

¹⁶⁴ Gilchrist, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Gilchrist, *ibid.*

In postcolonial Australia, McLean also acknowledges a decolonial turn, identifying in particular 'an alternative New Wave culture'.¹⁶⁶ He locates the commencement of such in the 1960s, and explains that as momentum built, it drew in the art world.¹⁶⁷ He suggests this was marked by resistance and opposition to Australia's 1988 Bicentenary celebrations, along with artists affiliated with Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, who were concerned with establishing a 'militant identity discourse'.¹⁶⁸ Vivien Johnson concurs, noting that cultural changes were occurring as a result of migration from Central Australia to the cities during the 1970s, and that by around the mid-1980s, urban Indigenous artists were amidst the white art world.¹⁶⁹ She explains that their roots were with the generation of those who grew up with the Land Rights movement taking place, and that this essentially provided the context and the inspiration for the early urban Indigenous artists.¹⁷⁰

To return to McLean's 'militant identity discourse', he suggests that it was urban Indigenous artists' objective to promote exclusively Indigenous voices, and in doing so, to determine the boundaries of the discourse, while at the same time rejecting the white art world's established influence and authority.¹⁷¹ In other words, McLean is implying that Indigenous artists wished to set their own agendas regarding their identity. This was achieved by establishing their own voice through a profusion of artwork underscored with a message of Indigenous autonomy.

The identity discourse that McLean describes, translates to the art of other Indigenous cultures. Native American curator Steven Loft explains that Indigenous art is an expression of the right to

¹⁶⁶ Ian McLean, 'Post-Identity: Urban Indigenous Art, 187-2015', op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁶⁷ McLean, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ McLean, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Vivien Johnson (ed.), *Art & Aboriginality 1987*, Aboriginal Arts Australia, Sydney, c.1987, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Johnson, *ibid.*

self-determination.¹⁷² Artists have the potential to assert control of their identity via the 'image' and in doing so, not only subvert oppression, but are liberated from it.¹⁷³ Similarly, Native American Art Historian Jolene Rickard contends that it is through the lens of self-determination that work produced by Indigenous artists is clarified and understood.¹⁷⁴ Ultimately then, self-determination becomes a critical element not only in what is produced by Indigenous artists, but also in how Indigenous art is interpreted by viewers.

McLean cites the exhibition *Tyerabarrbowaryaou: I Will Never Become a White Man*, 1992, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, as a pivotal exhibition in this endeavour.¹⁷⁵ It assisted in consolidating the tone of a collective militant identity discourse, while at the same time demonstrated that the identity politics of urban Indigenous art had taken root at an institutional level in Australia in just five years since the establishment of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative.¹⁷⁶ In terms of the socio-political subject, the six participating artists in the 1992 exhibition – Ian Abdulla, Gordon Bennett, Robert Campbell Jnr (Ngaku), Fiona Foley, Sally Morgan (Palyku) and Paddy Wainburranga (Rembarrnga) – addressed issues arising from Australia's colonial past. These included themes such as the European concept of Terra Nullius and the rationalised slaughter that followed this; oppression; the Stolen Generations; racial segregation; and deaths in custody.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Steven Loft, 'Sovereignty, Subjectivity and Social Action in the Films of Alanis Obomsawin' in Melanie Townsend, Dana Claxton and Steven Loft (eds), *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media*, Walter Phillips Gallery Editions, 2005, p. 64.

¹⁷³ Loft, *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁷⁴ Jolene Rickard, 'Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand', *Aperture* 139, Summer, 1995, p. 51, in Townsend, Claxton & Loft, *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁵ McLean, 'Post-Identity: Urban Indigenous Art, 187-2015', *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

¹⁷⁶ McLean, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Fiona Foley & Djon Mundine, *Tyerabarrbowaryaou: I Shall Never Become a White Man*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992.

Canadian new media artist Dana Claxton has mapped the movement of Aboriginal Canadian video art and in this there is a parallel to the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative. Video In, was established as an artist production centre that became the site for Aboriginal independent media art production.¹⁷⁸ Claxton explains that the discourse that emerged from the works produced in Video In, centred on aspects pertaining to cultural production, as well as race and gender and the effect, both ideological and economic, of dominating non-Indigenous new media art.¹⁷⁹ Critical commentary continued to evolve as other Indigenous moving image production centres are formed.¹⁸⁰ As with Boomalli, Video In's founding members capitalised on their group's works to attract other members and artists. Their works were catalytic in the discussion and focus on the political struggles faced by First Nation peoples.¹⁸¹

The art world has therefore witnessed a disruption to its establishment and its institutions, as urban Indigenous artists, as well as curators, have assisted in Indigenising spaces and challenging preconceptions about Indigenous identity, cultural diversity, histories, perspectives and representation. For Neale, the very nature of urban Indigenous art has been at the centre of this shift, facilitating change via its critical intrusions.¹⁸² But what exactly is the nature of urban Indigenous art? While it is acknowledged within the literature that the socio-political subject features within urban Indigenous art, and that this provides a platform to be critical, explorations into subject and meaning alone cannot adequately account for the changes that have taken place.

¹⁷⁸ Dana Claxton, 'Re:wind', in Townsend, Claxton & Loft (eds), *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media*, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁷⁹ Claxton, *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ Claxton, *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Claxton, *ibid.*

¹⁸² See Neale, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas', op. cit., p. 277.

Summary

This survey of literature has exposed various elements. Significantly, it has established why the term 'urban' is pervasive as an indicator of a mode of distinct practice within Australian Indigenous art, despite fluctuating and divisive classifications of its status by art world proponents. Also, it has explicated that patterns in literature exist in which urban Indigenous art is either absent, or represented chronologically, in anthology, or intermittently. Each of these modes of reference provides access to urban Indigenous art, however, they offer no cohesive picture and therefore restrict understanding of the movement. However, these patterns are not without precedent, and in this regard, the historiography of Indigenous art illuminates why urban Indigenous art is positioned (or absent) from literature in the ways described. As urban Indigenous art has typically been discussed in reference to something other than itself, that is, desert and remote Indigenous art, or later paired with this dominant mode, its assessment as a movement in its own right has therefore been non-existent.

In turning attention to urban Indigenous art as an expression of postcoloniality, the literature reveals that a series of decolonial values are pertinent to understanding the movement as a whole. This is an approach that has not been examined within scholarship and therefore an obvious direction that investigation should take. Until the movement is examined via this alternative mode of enquiry, the revelation and discrete significance of urban Indigenous art will continue to evade us.

Chapter 2

Breakthrough, a New Aesthetic and Collectivity

Introduction

Prior to the mid-1980s, urban Indigenous art was not a definitive movement, either in broad terms of art, or specifically within Indigenous art. Although there was some awareness in the art world of Indigenous artists practising within urbanised environments, there was no established group. The artists generally worked in an individual capacity. As early as the nineteenth century, Indigenous artists William Barak (Wurundjeri/Woiwurung c. 1824–1903) and Tommy McRae (Kwatkwat c. 1840–1901), for example, were producing art in populated colonial areas. Later, Kevin Gilbert (Wiradjuri 1933–1993), Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta 1948–1996), and Trevor Nickolls (Ngarrindjeri 1949–2012), followed. As precursors to the movement, their work was atypical in terms of Indigenous art. Their art practices differed in style from those Indigenous works of art seen throughout the twentieth century, collected by ethnographers in Arnhem Land or produced by desert artists based at Papunya.

When urban Indigenous artists did find opportunities to exhibit, it was generally in a solo format and relatively intermittent. Curatorial trends and patterns positioning 'urban' as an overarching notion were characteristically non-existent. This meant that there were limited opportunities for collaboration and artistic unity among artists. The limitation encountered by artists and their general lack of inclusion within group exhibitions of Indigenous art thus contributed to the movement's absence from visual art discourse. However, urban Indigenous artists were on the verge of a paradigm shift. With minimum art world provision, they sought recognition as they pursued an art form that collectively contested the dominant mode of Indigenous art.

During the foundation phase (mid to late 1980s), group exhibitions ensued, discussion of urban Indigenous art broadened, specific visual features were manifested, and collectivity and exposure of artists occurred. This chapter argues that four key aspects underpinned the agency of urban Indigenous artists during this time, enabling them to effect a new movement within Indigenous art. First is the seminal exhibition *Koori Art '84*, from which a hitherto unformed community of urban Indigenous artists launched a collective identity. The role of curators was instrumental in this process, as was the Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB), both of whom showed support for the artists and their direction. The critical literature that circulated in reference to the exhibition at the time is also addressed and it is argued that various other supporters and commentators assisted in navigating the unique development of urban Indigenous art.

Second is the visual and conceptual elements specific to the urban Indigenous art movement, which began to form an aesthetic base for the artists. Reference is made to three artists who were particularly active at the time: Raymond Meeks (Kokoimudji), Jeffrey Samuels (Ngemba) and Fiona Foley (Badtjala). The establishment of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, located in inner-Sydney's Chippendale, is the third key aspect. Through this artist-run organisation, urban Indigenous artists consolidated on the artist collectivity that had begun in this early phase. The fourth key aspect is the niche role that printmaking workshops and other collectives played, both in facilitating urban Indigenous artists and enabling the dissemination of their new art aesthetic.

The Breakthrough Exhibition: *Koori Art '84*

The exhibition *Koori Art '84*, which took place in Surry Hills, New South Wales, 1984, was executed by a range of art world actors. These included the curators Tim and Vivien Johnson, with the financial support of the Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) that assisted with the mounting of the exhibition, and the participating artists who conceived of the exhibition and were instrumental in its organisation.¹⁸³ In his opening night address, Chicka Dixon, who at the time was chairperson of the AAB, explained 'that [the Board] will certainly be funding contemporary art – as much as we're trying to keep our art alive in the traditional sense. We want to cater for the needs of all Aborigines, not just traditional Aboriginals.'¹⁸⁴ The AAB recognised that an alternative mode of Indigenous art existed and had the foresight to support *Koori Art '84*. The three-way engagement between curators, the AAB and the artists through the execution of *Koori Art '84* put two new pathways in place. One facilitated the inauguration of an Indigenous arts community, based predominantly in Sydney. The other provided artists with the opportunity to promote, in a group format, a mode of art that was alternative to an already familiar desert and remote mode of Indigenous art. Both pathways were pivotal to the inception of the urban Indigenous art movement.

The participating Indigenous artists in *Koori Art '84* were from various backgrounds. Nineteen artists were urban-based, not only from Sydney, but also from Bathurst, Adelaide and Melbourne, while several others were visiting from remote Northern and Central Australia.¹⁸⁵ The majority of artists from the city were self-taught, attending or graduates of art school or adult

¹⁸³ Anthony Lambert, 'Shattering the Myth that Aboriginal Art Exists Only in Traditional Forms', *Australian Artist*, vol. 1, issue 4, 1984, p. 24.

¹⁸⁴ Chicka Dixon quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Those visiting were well-known Arnhem Land artist Banduk Marika and desert artists Ida Nabanunka, Wenton Rubuntja, Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula, Johnny Warangula Tjururrula, along with artists from Ernabella Arts Incorporated. See Margo Neale, 'United in the Struggle', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2000, p. 267.

education classes. Artists Terry Shewring (language group unknown), Darren Beetson (Eora), Euphemia Bostock (Bundjalung), Peter Chester (language group unknown), Isabell E Coe (Wiradjuri), Andrew Saunders (language group unknown) and Jim Simon (Wiradjuri) were connected with the Eora Centre for Adult Aboriginal Education in Redfern, Sydney.¹⁸⁶ Another group, which included Fiona Foley, Fern Martins (Ngarabul/Waka Waka) and Gordon Syron (Biripi/Worimi), had studied at East Sydney Technical College.¹⁸⁷ Raymond Meeks and Jeffrey Samuels had both attended the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Sydney.¹⁸⁸ Avril Quail (Noonuccal) and Michael Riley (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi) both studied at Sydney College of the Arts, whilst Trevor Nickolls attended the South Australian School of Art and Torrens Park College of Advanced Education.¹⁸⁹ Finally, Warwick Keen (language group unknown) studied at Mitchell College of Advanced Education, Bathurst, while Ian Craigie (language group unknown) worked at the Australian Centre for Photography as a darkroom technician.¹⁹⁰ Margo Neale has pointed out that the group of urban-based artists was set apart by the fact that it was not dominated by fine-art educated, middle-class male artists.¹⁹¹ Instead the group represented a 'grassroots' community of learner practitioners.

The urban-based artists' works in this exhibition were relatively eclectic.¹⁹² Wally Caruana explains that this was a result of artists having typically worked in isolation prior to the event.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ Tim Johnson & Vivien Johnson (eds), *Koori Art '84*, Artspace, Surry Hills, New South Wales, 1984, n.p.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.* Fern Martins was known as Fernanda Martins at the time, but wishes to be acknowledged as Fern, personal email correspondence with the artist, 23 May 2016.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.* Although Nickolls attended the South Australian School of Art and Torrens Park College of Advanced Education, he is documented as having worked from a studio in Manly at the time of *Koori Art '84*, see Ulli Beier, *Dream Time-Machine Time: The Art of Trevor Nickolls*, Robert Brown & Associates in association with Aboriginal Artists Agency, Bathurst and Sydney, NSW, 1985, p. 22; also Australia Council, *Annual Report 1984-1985*, Commonwealth of Australia, North Sydney, 1985, p. 132.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

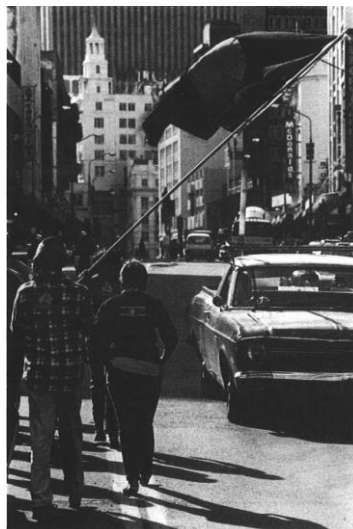
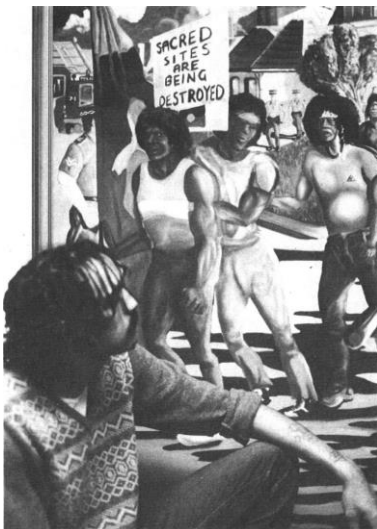
¹⁹¹ Neale, 'United in the Struggle', *op. cit.*

¹⁹² The location of many of the artworks exhibited in *Koori Art '84* remains unknown. Where this is the case, they have been reproduced in black and white, sourced from the original exhibition catalogue, Johnson & Johnson (eds), *Koori Art '84*, *op. cit.*

¹⁹³ Wally Caruana. 'The Art of Urban and Rural Aborigines'. in Göran Burenhult (ed.). *Traditional Peoples Today: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1994, p. 96.

On one hand this resulted in obvious stylistic disparities where comparisons are difficult to draw. Fiona Foley commented on this, asserting that, whilst she identified specifically with her Fraser Island descent, Aboriginal artists come 'from all sorts of socio-economic backgrounds, so their art naturally reflects that'.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, however, the artists shared similar concerns, meaning that, thematically, visual correlations can be made between works in the exhibition. With regard to the *Koori Art '84* artworks, in the earliest phase of urban Indigenous art, three main themes are distinguished: works that are political and emphasise Indigenous empowerment; works that use landscape or geography to connect with place; and works that manifest as personal explorations of self and identity. Raymond Meeks admitted that the works in the exhibition were diverse, yet conceded that, for some artists, their development was analogous.¹⁹⁵ This, he believed, assisted in fostering unity between artists.¹⁹⁶ This unity only contributed further to collective identity.

Politics



(L-R) Figure 1:
Andrew Saunders,
Untitled, c. 1984,
dimensions unknown,
media unknown,
location unknown;
Figure 2:
Ian Craigie,
'A' Day '84, c. 1984,
unspecified photograph,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Lambert, 'Shattering the Myth that Aboriginal Art Exists Only in Traditional Forms', op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ Meeks quoted in *ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁶ Meeks, *ibid.*

Three works representing the first theme of politics and Indigenous empowerment were Andrew Saunders's *Untitled*, c. 1984 (fig. 1), and Ian Craigie's *'A' Day '84*, 1984 (fig. 2), above, along with Gordon Syron's *Judgement by his Peers*, c. 1978–82 (fig. 3), below, which was produced a little earlier, but still exhibited in *Koori Art '84*.¹⁹⁷ They each displayed acute reference to political activism and commentary, through the illustration of marching, placard protesting, and satirical courtroom melodrama. Compositionally, it was the visual placement of Indigenous figures within the works to either dominate or balance each scene that was the most effective means of empowering Indigenous culture. The inclusion of the Aboriginal flag within two of these works was also critical in conveying political meaning geared toward an Indigenous agenda.



Figure 3:
Gordon Syron,
Judgement by his Peers, c. 1978–82,
oil on canvas,
dimensions unknown,
Collection of the artist

By portraying politics in their work, the artists attempted to instigate public awareness of issues such as land rights, inequality and the effects of colonialism. This complemented public recognition that had increased during the 1970s and into the 1980s. In support of the arts and land rights, Dr HC (Nugget) Coombs, for example, was involved in the establishment of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee in 1979 and publicly canvassed support for its cause through media

¹⁹⁷ In the exhibition catalogue this work by Syron is dated 1980, see Johnson & Johnson (eds), *Koori Art '84*, op. cit.; however, in a later article the author dates Syron's work as produced in 1978, see Vivien Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', *Art Network*, no. 15, 1985, p. 56. The work is also dated 1978 on the artist's website, viewed 12 June 2013, <<http://www.gordonsyron.com>>.

networks.¹⁹⁸ Also taking advantage of a media platform, art historian Bernard Smith, in 1980, used the Boyer Lectures to address particulars of settlement, the dispossession of Aboriginal people of their land and the ensuing disruption to culture that they faced. He stated:

The play will continue until [Aboriginal people] gain corporate, unalienable titles to their traditional lands in those cases where they are still dependent upon them, and they also gain as a race adequate reparations to enable them to recover as a people from the debasement and degradation they have suffered for almost two hundred years.¹⁹⁹

Closer attention was being paid to Australia's colonial crimes, past, present and future. Activism and commentary continued to establish platforms in social spaces to promulgate the importance of sovereignty, other issues pertaining to colonialism, and awareness of such. Meanwhile, some urban Indigenous artists found that the art world was an equally viable space to expose political concerns, as later chapters demonstrate.

Place

Key among the landscape and geographically oriented works in the exhibition that connected with place were: Terry Shewring's *40,000 years (awakening)*, 1984 (fig. 4), Jim Simon's *[Untitled]*, c. 1984 (fig. 5), Jeffrey Samuels's *A changing continent*, 1984²⁰⁰ (fig. 6), Fiona Foley's *Sea Shells on the Sea Shore*, 1984 (fig. 7) and *Bush leaves [a and b]*, c. 1984 (not shown), as well as the unfinished painting used for the cover of the *Koori Art '84* catalogue by Saunders, Shewring, Simon and others based at the Eora Centre (not shown).²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Aboriginal Treaty Committee, 'We Call for a Treaty within Australia, between Australians', *National Times*, 25 August 1979, p. 13, AIATSIS Online Exhibitions Archive, viewed 29 October 2013, <http://aiatsis.gov.au/archive_digitised_collections/treaty/docs/atc/m0016284_a.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹ Bernard Smith, 'A Cultural Convergence', in *1980 Boyer Lectures: The Spectre of Truganini*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1980, p. 52.

²⁰⁰ In the original exhibition catalogue, the media for this work is specified as acrylic and ochre on board. See Johnson and Johnson, *Koori Art '84*, op. cit.

²⁰¹ The location of *Bush leaves [a and b]*, c. 1984, and the painting used for the catalogue cover is currently unknown. Reproductions of the three works are of a poor quality and have been omitted.

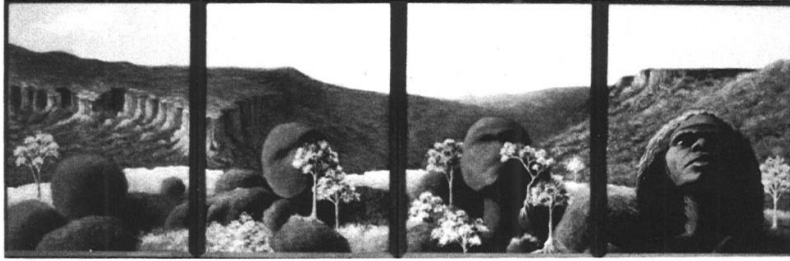


Figure 4:
Terry Shewring,
40,000 years (awakening),
1984,
media unknown,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown.



Figure 5:
Jim Simon,
[Untitled], c. 1984,
dimensions unknown,
media unknown,
location unknown.

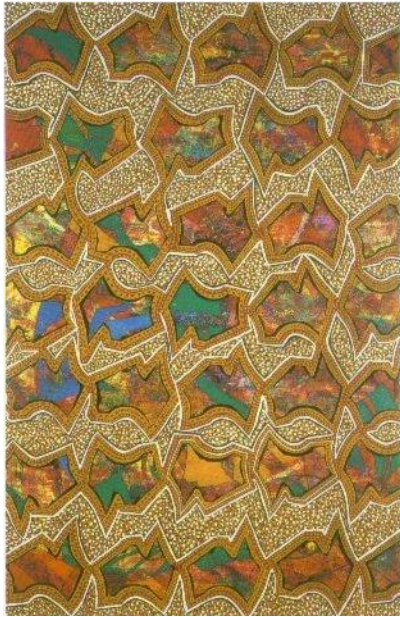


Figure 6:
Jeffrey Samuels,
A changing continent, 1984,
oil on hardboard,
187 x 124.2 cm,
AGNSW Collection.



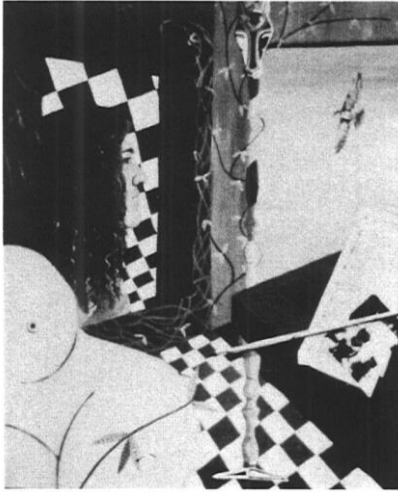
Figure 7:
Fiona Foley,
*Sea Shells on the Sea
Shore*, 1984,
monotype etching,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown.

The artists employed a range of Western art techniques, media and stylistic influences including landscape painting, abstraction, etching and storyboarding. They conflated these with their own unique styles to present original compositions portraying the land and its physical features, and pre-contact origins. Together, subject matter principally related to a concept of place as the origin and engenderment of Indigeneity. The works invoked reflection about how the environment has changed, yet at the same time expressed concern with the importance of the preservation of cultural bonds, despite the inevitability of change brought about by colonisation. These relations and reflections would continue to permeate urban Indigenous artworks in the years that followed, as interrogations about place revealed the socio-political undercurrent of loss, dislocation and displacement.

Self and Identity

Works in the exhibition pertaining to self and identity tended to be figurative. They included Warwick Keen's *Self portrait*, c. 1984 (fig. 8); Murijama's (language group unknown) *Untitled*, c. 1984 (fig. 9); Fern Martins's *Dreaming of the Inland Sea*, c. 1984 (fig. 10); four works by Raymond Meeks including *Wandjina Figure*, 1984²⁰² (fig. 11); Avril Quail's two works *WULULA*, *My Mother's Land*, 1984 (fig. 12), and *Kristina*, c. 1984 (fig. 13); Michael Riley's *Kristina (no glasses)*, c. 1984 (fig. 14); and Trevor Nickolls's *Old Man Dreaming*, c. 1984 (fig. 15).

²⁰² In the original exhibition catalogue, this work is titled *The Wandjina*, dated c. 1984, Johnson and Johnson, *Koori Art '84*, op. cit.



(L-R) Figure 8:
Warwick Keen,
Self portrait, c. 1984,
media unknown,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown;
Figure 9:
Muriijama,
Untitled, c. 1984,
silk screened t-shirt,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown.



Figure 10:
Fern Martins,
Dreaming of the Inland Sea,
c. 1984,
oil and photograph, hand
coloured, dimensions
unknown, location
unknown.

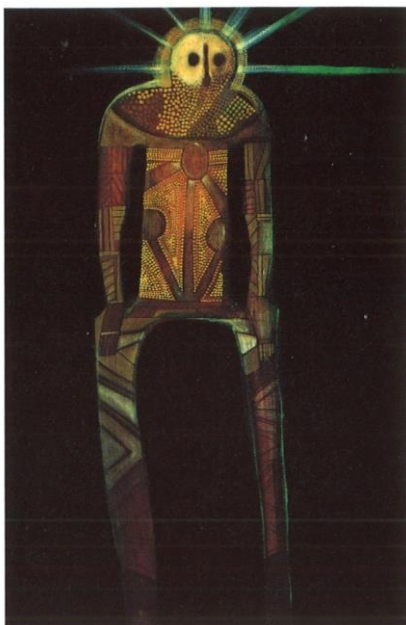


Figure 11:
Raymond Meeks,
Wandjina Figure, 1984,
oil on canvas, 93 x 63 cm,
Collection of Australian Museum.



Figure 12:
Avril Quail,
WULULA, My Mother's Land, 1984,
print and pastel, dimensions
unknown, location
unknown.

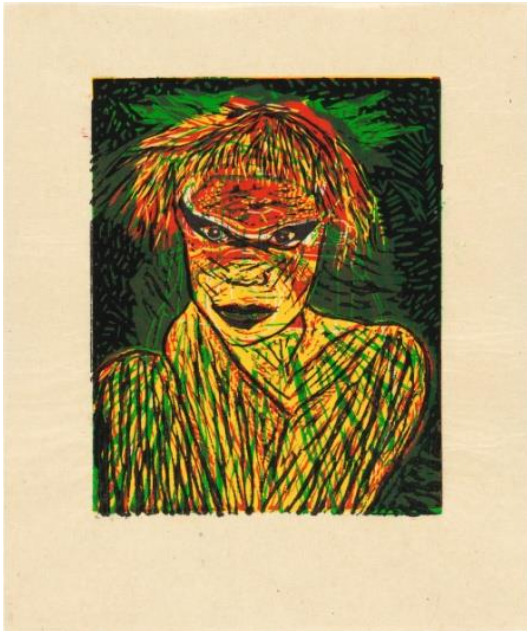


Figure 13:
Avril Quail,
Kristina, 1983,
linocut, edition of 6,
25.4 x 20.4 cm (image),
36.8 x 30.8 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.



Figure 14:
Michael Riley,
Kristina (no glasses), c. 1984,
gelatin silver photograph,
29.7 x 42 cm (image),
NGA Collection.

In many of the self and identity works, like those categorised as connecting with place, Western art practices filtered through. This was particularly so with regard to composition, perspective, expression, style and media used. The artists blended these features with their own unique visual languages, representing their personal concerns to produce a mode of Indigenous art that was not necessarily based on the Creation narratives or totemic content of desert or remote art, yet retained visual links to this at times. Alternatively, aspects of urban-life, heritage, thoughts and identities manifested. Trevor Nickolls describes it thus: 'My painting is a marriage of Aboriginal Culture and Western Culture to form a style called Traditional Contemporary – From Dreamtime to Machinetime'.²⁰³ His description epitomises a synthesised approach to art making that was deliberate and also favoured by other urban Indigenous artists at the time.

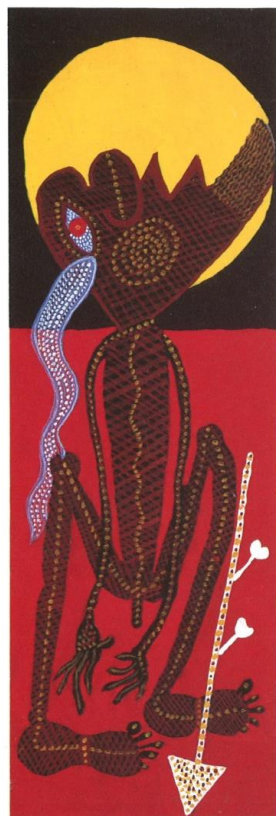


Figure 15:
Trevor Nickolls,
Old Man Dreaming, 1982,
media unknown,
60 x 20.5 cm,
location unknown.
Source: Ulli Beier, *Dream
Time – Machine Time: The Art
of Trevor Nickolls*, Robert
Brown & Associates in
association with Aboriginal
Artists Agency, Bathurst &
Sydney, 1985.

Despite the emergence of artists from art schools, works in the exhibition testify to an obvious disregard of the minimalist and international styles popular at the time amongst mainstream

²⁰³ Nickolls quoted in Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', op. cit.

artists.²⁰⁴ Simultaneously, as stated, the desert-remote Indigenous art mode, that is, acrylics on canvas, or natural pigments on bark, was not rendered by urban Indigenous artists in a customary way, but reworked in conjunction with Western methods to express the personal in varying degrees. Nickolls indicates a 'marriage' of cultures was executed visually, where artwork transcended the merely formal aspects of composition and application of paint upon canvas that linked to deeper spiritual meaning.

The examples above demonstrate that in 1984, urban Indigenous artists brought to the surface alternative representations of contemporary Indigenous experience, where autobiography, history, collective memory and political concerns were pushing into the frame. *Koori Art '84* was a landmark exhibition because each of these features set a collective precedent within Indigenous art. Together, the urban Indigenous artists had established a tangible aesthetic of contrast, from which the movement could proceed.

Review

Unfortunately, the critical response to *Koori Art '84* was limited at the time of exhibition, which reflects the marginalised status of urban Indigenous art in 1984. Only three reviews appear to have been published. In the local Surry Hills *On the Street* newspaper, Rob Miller's 'Koori Art '84' began with a description of the ambience of the venue and then briefly articulated what 'Koori' means.²⁰⁵ He said of the urban Indigenous artists:

Dispossessed of their cultural heritage, yet unable to fully reconcile themselves to the ethnocentric and empirical confines of western culture, they express in oils and acrylics, rather than the ochres of their ancestors, a search for an absorbed identity and a fascination with the mythology, which has been lost to them. What is retained, however,

²⁰⁴ Neale, 'United in the Struggle', op. cit.

²⁰⁵ Rob Miller, 'Koori Art '84', *On the Street*, 19 September 1984, p. 13.

perhaps passed down by word of mouth, are fragments of the forty-thousand year dreaming, before the white 'boat people' arrived, which is their only link to the past.²⁰⁶

Whilst Miller's somewhat patronising account was one dimensional in its criticism of subject and expression, it was typical in the way it articulated a stereotyped view of 'real' Aboriginality.

Despite this, however, it cued readers into some of the bigger issues facing urban Indigenous artists at the time. For example, he introduced dispossession, identity, the use of Western art traditions and how 'traditional' Aboriginal elements were expressed. Miller also introduced an Aboriginal perspective by including a reprint of a lengthy quotation from Bobbi Sykes, which originally appeared as the introduction to the exhibition's catalogue. Sykes's political commentary on colonisation further helped to contextualise some of these issues raised.

Even though Miller's comments do not interrogate the artwork in any formal depth, he was particularly attentive to Trevor Nickolls's *Old Man Dreaming*, which he claimed was 'probably the most successful synthesis of traditional aboriginal and western painting styles'.²⁰⁷ With respect to his previous comments, it appears Miller's opinion of a successful image is one in which the artist's deference to the mythological past and the complexities of their present identity are visually balanced. Whilst personal exploration of the self and identity do comprise one of the primary themes taken up by urban Indigenous artists in this period, execution in terms of how well an artist synthesises traditional and Western approaches to art cannot, however, be used as a measure of an image's success. The 'traditional versus contemporary' binary set up by Miller is not necessary in terms of aesthetic judgement.

Although *On the Street* newspaper had a small circulation, Miller's approach broke ground in the review genre. He demonstrated this in his attempt to justify for readers the visual

²⁰⁶ Miller, *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Miller, *ibid.*

constituents of Nickolls's work. In doing so he activated engagement with work by an urban Indigenous artist, which was lacking elsewhere.

Another short and rather quotation-heavy review appeared in *Australian Artist*, which was mildly descriptive. Perhaps the title and by-line were the most striking: 'Shattering the myth that Aboriginal art exists only in traditional forms: History in the making: this was the mood at the first collective exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art ever to be held in Australia'.²⁰⁸ Despite the author's assumption about *Koori Art '84* being the 'first collective exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art ever', it is the title's reference to 'history in the making', or the inauguration of the exhibition, that provoked a change to perceptions and understanding of Indigenous art. In consolidating the title of the article with the main point of the review, author Anthony Lambert said of the featured works, 'It shattered once and for all the clichéd view that Aboriginal art exists only in traditional forms such as bark, rock and body paintings.'²⁰⁹ Also pertinent was Lambert's observation that, 'despite the Western techniques and materials, the Aboriginality of the majority of works was unmistakable. Many traditional motifs appeared to meld remarkably easily with more modern images and materials.'²¹⁰ He cited Meek's painting *Wandjina Figure* (fig. 11), acknowledging that although the artist was based in Sydney, the work shares an 'affinity with traditional Aboriginal thought'.²¹¹ This 'melding', akin to Nickolls's comments stated earlier, transmitted a sense of the contemporaneity to which the author referred. Lambert did not develop his commentary any further around the concepts of 'history in the making' or the temporal coup regarding the exhibition's contemporary status, but instead included a number of short quotations from several of the artists, the catalogue essayist Dr Bobbi Sykes and the guest speaker at the opening of the exhibition, Chicka Dixon. As with Miller, his article lacked rigorous

²⁰⁸ Lambert, 'Shattering the Myth that Aboriginal Art Exists Only in Traditional Forms', op. cit., pp. 24–25.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ *ibid.*

critique. However, both the essence of the article and its accompanying published images of urban Indigenous art by Meeks, Samuels and Foley effectively illustrated the 'melding' of imagery that signalled a new 'unorthodox' or changing mode of Indigenous art.

In the year following the exhibition, its curator Vivien Johnson contributed a review to *Art Network*. She referred to the artists as 'urbanised' and 'disculturated' and suggested that the exhibition 'marked the emergence of an exciting new Aboriginal graphic tradition'.²¹² Beside her use of terminology that was relatively new to the discourse of Indigenous art, Johnson's review conveyed a clear enthusiasm for the movement in its rudimentary form. Her review was significant because it functioned as an assessment of the exhibition's reception, whilst simultaneously intimating the general opposition that was aroused at the time. She said:

But in the same way that Papunya painting was overlooked or dismissed for nearly a decade by the critical and institutional fraternity of Australian Art, this westernised, overtly political art continues to be written off as either Aboriginal kitsch or a sophisticated fabrication – a simulacrum of Aboriginality.²¹³

This statement established two things. First, that urban Indigenous art was being overlooked, and second, that it was perceived as 'manufactured' Aboriginal art and therefore was an inferior version. Subsequently, Johnson distinguished two loose categories into which work in the exhibition might be placed. On one hand she described those artists who had used their art education to 'employ Aboriginality to resolve issues of content rather than form', and ultimately achieve a way in which mainstream art audiences may understand the subject matter due to familiarity.²¹⁴ On the other hand, she emphasised how biography formed the basis of works that dealt with the 'struggle for survival and recognition on the margins of the white art world'.²¹⁵

Finally, Johnson was scathing about the lack of engagement by that 'white art world', with

²¹² Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', op. cit., p. 56.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

Aboriginal artists.²¹⁶ She explained: 'Koori Art '84, showing us that the challenge is right here in our own urban backyards, is an important beginning'.²¹⁷ Johnson's review may have been produced in response to the lack of critical literature responding to the exhibition. Either way, however, she built upon Miller's and Lambert's assessments and commenced the process of defining the urban Indigenous art mode through her dual categorisation: the priority of content over form and political biography. Johnson, both through her own involvement with curating *Koori Art '84* and in her later review, rightly advocated the genesis of a new aesthetic, and consequently played an important role in the foundation phase of the movement.

Toward a New Aesthetic

Throughout the mid to late 1980s, following *Koori Art '84*, those urban Indigenous artists who had been involved in the exhibition, along with others from art schools and institutions, participated in numerous group exhibitions.²¹⁸ Whilst at a programming level the exhibitions engaged a range of curators, catalogue editors, writers and several venues, administratively, many were secured with financial support from the AAB, distributed through Australia Council programs, groups, organisations and projects, as well as individual artist grants.²¹⁹ The latter occurred despite

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

²¹⁸ These included but were not limited to: *Two Worlds Collide: Cultural Convergences in Aboriginal and White Australian Art*, 1985 (Sydney); *NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers*, 1986 (Sydney); *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, 1986 (Willoughby, NSW); *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, 1987 (Portsmouth, UK); *Boomalli Au Go Go*, 1987 (Chippendale, NSW); *ANCAA and Boomalli*, 1988 (Chippendale, NSW); *De Facto Apartheid*, 1988 (Redfern, NSW); *Inside Black Australia*, 1988 (Canberra and Chippendale, NSW); *Kempsey Koori Artists*, 1988 (Chippendale, NSW); *Urban Aboriginal Art: A Selective View*, 1988 (Adelaide); *Eurobla*, 1988 (Sydney); *Gomileoi-Moree Mob*, 1989 (Chippendale, NSW); *40000 + 4*, 1989 (Bondi, NSW); *Aboriginal Women's Show*, 1989 (Chippendale, NSW); *Boomalli Breaking Boundaries*, 1989 (Chippendale, NSW); *Look at Us Now*, 1989 (Adelaide). Note that the location of ephemera from several of the Boomalli exhibitions listed above remains unknown and that the details of these exhibitions have been sourced from records in the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative Archive, Leichardt NSW (visited 5-6 July 2017), in conjunction with a timeline created by Mathew Poll, previously on staff at Boomalli, 'Significant Exhibitions of Aboriginal Art Sydney', *Aboriginal Art in Sydney*, blog, 2012, viewed 25 July 2013, <<http://mathewpoll.blogspot.com.au/2012/01/significant-exhibitions-of-aboriginal.html>>. Many additional small-scale exhibitions that included urban Indigenous artists also took place in Paddington during the late 1980s. Records of these are available in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection Archive at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (visited 7-8 July 2017).

²¹⁹ See Australia Council's Aboriginal Arts Board Reports in Australia Council, *Annual Report 1986–1987*, Commonwealth of Australia, North Sydney, 1987; Australia Council, *Annual Report 1987–1988*, Commonwealth of Australia, North

committee role changes within the AAB and its replacement in 1989 with the Aboriginal Arts Committee (AAC).²²⁰ Notably, funding from the Australia Council throughout this period of exhibitions steadily increased as the organisation remained committed to promoting the visual arts.²²¹ The support of these actors was not only logistic; it also contributed to the solidarity of the movement as it developed.

With regard to the artists themselves, some overlap across the 1980s exhibitions is evident. A core group of exhibiting artists emerged from this time period including Trevor Nickolls, Lin Onus, Sally Morgan (Palyku), Raymond Meeks, Fiona Foley, Robert Campbell Jnr (Ngaku), Judy Watson (Waanyi), Karen Casey (Tasmanian Aboriginal people), Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara), Michael Riley, Bronwyn Bancroft (Bundjalung), Euphemia Bostock, Avril Quail, Terry Shewring, James Simon, Tracey Moffatt, Andrew Saunders and Jeffrey Samuels.

As the artists built on their repertoires of practice and exhibition experience, they began to deliver consistency in their own individual styles, which in turn offered a degree of familiarity for viewers. Although the styles appeared eclectic when compared to each other in this early phase, the artworks, however, continued to operate within the aforementioned thematic categories, centring on politics, place and the personal. In order to emphasise how some urban Indigenous art looked in the primary stage of the movement, a selection of works by Raymond Meeks, Jeffrey Samuels and Fiona Foley, those artists most referenced in the review literature noted, will be given extra attention. Although several works included in the *Koori Art '84* exhibition have already been

Sydney, 1988; Australia Council, *Annual Report 1988–1989*, Commonwealth of Australia, North Sydney, 1989; Australia Council, *Annual Report 1989–1990*, Commonwealth of Australia, Redfern, New South Wales, 1990.

²²⁰ See Lesley Fogarty, 'Aboriginal Arts Unit: Australia Council', *Artlink*, vol. 10, nos 1 and 2, 1990, reprinted 1992, p. 118.

²²¹ Funding data ascertained from Australia Council Annual Reports as listed in previous footnote.

discussed, a closer comparison of visuality, artistic impact and underlying principles will further assist in determining some of the movement's early and consistent aesthetic characteristics.

Following the series of 'Wandjina' works included in *Koori Art '84*, Raymond Meeks persisted with the abstract figure. The work below, *Mimis and crocodile*, 1986 (fig. 16), was exhibited in *Urban Koories*, 1986. It consists of two anthropomorphic spirit figures coupled with a totemic crocodile that together bear hallmarks of early western Arnhem Land imagery.

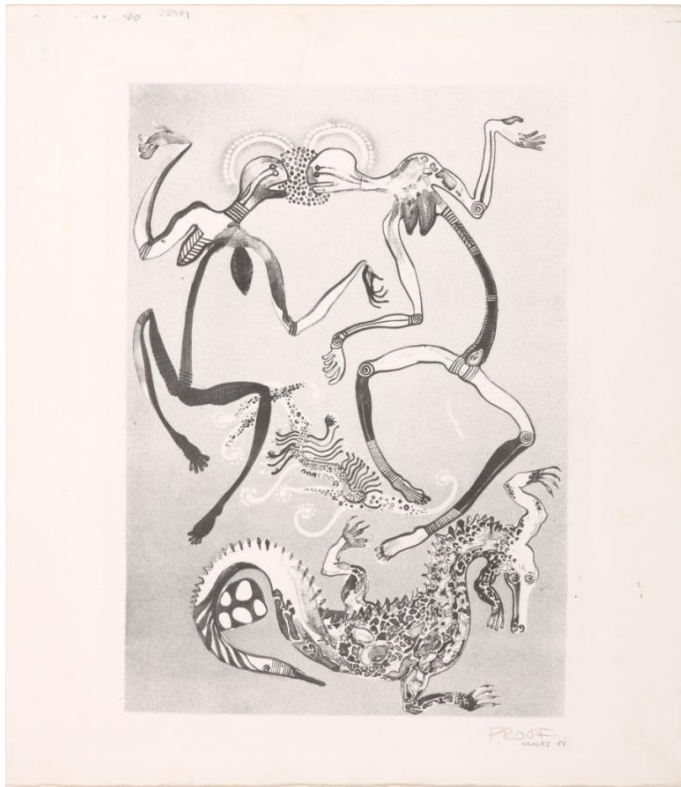


Figure 16:
Raymond Meeks,
Mimis and crocodile, 1986,
lithographic print,
56 x 43 cm,
NMA Collection.

Similarly to Nickolls's comments cited above regarding the blending of visual elements with personal concerns, Raymond Meeks is quoted in reference to his artwork, saying, 'I am obsessed by that imagery – Papunya, Maningrida, Yirrkala. I am trying to blend them because it works for me. I am hunting for lost pieces of myself.'²²² Meeks was born in Sydney, yet his

²²² Raymond Meeks in Suhanya Raffel & Chris Watson (eds), *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, Workshop Arts Centre, Glebe, NSW, 1986.

heritage is Kokoimudji – a region of Far North Queensland.²²³ He did not know his father and after losing his mother by the age of seven, he moved to Cairns with an uncle, where he lived for approximately the next eight years.²²⁴ Study took him to Brisbane at the age of 15 and then back to Sydney.²²⁵ The loss that Meeks refers to extends from his personal cultural dislocation as a result of the effects of colonialism; the ‘disculturation’ that Jones referred to in her review.²²⁶ Employing the printmaking medium, Meeks has drawn visually from a remote Indigenous art aesthetic as a means of consolidating his Aboriginal identity as an artist. His blended aesthetic reflects two modes of Indigenous art as he reconciles his Indigenous heritage.



Figure 17:
Raymond Meeks,
Dilly Bag, c. 1987,
linocut,
30 x 30 cm,
location unknown.
Source:
Vivien Johnson, *Australia:
Art & Aboriginality 1987*,
Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth,
1987.

In the linocut *Dilly Bag*, c. 1987²²⁷ (fig. 17), exhibited in *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, again a figure appears with two other animals; however, this time the latter take frog-like and serpentine forms. The figure on the left is similar to those adorned with halos in the previous image, although radiating lines extend around the head rather than dotted rings. Compared with

²²³ See Sasha Grishin, ‘Review: Arone Meeks: Beyond Blue: Unbroken at Megalo’, *The Canberra Times*, 19 May 2017, viewed 25 July 2018, <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/review-arone-meeks-beyond-the-blue-unbroken-at-megalo-20170516-gw68za.html>>.

²²⁴ Grishin, *ibid.*

²²⁵ Grishin, *ibid.*

²²⁶ Vivien Johnson, ‘Koori Art ’84’, *Art Network*, no. 15, 1985, p. 56.

²²⁷ It is unclear whether this work is the same as that held in the NGA Collection, as part of a set of five greeting cards, accession no. NGA 89.782.1.

Mimis and crocodile, the composition is a less free-form, more stylised version that incorporates a background structure to accentuate contrast, line and movement. Meeks's artist statement about this work evolved somewhat, where he expressed, 'But through my art I have identity and strength. It would be true to say that I am hunting for lost pieces of myself but through my culture I have many answers.'²²⁸ These comments reflect a far more assertive approach to his practice and a degree of resolve that had not been communicated previously. Consistently throughout Meek's oeuvre, his style was reiterated across a range of media as he utilised linocut and lithography, as well as both acrylic and oils on canvas.²²⁹ His figures, both anthropomorphic and animal, often appeared in pairs and incorporated a variety of stylistic conventions, some of which are recognisably from Arnhem Land, for example the use of cross-hatching and x-ray components. His figures typically alluded to narratives also associated with northern Australia, such as the dilly bag, Wagilag Sisters and Mimi figures, or in reference to the Wandjina figure from the north-west, traditionally the Kimberley region; however, what is significant, is that his affiliation to these was generic.

Meeks admitted that his artwork made reference to both desert and remote Indigenous characters and stylistic influence, but that his objective was, 'To explore and strengthen the existing links between urban and traditional Aboriginal thought and culture'.²³⁰ This is a critical point as it reveals a conceptual innovation in relation to aesthetics. Vivien Johnson, catalogue essayist for *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, explained that Raymond Meeks and other urban Indigenous artists had:

²²⁸ Vivien Johnson, *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, 1987, p. 8.

²²⁹ Unfortunately image captions accompanying early reproductions of Raymond Meeks's works are incomplete.

²³⁰ Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', op. cit.

Wrestled with the European standards of art school and then struggled on in isolation at the margins of the white art world for nearly a decade drawing their only artistic sustenance from links they forged with the Aboriginal community.²³¹

For Meeks, this link was tangible when in 1981 he visited Mornington Island for five months. He spent time learning from Lardil elders and building his knowledge of ancestry and heritage.²³² There he engaged with the local Indigenous community, renewed social values experienced during his earlier life in Far North Queensland, and learned the 'traditional methods in art and culture'.²³³ As a result, his work from this period illustrated forms that were familiarly Indigenous, expressed via Western art influences that straddled media and conceptuality. With regard to imagery he stated:

When I travel to different places, the country or the place that I'm in tends to come into my work. I'm not necessarily taking directly from it, it's more that it's part and parcel of where I am at that time and therefore you can't really say what is of a particular origin.²³⁴

Though the visual elements contained in Meeks's work give rise to suggestions of appropriation of such remote iconography, the artist asserted that he primarily explored personal identity and his connection with Indigenous culture.²³⁵ This he shows as fluid as he participates in shared Indigenous spaces. His distance from one particular Indigenous heritage, as a product of the colonial paradigm, led him to convey an aesthetic comprised distinctly of his own experiences of Indigenous culture. Though the subject of his work is not as obviously political as those

²³¹ Johnson, *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, op. cit., p. 4.

²³² Grishin, 'Review: Arone Meeks: Beyond Blue: Unbroken at Megalo', op. cit.; also Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, 'Arone Raymond Meeks', Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, undated, viewed 25 July 2018, <<https://www.boomalli.com.au/arone-meeks/>>.

²³³ Johnson, *Australia: Art & Aboriginality 1987*, op. cit., p. 36.

²³⁴ Raymond Meeks in Samuels & Watson, Jeffrey Samuels & Chris Watson (eds), *Aboriginal Australian Print and Poster*, Print Council, West Melbourne, 1987, op. cit., p. 38.

²³⁵ Meeks, in *ibid.*

categorised above in reference to *Koori Art '84*, they are nonetheless indicative of the underlying dislocation from culture that has been the experience of many urban Indigenous artists. Meeks's admission subsequently modified and transformed the Australian Indigenous visual tradition.

Jeffrey Samuels, similarly to Meeks, employed various stylistic elements emanating from a desert and remote Indigenous aesthetic into his Western art school methods. In *A changing continent*, 1984 (fig. 6), his contribution to *Koori Art '84*, Samuels blended stylised icons of the map of Australia with double rows of superimposed dots to frame each icon and added dotting infill. In Vivien Johnson's review of the work, she referred to his iconography as 'Papunya influenced treatments of the map of Australia', indicating Samuels's employment of dotting, its dominant earthy yellow palette and potentially Tingari-inspired repetition.²³⁶ She added that his work, and others, 'confronts the dilemma of detribalised artists working within or at least alongside the Western tradition'.²³⁷ Again, these comments imply how cultural distance to origins and heritage are a reality for urban Indigenous artists where the effects of colonialism have produced geographic and generational dislocation.

Samuels undertook secondary studies in Grafton, which took him away from his birthplace, the northwest New South Wales town of Bourke, and the small agricultural town Carinda, further east where he spent his early childhood years.²³⁸ At approximately the age of twenty, Samuels moved to Sydney to complete tertiary studies.²³⁹ Because of such separation, as encountered by

²³⁶ Johnson, 'Koori Art '84', op. cit., p. 56. For a brief account of the Tingari, see Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*, 3rd edn, Thames and Hudson, London, 2012, pp. 10, 162-164; also Lloyd D Graham, 'The Creation of Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay) in Pintupi/Kukatja Dreamings', *Aboriginal Studies Press*, no. 1, 2003, p. 30, Expanded Academic ASAP, viewed 5 April 2016.

²³⁷ Johnson, *ibid.*

²³⁸ Matt Poll, 'Jeffrey Samuels', Design & Art Australia Online, 2008-2011, viewed 25 July 2018, <<https://www.daaao.org.au/bio/jeffrey-samuels/biography/>>; see also National Portrait Gallery, 'Jeffrey Samuels', National Portrait Gallery, 2018, viewed 25 July 2018, <<https://www.portrait.gov.au/people/jeffrey-samuels-1956>>.

²³⁹ Poll, *ibid.*

Samuels, Johnson implies that there is a tendency for urban Indigenous artists to draw from familiar desert and remote Indigenous iconography for use in work that does not necessarily have 'tribal' specificity. Aspects of the iconography are appropriated, but modified and personalised in a way that detaches meaning and usage from custodial and cultural protocols.

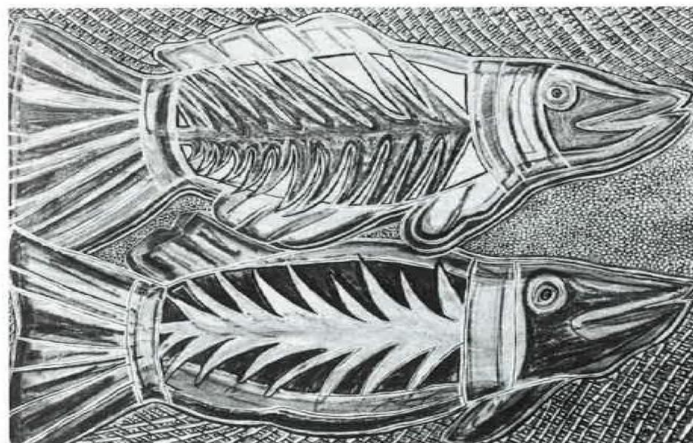


Figure 18:
Jeffrey Samuels,
Hello!, 1988,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown.
Source: Chris Watson, *ANCAAA
and Boomalli: Artworks
Produced and Managed by
Aboriginal People*, Boomalli
Aboriginal Artists Co-operative,
Chippendale, NSW, 1988.

Another of Samuels's early works, *Hello!*, 1988 (fig. 18), exhibited in *ANCAAA and Boomalli* in the same year as its production, depicts two fish side by side. Again, like Meeks's work, the pair of fish reflect a style and iconography associated with art from Arnhem Land. This is most evident in the internal 'x-ray' configurations of the fishes and their setting atop a predominantly cross-hatched ground. In addition, a sea of dotting infill is evident through the centre, reflecting Western Desert technique.



Figure 19:
Jeffrey Samuels,
Rainbow serpent entering the waterhole,
c. 1987,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
154.9 x 91.4 cm,
Collection of AIATSIS.

Samuels's *Rainbow serpent entering the waterhole*, c. 1987 (fig. 19), conveys elements of a well-known Dreaming narrative in an acutely abstract way. An array of geometric and irregular shapes combined with large, accentuated cross-hatching and myriad dots fill the composition. Whilst parallels can be drawn between this work and a number of bark paintings produced in Central and Western Arnhem Land in the same period regarding the Rainbow Serpent, Samuels challenges a typical configuration of the 'serpent' figure.²⁴⁰ Rather than executing the Creation ancestor with curved or sinuous lines, he has alternatively opted for jagged apexes and rectilinear planes. He has also added to his palette an electric blue that varies in depth, presenting a distinct contrast to the exclusively earthy hues found in the Arnhem Land works. This again demonstrates innovation where aesthetic features are transformed to reflect the cultural status of the artist in his own terms.

²⁴⁰ For example England Bangala, *Modj (Rainbow Serpent)*, 1988, natural pigments on bark (NGA); John Mawurndjul AM, *Rainbow Serpent (Ngalyod) with female mimi spirit*, 1984, natural pigments on bark (NGA); Djawida Nadjongorle, *Bark painting: Rainbow serpent with rainbow*, 1984, natural pigments on bark (NGA); and Jimmy Njiminjuma, *Ngalyod – the rainbow serpent*, c. 1985, natural pigments on bark (AGNSW).

As with Meeks, Samuels too spent time in Country, when in 1983 he received an Australia Council/AAB fellowship.²⁴¹ Although he did not return to his heritage area at this time, the fellowship allowed him to visit Mornington Island for six months. He claimed that this financial support permitted him to devote time to his art whilst studying 'traditional Aboriginal culture'.²⁴² Similarly to that of Meeks, the visuality inherent in Samuel's work bridges two modes of expression, and in incorporating remote aesthetics and Western traditions in art, the underlying significance is that his Aboriginality is reconciled. This reconciliation manifests as images pertaining to the natural environment and ancient Indigenous culture, which are also a reflection of 'experiences and emotions as an artist and a Koori' in connection with these underlying aspects'.²⁴³ His stylisation and abstraction, together with iconography allow him to communicate the cultural division present between urban and desert or remote areas. Samuels has described how he is from a 'generation of Koori artists who have realised the issues that confront [them]'.²⁴⁴ These he claims are the result of a lack of recognition both in art, history, and society as a result of the projected image of 'other' by mainstream Australia.²⁴⁵ Together they are the impetus for Samuels to consistently 'affirm his Aboriginal identity and cultural heritage' in visual terms.²⁴⁶ Samuels endeavours to bring about recognition for the Koori artist, which he achieves subtly by positioning cultural distance and dislocation as the underlying principles of his aesthetic.

Fiona Foley also consistently exhibited throughout the foundation phase, employing a range of media during this time, including printmaking, sculpture, installation and mixed media. Similarly to Meeks and Samuels, Foley too visited Country in the early stage of her career, travelling beyond her homelands that incorporate Maryborough, Hervey Bay and Fraser Island in southern

²⁴¹ Australia Council, *Annual Report 1982–1983*, Commonwealth of Australia, North Sydney, 1984, p. 102.

²⁴² Raffel & Watson (eds), *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, op. cit.

²⁴³ Jeffrey Samuels, 'Statement', in *Jeffrey Samuels: 'Selections 76-89'*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-operative, Chippendale, New South Wales, 1989, n.p.

²⁴⁴ Samuels, *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Samuels, *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Samuels quoted in Poll, 'Jeffrey Samuels', op. cit.

Queensland.²⁴⁷ She explained that one of her early artworks, *The Annihilation of the Blacks*, 1986 (fig. 20), exhibited in *Urban Koories* during the year of its production, was inspired by several events, including her visit to Bathurst Island and Ramingining in Arnhem Land.²⁴⁸



Figure 20:
Fiona Foley,
The Annihilation of the Blacks,
1986,
wood, paint, plant fibre, hair,
adhesive and feather,
278 x 300 x 60 cm,
NMA Collection
Photo: Lannon Harley.

Howard Morphy compared this artwork by Foley with a c. 1962 work collected in Aurukun titled *Fish on Poles* (not shown).²⁴⁹ The two works bear many compositional and stylistic similarities, and even though *Fish on Poles* is comprised of wooden fish suspended from the crossbar, rather than figures, it is evident that the Far North Queensland work influenced Foley's. Whereas the earlier work is indicative of north Queensland fish drying practices, Foley's is underpinned by histories of annihilation of Indigenous people as a result of colonisation to convey the sad reality of loss within her cultural heritage.²⁵⁰ She summarised this, stating, 'it's important for me through my work to inform the viewer of the atrocities that have been dealt to the Aboriginals by the white intruders'.²⁵¹ Morphy observed of Foley's technique that, while it integrated traditional Indigenous art styles and processes, her content 'is used to highlight the traumas of invasion and

²⁴⁷ Tess Allas, 'Fiona Foley', Design & Art Australia Online, 2007, viewed 25 July 2018, <<https://www.daaao.org.au/bio/fiona-foley/biography/>>.

²⁴⁸ Fiona Foley in Suhanya Raffel & Chris Watson (eds), *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, Workshop Arts Centre, Willoughby, New South Wales, n.p.

²⁴⁹ *Fish on Poles* was collected in 1962, produced by an unknown artist. It resides now in the collection of the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. See Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998, pp. 392–393.

²⁵⁰ Raffel & Watson (eds), *Urban Koories: Two Exhibitions of Urban Aboriginal Art*, op. cit.

²⁵¹ Foley quoted in *ibid.*

dispossession'.²⁵² Other comments Foley made in relation to this particular work alluded to her concerns about the absence of Indigenous art from the eminent contemporary Australian art biennial *Perspecta 1985*.²⁵³ Thus one single work, *The Annihilation of the Blacks*, was rendered multi-dimensional as it represented personal responses to Country, cultural process, colonial history, and the politics of Australian contemporary art at the time.



Figure 21:
Fiona Foley,
Men's business [a], 1987,
crayon and charcoal on
paper,
55 x 78.8 cm,
AGNSW Collection.

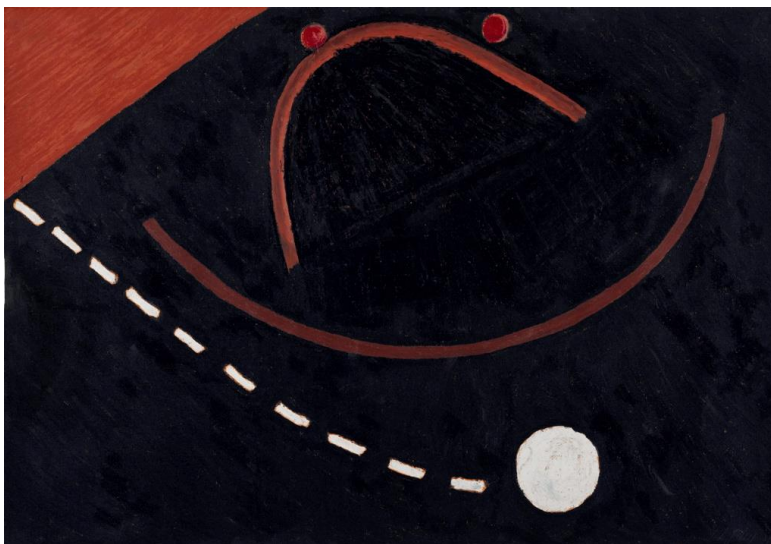


Figure 22:
Fiona Foley,
Men's business [b], 1987,
crayon and charcoal on
paper,
55 x 78.8 cm,
AGNSW Collection.

Foley's two crayon and charcoal works, above, both titled *Men's business*, 1987 (figs 21 and 22), were exhibited in *Boomalli Au-go-go*. They pay homage to symbolism emanating from Arnhem

²⁵² Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, op. cit., pp. 392-393.

²⁵³ *ibid.*

Land, accentuated by the natural pigment colour palette also synonymous with the region.²⁵⁴ As their title conveys, both works specifically reference men's ceremony. In particular, they refer to an initiation ceremony that took place in Maningrida during 1986, and depict initiates, spectators, dancers and props pertaining to mythological narratives and time of day.²⁵⁵ In addition to carrying Arnhem Land meaning, the iconography contained in the scenes may also be likened to that of the Western Desert. The arcs and u-shapes, circular and serpentine forms, as well as the ceremonial hats in the top image, have all been identified in Papunya works.²⁵⁶ Around the time of their production Djon Mundine, Curator of Aboriginal Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, affirmed that the *Men's business* pair drew from Western Desert symbols but used Arnhem Land colours, admitting that they satisfied a new contemporary direction in Aboriginal art.²⁵⁷ Mundine's comments were significant as, like Vivien Johnson's noted earlier in the chapter, they expressed recognition of 'new' development in the aesthetic of Australian Indigenous art.

The works of Raymond Meeks, Jeffrey Samuels and Fiona Foley reproduced here illustrate a conscious blending of iconography and style by the artists, which has its roots in the desert and remote Indigenous art aesthetic, but is expressed with Western art practices including drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and installation. Whether representing the spirit figures in the work of Meeks, the Rainbow Serpent Dreaming narrative in the work of Samuels or the initiation ceremonies in the work of Foley, notably the artists have demonstrated that the locus of

²⁵⁴ Brenda L Croft, 'To Be Young (at Heart), Gifted and Blak: The Cultural and Political Renaissance in Indigenous Art in Australia', in Hetti Perkins & Margie West (eds), *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2007, p. 288. They were also included in the exhibition *L'ete Australien a Montpellier* in 1990.

²⁵⁵ Fiona Foley quoted in 'Collection', Art Gallery of New South Wales website, viewed 26 July 2013, <<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/64.1988/>>.

²⁵⁶ Papunya works in which these visual motifs can also be seen include: Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri's *A Joke Story*, 1972 and *Family Funny Story*, 1972; Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri's *Angry Men at Tjilka*, 1973; and Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula's *Old Man's 'Mala' (Wallaby) Dreaming (version 1)*, 1971 and *Old Man's 'Mala' (Wallaby) Dreaming (version 2)*, 1972. Each of these five works is from the personal collection of Geoffrey Bardon. See Geoffrey Bardon & James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, Melbourne University Publishing, Carlton, Victoria, 2004.

²⁵⁷ Djon Mundine, 'Aboriginal Art: Art Gallery of New South Wales', *Art and Australia*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1988, p. 99.

production of Indigenous artworks did not need to conform to specific desert and remote regions. Furthermore, artworks did not need to represent the explicit meaning associated with these regions. Instead, the three artists admitted that they drew directly from their personal thoughts and experiences of the subjects depicted, rather than from any cultural responsibility to do so. This sits in contrast to desert and remote processes of art production that adhere to the roles of custodianship, totemic design and oral traditions.

Therefore, urban Indigenous artists have employed freedom in visuality and content. The artistic impact of the works is that their execution and representation are reconciled as culturally intuitive and distinctly Aboriginal in context. In the examples shown above, the underlying features refer to artists' geographic and generational separations from traditionally oriented origins and other practices and consequences of colonisation. As the chapters that follow demonstrate, these aspects are iterated throughout urban Indigenous art. The examples included above show a collective beginning.

Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative

Following the formation in 1987 of ANCAAA (Association of Northern Central Australian Aboriginal Artists²⁵⁸), which advocated for the protection of artists' rights, payments and an awareness of the challenges faced by Aboriginal artists in the Top End, a group of urban Indigenous artists based primarily in Sydney, were similarly inspired to form an equivalent association.²⁵⁹ Via connections developed in art school, and participation in a number of exhibitions together, and to some degree geographic proximity, an urban Indigenous artist

²⁵⁸ ANCAAA changed its name in 1992 to the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists, with the acronym ANKAAA. See ANKAAA website, viewed 1 April 2016, <<http://www.ankaaa.org.au/>>.

²⁵⁹ Michael Riley quoted in 'Michael Riley in Conversation' an interview with Hetti Perkins at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 27 November 2003, transcribed in Perkins & West (eds), *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, op. cit., p. 323.

community began to recognise how they might benefit from a collective identity within the visual arts during the mid-1980s.²⁶⁰ This culminated in 1987, when ten pioneer urban Indigenous artists established the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative.²⁶¹ The word 'boomalli' in the language of the Bandjalung, Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri, means 'to strike' or 'make a mark',²⁶² and this formed the conceptual basis of the co-operative.

The practical premise of the co-operative was to assist artists in self-management and self-determination in an environment committed to the promotion and teaching of the visual arts, operated exclusively by an Indigenous staff.²⁶³ Boomalli provided a dedicated gallery space for practising Indigenous artists, along with other facilities such as studios and storage spaces, a library and slide archive, and administrative and publishing services.²⁶⁴ Besides those Indigenous artists immediately associated with the co-operative, it was also anticipated that Boomalli would engage with Aboriginal and Islander artists in the wider community.²⁶⁵

At the time of the co-operative's inception, those involved were conscious of their shared 'history of exclusion' and opposition projected by mainstream Australian society regarding their

²⁶⁰ Brenda L Croft discusses this further in an interview with Ann McGrath & Hetti Perkins, 10 February 1995, transcribed in Anne McGrath, Hetti Perkins & Brenda Croft, 'Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative', *Labour History*, No. 69, 1995, p. 219, accessed via JSTOR, 29 July 2013, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27516402>>.

²⁶¹ Originally called Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, the ten artists involved in its establishment included Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda L Croft, Fiona Foley, Fern Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quail, Michael Riley and Jeffery Samuels as noted in Jonathan Jones, *Art Gallery of New South Wales Australian Collection Focus Room Boomalli: 20 Years On*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2007, <www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media/downloads/files/Boomalli_cat.pdf>.

²⁶² *ibid.* See also Neale, 'United in the Struggle', *op. cit.*; Hetti Perkins, 'Introduction', in Julie Donaldson & Theresa Willsteed (eds), *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, revised edn, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2013, p. 17.

²⁶³ Lyn Syme, 'Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative', in Kleinert & Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 544–545.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Jonathan Jones, *Art Gallery of New South Wales Australian Collection Focus Room Boomalli: 20 Years On*, *op. cit.*

authenticity and identity.²⁶⁶ They faced a unique difficulty in having no established reference point for what it meant to be city-based Aboriginal artists.²⁶⁷ The founding artists were intent on promoting urban Indigenous visual culture and Boomalli, in its capacity foremost as a co-operative of Aboriginal artists, was thus credited by some as the 'single most influential factor in the rapid rise to prominence' of urban Indigenous art.²⁶⁸ The physical presence of Boomalli provided an inhabitable space for its membership to participate in the arts, where they worked toward establishing alternative meanings and definitions of Aboriginality.²⁶⁹ These meanings and definitions were situated outside the stereotypes and the perpetuated view of Aboriginality that had emerged from the colonial paradigm. Artists were opposed to misconceptions about Aboriginality representing a static or unchanging culture, and being subordinate or inferior to settler or post-contact society. The pioneer Boomalli artists were also critical of any homogenising envelopment within the broader Indigenous art aesthetic and so embraced the opportunity to pursue unrestricted expressions of identity. Their exhibitions at Boomalli during the late 1980s offered a political and reflective edge, communicating collectively the prerogatives of Indigenous control and management of its visual artists.²⁷⁰ As founding member Michael Riley observed:

It was a time when people were enrolled in art colleges and getting trained in what an artist is supposed to be traditionally, as opposed to the 1950s and 1960s when Aboriginal artists were seen as making trinkets for tourists or kitsch art. It was a time when contemporary urban artists started to be taken seriously by the art world.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Howard Morphy, 'Acting in a Community: Art and Social Cohesion in Indigenous Australia', *Humanities Research*, vol. 15, no. 12, 2009, p. 126; Brenda L Croft interview in McGrath, Perkins & Croft, 'Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative', op. cit., p. 219.

²⁶⁷ Morphy, 'Acting in a Community', op. cit.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.* See also Neale, 'United in the Struggle', op. cit. Brenda L Croft concurs, stating, 'Arguably, Boomalli was the moving spirit behind the urban and rural Indigenous arts and cultural movement in evidence throughout Australia today' in 'Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow', in Luke Taylor (ed.), *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1999, p. 117.

²⁶⁹ Neale, 'United in the Struggle', op. cit.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 271–72.

²⁷¹ Michael Riley in Perkins & West (eds), *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, op. cit.; Brenda L Croft in McGrath, Perkins & Croft, 'Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative', op. cit., p. 219.

Peer support, along with Boomalli's geographic location within inner city Sydney, not far from the political activity of Redfern at the time, and the investment of funds by the AAB were also crucial to founding the co-operative.²⁷² Curator and artist, Jonathan Jones (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi), described its formation as 'acknowledging the reality of urban Aboriginal culture'.²⁷³ With its facilities, financial support and creative and cultural objectives, Boomalli provided a 'community-based arts model', which was functional and supportive of its own membership and the broader Indigenous community.²⁷⁴ Indigenous curator, Hetti Perkins, described how the co-operative's success resided in the diversity of its exhibited work and its artists, the positive response by audiences, and a need for it as a community resource.²⁷⁵ In its initial phase, Boomalli's communal vitality and commitment to its founding goals were fundamental to its artists who embraced the autonomy, which offered the freedom to effect a new, perceptible urban Indigenous mode of art.

Workshops and Collectives

In addition to Boomalli, a number of urban Indigenous artists immersed themselves in poster collectives and various other workshops that were already in operation at the time. In Sydney for example, Boomalli artist Avril Quail had already made inroads into printmaking, having engaged with Tin Sheds Art Workshop (1969–).²⁷⁶ Artist and activist Robert Bropho (Nyoongar) also took advantage of the workshop's screenprinting facilities, where he collaborated on the film

²⁷² In the 1986–1987 financial year, the Aboriginal Arts Board of Australia Council funded administrative assistance to the value of \$3500. In the 1987–1988 financial year, this increased with two amounts of \$8000 and \$26,000. In the 1988–1989 financial year, the Aboriginal Arts Board again contributed funds to the amount of \$33,000. See Australia Council annual reports for the periods 1987–1989 inclusive.

²⁷³ Jonathan Jones, *Art Gallery of New South Wales Australian Collection Focus Room Boomalli: 20 Years On*, op. cit.

²⁷⁴ Jon Altman, 'Art Business: The Indigenous Visual Arts Infrastructure', in Perkins and West (eds), *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, op. cit., p. 45.

²⁷⁵ Hetti Perkins in an interview, in McGrath, Perkins & Croft, 'Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative', op. cit., p. 221.

²⁷⁶ Tin Sheds Art Workshop is physically located at the University of Sydney, commonly known as Tin Sheds, and has comprised several poster collectives including Earthworks 1971–1979, Lucifoil Posters 1980–1983 and Tin Shed Posters 1984 onwards. See Centre for Australian Art, *Australian Prints + Printmaking*, Centre for Australian Art website, viewed 1 April 2016, <<http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au/>>.

promotion poster print *Munda nyuringu, hes [sic] taken the land, he believes it is, his he wont [sic] give it back*. A film by Aboriginal Fringe dwellers in the goldfields of W.A., 1984 (fig. 23).²⁷⁷



Figure 23:
Robert Bropho and Swan Valley Fringedwellers, *Munda nyuringu, hes taken the land, he believes it is, his he wont give it back*. A film by Aboriginal Fringe dwellers in the goldfields of W.A., 1984, screenprint, 70.2 x 45.5 (image), 76.1 x 51.1 (sheet), NGA Collection.

In recognising the potential to engage with local Indigenous artists, Tin Sheds also established and ran a Koori photographers' workshop.²⁷⁸ Artist Michael Riley saw the benefit of such an initiative, and enrolled as an alternative entry route to the arts.²⁷⁹

Meanwhile, artists Alice Hinton-Bateup (Kamilaroi/Wonnarua) and Tracey Moffatt expanded their art practices by making use of what was on offer at Garage Graphix Community Arts Group, established at Mount Druitt, New South Wales, in 1981.²⁸⁰ Here they collaborated on the work *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*, 1987 (fig. 24), a poster advertising an exhibition of the same name that was coordinated by the Print Council of Australia.

²⁷⁷ National Gallery of Australia, 'Collection Search: Robert Bropho', National Gallery of Australia website, viewed 1 April 2016, <<https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=101389>>. This print was produced prior to the artist's criminal activity.

²⁷⁸ See Juno Gemes, 'The Political and the Personal Process in Portraiture: Juno Gemes in Conversation – National Portrait Gallery August 2003', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 2003, p. 85.

²⁷⁹ Michael Riley in Brenda L Croft, 'From Little Things Big Things Grow', op. cit., p. 105.

²⁸⁰ Centre for Australian Art, *Australian Prints + Printmaking*, op. cit.

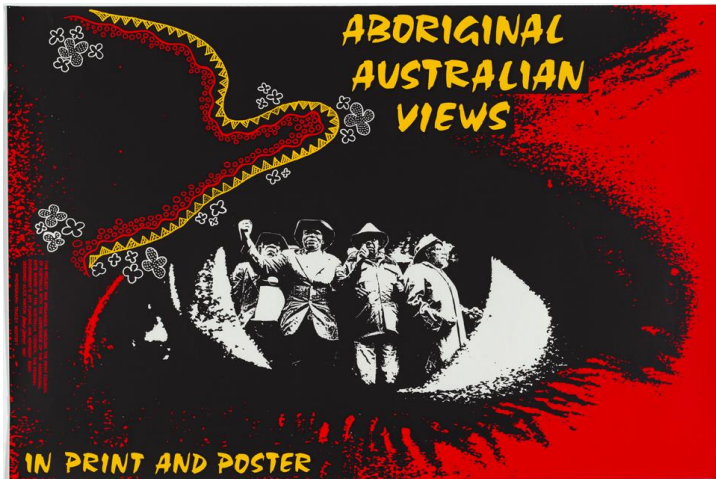


Figure 24:
 Alice Hinton-Bateup, Tracey
 Moffatt, Garage Graphix,
*Aboriginal Australian views in
 print and poster*, 1987,
 screenprint,
 50.2 x 76 cm,
 NGA Collection.

Hinton-Bateup maintained a staff role at the studio c. 1983–1985, using the resources at her disposal to produce several other prints on-site. She also collaborated with non-Indigenous artists Tanya Ellis and Marla Guppy (figs 25, 26 and 27) on various issue-based prints that pertained to Indigenous culture.²⁸¹

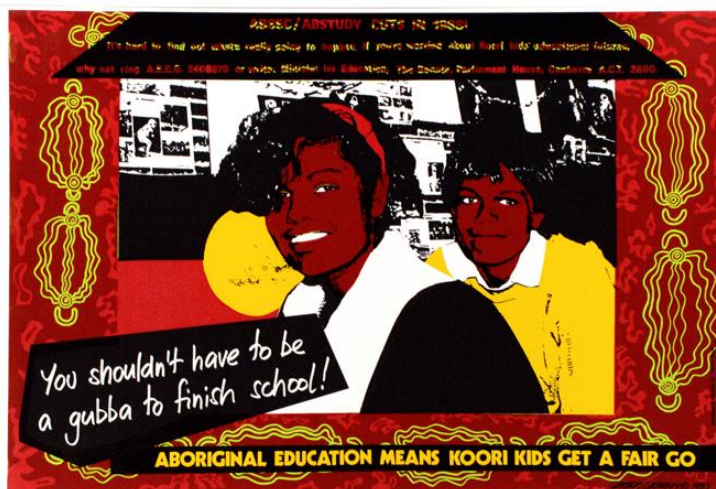


Figure 25:
 Alice Hinton-Bateup, Tanya
 Ellis, Marla Guppy, Garage
 Graphix,
*Aboriginal education means
 Koori kids get a fair go*,
 1987,
 screenprint,
 50.2 x 74.8 cm,
 NGA Collection.

²⁸¹ Alice Hinton-Bateup's employment tenure is discussed briefly in Samuels & Watson (eds), *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*, op. cit., p. 36. Regarding her collaborative works, see National Gallery of Australia website, op. cit.; also Bernhard Lüthi (ed.), *Ayatjara: Art of the First Australians*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, 1993, pp. 328, 352.

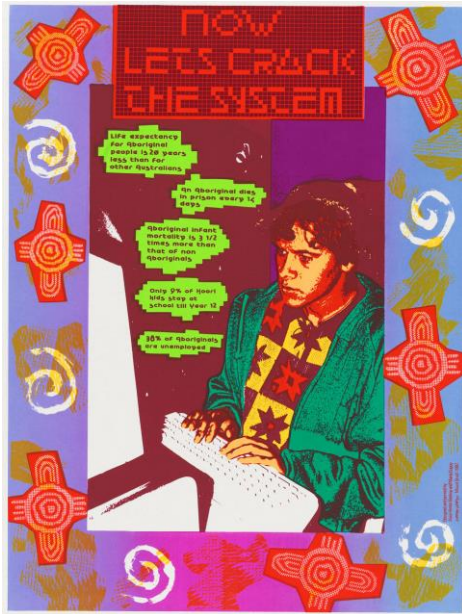


Figure 26:
Marla Guppy, Alice Hinton-Bateup, Garage Graphix,
Now let's crack the system, 1987,
screenprint,
65 x 50 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

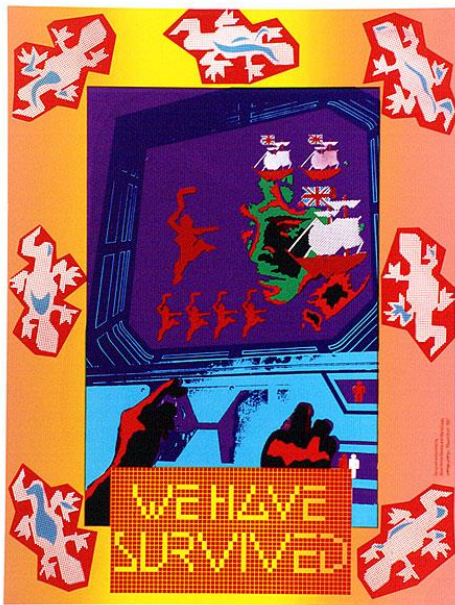


Figure 27:
Alice Hinton-Bateup, Marla Guppy, Garage Graphix,
We have survived, 1987,
screenprint,
61 x 46.2 cm (image),
65 x 50 cm (sheet),
Collection of FUAM.

Two of her individual works, *Lost heritage*, 1984 (fig. 28), and *Dispossessed*, 1986 (fig. 29), both printed at Garage Graphix, were curated into the aforementioned exhibition *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*.²⁸² Combining text and image, the prints conveyed some of the implications for Indigenous culture arising out of colonialism and loss of heritage and connection to Country. Similarly to previously discussed works, Hinton-Bateup also worked traditional stylistic elements into the pair. *Lost heritage* incorporated Mimi figures, for example, to represent

²⁸² Samuels & Watson, *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*, op. cit.

the depicted women's spirits.²⁸³ Hinton-Bateup explained that the young women's Indigenous identity transcends their restrictive clothing and imposed European culture.²⁸⁴

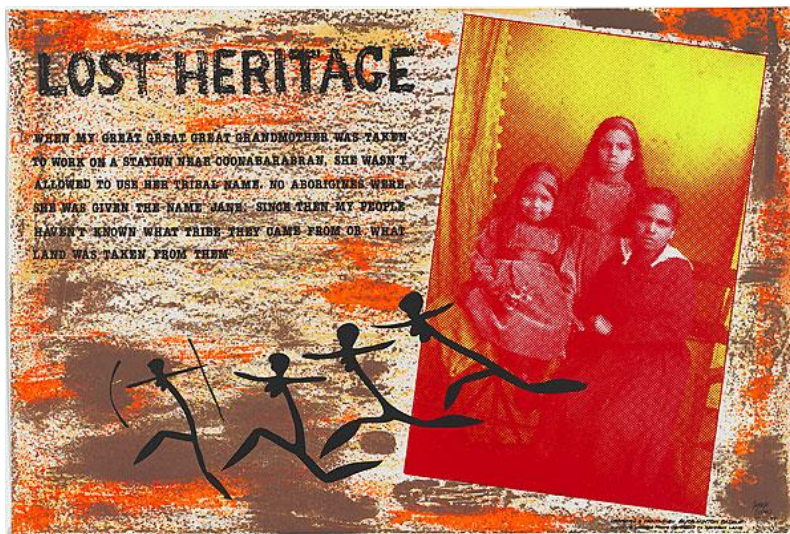


Figure 28:
Alice Hinton-Bateup,
Garage Graphix,
Lost heritage, 1984,
offset lithograph, 51.1
x 76.2 cm,
Collection of FUAM.

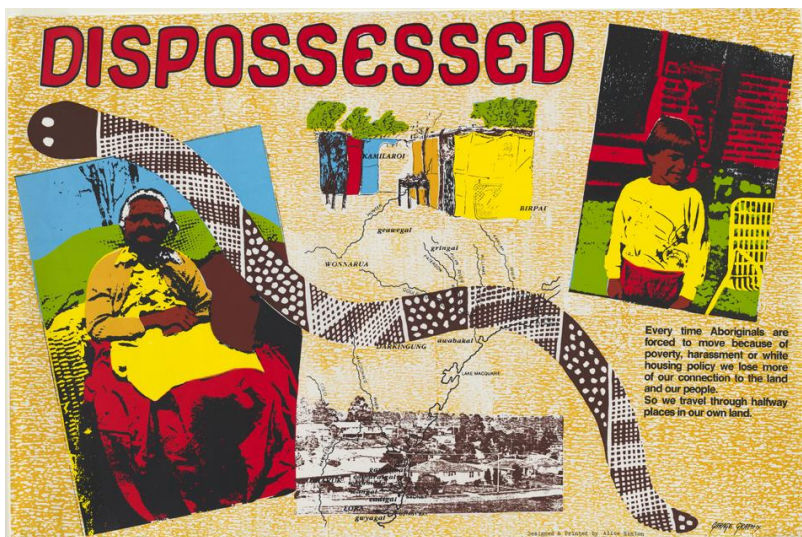


Figure 29:
Alice Hinton-Bateup,
Garage Graphix,
Dispossessed, 1986,
screenprint,
49.6 x 74.7 cm,
NGA Collection.

In Canberra, artist Kevin Gilbert affiliated himself with Megalo International Screenprinting Collective (1980–), a collective that evolved through five permutations.²⁸⁵ It was here that he produced the highly political screenprint *Treaty '88 Campaign*, 1986 (fig. 30).²⁸⁶ Several years

²⁸³ Chris Watson, 'Three Urban Views: Fiona Foley, Ray Meeks and Avril Quail interviewed by Jeffrey Samuels and Chris Watson', in *ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Previous names of the collective include Megalo Access Arts, Megalo Grafix, Megalo Graphix, Megalo Screenprint Incorporated and Megalo Screenprinting Collective as specified by Centre for Australian Art, *Australian Prints + Printmaking*, op. cit.

²⁸⁶ National Gallery of Australia website, op. cit.

later he also engaged with Studio One Inc (1985–2000), another Canberra-based studio. Meeks also utilised these printmaking facilities, where he produced several linocuts in 1989.²⁸⁷



Figure 30:
Kevin Gilbert,
Treaty '88 Campaign, 1986,
screenprint,
72.4 x 50.2 (image),
76.2 x 51 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

Finally, a group practising at Tranby Aboriginal College, Glebe, NSW, known as the Tranby College Postermakers (c. 1986–), collaborated on at least one major screenprint together: *The first national conference of Aboriginal controlled community based education institutions*, 1986 (fig. 31).

²⁸⁷ Titles included *Maroo Malie*, 1989 (NGA Collection); *Waterspirit*, 1989 (NGA Collection); and *Laura Dreaming*, 1989 (NGA Collection).



Figure 31:
Tranby College
Postermakers,
*The first national
conference on Aboriginal
controlled community based
education institutions*, 1986,
screenprint,
75.6 x 100.4 cm (image),
76 x 102.1 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

Collectives and workshops had specific objectives concerned with collaborative practice where community access was executed across both the management of facilities and the production of artwork.²⁸⁸ Facilities were usually co-ordinated by experienced staff connected with the workshops' affiliated universities, who were able to offer those who accessed the studios instruction in techniques and processes as a basis for creative expression through the printed medium.²⁸⁹ Artists were able to explore printed media, which could be done relatively quickly and cost-effectively. At times, the immersive nature of the collectives and workshops provided the impetus for artists to pursue tertiary educations and careers in the arts.²⁹⁰

Despite the range in the cultural background of the artists, designers and printers utilising the workshop facilities across various states, what emanated visually was often a result of institutional affiliation and the associated political ethos at the time. Due to their location generally in and around tertiary institutions, the critical and ethical debates of these places often influenced works, politically and socially.²⁹¹ Arguably the visual practice that materialised, though

²⁸⁸ Karilyn Brown (ed.), *Who is Bill Posters?: An Examination of Six Australian Socially Concerned Alternative Print Media Organisations*, Community Cultural Development Unit, Australia Council, North Sydney, c. 1989, p. 4.

²⁸⁹ Lee-Anne Hall, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁹⁰ Croft, 'Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow', *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁹¹ Lee-Anne Hall, 'Introduction', in Brown (ed.), *Who is Bill Posters?: An Examination of Six Australian Socially Concerned Alternative Print Media Organisations*, *op. cit.*

rooted to traditions of the bill posters of the 1960s and 1970s, was a unique one that Croft explains:

emerge[d] through ... irreverence to high art, and ... willingness to experiment with ways to communicate information. The traditional view of the artist, the preciousness of the product, distribution and audience reception were all under attack. Screenprinting in this environment was popularly adopted as a medium because of its inherent ability to refute these concerns.²⁹²

Though cultural distinctions are not attributed in the summary above, there are obvious parallels with urban Indigenous artists whose agendas were concerned with overcoming preconceived notions of what constituted an accepted Indigenous art aesthetic. As urban Indigenous artists explored a new aesthetic, the artwork produced was, at the time, still excluded by high art hierarchies.

An analysis of the screenprints and posters from the foundation phase reveals obvious aesthetic consistencies between urban Indigenous artists and their workshop or collective affiliates.

Thematically, the works surveyed a range of socio-political issues present within the national consciousness at the time, which were typically realities facing Indigenous communities in urban, rural and outback areas. Prints flagged issues relating to sovereignty and land rights, dispossession, education, invasion, survival, the Stolen Generations and self-determination as broad subjects. As illustrated in the above examples, artists dominated their scenes with figures or figurative elements in order to imbue the socio-political subject matter with human content. Whether male, female, young, old, an eye, or a handprint, artists recognised that the figurative best expressed their current concerns that tended to revolve around political and personal objectives. Furthermore, a distinct palette of red, yellow, black and white was used boldly across the majority of the prints, either as background or infill block colour, borders and framing devices,

²⁹² Croft, 'Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow', op. cit.

or as text and line work, echoing the colours of the Aboriginal flag (which was designed in 1971).²⁹³

What remained significant aesthetically in printmaking from this early phase was the juxtaposition of desert or remote-based Indigenous iconography with the artists' present motivations. The prints promoted political awareness in the current climate, whilst at the same time drawing from central, Western Desert and northern remote iconographic repertoires. These repertoires included patterns and designs incorporating dots, lines and cross-hatching, curvilinear lines, roundels, u-shapes and sets of concentric circles, loose and specific geographic demarcation, spirit figures, silhouetted and outlined hand shapes, native animals and floral species. Whilst Meeks, Samuels and Foley had exposed this connection in their works too, albeit more subtly, this technique of juxtaposition provoked audiences to recognise the orientation of the subject matter as specifically Indigenous. In other words, artists were concerned that the Indigenous message contained in the political works be perceived without confusion.

The production of such posters expressed the artists' agency whilst fulfilling a range of objectives. Critically, they signalled distinctly Indigenous issues via a medium that could be exposed in places and spaces that did not subscribe to high art expectations and therefore had the potential to reach a broader audience than those that were institutionally bound. In addition, they presented typical Indigenous imagery as a visual language that, when combined with text-based messages, formed a discernible segue for establishing understanding of contemporary Indigenous culture and experience. Furthermore, in the physical spaces where the production of

²⁹³ Note that this colour combination was used by non-Indigenous printmakers also, often in support of the challenges faced by Indigenous communities. See for example Michael Callaghan, *Smash uranium police states*, 1978, in conjunction with Tin Sheds and International Socialists, NGA Collection; Bridget Bogart, *Right to March Dance*, 1978, in conjunction with Tin Sheds, NGA Collection; Bob Clutterbuck's *Stop the Merchants of Nuclear Death*, 1982, in conjunction with Redletter Press, NGA Collection, and *Land*, 1987, NGA Collection; Pam Debenham, *September 28th – anniversary of John Pat's death in police custody*, 1984, in conjunction with Tin Sheds/Lucifoil Posters, NGA Collection.

the prints took place, that is, where the collectives and workshops were housed, the interactive processes that came with access, learning, printing and exhibiting assisted in forging a community of urban Indigenous artists who shared similar ambitions and values.

Summary

The mid to late 1980s was a significant time for urban Indigenous artists as they played decisive roles, along with a number of other art world actors, in the establishment of an Australian urban Indigenous art movement. It has been argued that four key elements stand out in this process. *Koori Art '84* marked the commencement of the movement and was brought about by artists, curators and funding bodies. Together they effected the collective event in which common art practices were recognised and established first among multiple urban Indigenous artists. Three dominant themes of urban Indigenous art emerge from the exhibition. These include politics, with an emphasis on Indigenous empowerment; landscape and geography as connecting with place; and personal explorations of self and identity. The works of Raymond Meeks, Jeffrey Samuels and Fiona Foley, all of whom were especially active in the earliest phase of urban Indigenous art, provide key examples of initial aesthetic characteristics of the movement in which consistency is evident.

My analysis of their work found a blending of visual elements synonymous with the dominant mode of Indigenous art at the time, and contemporary Western art practices. This deliberately combined approach allowed the artists to visually explore their geographic positions, cultural separation and personal experiences, from which the impacts of colonisation emerge through their aesthetic. Viewed together, this was a revelation, and in an attempt to capture this change in direction of Indigenous art, a number of early commentators responded to the new collective

works, despite having no basis from which to critique them. Their efforts, however, set a precedent for further engagement in the field of review.

As the community of urban Indigenous artists matured it led to Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative and a number of other groups, predominantly located in printmaking studios, whose work reflected a political agenda. With these groups and resources as a foundation, urban Indigenous artists continued to instigate exhibitions and events, and mobilise opportunities and networks that shaped the movement. Simultaneously a new and alternative Indigenous art mode was disseminated. A closer examination of its distinctive aesthetic character follows.

Chapter 3

Early Characteristics: Eliciting Empowerment through the Socio-Political Climate

Introduction

The art produced by urban Indigenous artists in the mid to late 1980s, had a specific agenda. The previous chapter highlighted the primary themes of politics, place, self and identity in relation to work produced by urban Indigenous artists in the exhibition *Koori Art '84*. Between 1984 and 1989 a visual shift took place whereby politics began to occupy the forefront of the urban Indigenous art movement in its early phase. In many ways, this looked like a leitmotiv, that is, a consistent theme approached by artists as they engaged in the socio-political milieu of the time. However, contemporary art theorist Jill Bennett has argued that through artists' engagement with politics, their ensuing aesthetics are, by their very nature, political.²⁹⁴ In other words, the representation of politics in artists' works is not merely reflective, but participatory. Bennett has also argued that politics do not simply inform works, but are enacted through them as they function on material and sensate levels.²⁹⁵ On a material level, a socio-political agenda is evidenced in aesthetic processes and description, while on a sensate level, it is apparent through the 'current of affect' that it generates.²⁹⁶ In the context Bennett describes, aesthetics is thus a modality of this socio-political agenda rather than simply a practice of visual mediation.²⁹⁷ Meanwhile, affect equally affords urban Indigenous art with socio-political force.

The Australian art world was already familiar with socio-political art as it had witnessed works committed to sub-themes of gender, race, international relations and the environment, for

²⁹⁴ Jill Bennett, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Art and Politics after Identity', in Ian North (ed.), *Visual Animals: Crossovers, Evolution and New Aesthetics*, The Contemporary ArtCentre of South Australia Inc., Parkside, South Australia, 2007, pp. 126-127.

²⁹⁵ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁹⁶ Bennett, *ibid.*, pp. 127 & 129.

²⁹⁷ Bennett, *ibid.*

example, since around 1970.²⁹⁸ As urban Indigenous artists enacted a socio-political agenda in their work, they were fuelling the growing discourse in the Australian art world concerning the understated position of Indigenous people within a national and collective identity. This chapter argues that Indigenous empowerment, as a socio-political priority in the mid to late 1980s, was expressed aesthetically and worked affectively, as urban Indigenous artists sought to effect change in the country's consciousness about the position of its First Peoples. Furthermore, as a result of institutional support, which amplified the visibility of urban Indigenous art, it is shown that empowerment was also impelled through public channels. The chapter establishes, that by the end of the 1980s, artists had initiated a distinct socio-political aesthetic that was identifiable within the mode of urban Indigenous art.

Toward Empowerment – The Socio-Political Climate and National Awareness

Whilst urban Indigenous artists were actively establishing cooperatives, participating in workshops and collectives, and exhibiting and producing art that expanded the parameters of their art, certain social and political events and developments were simultaneously affecting Australia's Indigenous communities. Some of these were of national significance, highlighting issues and concerns facing Indigenous culture, whereas others celebrated various achievements and vindications. However, in many cases these were not necessarily art-based, but urban Indigenous artists turned to them as a creative basis to forge aesthetic and affective links with the socio-political milieu in an attempt at agency. As agents, urban Indigenous artists endeavoured to lead collective change.²⁹⁹ They initiated shifts in popular perspectives, in an effort to make visible a new reality.³⁰⁰ This reality was one in which Indigenous authority across

²⁹⁸ See Sasha Grishin, 'The Postmodern Condition and the Changing Nature of Australian Art', in Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2013, pp. 468-477.

²⁹⁹ See discussion of agents and agency in Doris Sommer, 'Prologue', in *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2014, p. 4.

³⁰⁰ Robyn Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 2.

the socio-political spectrum mattered. It was a reality that prompted in viewers a response to imagery, proceeding with the social function of advocating the artists' determined ideals about Indigeneity.³⁰¹ The impacts of these shifts were not always directly perceivable, but were sometimes recognised retrospectively.

Socio-political aesthetics are a product of socio-political engagement. Much activity took place during the early phase of urban Indigenous art, between the years 1984 and 1989 that stimulated such engagement.³⁰² In reviewing a range of events, from the implementation of the *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage (Interim Protection) Act* of 1984, to the new appointment of the Aboriginal Heritage Commission in 1989, it is clear that these were a consequence of the process of decolonisation that was taking place. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine the details of each of these. Suffice to say that together, they reflect an environment of agency present at the time that exceeded art alone. Several of these events were politically and creatively harnessed by urban Indigenous artists specifically. This was done explicitly and discreetly, and the agency that manifested aesthetically in their artwork is demonstrated in this chapter. As outlined, empowerment was a key objective for artists, attained through intelligibility of aesthetics that linked with their socio-political engagement. Urban Indigenous artists capitalised on the steps toward decolonisation, using the modality of aesthetics to present perspectives that commanded attention. This chapter argues that as artists

³⁰¹ See discussion of the social function of art in Ferrell, 'Culture', in *ibid.*, pp. 45-73.

³⁰² In order to convey the breadth of socio-political activity taking place, selected events are listed here chronologically. These include: the implementation of the *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage (Interim Protection) Act 1984*; the hand back of Uluru, 1985; Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs, 1986; the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1987; the first World Indigenous Peoples Congress, Vancouver, Canada, 1987; major Bicentenary celebrations, 1988; the official opening of New Parliament House with a forecourt mosaic created by Michael Nelson Jagamarra, 1988; the recommendation made by the New South Wales Taskforce on Aboriginal Heritage and Culture that the responsibility for Aboriginal heritage be managed by a newly appointed Aboriginal Heritage Commission, 1989; the passing of a resolution on prior Indigenous ownership and dispossession at New Parliament House, Canberra, 1989; Some of these events are also listed in Brenda L Croft, 'Chronology', in Kathryn Favell (ed.), *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p. 155.

exploited sensate levels, an increased general understanding of the socio-political milieu came about for the audiences of urban Indigenous art.

Also introduced earlier, affect was a key factor in the ways urban Indigenous artists empowered the Indigenous subject. Doris Sommer, Professor of African and African American Studies, describes how, via its very autonomy, art freely has the ability to challenge existing arrangements and to effect fresh perceptions.³⁰³ Art may educate, rouse and affect viewers' responses.³⁰⁴ In this way, art and images are able to mobilise affects that can therefore shape identity and community.³⁰⁵ This is possible because affect is constituted by thinking and active emotion.³⁰⁶ Academic, Nigel Thrift, elaborates on this idea, explaining that, '... emotions form a rich moral array through which and with which the world is thought'.³⁰⁷ This builds upon the writing of sociologist Jack Katz, who acknowledges that affect engenders 'a holistically sensed, new texture in the social moment, and one relates to others in and through that emergent and transforming experience.'³⁰⁸ The emergent and transforming experience that comes from affect gives rise to a crucial shift, which may be provoked through the encounter with art. Ultimately, the aesthetic and affective dimensions of art enable a translation of experience.³⁰⁹ Conversely, curators Hetti Perkins and Margie West explain how art also has the potential to acknowledge and exorcise those experiences that are disturbing.³¹⁰ In this sense, artists 'endeavour to find a

³⁰³ Doris Sommer, 'Art and Accountability', in Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities*, op. cit., p. 82.

³⁰⁴ Hetti Perkins & Margie West (eds.), *One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2007, p. 26.

³⁰⁵ Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁰⁶ Catherine Speck, 'Picturing War's Affects on the Homefront during the First World War', in Ann Murray (ed.), Routledge, New York 2018, p. 29 (28-37); Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Athlone Press, London, 1988, p. 273; Nigel Thrift, 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect', *Human Geography*, no. 86, 2004, p. 60.

³⁰⁷ Thrift, *ibid.*, p. 60

³⁰⁸ Jack Katz, quoted in Thrift, *ibid.*; See also Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, p. 343.

³⁰⁹ Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, op. cit., p. 58.

³¹⁰ Perkins & West, *One Sun, One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, op. cit., p. 26.

communicable language of sensation and affect.³¹¹ Consequently, art, both in its affective production as well as in its affective responses, has the capacity to strengthen identity and cultural values.³¹² This may occur as experience and translation takes place for, and between, artists and viewers.

Urban Indigenous artists bolstered the aesthetic dimension of new works, specifically to translate socio-political experiences. This is explored through discussion of the events that follow. In terms of outcome, a result of this translation is that an opening to new truth-making may occur, when previous understandings are challenged and the organised perceptions already held by viewers, are relaxed.³¹³ With this new truth-making comes the opportunity for empowerment; the power of authority, confidence and control of circumstances. The antithesis of this process can be explained in the context of Walter Benjamin's concept of translation and language. He describes how through the process of preserving one's own distinct state in which native language occurs, the potential to affect that language by a foreign tongue is hampered.³¹⁴ Urban Indigenous artists did not preserve the visual language of the familiar mode that had been stereotypically adopted by the settler nation, but instead they employed a *new* visual language with which to communicate. This was an affective language, not translated through the prescribed readings of desert or remote Indigenous art, or exclusive Western visual traditions of socio-political art. It was an aesthetic that allowed meanings and experiences to be conveyed with intelligibility, bringing about new engagement with viewers and the making of new truth.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Jill Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005, p. 2.

³¹² Perkins & West, *One Sun, One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia*, op. cit.

³¹³ Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, op. cit., p. 58.

³¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 2011, p. 81; and Ferrell, *ibid.*

³¹⁵ Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', op. cit., p. 3.

The following sub-sections of this chapter investigate how urban Indigenous artists turned to: Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs, 1986; the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, commencing in 1987; and Australia's Bicentenary celebrations of 1988. In addressing these events, artists challenged the status quo, provoked alternative readings of Indigenous culture and produced a range of substitute visual resources and responses that would stimulate Indigenous empowerment.

The socio-political aesthetic urban Indigenous artists forged in connection with these three key events of the 1980s are examined. Aspects of each event are discussed including their socio-political roles and contexts, and their relation to the aesthetics of urban Indigenous art. Though the visit of Pope John Paul II elicited just two key visual responses by urban Indigenous artists, profound statements are made in each. Conversely, the range of artworks produced in relation to Aboriginal deaths in custody and the Bicentenary is vast, requiring in each case a reduced sample selection for analysis.³¹⁶ Whilst the three selected events are notably very different in terms of subject, actors, duration, tone and audience, for example, they show that despite such breadth, each presented the potential for urban Indigenous artists to propagate empowerment.

The Visit of Pope John Paul II, Alice Springs, 1986

Pope John Paul II made a visit to Australia in 1986.³¹⁷ Part of the Pope's tour included a visit to Alice Springs, where at Blatherskite Park he made a lengthy speech about Indigenous culture and the effects of colonisation, and acknowledged the need for remedy with regard to land rights

³¹⁶ Examples selected are drawn from a cross-section of artists, rather than multiple works by a few individual artists.

³¹⁷ Pope John Paul II visited Australia in 1986 from 24 November to 1 December. See 'Papal Visit to the Heart', *The Catholic Leader*, 8 October 2006, viewed 19 September 2013, <http://www.catholicleader.com.au/news.php/features/papal-visit-to-the-heart_42189>.

and discrimination.³¹⁸ The speech paid homage to Indigenous Australians as Australia's First Peoples and recognised their unique connection between culture and Country.³¹⁹

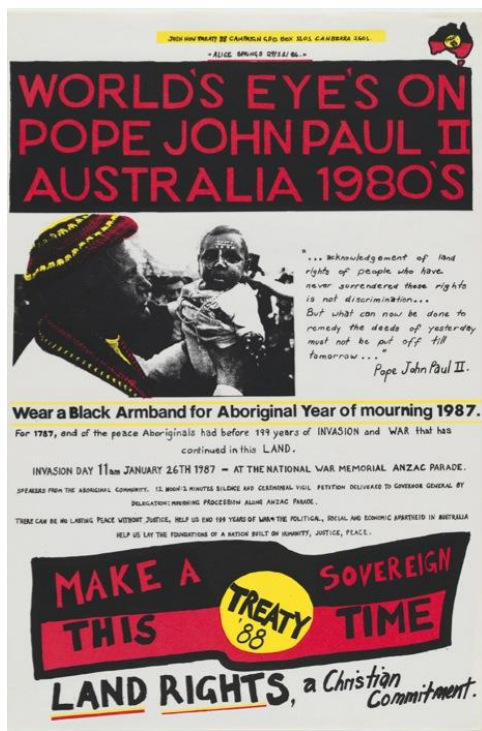


Figure 30:
Kevin Gilbert,
Treaty '88 Campaign, 1986
screenprint, 72.4 x 50.2 (image),
76.2 x 51 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

The screenprint by artist and activist Kevin Gilbert (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi) *Treaty '88 Campaign*, 1986 (fig. 30), directly references the visit. The image makes specific links with the event in a number of ways. Most obviously via its photographic content the Pope is shown wearing a crocheted beanie and stole that Indigenous elders presented to him during the visit.³²⁰ Just as Benjamin speaks of the foreign tongue, Gilbert translates an alternative context by the accentuated colour of these handmade woollen objects within the composition, which appear disparate and foreign against the familiar vestments of the spiritual leader. He holds infant Liam Pandella, of the Nauiyu Community based at Daly River.³²¹ The artist has utilised the documentary photography mode, in order to convey the Pope's presence as factual; presenting

³¹⁸ Pope John Paul II's speech was delivered in Alice Springs on 29 November 1986. See Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 'Pilgrimage in Australia: Address of John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park', transcript, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986, viewed 19 September 2013, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia.html>.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ Adrian Lyons, 'Australian Bicentenary: 1988', *America*, 12 December 1987, vol. 127, issue 18, p. 454, viewed 31 October 2013, (EBSCO); Frank Brennan, 'The Pope in Alice: 25 Years On', *Eureka Street*, vol. 21, no. 23, 2011, viewed 23 October 2017, <<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aid=29241#.V8aCPph96Uk>>.

³²¹ Brennan, *ibid.*

a scene based on real events that took place at a particular time in a particular place. Gilbert's inclusion on the poster of a quotation from the Pope's speech, adds to the gravitas of the event, which the artist contextualises as being specifically about land rights. What is underscored politically, is that the Pope's comments about land rights and discrimination, were made at a time when issues such as these were on the national agenda, particularly as a federal election was scheduled to take place in the following year.³²² Gilbert has reproduced the Pope's words in an attempt to add authority to the tone of the work. His addition also acts as a mnemonic device that takes viewers back to the historical moment of the event and the influential words of a Western religious leader; there is anticipation that the words will elicit solemnity in its audience.

By the time the Pope made his speech in Alice Springs, debate about land rights had escalated within both public and government spheres. The Aboriginal Treaty Committee had been established in 1979, following the National Aboriginal Conference in 1977. Running until 1983, the committee had the aim of providing information and awareness to the non-Indigenous public about land rights and what a treaty might involve for the nation. By 1980, Gilbert had begun to generate openly oppositional commentary to the debate, commencing with his examination of the government's Makarrata or Treaty of Commitment between Australia's Indigenous population and the Australian Government that had been proposed the previous year. Gilbert's opposition mounted in response to the government's diluted terms of a treaty, which he claimed did not recognise the Indigenous population as equals.³²³ Together with his criticism of the National Aboriginal Conference in general, his position culminated with direct involvement in the 'Treaty

³²² Australian Electoral Commission, 'Federal, State and Territory Election Dates from 1946 to the Present', Australian Electoral Commission website, 2013, viewed 1 November 2013, <http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Australian_Electoral_History/Federal_State_and_Territory_elections_dates_1946_Present.htm>.

³²³ Kevin Gilbert, 'Makarrata: NAC Sellout', *AIM (Aboriginal-Islander Message)*, no. 13, 1980, p. 5, viewed 12 November 2013, <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/treaty/docs/t88/m0019849_a.pdf>.

'88' campaign.³²⁴ Both the treaty campaign and its associated debate that centred on land rights, continued. Punctuating this political episode was the Pope's visit to Australia, in which the international religious figure felt inclined to pass comment on the topics of land rights, racism, loss and survival. His visit to Alice Springs, with its large Indigenous population, was perfectly timed for Gilbert. The Pope's interest in Australian affairs, which was broadcast around the world, drew global attention to the plight of Indigenous peoples. As the Bicentenary neared, Gilbert's emphasis on the Pope's presence and his words stimulated reflection on the message shared by the pontiff regarding land rights.

Gilbert had seized the moment, layering image and text with bold minimal colour to maximum visual effect. Furthermore, Gilbert's text communicated emotive language. He incorporated words into the composition such as 'mourning', 'invasion', 'war', 'peace', and 'Christian commitment', and by employing affective associations he engaged viewers in a dialogue of loss, damage, hope and Western spiritual responsibility. These associations and dialogue are tied to the lived experiences of emotions remembered, but also the sensations that manifest in the present.³²⁵ The aesthetics of the artwork presented text-based imagery alongside imagery of the Pope, whom as a benevolent focal point, drew audiences into the socio-political matter at hand.

The screenprint was in essence an advertisement for the 'Treaty '88' campaign; art as a 'call to action'. It called on viewers to consider joining or contributing to the campaign, offering them the chance to be physically involved in change. Gilbert suggests they 'wear a black armband', and in doing so, expects that affect may engender solidarity. The potential sensation of solidarity

³²⁴ See timeline and documentation on Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Islander Studies (AIATSIS), 'Treaty: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Islander Studies', AIATSIS, 2013, viewed 1 November 2013, <<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/treaty/nac.html>>.

³²⁵ Jill Bennett, 'Insides, Outsides: Trauma, Affect, and Art', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

experienced by viewers is indicative of what Jill Bennett describes as an 'affective response'.³²⁶ Similarly, philosopher Gilles Deleuze suggests that some signs are felt rather than recognised, and that a reaction to these is deep thought, or more intensively, critical inquiry.³²⁷ Solidarity was meant to be felt. Gilbert's text 'Wear a Black Armband for Aboriginal Year of Mourning 1987' is printed in black and is positioned centrally within the work. It is a statement that conjures up imagery of groups of people who mark their respect for someone deceased by collectively wearing a black armband. Gilbert's textual sign is understood in terms of what is meant through this physical act of mourning as a united body of people, and the possible sensational response to this. Solidarity is reinforced by Gilbert's amplification of the Pope's crocheted accessories. The colours of the Aboriginal flag are used to identify with the pictured Indigenous people assembled at Blatherskite Park, as well as the wider Indigenous community. Bennett explains how community, in this sense, is realised through aesthetics.³²⁸ Similarly, solidarity is felt communally through Gilbert's visual devices.

Visual branding is important within this work and was a technique also employed by other artists to make aesthetic links. In particular, 'Treaty '88', which at the time of the print was a potential future event, was incorporated as a slogan by the artist. Gilbert emphasised the significance of the political event by composing the words within the central yellow circle of the Aboriginal flag in the lower section of the image. This technique positioned the event as central to the Indigenous political cause, projected as part of the Aboriginal flag. It thus allowed viewers to identify 'Treaty '88' with Indigenous protest, which therefore motivated thought about their own personal involvement. As mentioned, Gilbert used the colours black, red and yellow effectively, in relation to both the text and the flag components. The emblazoned statement, 'Make a sovereign this

³²⁶ Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', op. cit., p. 7.

³²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, cited in Bennett, *ibid.*; See also, Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard, new edn, Athlone, London, 2000.

³²⁸ Jill Bennett, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Art and Politics after Identity', op. cit., p. 126.

time', presented via an inverse colour configuration on the Aboriginal flag, is effective in inciting affect in viewers; namely to confront their perceptions about the establishment of nationhood. Gilbert provokes consideration of Indigenous power and Indigenous authority, and he emphasises how these have been undermined in the past.

The artist promotes land rights and sovereignty as the primary message of the screenprint, however, the message is visually strengthened through the representation of and comments made by the Pope. What this composition by Gilbert reveals is a technique whereby one subject of particular importance, that is the Pope's visit to Australia, became a platform for another, to demonstrate issues of Indigenous concern. These two aspects, event and concern, are projected to audiences through aesthetic and affective channels. The artist draws on documentary photography and quotation attached to the material event, with text, colour and iconography that promote feelings of solidarity and mourning. These characteristics are used in order to express the artist's socio-political position that calls for Indigenous action and empowerment.

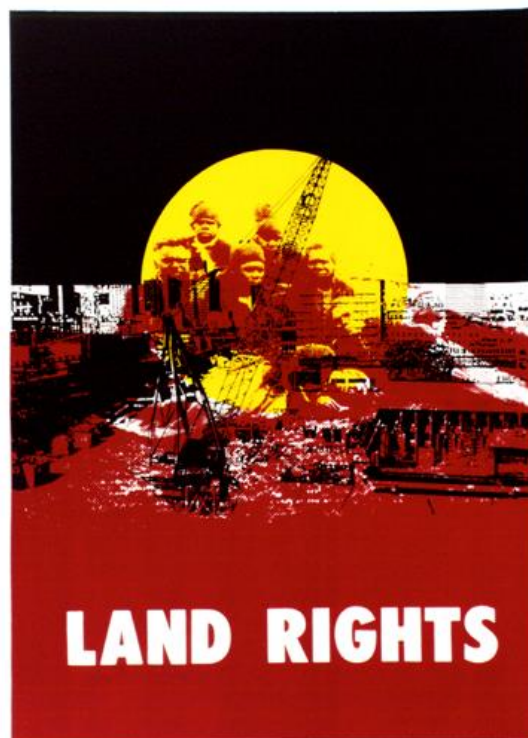


Figure 32:
Karen Casey, *Land rights*, 1987,
screenprint, edition 1/30,
67.4 x 48.6 cm (image),
86 x 61 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

Figure 33:
Wendy Dunn and
Alice Hinton-Bateup,
Australia Day, 1987,
screenprint,
50 x 68 cm,
Powerhouse Museum Collection.



In subsequent prints produced and circulated regarding 'Treaty '88', land rights and sovereignty did not necessarily incorporate popular or established public figures, but collectively they extended the discourse of the subject portrayed. Land rights specifically were also the central focus of two works exhibited in *Aboriginal Australian Views in Print and Poster*, 1987: Karen Casey (Tasmanian Aboriginal people) produced *Land rights*, 1987 (fig. 32), purchased by the NGA in 1988, and the collaborative print *Australia Day*, 1987 (fig. 33), was produced by Wendy Dunn (language group unconfirmed) and Alice Hinton-Bateup (Kamilaroi/Wonnarua), acquired by the Powerhouse Museum c. 1990. They were both produced around the same time as Gilbert's poster and similarly utilise documentary photography processes along with text that expresses an Indigenous socio-political position, while at the same time employing the colours of the Aboriginal flag for visual effect. Dunn's and Hinton-Bateup's image incorporated a photograph taken from a 1987 Bicentennial protest demonstration, possibly in connection with Gilbert's 'Treaty '88' event.³²⁹ In poster format, the work was also reproduced for sale in order to raise funds to send artist Wendy Dunn to the inaugural World Indigenous People's Congress, held in Vancouver in 1987.³³⁰ Casey's screenprint, on the other hand, visually juxtaposes traditional

³²⁹ Powerhouse Museum, '90/222 Poster: Australia Day Invasion Day', viewed 29 February 2016, <<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=103465&search=Australian+Day+screenprint&images=&c=1&s=>>>.

³³⁰ Powerhouse Museum, *ibid.*

landowners against land that has been used for mining, with the Aboriginal flag as a backdrop. The artist uses irony to question what rights those people depicted actually have, and extends the implication of this to viewers.

Figure 34:
Iris Clayton,
[Untitled], c. 1988,
unspecified photograph,
dimensions unknown,
location unknown,
Source: Kevin Gilbert,
*Inside Black Australia:
Aboriginal Photographers
Exhibition*, Treaty '88,
Canberra, 1988.



The photograph by health worker and cultural activist Iris Clayton (Wiradjuri – unconfirmed) *[Untitled]*, c. 1988 (fig. 34), contrasts dramatically in style to Gilbert's screenprinted political poster, yet also utilised the papal visit of 1986 for political purpose, albeit more subtly. The image was produced for *Inside Black Australia: Aboriginal Photographers Exhibition*, 1988, and the artist said of her work, 'For me, the Pope's visit showed the solidarity and needs of the Aboriginal People to the world'.³³¹ The artist thus acknowledged that the Pope, as an international figure, provided much needed exposure for both the unity exhibited by Indigenous Australians as well as the challenges faced by Indigenous communities. The image illustrates the documentary idiom, conjuring reality and truthfulness of scene via the black and white pictorial tradition. Yet, like Gilbert's print, it exploits the context of the Pope's presence within the scene for its political propagation. As the Pope stops and speaks to a young Aboriginal boy, the work spotlights the debate on sovereignty that was continuing in response to Australia's Bicentenary.

³³¹ Iris Clayton, 'Artist Statement', in Kevin Gilbert, *Inside Black Australia: Aboriginal Photographers Exhibition*, Treaty '88, Canberra, 1988, p. 7.

Moreover, as it was exhibited in *Inside Black Australia*, Clayton's image must also be read in the context of the exhibition's rationale. Curator Kevin Gilbert explained that it provided viewers insight into the exceptionally personal aspects of Indigenous life and the factors that impacted on these lives.³³² His objective for the exhibition was to question the status quo in Australia and to ask why, in many cases, Indigenous people were exposed to ghettos and fringe camps, and lived in refugee situations within their own country.³³³ He stated, 'In order to enshrine and protect our Sovereign Rights forever, we pursue a Sovereign Treaty with the Australian Government, under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties'.³³⁴ *Inside Black Australia*, which was staged several months after Australia's Bicentenary, operated as a protest against the national celebrations.³³⁵ It revealed obvious links between aesthetics and Gilbert's rationale to propagate his position on land rights, sovereignty and a treaty, as projected in his aforementioned work. By inclusion and association, Clayton's image was complicit in exploiting the Pope's visit to engage audiences in political dialogue. Gilbert's inclusion of this image within the exhibition triggered recollections of the Pope's visit two years prior, and particularly the Catholic icon's dedicated speech about land rights. Just as the image was evocative of an event passed, it also operated by bringing into the present the emotions and sensations connected with those memories.³³⁶ This affective process allowed the artwork to recapitulate a distinct political agenda precisely through its aesthetic.

Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

The 1980s was an era with very high statistics of Aboriginal deaths in custody, sparking a Royal Commission in 1987 to examine cases of deaths in prison and police custody that had occurred

³³² Gilbert, *Inside Black Australia*, op. cit., p. 2.

³³³ Gilbert, *ibid.*

³³⁴ Gilbert, *ibid.*, p. 7.

³³⁵ Gael Newton, 'The Elders: Indigenous Photography in Australia', in Favelle, *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, op. cit., p. 47.

³³⁶ Jill Bennett, 'Insides, Outsides: Trauma, Affect, and Art', op. cit., pp. 22-23.

across states and territories between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989.³³⁷ Prime Minister Bob Hawke, instigated a Royal Commission following increased public concern about a perceived prevalence of Aboriginal custodial deaths and a general lack of explanation on behalf of those involved with the deceased.³³⁸ In the eight months prior to the establishment of the commission, sixteen Indigenous custodial deaths had occurred, which escalated concern from the public.³³⁹ Social and environmental psychologist, Joseph Reser, claimed that the subject's poignancy at the time was 'derived in part from its juxtaposition to the political and cultural events leading up to the Australian Bicentenary "celebrations" in 1988, and to an ongoing review of Australia by the United Nations Working Committee on Indigenous People'.³⁴⁰ A sense of discrepancy was evident as the Australian Government, on the one hand, addressed human rights issues pertinent to South Africa and the Soviet Union, and yet on the other had failed to recognise the mounting severity of the deaths in custody situation at home.³⁴¹ Tensions were further enhanced by the rate of suicide in custody, which sparked not only public suspicions about duty of care, mistreatment of prisoners and institutional racism, but also the greater adversities reflected in economic, social and cultural areas of Aboriginal life.³⁴²

Responses to the subject ranged from large community marches, rallies and protests, to appeals made through the media, such as in interviews, statements and articles. These were far

³³⁷ Peter Nagle & Richard Summerrell, *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: The Royal Commission and its Records, 1987–1991*, National Archives of Australia, research guide from website, viewed 11 November 2013, <http://guides.naa.gov.au/content/Guide002_tcm48-54584.pdf>, p. 7. See also Wendy Baker, 'A Case Study in Ethical Failure: Twenty Years of Media Coverage of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody', *Pacific Journalism Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2005, pp. 17–41, viewed 18 November 2013, <<http://search.informit.com.au.proxy.library.adelaide.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=123144714258609;res=IELHSS>> ISSN: 1023–9499>.

³³⁸ Nagle & Summerrell, *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, op. cit.

³³⁹ Peter Grabosky et al., *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Woden, ACT, 1988.

³⁴⁰ Joseph Reser, 'Deaths in Custody', in Kleinert & Neale (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2000, p. 572.

³⁴¹ Grabosky et al., *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, op. cit., pp. 1–2.

³⁴² Reser, 'Deaths in Custody', op. cit.; Grabosky, *ibid*.

reaching, with forms of public outcry taking place in cities and regional areas of the country.³⁴³ In some cases, the responses were generic, that is, opposition to the situation itself was in broad terms, whilst in others, specific cases were discussed. This was most notable in the media, which covered the controversial deaths of sixteen-year old John Pat, who died in police custody in Western Australia in 1983, and nineteen-year old Kingsley Dixon, in an Adelaide prison in 1987.³⁴⁴ Governments in all states and territories supported the Royal Commission.³⁴⁵ Offices were put in place in the state capitals Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin and Perth, with an additional office in Broome, whilst sub-offices were established in Melbourne, Alice Springs and Hobart.³⁴⁶ The Royal Commission was completed in 1991 when a comprehensive report was handed down, following an interim report that was presented in 1988.³⁴⁷ Of the cases examined, most deaths had occurred in 1987 and in 1988.³⁴⁸

Creative responses to the subject were vast. For urban Indigenous artists working in the early phase of the movement, when the numbers of deaths in custody escalated, and the Royal Commission itself was implemented, artworks ranged from scenes that documented the associated public events, primarily through the use of photography, to more personal portrayals of the subject within a much larger narrative of Indigenous experience.

³⁴³ Artist Brenda Croft documents a rally to stop black deaths in custody in Redfern, Sydney, 1985, whilst the regional town of Brewarrina, in north-west New South Wales, for example, held a protest march during 1987. See Penny Taylor (ed.), *After 200 Years: Photographic Essays of Aboriginal and Islander Australia Today*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, p. 81–83.

³⁴⁴ See Peter Grabosky, 'An Aboriginal Death in Custody: The Death of John Pat', in *Wayward Governance: Illegality and its Control in the Public Sector*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1989, pp. 79–92; Tony Hewett, 'Aborigines in Jail Treated "Like dogs"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1987, published in Jenni Stocks (ed.), *Images and Language '88: Aboriginal Perspectives on a Celebration*, Inner City Education Centre Stanmore, Sydney, 1988, p. 16.

³⁴⁵ Nagle & Summerrell, *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, op cit., pp. 7–8.

³⁴⁶ Nagle & Summerrell, *ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁴⁷ Nagle & Summerrell, *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Australasian Legal Information Institute, *Final Report of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody – Summary: Part A The Deaths Investigated by the Royal Commission*, Indigenous Law Resources, viewed 11 November 2013, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/rciadic_summary/rcsumk03.html>.



Figure 35:
Robert Campbell Jnr,
Abo history (facts), 1988,
synthetic polymer paint on
canvas,
130 x 200 cm,
NGA Collection.

The subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody was aptly explored by Kempsey-based artist Robert Campbell Jnr (Ngaku, 1944–1993). In *Abo history (facts)*, 1988 (fig. 35), the artist illustrates, frame-by-frame, an Indigenous perspective of colonial history. The succession of events, as alluded to by the title of the work are delineated as basic cultural ‘facts’; the telling of which, Campbell reclaims from the dominant narrative. Aboriginal deaths in custody is just one of these amongst many others, which is presented as a tragic suicidal end in the last frame of the work that concludes a multi-part pictorial story, not only of simplified temporal sequence, but of colonial experience, post-contact Indigenous history and unavoidable change.

Art critics, historians and curators have explained that Campbell’s background patterning, the animals he has incorporated into his work as well as colour used are based on traditional Ngaku clan designs.³⁴⁹ His decorative style has been likened to the fine engravings found on artefacts from the Macleay River region, as well as the animatedly designed possum-skin cloaks.³⁵⁰ However, breaking with cultural traditions, Campbell has modified and individualised these influences, establishing an idiosyncratic approach to style and composition that he has deliberately maintained throughout his oeuvre. Campbell maintains, that despite his visual

³⁴⁹ Avril Quail, ‘Robert Campbell Jnr’, in Franchesca Cubillo & Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2010, p. 224; see also George Alexander, ‘Robert Campbell Jnr’, in Julie Donaldson & Theresa Willsteed (eds), *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, revised edn, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2013, p. 42; Djon Mundine, ‘Robert Campbell: Biography’, *Design and Art Australia Online*, 2011, viewed 21 December, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/junior-robert-campbell/personal_details/>.

³⁵⁰ George Alexander, ‘Robert Campbell Jnr’, *ibid.*

innovation, works are based on his past and present environment and his relationship with people and the landscape.³⁵¹ Similarly to Meeks's comments in the previous chapter, Campbell said of his work, 'My art is my personal response to these stimuli, wherever I may be.'³⁵² In this sense, as a Kempsey-based artist, Campbell also responds to his urbanised regional setting and the broader concerns of his Aboriginal community.

His aesthetic at one level is narrative driven; presenting scenes typically filled with active figures exhibiting straight or stiffly bent limbs, which Campbell expresses with a naivety of form. Perspectival techniques such as foregrounding and backgrounding allow viewers to coherently follow each frame sequence within a scene. The configuration of these features is presented as cartoon-like, yet the subject represented, though simplified and exaggerated, is far from comical. Campbell accentuates a disparity between visuality and subject, whereby viewers are drawn into his work by its colour, composition and comic-like appearance, only to find these are a ruse, as revealed by its grim content. Instead, viewers partake in Campbell's life and collective memory of life.³⁵³ On another level, his aesthetic transmits feelings of pain, suffering and irrevocable change. Despite the vibrant colour and animation, the work above is arresting as it emits a disillusioned outlook on Indigenous and non-Indigenous interactions and relationships that have come to embody contemporary Indigenous life and experience.

Custodial death is the primary focus in several other works by Campbell including *Death in custody*, 1987 (appendix), *Why Weren't They Charged With Perjury*, 1988 (appendix), and the 1990 work, *Killed in the Line of Duties Led to Gundy's Innocent Killing (Who Me, Why Me?)*, 1990, (appendix). Campbell's experiences in Kempsey at the time such works were produced,

³⁵¹ Robert Campbell Jnr, 'Robert Campbell Jnr', *Artlink*, vol. 10, nos. 1 & 2, 1990, reprinted 1992, p. 83.

³⁵² Campbell Jnr, *ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁵³ Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', *op. cit.*, p. 3.

reflect and impart many of the socio-political and cultural concerns that his community was facing. The Kempsey community had experienced racial segregation, discrimination and a lack of egalitarianism, which contributed to the socio-political character of the town.³⁵⁴ For many, the outcome of such an environment has been tragic and Campbell's images convey the broad traumatic experience connected with custodial deaths. In conveying aspects of trauma, Jill Bennett explains that the works also therefore operate outside art's traditional disciplinary boundaries.³⁵⁵ She suggests that the expression of trauma and the conflict it engenders, form an 'affective operation of art'.³⁵⁶ For Campbell, deaths in custody, and the violent and racist unravelling of colonisation, which he deemed to be its catalyst, precisely engender trauma and conflict. His notions of these effectively reach his audience. His dynamic visual devices lure viewers in, forcing them to engage with the underlying reality of colonisation and its affects. Campbell exploits the socio-political aesthetic and solicits viewers in the process.

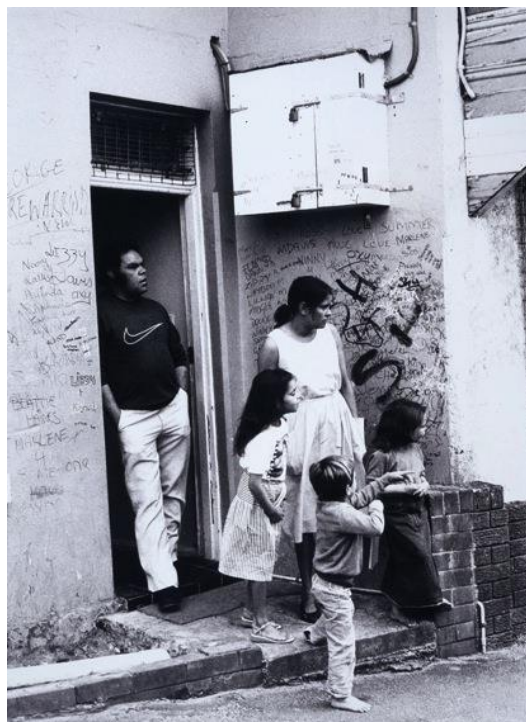


Figure 36:
Brenda L Croft,
Koori family in Eveleigh Street, Redfern.
Stop Black Deaths in Custody rally,
28 September 1985, 1985,
gelatin silver photograph,
50.4 x 37.8 cm (image),
50.4 x 40.5 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

³⁵⁴ See Barry Morris, 'Racism, Egalitarianism and Aborigines', in Gillian Cowlishaw (ed.), *Race Matters: Indigenous Australians and 'Our' Society*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, pp. 161-176.

³⁵⁵ See discussion on this in Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', op. cit., pp. 2-3.

³⁵⁶ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 3.

In contrast to Campbell's distinct cartoon-like artworks that render history and conflict in a quasi-naïve chronological narrative, Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/ Malngin/ Mudpurra/ Bilinara) has employed the photo-documentary idiom for the image titled *Koori family in Eveleigh Street, Redfern. Stop Black Deaths in Custody rally, 28 September 1985, 1985* (fig. 36). Croft's gelatin silver print was produced to acknowledge the tangible sentiment of disapproval emanating from the street in Redfern in response to Aboriginal deaths in custody at the time. Moreover, she demonstrates the humanity of the situation, as the family and their surroundings portrayed, are enveloped by the graffiti covered, dilapidated infrastructure of their Redfern home. Viewers are drawn into the rhythm of Croft's scene in search of what the family group is gazing upon that is out of view, as a young boy points to something beyond the frame. While no particular detail of the black and white image offers visible insight into what it is they see, Croft reveals this information in the work's title, which accentuates the socio-political atmosphere. Notably, however, there is some distance between the family and the rally and in this space the viewer may identify empathetically, as the family watch on respectfully. Critical theorist Dominick LaCapra describes such an empathetic relationship to an event as virtual rather than vicarious, where an emotional response has the potential to arise, yet it comes with the realisation that the experience represented is not intimately known.³⁵⁷ As Croft portrays this relationship between figures and event in her scene, the image also assists in facilitating a space for such an affective relationship to occur for viewers.

With regard to this work, Croft as artist is both a participant and a documenter and offers her visual testimony of the event in such a way that viewers see what she sees. Croft explained that at the time this work was produced, 'It was about being an insider photographing what was

³⁵⁷ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2001, p. 40; see also Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2004, p. 118.

happening'.³⁵⁸ As well as offering viewers an access point to think about the rally empathetically, Croft also used her position as an insider to present an alternative perspective to the images documented and popularised in the media regarding the subject of deaths in custody. Not only was Croft directing the shape of urban Indigenous art insofar as she represented the photo-documentary idiom from an Indigenous perspective, just as Iris Clayton had done, but she was also role-modelling political agency by empowering the Indigenous subject of her work. In fashioning an image that portrayed the family of onlookers of a rally in Redfern, that is, the residents who witnessed the rally, she also reflected the concern, empathy and action on behalf of the public at the time in response to what was occurring to Aboriginal people in custody. Imbued with visual realism, these reference points lent both personal and geographic context to the event and projected the severity of the subject that affected the local community or neighbourhood. Croft recalled the march that took place in 1985 and said of this image, 'it really just showed what it was like living right in Eveleigh Street in Sydney'.³⁵⁹ This photograph was acquired by the NGA in 1989.

³⁵⁸ LaCapra, *History in Transit*, *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Brenda Croft in 'Re-take Artists Talk: Brenda L Croft', in *Re-take: Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Photography*, National Gallery of Australia, 13 October, 1998, viewed 28 October 2013, <<http://nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/artistFrameset.htm>>.



Figure 37:
Byron Pickett,
Black deaths, 1988,
photo screenprint, edition 7/11,
50.5 x 54 cm,
Collection of FUAM.

A print by Byron Pickett (Nyoongar) expresses the artist's concern with the subject. *Black deaths*, 1988 (fig. 37), Pickett's colour screenprint incorporating the photo-emulsion process, calls for a stop to the Aboriginal deaths in custody, where it is explicitly stated in linked script, 'Stop black deaths in custody for the sake of Australia's [sic] dignity and pride'. It is a particularly confronting image as the bust of a bearded man with chains around his neck is visible behind the cell bars. Just as other urban Indigenous artists have used the iconic colours of the Aboriginal flag, so too has Pickett in the framing device employed that doubles as a stylised shape of Australia.

Whilst Pickett's comments are unifying in the way that they appeal for change 'for the sake of *Australia's* dignity and pride', and refer to Australia in the sense of a shared country, they are at the same time accusatory. In using the word 'stop', the work speaks directly back to viewers, who are thus implicated in the occurrence of custodial deaths. For Pickett, language is used as a direct tool with which to affect viewers. His message is clear and easily translatable.³⁶⁰ This translatability works similarly to the visual devices employed by Robert Campbell Jnr outlined

³⁶⁰ See Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator: an Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', in *Illuminations*, op. cit., p. 81.

above, which lure viewers in to the scene, compelling their consideration of the trauma associated with the subject portrayed. Walter Benjamin explains how translatability is dependent on the level of attachment of meaning.³⁶¹ In Pickett's artwork, meaning is unambiguous. The image registers feelings of marginalisation, desperation, mental conflict and victimisation. The artist layers the central visual elements with perspective and depth, allowing viewers to see simultaneously the Aboriginal subject, the cell setting, and the hanging cloth, all denoting suicide. This central iconography dominated by the figure pulls the physicality of the issue into focus, specifically heightening the humanity of the image. The image of the unnamed man is a familiar one associated with visual material documenting the nineteenth century custodial practice of manacling Aboriginal men by the neck. The visual history of this practice is affronting, particularly considering that it was extended to women and children as well.³⁶² The artist makes a temporal connection here, equating the past with the present, which again aligns with Bennett's theory of memory and sensation of a traumatic event that need not be isolated to a particular time.³⁶³ The affect associated with the event may take place regardless of when it occurred. Through Pickett's image, viewers distinguish this traumatic affect and in doing so, are compelled to conceive of an imperative solution.

Since 1976, research into the over-representation of Indigenous populations within the Australian prison system has tried to account for the discrepancy in numbers when compared with non-Indigenous prison populations.³⁶⁴ Indigenous educator John Williams-Mozley, summarises the incongruity as a consequence of several factors including police discrimination, discrimination by both the criminal law and criminal justice system, racism, dispossession, the ongoing effects of

³⁶¹ Benjamin, *ibid.*, pp. 69-82.

³⁶² Kristyn Harman & Elizabeth Grant, "Impossible to Detain ... without Chains?": The Use of Restraints on Aboriginal People in Policing and Prisons', *History Australia*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 157-176.

³⁶³ Bennett, 'Insides, Outsides: Trauma, Affect, and Art', pp. 22-23.

³⁶⁴ John Williams-Mozley, 'Overkill, Over Time: The Criminalisation of Indigenous Society – or Genocide by Stealth' in Kaye Price (ed.), *Knowledge of Life: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria, 2015, p. 62.

colonisation, poverty, alcohol abuse, and general practices of exclusion within Australian society.³⁶⁵ The Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody corroborated the findings of the earlier research, concluding that one of the fundamental reasons for the Aboriginal over-representation in the prison system was the perpetual inequality and disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people across social, cultural and economic spheres.³⁶⁶ Pickett's screenprint is both a plea and a recommendation, juxtaposing image and text in a way that probes accountability and responsibility. The artist effectively brings each of the above factors into his frame, creating a visual dialogue that binds viewers to the tragedy of deaths in custody. It is anticipated that the affect transmitted through this process, combined with the confronting and accusatory vitality of the image's aesthetic, will elicit a solution and change. Only through change, will a marginalised group of people be empowered.



Figure 38:
Kunwingie (Kerry Giles),
Black deaths in custody, 1988,
screenprint,
edition 15/29,
39.2 x 63 cm (image),
61 x 86 cm (sheet),
Collection of FUAM.

Similarly to Pickett's image, a screenprint by Kunwingie (Kerry Giles) (Ngarrindjeri, 1959-1997), *Black deaths in custody*, 1988 (fig. 38), incorporates iconography comprising cell walls, cell bars, a figurative element of hands, and a looped rope indicative of suicide. Kunwingie, like other Indigenous artists discussed throughout this chapter, employed the emblematic Aboriginal flag within the composition. This central aesthetic feature provides a symbolic cultural backdrop to the scene that may be easily identified by viewers.

³⁶⁵ Williams-Mozley, *ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁶⁶ Williams-Mozley, *ibid.*

Kunwingie also introduces text in her image with several areas of red 'graffiti' superimposed upon the tessellating brickwork.³⁶⁷ This text provides commentary and questions that read: 'Suicide is not our culture'; 'How many die before they even see a jail?'; 'Why is this going on?'; 'One Q.C. for over 100 cases'; 'How many more Mr. Government?'; 'Since 1980 122 deaths'; and 'How many in your family?' The artist's tone is an intensely critical one that points to the government's deficiency in both the deaths in custody issue and the Royal Commission itself. Just as Pickett used text and image affectively, Kunwingie's amalgamation of visual features presents the subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody boldly in plain-sight, which theorists Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe as one of several key orientations of affect.³⁶⁸ Seigworth and Gregg explain how expressing affect clearly in politically engaged works, particularly those undertaken by disempowered groups, attends to collective experience.³⁶⁹ This process in turn exposes the various problems and excesses residing within 'normative' power structures. Thus the graffiti covered, barred cell window Kunwingie illustrates, is not merely a framing device for the shocking central activity that is set to take place in the scene at hand. Instead, the artwork is the visual manifestation of the collective despair that is felt around the subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody. The artist translates the affect of this socio-political quandary, which she deems to be the result of unmitigated negligence.

³⁶⁷ This text is difficult to read in a small reproduction.

³⁶⁸ See Gregory J Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010, pp. 6-7.

³⁶⁹ Seigworth and Gregg, *ibid.*, p. 7.



Figure 39: Gordon Bennett, *The Persistence of Language*, 1987, (triptych) synthetic polymer paint on 3 canvas panels, 152.3 x 411 cm (overall), AGWA Collection © The Estate of Gordon Bennett

Artist Gordon Bennett produced the three-panel painting above, *The Persistence of Language*, 1987 (fig. 39), which marks a departure from both the photo-documentary idiom and the printmaking medium. While the work retains a textual component, it sits in contrast to those discussed previously in this section that have been instructional or questioning, in terms of their messages communicated with text. Instead, here the repeated blood red words, 'Boong', 'Abo', 'Darkie', 'Koon', 'Nigger' and 'Heathen', listed on the right hand side of the canvas, are a staccato of purely racist slurs. Bennett's image is a confronting, expressionist piece that employs crude and grotesque imagery to ironically allude to aspects flowing from the Enlightenment and colonisation that have all had adverse effects on Indigenous culture. Moreover, language, as a tool for colonial dominance is referenced.³⁷⁰ He says of these words particularly, that when they are 'directed at a group or individual over a long enough period, [they] can produce a kind of claustrophobic box where self-esteem is stifled and suicide becomes a viable way out.'³⁷¹ Bennett's message, which he both exposes and responds to, is that colonial language and its dominance within Australian history have each been complicit in the process of entrenching racism and may be seen as the crux of the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

³⁷⁰ See David R. Cole & Linda J Graham (eds), *The Power In / Of Language*, John Wiley & Sons, Oxford, 2012; See also discussion of power in Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1992, pp. 777-795; also language as dominating and exclusive in Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensay, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, c. 1998; and language and power in Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, translated by Gino Raymond, Polity Press, Cambridge, 5th edn, 2011.

³⁷¹ Gordon Bennett, artist's statement in Janet Hogan (ed.), *Balance 1990: Views, Vision, Influences*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1990, pp. 47 & 49.

Aboriginal deaths in custody are collectively affective in that they bear upon the political and moral foundation of a community, and may be looked upon as a 'limit event'.³⁷² LaCapra defines two perspectives of what he calls 'limit events' or extreme events and experiences. One asserts redemption, where after loss, recovery is possible.³⁷³ The other denies redemption, with the view that the effects of extreme events and experiences are irresolvable.³⁷⁴ He argues that each has an active component. On the one hand, redemption involves formulations of 'working-through' limit events as steps toward meaningfulness in life and the transcendence of difficulties.³⁷⁵ On the other hand, LaCapra explains that 'acting-out' involves melancholy and compulsive repetition, where difficulties remain concealed or appear distorted.³⁷⁶

In thinking about Aboriginal deaths in custody, it is near impossible to view Bennett's ghouls, winged and illuminated figures, shadowy silhouette, and heads impaled on sticks that are held like medieval torches, with any sense of neutrality. Rather, they appear to be the visual manifestation of LaCapra's 'acting-out'. The terrifying scene presents feelings of intense consternation that play out across each of the three panels, akin to the distorted narrative of a recurring nightmare. Ian McLean describes the work as 'a large Goyaesque triptych'.³⁷⁷ A shift in emphasis from subject to viewer takes place in the visual space of this work, which blurs the burden of LaCapra's 'limit event'. Just as other artists have drawn viewers into works in various ways discussed in this section, so too are they ensnared in Bennett's work. McLean explains how the artist attempted to reposition the viewer as subject, where what is seen beyond the cell

³⁷² Simone Gigliotti, 'Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Stolen Generations', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2003, p. 164.

³⁷³ Dominick LaCapra, 'Approaching Limit Events: Siting Agamben', in *History in Transit*, op. cit., p. 144.

³⁷⁴ LaCapra, *ibid.*

³⁷⁵ LaCapra, *ibid.*

³⁷⁶ LaCapra, *ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Ian McLean, 'Philosophy and Painting: Gordon Bennett's Critical Aesthetic', in Ian McLean & Gordon Bennett, *The Art of Gordon Bennett*, Craftsman House, Roseville East, NSW, 1996, p. 75.

walls are the leering faces of the viewer's own white civilisation, exacerbated by taunts from a racist vernacular.³⁷⁸ Bennett's leering faces, transposed as the viewers' own, comment on collective accountability, but also collusion. Jill Bennett explains that imagery connected with trauma need not conform easily to a logic of representation.³⁷⁹ The distortions, quasi-narrative, grotesqueries and imposed self-reflexivity present within *The Persistence of language*, bind viewers in an affective transaction of aesthetics and feelings.

Gordon Bennett was a graduate of the Queensland College of Art, completing his Fine Art Bachelor degree in 1988.³⁸⁰ This artwork was produced during his art school studies and purchased by the Art Gallery of Western Australia just two years later in 1989. This acquisition is indicative of the provenance of much of Bennett's early work, which dealt with the politics of history and identity. As such, the iconography of this work is set within a network of signs and meaning that extend philosophically into Australian identity and culture, as well as systems of language and power. As these networks and systems have evolved into the realm of postcoloniality, they have controlled and defined how self and collective identity have been directed and defined.³⁸¹ Bound to this process is the social exclusion of the Indigenous subject. Bennett's image draws attention to the systemic racism and poor treatment of Indigenous people that traverses various fields, from language to incarceration.³⁸² Consequently, the aesthetic characteristics blend a multitude of elements pertaining to Indigenous and non-Indigenous hierarchies and experience, as he comments upon the nexus between them.

³⁷⁸ McLean, *ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

³⁷⁹ Jill Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁸⁰ Richard Bell, 'Gordon Bennett: Richard Bell's Tribute to the Passing of an Australian Art Great', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2014, viewed 22 December 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/australia-culture-blog/2014/jun/14/gordon-bennett-richard-bells-tribute-to-the-passing-of-an-australian-art-great>>.

³⁸¹ National Gallery of Victoria, 'Borrowed Images and Styles', *Gordon Bennett: Education Resource*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, viewed 27 October 2017, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/gordonbennett/education/04.html>>.

³⁸² Asmi Wood, 'Law and Native Title', in Price, *Knowledge of Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

An additional work was printed by Bennett in the same year; an untitled lithograph (appendix), which was also purchased in 1989 by a public gallery, this time the NGA.

Various aesthetic elements of *The persistence of language* are seen to be replicated, suggesting that the print may have been a study for the larger painting. There is a particular emphasis on the leering faces at the barred window and the list of discriminatory terms angled on the left.

Nevertheless, its reference to the subject of deaths in custody remains resonant. LaCapra also talks about the possibility of 'working-through' as a *repetitive* process. He explains that while this process may not disperse 'acting-out' altogether, a critical distance may be achieved in which positive transformation, not least of all in civic life, may occur.³⁸³ Bennett appears to have taken steps to 'work-through' the 'limit event' of Aboriginal deaths in custody, a subject that he takes up in the next decade as well. His repetition of scene and subject is an indication of this and ultimately presents a critical distance. Redemption, which initially seemed unattainable, may in fact have given way to some recovery of loss, should some positive transformation regarding Aboriginal deaths in custody take place.

³⁸³ La Capra, *History in Transit*, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

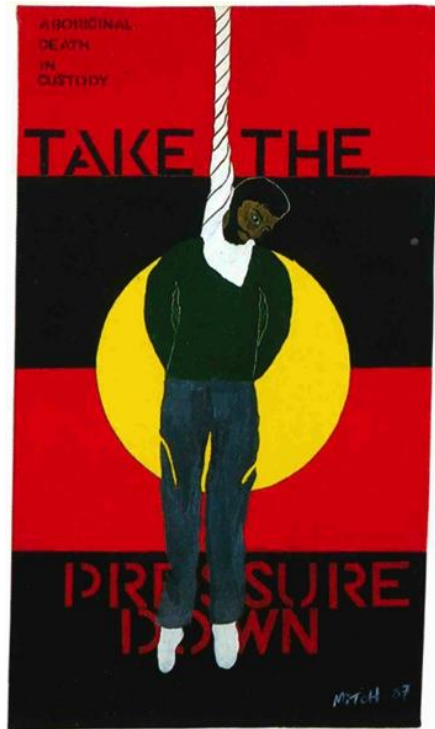


Figure 40:
Michael (Mitch) Dunnett Jr,
Take the Pressure Down, 1987,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
119 x 68 cm,
SAM Collection.

Whilst the works highlighted in this section so far take a general approach to the subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody, the work above by Mitch Dunnett Jnr (Wirangu/Nyoongar), specifically references the incident of Kingsley Dixon, a fellow inmate of Dunnett's who was found dead in his cell.³⁸⁴ *Take the Pressure Down*, 1987 (fig. 40), was produced while the artist was in Adelaide Gaol.³⁸⁵ Dunnett was affected by Dixon's death and sought to aesthetically communicate a clear message about his concerns with the subject in the late 1980s. The image makes clear and prominent use of the Aboriginal flag, as well as text that assists in contextualising the piece, in the top left corner of the composition. The balanced central text draws upon the lyrics of a popular John Farnham song to assist in engaging viewers in a dialogue that aims to acknowledge the social and personal strain of the subject. It is Dunnett's employment of the explicit graphic figure that is most affective for viewers. Dunnett used this aesthetic configuration to draw attention to the tragedy of the socio-political situation that was taking place. His response is aimed toward the necessity of the establishment of the Royal

³⁸⁴ Tess Allas, 'Mitch Dunnett Jr: Biography', *Design & Art Australia Online*, 2011, viewed 22 December 2017, <<https://www.daa.org.au/bio/mitch-dunnett-jnr/biography/>>.

³⁸⁵ Peter Sutton, 'Dreamings' in Peter Sutton (ed.), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1988, p. 32.

Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, in particular combatting the high proportion of deaths by suicide.³⁸⁶ This work received media coverage when it appeared in an exhibition at the South Australian Museum ahead of its inclusion in the exhibition catalogue, *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*.³⁸⁷ Though Dunnett's image is a personal response, he used the focus on deaths in custody at the time to capitalise on the subject's affective reality. The argument is that this reality was in the midst of being made visible, as it simultaneously coerced viewers to participate in Aboriginal determined cultural ideals concerning Indigeneity.³⁸⁸ This work was purchased by the South Australian Museum in 1987.

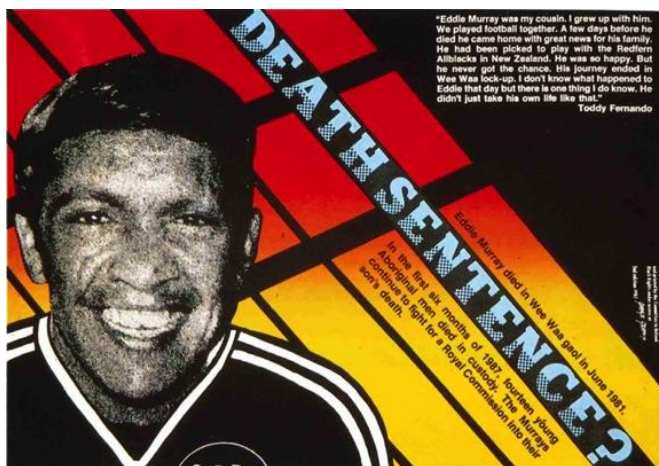


Figure 41:
 Toddy Fernando and Marla Guppy
Death's in Custody [sic], 1987,
 screenprinted poster,
 68 x 49 cm,
 National Library of Australia.

A similar work was produced by Toddy Fernando (language group unknown) in collaboration with Marla Guppy at Garage Graphix. The work *Death's in Custody* [sic], 1987 (fig. 41), also responded to a specific custodial death, that of Eddie Murray, a 21-year-old Aboriginal man from Wee Waa, New South Wales. The work draws attention to the unknown circumstances of Murray's death after he had been taken into custody for appearing drunk and disorderly.³⁸⁹ Using a variety of visual techniques, the artist questions the likelihood of his alleged suicide, given the positive, promising backstory of the victim. The work is ultimately an appeal for facts; for

³⁸⁶ Sutton, *ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁸⁷ The work appeared in an exhibition at the South Australian Museum, titled, *Images of the Body*, c.1987, personal correspondence with Professor Peter Sutton, 2 November 2017; see also Sutton, *ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁸⁸ See discussion of the social function of art in Ferrell, 'Culture', *op. cit.*, pp. 45-73.

³⁸⁹ New South Wales Legislative Council Hansard. 'Eddie Murray Death in Custody Inquiry Uanita Nielsen Murder Investigation', 22 June 2004, article 68, pp. 9783-9784.

information; for answers from authorities, while at the same time, intended to impress upon viewers the graveness of such circumstances.

Artworks that operate affectively allow access or responses to the underlying socio-political subject by the viewer. They are not, therefore, representations. Rather, they are interventions.³⁹⁰

In specifically referencing named victims, artists achieve a greater degree of intimacy with viewers who cannot simply reflect on Aboriginal deaths in custody as affecting an unknown, unfamiliar group of people; artists demand acknowledgement and recognition for victims and Aboriginal communities.



Figure 42:
Lin Onus,
Accidental death, 1989,
synthetic polymer paint on fibreglass,
241 x 53 cm,
NGA Collection.

Accidental death, 1989 (fig. 42), by Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta, 1948–1996), is also specific in its reference. It is an aesthetic response to the fatal circumstances of 29-year-old David John Gundy, who in a house raid undertaken by law enforcement authorities, was shot in his home by

³⁹⁰ Bennett, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Art and Politics after Identity', p. 128.

a police officer on 27 April 1989.³⁹¹ Drawing together two distinct styles, this artwork forms the artist's first sculptural piece.³⁹² Onus visually references Arnhem Land styles in two ways. First, with a traditional cross-hatched plane that establishes a background pattern to the foreground iconography. Second, he employs a cylindrical form for the fibreglass structure that is synonymous with hollow log coffins that feature in art and ceremony. As the two-dimensional picture plane is applied to the front surface of the sculpture, the artist essentially blends a Western funeral ritual illustration with the physicality of a traditional Indigenous mortuary object. The sculpture is overtly politicised where the artist has replicated arms and ammunition as part of the work's three-dimensional framing device.

Like Brenda L Croft, Onus too is deliberate with his title. Though not completely explicit, *Accidental death* provides some insight to the content and concept of the artwork, especially when considered in tandem with the visual elements of the piece. In this case, together they prompt ideas of conflict, violence, arms, perpetrators and victims. The artist was also aware that the victim's eight-year-old son was present at the time his father was shot.³⁹³ This incident particularly resonated with the artist because, when it occurred, Onus too had an eight-year-old son, and as a result found these sad and personal details of the shooting difficult to come to terms with.³⁹⁴ Trauma associated with the event was transferred to the artist, and by extension, to the viewer.

³⁹¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *Report of the Inquiry into the Death of David John Gundy*, Commissioner JH Wooten, Sydney, 1991. See also Indigenous Law Resources: Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Report of the Inquiry into the Death of David John Gundy*, Australasian Legal Information Institute website, viewed 21 November 2013, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/individual/brm_djg/>.

³⁹² Jo Onus & Tiriki Onus, 'Chronology', in Margo Neale et al., *Urban Dingo: the Art and Life of Lin Onus 1948–1996*, Craftsman House and Queensland Art Gallery, Sydney, 2000, p. 124.

³⁹³ Onus & Onus, *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Onus & Onus, *ibid.*

The literal reference of the artwork's title, however, is to the reported details of the police shooting in which David Gundy was 'accidentally shot by the gun of a trespassing policeman when he sought to turn the intruder out of his room'.³⁹⁵ Onus said of the sculpture that he had to create it.³⁹⁶ His response to a highly controversial event was an emotionally and politically charged artwork that expressed personal sadness and concern. At the same time, Onus's artwork contributed to the larger dialogue, both socially and visually, of Aboriginal deaths in custody that was paramount in the lead up to the Royal Commission. This sculpture was also purchased by the NGA in 1989, the year of its creation.

The works discussed in the above subsection illustrate how artists engaged with the subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody and in doing so, elicited a distinctive aesthetic within their work. This aesthetic, comprising a distinct link between visibility and the underlying socio-political issue at hand, made its artistic impact affectively, in the way it appealed to viewers. With authority, by way of insight and experience regarding the subject, urban Indigenous artists produced varied responses. These have ranged from the communication of specific details, and expressionist manifestations, to documentary images, in which works have engendered criticism, disillusionment, empathy, solidarity, humanism, anger and despair. As artists have aesthetically rendered myriad deplorable features of the subject of deaths in custody, so too have the thoughts and feelings attached to these features been transmitted to viewers.

Australia's Bicentenary

A third event that illuminates the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art is Australia's Bicentenary, celebrated on 26 January in 1988. This was a large, national event that included

³⁹⁵ Indigenous Law Resources: Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, op. cit.

³⁹⁶ Lin Onus, quoted in Onus & Onus, 'Chronology', op. cit.

many groups, organisations, venues and programs that were historical, creative and recreational. It culminated with a First Fleet re-enactment and the arrival of international tall ships in Sydney Harbour.³⁹⁷ On 21 January 1980, the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) was incorporated after an announcement by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in the previous year (1979), that the ABA would plan and manage a national program in celebration and commemoration of the Bicentenary.³⁹⁸ The ABA had various roles including: making arrangements; carrying out objectives; developing and recommending a theme and a focus; promoting involvement and participation by a range of bodies including government, community and public; encouraging initiatives and drawing upon ideas from community groups and individuals; stimulating historical consciousness regarding the event; conducting national competitions in order to secure a symbol design; considering how the event might be extended internationally; as well as several other roles regarding the control and involvement of the government.³⁹⁹

The ABA's objectives included: strengthening Australia's sense of pride, purpose and identity; offering an inclusive program of events; providing mementos that the population would appreciate; undertaking educational and cultural programs that would assist with recognition of Australia's origins, present and future; promoting the 'Living Together' theme of the event; and strengthening the relationship with neighbouring countries via international participation in the event.⁴⁰⁰ The Bicentenary program itself was also underscored by various other aims, for example, appealing to all Australians, having an emphasis on youth, being informative and cultural, recognising migration as well as Aboriginal occupancy, regarding history but emphasising the present and future of Australia, and that communities be reminded of the

³⁹⁷ Australia Day National Website, '1988: The Bicentenary', National Australia Day Council, viewed 28 October 2013, <<http://www.australiaday.org.au/australia-day/history/1988-the-bicentenary/>>.

³⁹⁸ Australian Bicentennial Authority, 'Introduction: Review of Operations', in *The Australian Bicentennial Authority: First Annual Report on Activities to 30 June 1981*, Australian Bicentennial Authority, Sydney, 1981, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ ABA roles are outlined in detail, Australian Bicentennial Authority, *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁰ ABA objectives are outlined in detail, Australian Bicentennial Authority, *ibid.*

Bicentenary.⁴⁰¹ The theme of the Bicentenary was established as 'Living Together', which embodied relationships between Australians, the environment, those from other parts of the world and responsibility to those who will inherit the country.⁴⁰²

Around the time of the establishment of the Australian Bicentenary Authority in 1980, state representatives agreed that 26 January 1788 should be understood as a day of contact rather than one of conquest.⁴⁰³ Indigenous communities had already established a sentiment of opposition to Australia Day, treating it as a day of mourning rather than celebration.⁴⁰⁴ Political posters were circulated in both the lead-up to the event and on the day that promoted the slogans 'WHITE AUSTRALIA HAS A BLACK HISTORY – DON'T CELEBRATE 1988' and 'AUSTRALIA DAY = INVASION DAY 1988'.⁴⁰⁵ A physical Indigenous presence was felt at Lady Macquarie's Point on Sydney Harbour, where flags promoting land rights were in flight.⁴⁰⁶ Furthermore, a protest concert took place at Bondi Pavilion, whilst a march supported by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities occurred at Belmore Park.⁴⁰⁷ The opposition felt and staged in response to the Bicentenary decried the event's objectives that concerned the formation of a single collective identity, rather than identities.⁴⁰⁸

The Bicentenary appeared to some as a project of exclusion.⁴⁰⁹ This was particularly noticeable in the arts, as few Indigenous visual arts events were included in the official Bicentenary program. Under the auspices of the Australian Bicentenary Authority and the National Aboriginal

⁴⁰¹ These aims are further outlined, Australian Bicentennial Authority, *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁰² This theme is further outlined, Australian Bicentennial Authority, *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁰³ Australia Day National Website, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰⁴ Australia Day National Website, *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Australia Day National Website, *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Australia Day National Website, *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ Australia Day National Website, *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ See Graeme Turner, 'Redefining the Nation: From Purity to Hybridity', in *Making it National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. 123.

⁴⁰⁹ Turner, *ibid.*, p. 124.

and Torres Strait Island Program along with the National Publications Program, one substantial project was funded. *After 200 Years: Photographic Essays of Aboriginal and Islander Australia Today* was coordinated by Penny Taylor at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. It was premised upon documenting the diversity of Aboriginal and Islander culture, as it existed during the late 1980s.⁴¹⁰ More than 50,000 documented photographs were amassed, with a number of these works selected for a published volume. Each artist's entry in the volume was accompanied by an introduction to the works that were reproduced.

Over twenty Indigenous and non-Indigenous photographers were commissioned for the project, including urban Indigenous photographers Ricky Maynard (Ben Lomond/Cape Portland), Polly Sumner (Ngarrindjeri), Michael Riley (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi), Alana Harris (Wiradjuri/Ngunnawal) and Peter McKenzie (La Perouse/Eora/Anaiwan).⁴¹¹ The project promoted a view of Indigenous life 200 years after settlement with the aim of subverting perceived notions of Indigeneity typically held by non-Indigenous Australians. In addition to the objectives sought by the project with respect to representation, the participation of Indigenous photographers allowed uniquely Indigenous views to be expressed. Each artist involved in the project was commissioned to document a community, or group within a community, that had a different regional emphasis. In addition, the artists had to be available to the community they recorded, in a professional capacity. In other words, the communities involved had the opportunity to utilise the services of their allocated artist further if they so wished.

The premise and the vision of the project remained consistent among the commissioned artists. This was, in essence, to empower the Indigenous subject via the photo-documentary idiom,

⁴¹⁰ Penny Taylor, 'Introduction', in Penny Taylor, *After 200 Years*, op. cit., p. xv.

⁴¹¹ Taylor, *ibid.*

which was to be achieved via a collaborative process where an Indigenous sitter or group would express to the commissioned artist how they wished to be represented.⁴¹² Sitters then had the opportunity to comment upon themselves as the subject, and provide feedback that was then incorporated by the artist into the final image. Each image was thus based upon the interaction between the sitter and the artist or photographer.

As a Bicentenary initiative, the *After 200 Years* project presented a positive view of Indigenous culture, which sat in contrast to the predominantly negative view that had previously developed, established by mainstream culture and society typically disseminated in the media. *After 200 Years* established in the consciousness of the Australian public artistic images of Indigenous culture from diverse regions of the country, which were contemporary, current and far more accurate in terms of the representation of Indigeneity than those that had been instigated and perpetuated from a non-Indigenous, colonial lens, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Various politicised images emerged from the *After 200 Years* project, with several that were displayed in opposition to specific Bicentenary events, including Peter McKenzie's, *Protest march against First Fleet re-enactment at La Perouse beach, January 1988*, 1988 (fig. 43).⁴¹³

Though peaceful, unrest about the celebration of the Bicentenary is clearly witnessed in this work as a large prominent banner carried by the central group states 'AUSTRALIA DAY=INVASION

⁴¹² Taylor, 'Introduction', op. cit., pp. xv-xxv

⁴¹³ See also Peter McKenzie's *Protest against First Fleet re-enactment at Botany Bay, La Perouse*, c. 1988, in Appendix. Note that while there were various politicised images produced as part of the *After 200 Years* project, access to many of these is via the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies archive, Canberra. Six images contributing to the repertoire of protest imagery are included within the *After 200 Years* publication, produced by Indigenous artists Michael Riley, Alana Harris and Peter McKenzie. McKenzie's images in particular, add to the body of documentation surrounding events that took place on this significant day. Queensland artist Michael Aird (Kumbumerri) also documented political activity that took place on the day (see Appendix), while in popular, non-art media, there is alternative visual material documenting the much larger rally that took place between Redfern Park and Hyde Park. See Natalie Cromb, 'Analysis: The 88 Protests', *NITV*, January 2018, viewed 28 June 2018, <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/explainer/analysis-88-protests>>; Alana Harris, *Australia's too Old to Celebrate Birthdays (Galarrwuy Yunupingu)*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1988; also Melinda Hinkson, *Aboriginal Sydney: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present*, 2nd edn, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2010.

DAY 1988 WHAT'S THERE TO CELEBRATE?'⁴¹⁴ The intergenerational march, which was staged at La Perouse community house, Yarra Bay House and its adjacent reserve, marked community opposition to the First Fleet re-enactment that was to take place.

Figure 43:
Peter McKenzie,
*Protest march against First Fleet
re-enactment at La Perouse
beach, January 1988, 1988,*
gelatin silver photograph,
18.6 x 28 cm (image),
23.8 x 33 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.



This site of La Perouse is significant to both the event and McKenzie's image. La Perouse is the only Sydney suburb whose Aboriginal community has retained its territory throughout colonisation, having faced a history of challenges regarding land rights, depression and government interventions.⁴¹⁵ It is located geographically at the entry to Botany Bay, meaning therefore, that the La Perouse Aboriginal community had to physically witness a return of international tall ships to Botany Bay, as part of this 'celebratory' event, before they sailed on to Sydney Harbour on 26 January 1988. 'Invasion' is a loaded term that refers to the historical encounter of the British, but socially and culturally reflects the collective memory associated with this event from the past.

⁴¹⁴ This banner was also depicted in fig. 33 by Wendy Dunn and Alice Hinton-Bateup, *Australia Day, c. 1986–1987*, Powerhouse Museum Collection.

⁴¹⁵ Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, *La Perouse, the Place, the People and the Sea: A Collection of Writing by Members of the Aboriginal Community*, Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1988; See also Julia Kensy, 'La Perouse', *The Dictionary of Sydney*, 1988, viewed 22 December 2017, <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/la_perouse>.

As a member of the La Perouse community himself, McKenzie captures his community at work as they participate in a 'counter-narrative of Indigenous cultural and political action'.⁴¹⁶ His representation of the event, employing the documentary idiom, extends the longevity of the event itself, expanding its potential to transform reality. As a visual record of the protest, the image provides additional access for audiences' understanding about such realities, where narratives, perspectives and recognition can assist with influencing the political systems in which they operate.⁴¹⁷ Protests, for example, 'arise out of resistance to the dominant political hegemony', and may result in the establishment of authority and equality.⁴¹⁸ Such is an ideal outcome that McKenzie's image contributes to.

As part of the *After 200 Years* project, the artist documented a response to this particular scene.

Bert Longbottom was quoted:

We showed our strength as the Aboriginal race in January this year when we demonstrated our national unity in opposition to the Bicentenary celebrations. I've yet to see a Bicentenary event that's worth anything; it's a total waste of money that should have been put into housing. I don't believe money should have been spent to commemorate the landing of any person to come to our land. I still believe we own the land, and for us to participate in the Bicentenary is a great wrong.⁴¹⁹

This statement offers a personal voice and perspective to viewers, as they take in the scene and piece together the deep opposition felt toward the official sentiment of the day. The statement acknowledges and promotes feelings of unity and contends that alternative concerns be priorities, rather than the passing of two centuries since 'contact'. McKenzie's images are ultimately art in action, recording and affirming the Indigenous position on the Bicentenary. Their undercurrent is connected with the truth and the trauma of what the Bicentenary signified, and McKenzie finds a communicative vehicle with which to express the lingering Indigenous

⁴¹⁶ Steve Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', in Price, *Knowledge of Life*, op. cit., p. 14.

⁴¹⁷ Kinnane, *ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ Kinnane, *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴¹⁹ Bert Longbottom, 'La Perouse', in Taylor, *After 200 Years*, op. cit., p. 354.

experience of this.⁴²⁰ For Indigenous Australians, such celebrations of British invasion have ultimately denied the violence that took place in Australia's 'founding' history. Protests such as these, however, encourage a primarily non-Indigenous public to consider how the 'peaceful settlement' of Australia has been misconstrued.⁴²¹

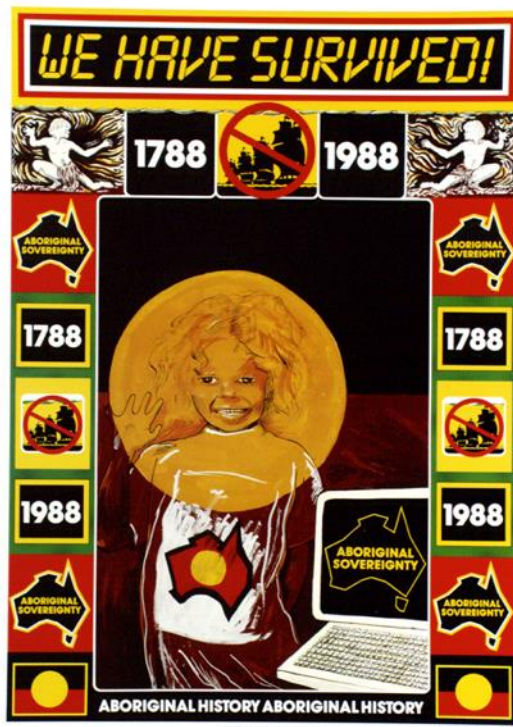


Figure 44:
 Jeffrey Samuels,
We have survived, 1988,
 screenprint,
 70.6 x 47.7 cm (image),
 81.6 x 56.1 cm (sheet),
 NGA Collection.

Jeffrey Samuels (Ngemba) also contributed to the visual dialogue of the Bicentenary with the screenprint *We have survived*, 1988 (fig. 44). This image is one of several that were produced in 1988 as part of a series of the same name, commissioned by the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council. As a series the works conveyed themes associated with colonisation, culture and change. Samuels's statement 'WE HAVE SURVIVED' is a testimony, however. He is testifying to the fact that after 200 years, Aboriginal people, culture and its history persists, despite the challenges encountered. Jill Bennett argues that the receiving of testimony is as important as the utterance of it.⁴²² Social and literary theorist Gayatri Spivak concurs suggesting

⁴²⁰ See Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', op. cit., p. 2.

⁴²¹ Heather Goodall, 'Survival Day', in Kleinert & Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* op. cit., p. 705.

⁴²² Jill Bennett, 'Face to Face Encounters', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 105.

that in terms of resistance and liberation, listening to testimony, given a listener's willingness to do this, allows an encounter between the two to occur.⁴²³ It is through this encounter that difference between the two entities is reduced, that tolerance is increased and that repudiation or assimilation of the subject shared is discarded.⁴²⁴

In the work *We have survived*, testimony is characterised through the central child figure whose face fills the central gold disc of the Aboriginal flag. The child signifies cultural resilience and ongoing Indigenous presence within a country whose sovereignty has been challenged for two centuries. That sovereignty is stated throughout the image. The smiling child stands beneath words emblazoned across the top of the work, together affirming both survival and a future generation of Aboriginal people. This is the testimony that draws viewers into this work. As they take in Samuels's message, a distinction is made between perception of the self and the communicated experience of another.⁴²⁵ Perception in this case refers to typical non-Indigenous understandings of what the Bicentenary means. This is countered by Samuels's reference to experience that is indicative of collective survival. Survival is not simply the continuance of living; it is the continuance of living in spite of something that has, or has had, the potential to extinguish life. In this context, the image is effective. The artist has worked the various aesthetic components into a politicised schema in order to produce a powerful testimonial encounter of life.

Another artist who created images with an agenda relating to the Bicentenary was Brenda L Croft. She produced photographs documenting the 'Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope' that took place on 26 January, 1988. Croft used as a reference point a proclamation in 1938 that

⁴²³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface and Afterword to Mahasweta Devi, 'Imaginary Maps'", in Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean (eds), *The Spivak Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1996, pp. 267-286.

⁴²⁴ Spivak, *ibid.*; See also Bennett, 'Face to Face Encounters', *op. cit.*

⁴²⁵ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

deemed 26 January a 'Day of Mourning' by Australian Indigenous populations.⁴²⁶ The day was dubbed 'Invasion Day', and it opposes celebrations regarding the arrival of the First Fleet at Port Jackson.⁴²⁷ Invasion Day pays homage to Australia's Indigenous cultural and spiritual survival. On the day the Bicentenary was observed, 26 January 1988, more than 50,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians protested the First Fleet re-enactment. Solidarity against the celebration of invasion of the nation was tangible as participants united in the Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope.⁴²⁸ This solidarity was documented in a number of works, including the image below, *Elders from Northern Territory, Chalmers Street, Redfern. Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988, 1988* (fig. 45).⁴²⁹

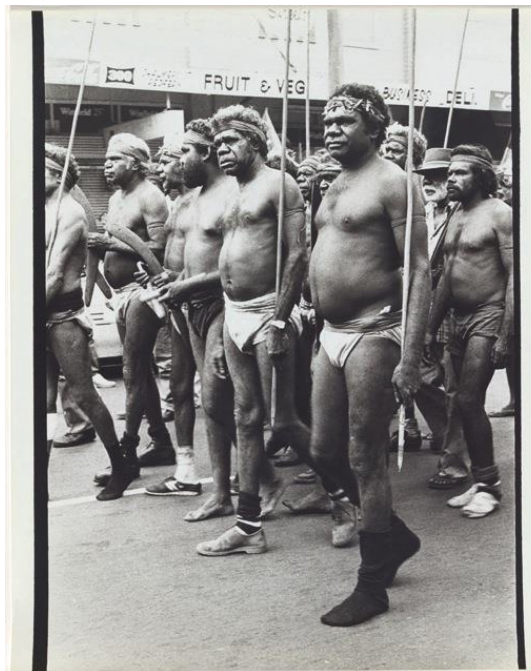


Figure 45:
Brenda L Croft,
*Elders from Northern Territory,
Chalmers Street, Redfern. Long
March of Freedom, Justice and
Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January
1988, 1988,*
gelatin silver photograph,
50.4 x 37.6 cm (image),
50.4 x 40.5 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

Croft is again artist, participant and documenter of the event. She composes her scene with the elders of the Northern Territory as the primary focal point. As she illustrates their march, positioned side by side along Chalmers Street, Redfern, a sense of custom, pride and togetherness is displayed. Their appearance invites contemplation about the temporal continuum

⁴²⁶ Brenda Croft, 'Artist Statement', in *Re-take: Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Photography*, National Gallery of Australia, viewed 11 November 2013, <http://nga.gov.au/Retake/retake_art2/GalFrameset.htm>.

⁴²⁷ Croft, *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Croft, *ibid.*

⁴²⁹ See also Brenda L Croft, *Michael Watson in Redfern on the Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988, 1988*, in Appendix.

that binds the past with the present and the cultural authority expressed in this scene. In this way the scene is a testimony, similar to Samuels's above, as the elders embody the resistance of colonisation and stand for a future of 'freedom, justice and hope'. Even though the viewer is distanced from the actuality of what occurred in 1788, Croft's image poignantly reflects on the loss associated with that encounter. Her aesthetic expression reinforces the sentiments of cultural and spiritual survival; where traditions are here emulated despite the scene's distinct urban setting. Viewers are led toward conceptual engagement with the scene as they process the circumstances surrounding the origin event of contact and its commemoration, as felt by the subjects portrayed. Moreover, Croft presents her figures in a way that projects an interpersonal experience between subject and viewer.⁴³⁰ Through the realism expressed in the scene, accentuated again by the documentary idiom, an emotional response is also provoked in viewers. Jill Bennett explains that viewers may not be privy to the 'secret' of personal experience, but that they can be touched or affected by it nevertheless.⁴³¹ This is felt when viewing the elders of the Northern Territory. Croft's images empower Indigenous culture as she projects Indigenous responses to that which the Bicentenary represented. Her protest photographs were purchased by the NGA in 1988.

Whilst Croft's and McKenzie's images document a historical event, they also convey views that engender concepts of survival and unity, underpinned by collective experience of dispossession, which sit in contradistinction to many general perceptions of the celebration of the nation. Cultural commentator Meaghan Morris has expanded upon this, explaining that mourning rather than celebration of the Bicentenary provoked consideration of the First Fleet re-enactment as a

⁴³⁰ Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', op. cit., p. 7.

⁴³¹ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 7.

political event of the present, rather than a factual portrayal of the past.⁴³² She described how the Bicentenary had the potential to embody a space for precedents to be rescinded and revised.⁴³³ Urban Indigenous artists took advantage of such potential, exposing their opposition to historical events. They exposed aspects of both the constituent parts and the culmination of history, loading images with socio-political aesthetic containing both implicit and explicit visual cues and meaning that contested the status quo.

With regard specifically to the Bicentenary, Associate Professor of culture and communication, Chris Healy, explained that the Indigenous opposition and ultimate boycott of it was transformational.⁴³⁴ He stated:

The boycott was radically unlike earlier indigenous protests around national historic commemorations such as the 1938 celebrations or those in 1970 marking 200 years since Cook visited the continent. There were significant protests in 1988 and, while the boycott was not universal, the protests and the boycott were, perhaps surprisingly, not a request to be included or a call to add another meaning to 1988. Instead they claimed that the celebrations were a 'big lie' because 'White Australia has a Black History' going back 40,000 not 200 years, and that this fact fundamentally undermined the authority of the bicentenary to represent Australia.⁴³⁵

Furthermore, Healy claimed that the Indigenous boycott effectively presented the protesting group as one outside of the nation-state, and that by abstaining from the celebrations it highlighted aspects of an enduring colonialism that had yet to be resolved.⁴³⁶ The international coverage of both sides of the Bicentenary event by the media only added to the political foci at the time.⁴³⁷

⁴³² Meaghan Morris in Graeme Turner, 'Picnic at Ayers Rock: The Bicentenary', in Turner, *Making it National*, op. cit., p. 87.

⁴³³ Morris in Turner, *ibid.*

⁴³⁴ Chris Healy, 'The Spectre of Heritage', in *Forgetting Aborigines*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008, p. 110.

⁴³⁵ Healy, *ibid.*, pp. 110–111.

⁴³⁶ Healy, *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴³⁷ Turner, *Making it National*, op. cit., p. 84.

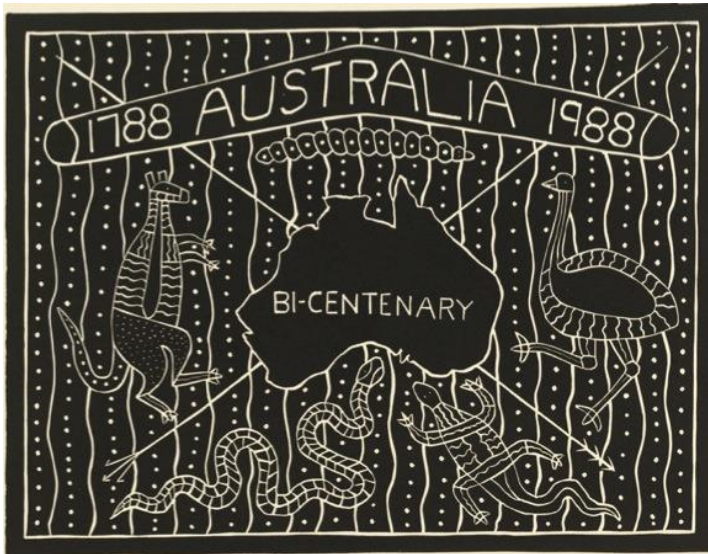


Figure 46:
Robert Campbell Jnr with Tony
Coleing,
Bicentenary, 1986,
linocut, edition 8/20,
31.1 x 40.6 cm (image),
45.4 x 54.3 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

In anticipation of the Bicentenary, Robert Campbell Jnr produced the linocut *Bicentenary*, 1986 (fig. 46), which was printed in edition by Tony Coleing and purchased by the NGA in 1987. The monochromatic work displays stereotypical Indigenous iconography that audiences would arguably be familiar with, illustrated in Campbell's not so typical style. He has drawn particularly on aspects of Australia's national emblem as represented by the kangaroo and emu, which frame a centred Australia shape containing the word 'BI-CENTENARY'. The image has a boomerang across its top that states '1788 AUSTRALIA 1988'. Similarly to Jeffrey Samuels's work *We have survived*, which utilises dates to convey temporality, or Croft's depiction of elders that bridged the present to the past, Campbell too references the continuum of time, which can be read as a statement about the perpetuity, both spiritually and culturally, of Indigenous inhabitation of the nation. His imagery posits the land as belonging entirely to an Indigenous Australia. The artist has thus reconciled the Bicentenary as a celebration removed from its non-Indigenous, Western, European contexts and instead proclaims sovereignty, continuity and survival amidst the non-Indigenous commemoration of the event. Viewers are thus provoked to consider the place of the non-Indigenous Australian within this alternative context that the artist aesthetically advocates.

There is no doubt that Indigenous opposition to Australia's Bicentenary in 1988, a position that was also supported by many non-Indigenous members of the community, exposed a multitude of concerns that the nation had yet to address, the most fundamental of which were land rights and sovereignty. The controversy was taken up by several urban Indigenous artists, who embedded a range of perspectives on the matter, from representation and history to mourning and survival within their socio-political aesthetic. Their responses were varied and expressed via a range of media. It was obvious, too, that the photo-documentary idiom in which artistic photographic images expressed a variety of contexts was a popular way for urban Indigenous artists to illustrate their socio-political positions.⁴³⁸ Artists such as Brenda L Croft and Peter McKenzie, as well as those introduced earlier in this chapter such as Kevin Gilbert and Iris Clayton, employed the social role of photo-documentary effectively. They empowered Indigeneity by negating its perceived static nature that had been propagated historically via colonial or European lenses. Moreover, it presented witness and testimonial accounts of what was taking place. By virtue of this negation, urban Indigenous artists mobilised their subjects and ultimately imparted their political perspectives via their aesthetic, with the assistance of affective techniques and devices. Leigh Raiford, Associate Professor of African American studies, asserts that photography has the ability to advance a social role in that it is 'imbued with a living engagement with our past'.⁴³⁹ Together the communicable and social roles of photography afforded urban Indigenous artists a platform from which they could refute static concepts of history. Instead, they projected with authority their concerns within the present, increasing their potential to shape the future, as audiences processed each scene and its associated meanings and implications.

⁴³⁸ For example, *After 200 Years* is a photographic archive and publication, *Inside Black Australia* was a touring exhibition, works reflecting the subject of Aboriginal deaths in custody were reproduced in the media and resource kits, and documentary photographs were circulated in the ABA Newsletter.

⁴³⁹ Leigh Raiford, 'Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory', *History and Theory, Theme Issue*, issue 48, 2009, p. 119, viewed 28 November 2013, <http://content.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.adelaide.edu.au/pdf23_24/pdf/2009/HAT/01Dec09/45694167.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=45694167&S=R&D=aph&EbscoContent=dGJyMNxb4kSeqLU4zOX0OLCmr0ueqLFSr6i4TLGWxWXS&ContentCustmer=dGJyMPGst061rbJluePfgex44D6f1A>.

Summary

This chapter has established that in the early phase of the urban Indigenous art movement, artists made aesthetic links in their work to what was happening socio-politically in their time. This has been demonstrated by looking specifically at how artists engaged with three different socio-political episodes: the visit of Pope John Paul II to Australia; Aboriginal deaths in custody; and Australia's Bicentenary. It is contended that in their role as agents, urban Indigenous artists creatively interceded with these events to empower alternative perceptions of them, including the historical contexts that surrounded them, which have been overlooked or understated in favour of mainstream views. These alternative views ultimately facilitated Indigenist perspectives that have highlighted the position of the Indigenous subject.

Various visual techniques were employed by artists to advance Indigenous views and voices. One approach has been the incorporation of text, which promoted Indigenous concerns. At the same time, text has been used to provide background information and expand the contextual frameworks of certain socio-political subjects or events. The colours and design of the Aboriginal flag were boldly used often, which is a clear symbolic device that Indigenises the visuality and meaning of an artwork. Simple literal visual references were made to the socio-political subject, while composite visual narratives similarly communicated and drew attention to Indigenous perspectives on the subjects to which they referred. Imagery has been layered, allowing multiple meanings to be transmitted, and reflective devices were used to complexly engage non-Indigenous viewers in dialogue that surrounded a particular subject. This has stimulated questions about responsibility and complicity. The representation of dates has referred to temporality and ultimately conveyed the immutable presence of Indigenous culture that spans past and present. Similarly, the illustration of clothing and props has assisted artists to connect visually the past with the present. The inclusion of figures within artworks, particularly in prints

and photographs, was a deliberate technique that allowed artists to humanise aspects of the socio-political subjects taken up. Whilst Pope John Paul II is a prominent European figure, most other figures presented were Indigenous. Setting, site and place were also characteristics that expressed the subject socio-politically, whether in affirming details or simply in their documentation of a particular event or scene.

Another significant effect of urban Indigenous art in the years leading up to 1990, was that as works aesthetically connected with the socio-political subject, they were equally affective in nature. In other words, the visuality and underlying issues pertaining to the socio-political subject converged with affect to emit deep thoughts and feelings on the part of the artists, but also viewers. For example, the figure and presence of the Pope in the two images discussed, provoked feelings of solemnity, as the loss of rights to land and the desire for sovereignty were communicated. Couched within these feelings were additional affects pertaining to opposition, resistance and invasion where the provocation of memory and reflection were made. Though the examples were few, the objective of solidarity was clear. In terms of Aboriginal deaths in custody, artists transmitted feelings of despair, suffering, pain, community concern, trauma, conflict and disapproval as disturbing experiences, both personal and collective, which were exorcised through various artworks. In conjunction with aesthetics, affect admitted viewers into a relationship of complicity with the subject, as artists ultimately endeavoured to convey the necessity of resolution. Artworks connected with the Bicentenary reflected feelings of trauma, exclusion, resistance, mourning and invasion as artists strived to express the importance of solidarity, most notably through the method of visual testimony.

Artists capitalised on the emotional responses stimulated by their artworks and began to shape a new reality. Their aesthetic and affective configurations that were provocatively socio-political in nature, made Indigenous perspectives accessible and intelligible. The motive of this approach, taken up by the numerous artists discussed in this chapter, was to supplant events and history with images that promoted Indigenous ideals, empowering the Indigenous subject represented.

Chapter 4

Defying Colonial Representation: Authentic and Diverse Experience

Introduction

It is argued in this chapter that as the urban Indigenous art movement transitioned from the late 1980s into a phase of proliferation during the 1990s, many urban Indigenous artists, working in both city and regional spaces, defied in their work the colonial representations used to 'other' Indigenous people. In responding to the process of 'othering' as well as the way representations of Indigenous people have been shaped within the colonial archive, this chapter establishes that urban Indigenous artists used a socio-political aesthetic to affirm authenticity, as well as diversity, across the spectrum of Aboriginality. Geography and its impact on wider understandings about authenticity and the formation of stereotypes is also considered. The initial geographic regions to be colonised in Australia were the first areas to become urbanised, therefore, the Indigenous people residing in these areas were the first affected by dislocation and displacement as a result of colonial practices. As such, the contemporary Indigenous experience has been an ongoing product of interaction with the colonising culture. The chapter establishes that urban Indigenous artists from numerous regions and language groups drew attention to this relationship in their work, despite their temporal distance from its origins.

A range of artworks are examined under the subheadings of 'Resisting Colonial Representation' and 'Contemporary Indigenous Experience as Authentic and Diverse', respectively. Artists who were actively resisting colonial representation include a number who were already practising, such as Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley (Badtjala), Richard Bell (Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang) and Michael Riley (Wiradjuri/ Kamilaroi), while Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri) and Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway) were commencing their careers. With regard to conveying authenticity and diversity, established artists Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara), and Lin

Onus (Yorta Yorta) were particularly dynamic. New artists to the movement at this time included Darren Siwes (Ngalkban) and Destiny Deacon (Ku Ku/Erub/Mer), who were equally active in expressing contemporary Indigenous experience in order to expand understandings of Aboriginality.

This chapter, in contrast to Chapter 3, draws primarily on key examples of photography and installation to demonstrate the socio-political aesthetic, rather than a cross-section of media. Artworks pertaining to the representation and experience of the Indigenous subject began in the 1990s to engage the viewer and the process of viewing, much more deliberately than previous works had done. Part of this process was linked with how nineteenth century representations of the Indigenous subject were dominated by photographic and documentary material, which led to photographic responses in urban Indigenous art. Consequently, this has directed my research toward the photographic medium. Analyses in this chapter commence with the works of Brook Andrew, as much of his source material in the 1990s was photographic, and rooted in instances of nineteenth century representation. Artists Fiona Foley and Michael Riley also responded very clearly to the colonising gaze in their photographic practices and therefore examples of their work will be discussed. As such, the theory of the colonial gaze and discourses on viewing that are employed in the analyses of Andrew's work extend to many of the works that follow in this chapter. Complementarily, research encompassing several sculptural installations by Gordon Bennett, Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway), Lin Onus and Destiny Deacon, may also be approached with the same lens despite the works' three-dimensionality. It will be demonstrated through the variety of examples examined, that consistency of the socio-political aesthetic within urban Indigenous art was maintained and promoted. This was achieved as artists engaged personally and collectively with mainstream and dominant ideas about representation and authenticity.

Resisting Colonial Representation

In Australia's imagination, Aboriginality has existed as 'other' throughout the nation's history. Whilst this is essentially a result of Britain's expansion of its empire, the ensuing colonisation and the dominance of European cultures and perspectives have been facilitated by powerful visual representations. In other words, representations of Aboriginality were executed by the dominant culture that characterised the settler nation. Despite the range of ways in which European cultures experienced non-European cultures during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including voyages, exploration and advances made in human sciences for example, visual representation has remained vital to the inequitable power relations perpetuated in colonised places.⁴⁴⁰ As historian and curator Anne-Marie Willis has observed, 'Power relations are implicit in the visual imagery that serves the production of such knowledge: the "Other" is "served up" for the gaze and analysis of the more powerful'.⁴⁴¹ Art historian and critic Thomas McEvelley has described this mode of power as a type of psychological colonisation, whereby the experience and reception of those things represented are implicated by the authoritative nature of their representation.⁴⁴²

Portrait photographs produced in support of nineteenth century colonial ethnographic studies have contributed to hierarchical concepts of racial difference in which Australian Indigenous subjects were typically romanticised or vilified.⁴⁴³ Consequently, the visual representations of Australia's Aboriginal people as primitive or inferior affirmed scientific 'understandings' about evolution and difference. In this regard, not only were Australian Indigenous people excluded

⁴⁴⁰ Anne-Marie Willis discusses the historiography of the representation of Aboriginal subjects in Anne-Marie Willis, 'Nation and Otherness', *Illusions of Identity: The Art of the Nation*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, c. 1993, pp. 99–125.

⁴⁴¹ Willis, *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁴² Thomas McEvelley, 'Here Comes Everybody', in Johannesburg Biennale, *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale*, 28 February–30 April 1995, Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, Johannesburg, 1995, pp. 54–55.

⁴⁴³ Wendy Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, p. 252. See also the comprehensive research of ethnographic photographic images of Australian Aboriginal people in Catherine De Lorenzo, *Ethnography: Photographic Images of Aboriginal Australians*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1993.

from the shared humanity in which they participated, but the colonial gaze that denied that humanity, further objectified them as something 'other'.⁴⁴⁴

One artist who has confronted the concept of the gaze and its ensuing colonial and psychological hierarchies is Brook Andrew. Andrew has drawn consistently from the colonial archive throughout his career. *I split your gaze*, 1997 (fig. 47), produced in the early years of his art practice challenges the 'othering' role preserved throughout colonial imagery. The source image of this work is an ethnographic one and the male subject has been identified as Cunningham (Gunninghun, Cunninchun), from the region of Armidale, believe to have been photographed by Charles Kerry c. 1900.⁴⁴⁵



Figure 47:
Brook Andrew,
I split your gaze, 1997
gelatin silver photograph,
122.6 x 114 cm (image and sheet),
NGV Collection.

⁴⁴⁴ Garden, *ibid.*, pp. 252-253.

⁴⁴⁵ Brook Andrew discusses the provenance of the image of Cunningham, suggesting that while documentation states the name Cunningham, it is likely that Cunningham was the name of a station owner in the region of Armidale, rather than the man depicted in this work, see Australian Tapestry Workshop, 'The Making of Catching Breath – Brook Andrew and Chris Cochius in Conversation', Australian Tapestry Workshop, *YouTube*, 14 September 2014, viewed 10 November 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo<9xJbkuSDY>>. Images of 'Cunningham' exist in The Kerry King Collection of Nineteenth Century Portraits at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the Tyrrell Collection at the State Library of New South Wales.

Andrew restages the ethnographically rendered Indigenous subject by inviting the viewer's gaze, and the empowered sense of self that this traditionally invokes.⁴⁴⁶ However, the artist then resists that gaze, by splitting the subject vertically, as a visual device that ultimately disempowers the historical and authoritative mode of viewing. Andrew thus transforms the typical nineteenth century image as he attempts to literally, 'split the colonial gaze'.⁴⁴⁷ Academic Kate MacNeill has described how Andrew's image structure disrupts the viewer, impeding established processes of visual comprehension.⁴⁴⁸ While the image employed by the artist is located within the colonial archive, Andrew's splitting technique has prevented the viewer from undertaking any further objectification of the subject present in the image.⁴⁴⁹ In other words, the aesthetic of *I split your gaze* is such that the viewer can no longer project a particular identity, that is, a colonial one, onto the subject depicted.⁴⁵⁰ Thus the colonial gaze is disabled; the source image no longer endows the viewer with power. Representation is subverted.

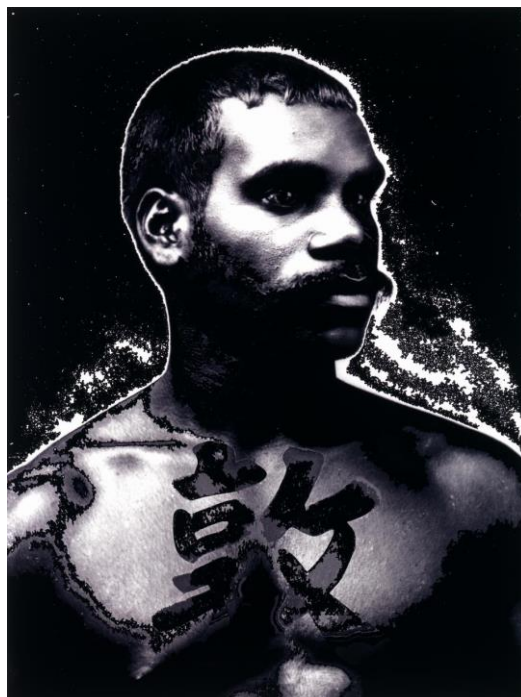


Figure 48:
Brook Andrew,
Sexy & Dangerous II, 1996,
duraclear mounted on acrylic,
170 x 127 x 0.6 cm,
courtesy of the artist and Tolarno
Galleries, Melbourne.

⁴⁴⁶ Kate MacNeill, 'Undoing the Colonial Gaze: Ambiguity in the Art of Brook Andrew', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2006 & vol. 7, no. 1, 2007, p. 180.

⁴⁴⁷ Artist quoted in Kate MacNeill, *ibid.*, pp. 182-183.

⁴⁴⁸ MacNeill, *ibid.*, pp. 182 & 185.

⁴⁴⁹ MacNeill, *ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁵⁰ MacNeill, *ibid.*, p. 184.

Brook Andrew's *Sexy & Dangerous II*, 1996, (fig. 48), operates in the same way. Again using an ethnographic image of 'Cunningham', the artist has embellished its visual properties and recast the subject in a new light that does not subscribe to the colonial gaze. Here Andrew has stylised the source image, superimposing Chinese characters onto the subject's torso while distorting the work's contrast. The calligraphic Chinese language in particular, obstructs a colonial reading of the image, distancing viewers from the original intent of the colonial gaze. Australian art curator Wendy Garden explains how the employment of language in Andrew's work is a visual device that also counters the assimilationist narrative associated with the colonial consumption of the ethnographic image.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, the image has been dramatically increased in scale so that the subject's physical features appear much larger than life-size, removing it further from the ethnographic lens through which the original was produced. Garden has inferred that the scale with which Andrew works prompts an alternative viewing experience for the viewer.⁴⁵² What is meant by this is that the dynamic between viewing a small paper-based image, as the original nineteenth century source image would have been, and viewing the large scale image, is significantly altered. Garden suggests that this manipulation of scale 'arrests the viewer in a bodily relationship', and that, 'Andrew's work requires a corporeal engagement by the viewer'.⁴⁵³ It is through this physical relationship to the work that the viewer may reflect on how a lack of personal accountability for projecting colonial meaning onto such an image, has assisted in perpetuating the fixity of the colonial gaze. Garden claims that such an engagement allows for a more empathetic relationship with the photograph, whereby the established colonial viewing and knowledge systems are transcended and meaning instead becomes continual rather than absolute.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁵² Garden, *ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴⁵³ Garden, *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ Garden, *ibid.*, pp. 256-257.

Art centre director, Lisa Havilah has also considered the theory of viewing in Andrew's work. She has explained that his practice confronts how viewing takes place, and that through this he exposes the politics of difference.⁴⁵⁵ This politics of difference is premised on the injustice that is produced when one group dominates another with regard to its resources and the construction of meaning.⁴⁵⁶ Andrew's artworks above, confound the way colonial images are both 'received and perceived' as he shifts their aesthetic parameters.⁴⁵⁷ The power and authority invoked through the gaze and its representations that have perpetually 'othered' the Indigenous subject, thus become challenged.

What was also integral to colonial authority was that experiences and discoveries made in the outer reaches of the empire, such as Australia, were assimilated into 'enlightened' ways of seeing that had already been well established, which effectively perpetuated such power relations.⁴⁵⁸ The result visually was that representations of the 'other' ultimately combined part of the object being represented with part of the mindset or culture of whomever was undertaking the representation.⁴⁵⁹ In terms of visual communication through art, the latter effectively expressed biases, where what was seen was not necessarily portrayed accurately or analytically, but rather picturesquely or imaginatively, depending on the objectives of whomever was charged with the task.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁵ Lisa Havilah, 'Brook Andrew', in Kelly Gellatly (ed.), *Re-take: Contemporary Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Photography*, exhibition catalogue, 1998, viewed 10 November 2017, <<https://nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/00000000.htm>>.

⁴⁵⁶ See Sara de Jong, 'Diversity Politics and the Politics of Difference', in Ulrike M Vieten (ed.), *Revisiting Iris Marion Young on Normalisation, Inclusion and Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, United Kingdom, 2014, p. 89.

⁴⁵⁷ Rachel Kent, et al., 'Brook Andrew', in Art & Australia (ed.), *Current: Contemporary Art from Australia and New Zealand*, Dot Publishing, 2008, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁸ Peter Beilharz, 'Imagining the Pacific', in *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 68–69.

⁴⁵⁹ Beilharz, *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴⁶⁰ Beilharz, *ibid.*; A useful example of this is George Stubbs's *The Kongouro from New Holland (Kangaroo)*, 1772, in which George Stubbs, foremost British animal painter at the time of Cook's First Voyage, was unable to view the kangaroo from life and instead was guided by pencil sketches made by voyage artist Sydney Parkinson, and a stuffed or inflated pelt that Joseph Banks returned from Australia with. Stubbs's somewhat imaginative painting of the animal is anatomically incorrect and set within a picturesque British landscape, arguably appealing to British tastes in landscape at the time, see National Maritime Museum, 'The Kongouro from New Holland (Kangaroo)', National Maritime Museum, Greenwich,

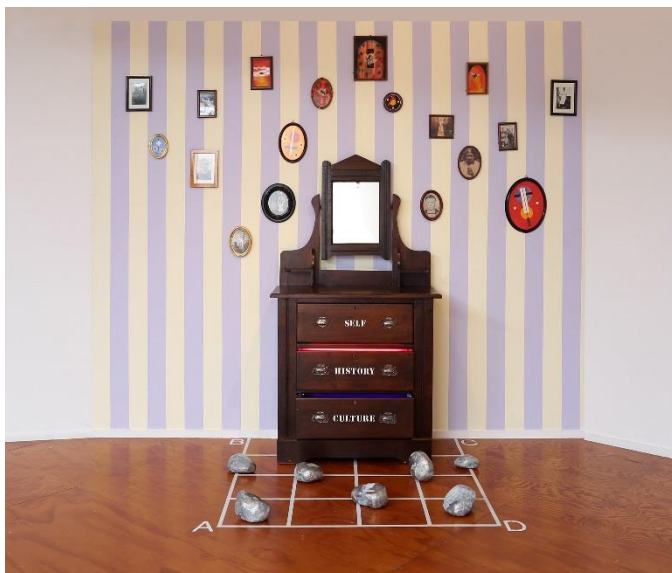


Figure 49:
Gordon Bennett,
Self Portrait (Ancestor Figures), 1992,
chest of drawers, watercolours,
photographs, lead encased rocks, lights,
masking tape, installation,
dimensions variable,
Collection of the MCA Australia
© The Estate of Gordon Bennett

Artist Gordon Bennett considered bias and depictions of 'other' in his early-career abstract installation piece *Self Portrait (Ancestor Figures)*, 1992 (fig. 49). It operates similarly to those images by Andrew discussed above, prompting viewers to engage physically with the work. Viewers are able to walk around the grid on the floor, which is filled with several rocks, peruse the framed images from multiple viewpoints and look into the central mirror. The intimate quasi-living room setting of the installation, complete with wallpaper and timber bureau are indicative of the urban dwelling, and consequently convey Bennett's 'refus[al] to live out a preconstructed Aboriginal identity'.⁴⁶¹ This position is supported by the range of objects relating to elementary concepts of identity, such as family pictures and drawings that negate colonial presumptions about the Indigenous subject as primitive. Ambiguity presents, in the title of the work, from which viewers must make meaning through their own 'variable bodily positioning' to the work's features.⁴⁶²

London, viewed 11 September 2017, <<http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/573621.html>>; such imaginative and artistic licence was arguably attributed also to the portrayal of the Indigenous subject, particularly in the works of Sydney Parkinson (1745-1771) and the Port Jackson Painter (active 1788-c.1795).

⁴⁶¹ Jill Bennett, 'Global Interconnections', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005, p. 134.

⁴⁶² Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 256.

Bennett's installation exposes and divests the colonial attributes of image making that have enacted 'othering' and subsequently impacted upon concepts of self and identity. This commences with the universal building blocks of language, represented by the letters A, B, C and D on the floor, that have powerfully served to define and colonise the 'other' in the shared colonial space. Bennett's grid maps and defines space, again in the European tradition.⁴⁶³ He employs irony to comment on how this tradition projects its own perspective at the expense of alternatives. Moreover, the spatial device translates as ownership and territory, clearly delineated through structure and line, expressing the fixed nature of 'stereotypes, labels, identities and systems of thought'.⁴⁶⁴ The consequence of these defining features, for those who operate outside them, is displacement and distance – 'othering'. Meanwhile, the white cherubs associated with the history and tradition of European art have been substituted with black angels, as noted in several of the top most wall hanging frames. Not only do the black angels draw attention to the art historical hierarchy of European vision, they underscore racial hierarchies more broadly.

As raised in Chapter 3, Bennett deals with concepts of reflection, and again employs a mirror in this work. However, it is composed as part of the physical space, rather than in the two-dimensional format. As part of the installation, the mirror works similarly to Michelangelo Pistoletto's 'Mirror Paintings', produced during the early 1960s. These were painted upon and placed on the floor within the gallery space. Their positioning created a virtual passage where the inclusion of the viewer and their surroundings, through the reflected surface, generated a self-portrait that was constantly changing as each individual viewer entered the gallery space. A

⁴⁶³ National Gallery of Victoria, 'Exploring Identity - Self-Portraiture', *Gordon Bennett: Education Resource*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, viewed 27 October 2017, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/gordonbennett/education/02.html>>.

⁴⁶⁴ National Gallery of Victoria, *ibid.*

relationship was activated in this way, between aesthetics and reality.⁴⁶⁵ Bennett's viewers, in contrast to Pistoletto's, are in postcolonial Australia, so this reality is contingent on the role of the colonial gaze. Bennett's mirror is intended to expose the colonial gaze by returning the viewer's own back to them. As viewers are made a part of *Self Portrait (Ancestor Figures)* by their own reflection, they are forced to reason with their personal gaze and its colonial associations, as they engage with the installation.

The engagement the artist provokes is what theorist Jill Bennett describes as 'an acknowledgement of a shared, contingent experience'.⁴⁶⁶ For Gordon Bennett, this is where Aboriginality is determined – through experience, rather than by any fixed determinants, particularly those that have stemmed from bias or preconceptions.⁴⁶⁷ His aesthetic undermines the fixity of time and place that have configured 'otherness'.⁴⁶⁸ What ensues, as the viewer steps into Bennett's creative space, is a step toward the dismantling of the authority of knowledge. Jill Bennett explains that through such a process, Aboriginality is not isolated to Australia's colonial past as visual documentation purports, but 'emerges through a negotiation of memories of pain and loss in the present'.⁴⁶⁹ In this sense, *Self Portrait (Ancestor Figures)*, is ultimately affective, stimulating viewers to forge new meanings that escape the colonising gaze. While this affective outcome is intrinsic to the work, the artist has nevertheless identified attitudes and representations of Aboriginal people that are premised on self and Other, engendered by European and colonial views. Critic Juliette Peers describes Gordon Bennett's aesthetic approach as declamatory as he grappled with racism and isolation.⁴⁷⁰ Yet, in spite of this

⁴⁶⁵ Michelangelo Pistoletto, 'Plexiglass', in *Michelangelo Pistoletto*, exhibition catalogue, Gallerie Sperone, Torino, 1964.

⁴⁶⁶ Bennett, 'Global Interconnections', op. cit., p. 133.

⁴⁶⁷ Bennett, *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁶⁹ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁷⁰ Juliette Peers, 'Three Colours: Gordon Bennett and Peter Robinson', *Artlink*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2004, September 2004, viewed 14 November 2017, <<https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2213/three-colours-gordon-bennett-and-peter-robinson/>>.

criticism, Bennett's piece was particularly poignant in terms of its relevance to wider postcolonial discourse in the early 1990s as it challenged the regimes of authority in disciplines of identity and politics within the dominant culture.

This process of 'othering' that emerges from the politics of difference, is just one of many ways the Aboriginal subject has been characterised through the colonial lens. It is not within the scope of this thesis to chart the historiography of the visual representation of Aboriginality, nevertheless, it is important to recognise and acknowledge when considering the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art, that a series of visual tropes pertaining to Indigenous subjects have been developed and sustained over time. The framework that these tropes emerge from is a well-established one, with Hetti Perkins attesting to three well-known primary stereotypes: noble savages, members of a dying race, and cultureless outcasts.⁴⁷¹ Bernard Smith has elaborated on the concept of 'noble savage', proposing that this was the earliest representation that employed Aboriginal people, generated in the late eighteenth century in association with Rousseau's theory of romanticism and via the lens of primitivism.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ These tropes are discussed in the context of portraiture in Hetti Perkins, 'Introduction', in Julie Donaldson & Theresa Willsteed (eds), *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, revised edn, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2013, p. 16.

⁴⁷² See Bernard Smith, 'The Ignoble and the Romantic Savage, 1820–50' in *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edn, Harper & Row, Sydney, 1985, pp. 317–332; Peter Beilharz, 'Encountering Australian Painting', in *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, op. cit., pp. 30, 69–70.

Figure 50:
Fiona Foley,
Native Blood, 1994,
C-type photograph,
edition of 14,
50 x 40 cm,
photograph: Sandy Edwards,
Private Collection.



Fiona Foley vehemently resists these colonial categories that pervade understandings of Indigenous culture, proposing instead, alternative views on Indigeneity. During 1994, Foley produced three series of works that presented contemporary views of her Badtjala heritage. In *Badtjala Woman* (appendix), *Native Blood* (fig. 50) and *Modern Nomad* (appendix), Foley diversified the representation of Aboriginal identity. Like Andrew, she responded to imagery found in the colonial archive, which included nineteenth century postcards and studio photographs depicting Aboriginal people.⁴⁷³ She too has employed the photograph as a subversive tool, expressing her disapproval of the colonial practices of anthropology that have visually documented Indigenous persons and communities with bias, especially her own K'gari (Fraser Island) ancestors.⁴⁷⁴ In opposition to the dominant gaze and the ways the Badtjala had previously been photographed ethnographically, Foley, in *Native Blood* (detail), with herself as subject, returns the viewer's gaze. It is a political act that demands attention. She offers a counter image to the exoticised 'other' and a visual retort to the nineteenth century speculation

⁴⁷³ Collections in the John Oxley Library, Brisbane, are noted in Stuart Koop, 'The Wrong Head on the Right Body', in Fiona Foley & Simryn Gill, *Your Place or Mine?*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2002, p. 26.

⁴⁷⁴ Martin Thomas, 'Fiona Foley', in Judy Annear (ed.), *Australian Perspectives 1995*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1995, p. 40.

about Indigenous populations in decline.⁴⁷⁵ In other words, she is directly rejecting the colonising gaze that has determined the Indigenous subject as the 'noble savage' or part of a 'dying race'. Instead, her restaging of colonial source imagery in a new contemporary context undermines assumptions held, which are, in essence, colonial constructs. Through their engagement with Foley as the self-substituted subject, viewers are forced to consider how ethnography and an empowered position as a result of this, has objectified Aboriginal people and culture.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, as assumptions are directed back to the viewer, they are made to reflect on how these have been established.

Foley reclaims autonomy for the identity of the Badtjala in a number of other aesthetic ways: she has selected the female photographer Sandy Edwards; arranged her own setting; chosen her adornments and props; and exposed her body as she wishes. Foley's aesthetic choices regarding subject, expression and representation ultimately resist the stereotypical imagery found in homogenising historical visual records. Instead, she confers her presentness visually as an Indigenous woman and conveys the contemporariness of experience. Thus the Badtjala is recast as dynamic rather than as historically static.

The medium of photography is apposite for Foley, which she deliberately employs as a visual reference to the historical ethnographic mode of nineteenth century photography. In this case, her photographic image is also intertemporal, in that it relates to the past and the present, as she draws out both history and memory in the process of representation.⁴⁷⁷ Academic Shaun Wilson explains how memory is imbedded in copied images, but that in copying an image, considered to

⁴⁷⁵ Kate Sands, *Fiona Foley Forbidden: MCA Learning Resource*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2009, p. 22.

⁴⁷⁶ Fiona Nicholl in Fiona Foley et al., *Fiona Foley: Forbidden*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2009.

⁴⁷⁷ Sands, *Fiona Foley Forbidden: MCA Learning Resource*, op. cit., p. 24.

be a second-generation image, a third image is created as a result of the reinvented context.⁴⁷⁸ It is in this third space that new associations with an image are forged, as was similarly encountered with Andrew's works. What is significant in this process is that while a memory lingers in the successive images, its original value is forfeited.⁴⁷⁹ This aspect is a critical one for urban Indigenous artists who through the process of resisting colonial representation, create new imagery that deconstructs and decolonises primary visual sources. The objective is to shift the Indigenous subject from the dominating colonial gaze that has established and perpetuated Indigenous representation as 'other'. While implementing this shift is a primary objective, bringing the prejudicial nature of the colonial gaze to light and Indigenising it, is a priority for artists.

Following the romantic projections of Indigenous subjects identified by Bernard Smith, in which representations as 'noble savages' or as heroes and gods were prevalent, illustrations antithetical in nature followed. These included anthropological images in the nineteenth century, such as those by George French Angas (1822–1886). They typically depicted physical characteristics in terms of ethnicity, body markings and material culture that were compared to images of other 'natives' for the purpose of an 'enlightened' study of humans.⁴⁸⁰ Such representation contributed to the designation of racial Otherness, premised upon classification and ranking processes concerning what were, at the time, believed to be quantifiable variables of human attributes.⁴⁸¹ This Darwinian way of looking at culture projected Indigenous Australians as an extant stone-age people who were perceived to occupy the lowest position in human

⁴⁷⁸ Shaun Wilson, 'Remixing Memory: The Copied Image in Australian Photography', *Photofile*, no. 77, 2006, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁹ Wilson, *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Willis, 'Nation and Otherness', *op. cit.*, p. 102; see also Philip Jones, 'George French Angas: Colonial Artist at Large', in Jaynie Anderson (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, the proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art, Melbourne, 13–18 January, 2008, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2009, pp. 322–327.

⁴⁸¹ Willis, 'Nation and Otherness', *op. cit.*

development.⁴⁸² This shift in classification served to enhance the Enlightened vision Europe had of itself.⁴⁸³

Julie Gough, who considers how representations rooted in this colonial paradigm have contributed to the construction of identity and the concepts of inferiority and superiority, has investigated these ideas. Her earliest exhibited work, *Medical Series*, 1994, consisted of ten folded and welded metal cases that displayed found and made objects that reconfigured the supposed scientific tools and accompanying medical basis upon which racial difference was measured.⁴⁸⁴ She was investigating how science projected its own ideals, explaining that:

Any person of a particular race would find that even if their hair and blood type corresponded with the race they identified with, their fingerprints, earwax consistency, and body fat folds could link them with an entirely different racial grouping.⁴⁸⁵

Gough's interest in archival research informed her subject matter. Of particular note were the processes of social Darwinism including phrenology, which were used to classify Aboriginal people, to support ideas about the 'dying race'. 'Primitive' Aboriginal people were thought to be 'dying out' as a result of colonisation and progress; to be replaced by a superior, 'civilized' British people.⁴⁸⁶ One consequence of the 'dying race' concept was that it reinforced ideas concerning 'full-blood' Aboriginal people: those deemed 'real', whereas 'half-caste' Aboriginal people were believed to have 'lost' their traditional culture.

⁴⁸² Bernhard Lüthi, 'The Marginalisation of (Contemporary) Non-European/Non-American Art' in Bernhard Lüthi and Gary Lee, *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians: Traditional and Contemporary Works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, DuMont, Köln, c. 1993, p. 17.

⁴⁸³ Lüthi, *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ Julie Gough, 'Medical Series, 1994', *op. cit.*; This piece was submitted for the artist's Honours year of study in Visual Arts and was subsequently shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, where it was included in *Perspecta 1995*, see Julie Gough, 'Medical Series, 1994', in *SlideShare*, viewed 7 January 2018, <<https://www.slideshare.net/JulieGough/gough-56artworks-w-texts-sm>>. An image of all ten components of the series appears in the appendix.

⁴⁸⁵ Julie Gough quoted in Peter Hill, 'Julie Gough', in Judy Annear (ed.), *Australian Perspecta 1995*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1995, p. 46.

⁴⁸⁶ Elizabeth Furniss, 'Timeline History and the Anzac Myth: Settler Narratives of Local History in a North Australian Town', *Oceania*, vol. 74, no. 4, June 2001, p. 288.



Figure 51:
Julie Gough,
*Physical Characteristics – Body
Odour*, from the series *Medical
Series*, 1994,
tin, soap, wax, towelling,
stainless steel, found items,
TMAG Collection.

Gough's *Physical Characteristics – Body Odour*, 1994 (fig. 51), is one of the ten from her *Medical Series*: each was concerned with medical and anthropological 'measures' of racial difference.⁴⁸⁷ The other nine case studies included: brain capacity; skull dimensions; earwax consistency; physiological adaptation to cold; intelligence testing; eyeball weight; tooth avulsion; hair differentiation; and fingerprint patterning. Each reflects on the anthropological scramble to document the 'dying race' and record the physical details of the 'last' 'full-blood' Aboriginal people – the 'last of a tribe'. This process of colonial scientific documentation, continued to be a pattern of representation in which a narrative of 'lasts' was worked into settler historical consciousness.⁴⁸⁸ This repeated representation of Aboriginal people served to reinforce the narrative through the continued reproduction of the concept itself.⁴⁸⁹ It was an exercise in myth building, which Gough is interrogating.

As such, Gough is approaching the politics of difference by illuminating how the testing of a person's physical attributes, which endorse representations of 'other', is fundamentally deceptive in nature. With this work, Gough brought history and science into the art museum via the lens of

⁴⁸⁷ Julie Gough, website, viewed 28 October 2014, <<http://juliegough.net/>>.

⁴⁸⁸ Furniss, 'Timeline History and the Anzac Myth: Settler Narratives of Local History in a North Australian Town', op. cit., pp. 288-289.

⁴⁸⁹ Furniss, *ibid.*

contemporary art. The potential affect of her installation on viewers is that via its props, text and cogent delivery, the historical imaginary is transformed. Garden explains that through such a transformation, like that of a rematerialised photograph, historic injustices are acknowledged.⁴⁹⁰ Viewers are confronted by Gough's inference that such practices have had a perceptible negative influence on the development of Indigenous identity, and assisted in advancing Eurocentric authority. In the years that followed, Gough continued to engage with the archive, combining it with field work as she investigated history and experience, particularly that of her Tasmanian Aboriginal ancestors.⁴⁹¹

Scientific authority persisted in terms of representation. Early impressions of the Indigenous subject as 'uncorrupted' by civilisation that had previously contributed to somewhat positive, albeit inaccurate representations of Indigenous culture as 'noble' had dissipated. Instead, low anthropological classifications deemed Indigenous culture's 'uncivilised nature' the most inferior of all humanity. This was reinforced colonialist ideology that accompanied science at the time. This allowed the Aboriginal 'other' to be drawn further away from the concept of primitivism, ultimately toward that of an 'ignoble savage', projected commonly in lithographic works as 'low lifes' and 'undesirables'.⁴⁹² These impressions continue as colonialism's legacy and are explored by Richard Bell.

⁴⁹⁰ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 262.

⁴⁹¹ Gough, 'Medical Series, 1994', op. cit.

⁴⁹² Willis, 'Nation and Otherness', op. cit.

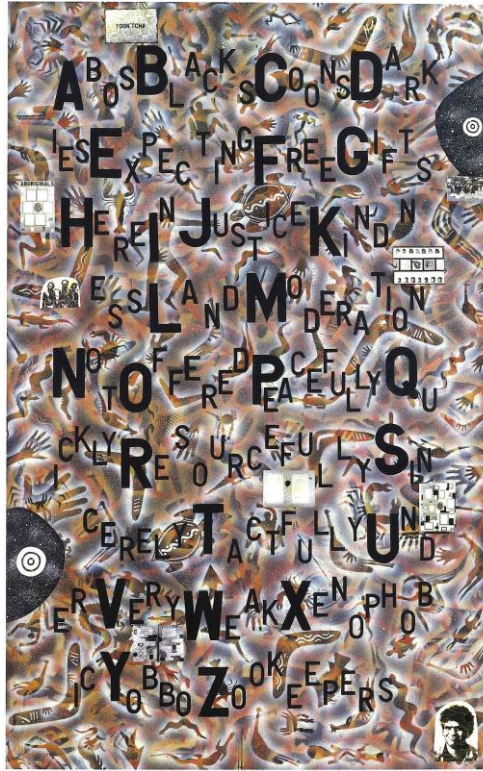


Figure 52:
Richard Bell,
Devine inspiration, 1993 (detail),
synthetic polymer paint and collage
on canvas and text panel,
239.6 x 149.6 cm (painting),
AGNSW.

In the early 1990s, Bell activated politics in his artwork.⁴⁹³ He was particularly inspired by the Black Power movement in Redfern and protest culture throughout the late 1960s to 1980s.⁴⁹⁴ An early work in which Bell has addressed the concept of ignobility or inferiority, and how the way language has been complicit in the process of 'othering', is *Devine inspiration*, 1993 (fig. 52). He has employed a number of aesthetic devices in this painting with photographic collage to convey the hierarchy of language within culture. Bell has juxtaposed bold, black text over stencilled generic pictograms typically associated with rock art. Using the alphabet, the first four letters convey the words 'Abo', 'Blacks', 'Coons', 'Darkies', which are derogatory terms present within a vernacular of colonialism.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ This occurred when he made the transition from producing and painting artefacts and tourist items to works for the contemporary artmarket, see Hetti Perkins, 'Interview with Richard Bell', in Richard Bell, *Lessons on Etiquette and Manners*, Monash University Museum of Art, Caulfield East, Victoria, 2012, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁴ See Hetti Perkins, 'Richard Bell: In Conversation with Hetti Perkins', in Hetti Perkins & Jonathan Jones (eds), *Half Light Portraits from Black Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008, pp. 40-43; also Daniel Browning, 'Decolonising Now: The Activism of Richard Bell', in Richard Bell, *Lessons on Etiquette and Manners*, Monash University Museum of Art, Caulfield East, Victoria, 2012, pp. 23-26; and Genevieve Murray, 'Contested Space: Art and the Right to the City', *Assemble*, 18 October 2016, viewed 8 January 2017, <<http://assemblepapers.com.au/2016/10/18/contested-space-art-and-the-right-to-the-city/>>.

⁴⁹⁵ These are terms that have also been employed in the work of Gordon Bennett, see figure 39 (Chapter 3).

Bell deliberately politicised the alphabet, drawing out terms and associations loaded with meaning that ascribe a racist ideology. Hetti Perkins claims that the last sequence of words is directed at the racist oppressors, whom he censures with the phrase, 'Very Weak Xenophobic Yobbo Zookeepers'.⁴⁹⁶ The aesthetic characteristics of this work evoke pre-contact traditions in Indigenous art, such as the stencilled animal shapes and hand prints evident in the background. These are employed intentionally to connect with colonial ideas about primitivism, but also to ironically allude to the artist's views on cultural authenticity. Bell is critical of the way the art market privileges those Aboriginal artists it deems to be 'tribal' or from the 'outback'.⁴⁹⁷ The scattered collaged components intertextually relate to other works by the artist, and include documentary imagery pertaining to Indigenous people and events. These visual elements are positioned behind vituperating text that together account for the negative impressions of Indigenous culture that have persisted since the shift from noble to ignoble as a result of colonialism.



Figure 53: Richard Bell, *Pigeonholes*, 1992, 13 photographic panels on hardboard, 76 x 292 cm (overall), purchased 1993, AGNSW Collection.

Bell had been building on these ideas, which emerged when he was part of the Campfire Group in Brisbane. In the previous year, Bell's *Pigeonholes*, 1992 (fig. 53), similarly confronted

⁴⁹⁶ Hetti Perkins, 'Richard Bell', in Willstead, *Tradition Today*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴⁹⁷ Perkins, *ibid*; Bell's criticism of privilege was articulated in 2002 sometime after this particular work was produced, published online in 2003, <<http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/news/bell.html>>; and in print, Richard Bell, 'Bell's Theorem, Aboriginal Art It's a White Thing', in Margie West (ed.), *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award: Celebrating 20 Years*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2004, pp. 20-29.

Australian racism.⁴⁹⁸ As Bell interrogates language, he incorporated rhyme and pun as a provocation regarding class, racial and social hierarchies. This plays out in the white labels situated below each portrait conveying respectable roles, while the black labels are indicative of the 'inferior' stereotypes assigned to Indigenous people. Ironically, Bell implies through the repeated image of himself that no matter what role an Indigenous person has, racial censure is inevitable.

For critic Michael Harvey, Bell's inclusion of language acts as a 'reverse-colonialist gesture' and is deliberately subvert in nature.⁴⁹⁹ Bells aesthetic inclusion of language in both works discussed above, expresses the racist position of the 'coloniser', while at the same time, through enunciating that language and its meaning, he rejects the colonial context. Onus is placed on the viewer to consider what is meant by Bell's gesture of voiding or rejecting meaning – a technique that cultural theorist Homi Bhabha explains can 'disarticulate the voice of authority'.⁵⁰⁰ This approach builds upon Walter Benjamin's concepts of language and translation, discussed in Chapter 3, whereby Bell's strategy of employing language in a transformed state and context, impedes the preservation of colonial meaning attached to the original.

In addition to the scientific classifications and racist views that estimated Aboriginal people as 'primitive', 'inferior' or 'undesirable', was the late nineteenth century perception that Aboriginal people were a 'dying race'. This generated a proliferation of photographic documentation

⁴⁹⁸ Perkins, *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ Michael Harvey, 'Richard Bell', in *Art in America*, vol. 98, no. 2, February 2010, n.p., viewed 17 November 2017, <<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/richard-bell/>>.

⁵⁰⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London & New York, 1994; also William John Thomas Mitchell, 'Translator Translated', *Artforum International*, vol. 33, no. 7, 1995, n.p.

concerned with capturing realistic images of 'traditional' life.⁵⁰¹ These included photographic tableaux in which Aboriginal subjects featured, sometimes in situ in the landscape, and other times cast in studio settings artificially depicting the outdoors, both with props and costumes, most notably produced by JW (John William) Lindt (1845–1926).⁵⁰² This developed during the twentieth century, into a prevalence of images documenting Aboriginal people, their lives and culture, which were predominantly set in remote and rural areas and notably in the photographic medium. Images invariably included Indigenous subjects in family groups, on missions, participating in ceremony, at specific sites or artists at their work.⁵⁰³



Figure 54:
Michael Riley,
Mr and Mrs Lyall Munro, 1990, from the
series *A common place: Portraits of
Moree Murries*, 1990,
gelatin silver photograph,
55.9 x 39 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

Michael Riley, like Fiona Foley and Richard Bell, was opposed to the defining of Aboriginal people as 'other'. He took a compassionate approach to his subjects by looking beyond the

⁵⁰¹ Willis, 'Nation and Otherness', op. cit., pp. 106–107. See also Jane Lydon, 'Introduction: The Photographic Encounter', in Jane Lydon (ed.), *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2014, pp. 3–4.

⁵⁰² See discussion of Lindt's work in Jane Lydon, Sari Braithwaite & Shauna Bostock-Smith, 'Photographing Indigenous People in New South Wales' in Lydon, *Calling the Shots*, op. cit., pp. 58–60.

⁵⁰³ See examples in Peter Sutton (ed.), *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, The Asia Society Galleries, USA, 1988, pp. 143–179; Lydon, *Calling the Shots*, op. cit.

image.⁵⁰⁴ His photographic series *A Common Place: Portraits of Moree Murries*, 1990, documents and honours members of the community from his mother's home town. Riley reverses the stereotypical aesthetic of historical images of Aboriginal people and instead of the artificial setting, augmented with props synonymous with Lindt's practice, his choice of a single cloth sheet provides a simple, neutral backdrop.⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, Riley let the sitters decide how they wanted to be represented; it was not the prerogative of the photographer, as he said:

... [it] was important in that it let me show a community of Aboriginal people in the country ... People walked in front of the camera and sat however they wanted to sit, and showed themselves however they wanted to show themselves.⁵⁰⁶

Also in opposition to the majority of historical works in which Indigenous people were cast as anonymous subjects or a generalised type of people, as in Lindt's tableaux, Riley identifies his sitters and their associated context. For *Mr and Mrs Lyall Munro*, 1990 (fig. 54), he has provided their marital status, their family name, their geographic location of Moree, New South Wales, and their language group. Their clothes are their own and they look and smile out from the scene; aspects that contrast with nineteenth century images in which subjects were often photographed with serious expressions, partially naked or adorned with 'cultural' props.⁵⁰⁷

Riley's series of fifteen works celebrate Murri community life.⁵⁰⁸ In a contemporary art context, his scenes of strong, proud, named Aboriginal people and families testify to their presentness and extant culture, while refuting the colonial view of a race in decline.

Moreover, as Garden's explains, 'the viewer must engage other ways of making meaning

⁵⁰⁴ See Hetti Perkins, 'Michael Riley: In Conversation with Michael Riley', in Perkins & Jones (eds), *Half Light Portraits from Black Australia*, op. cit., pp. 110-119.

⁵⁰⁵ Anthony Gardner, 'Michael Riley: Art Gallery of New South Wales', *Artforum International*, vol. 46, no. 10, summer 2008, p. 461.

⁵⁰⁶ Michael Riley, 'A Common Place: Portraits of Moree Murries 1990', artist statement, viewed 19 November 2017, <<http://www.michaelriley.com.au/a-common-place-portraits-of-moree-murries/>>.

⁵⁰⁷ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 258.

⁵⁰⁸ Gardner, 'Michael Riley: Art Gallery of New South Wales', op. cit.

which requires an investment that is more cognisant of the shared humanity between the viewer and the person depicted'.⁵⁰⁹ Thus the viewing space is one in which the colonial gaze is exposed and new understandings about the representation of Indigenous people are presented.

Riley continued revising stereotypical colonial representation of Indigenous people. Eight years after his *Moree Murries*, he was involved in the *Yarns from the Talbragar Reserve* project (1998). Riley's role in this project was to photograph the elders and Indigenous inhabitants of Dubbo.⁵¹⁰ The 18 images set in his father's country pay homage to the Aboriginal community members associated with the Talbragar Reserve in the Wiradjuri nation.⁵¹¹ Riley kept the setting simple; creating scenes that were devoid of the accoutrements present in early colonial tableaux.

Figure 55:
Michael Riley,
Tucker Taylor (detail), from the
series *Yarns from the Talbragar
Reserve*, 1998,
gelatin silver photograph,
51 x 61 cm,
Dubbo Regional Gallery
© Michael Riley Foundation/
Copyright Agency, 2018.



Aesthetic emphasis was instead placed on projecting the individuality and expression of his sitters. *Tucker Taylor* (detail) (fig. 55), 1998, retains his sunglasses and casually stands

⁵⁰⁹ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 260.

⁵¹⁰ Rene Sutherland, 'Afterword', in Rebecca Pinchin (ed.), *Yarns from the Talbragar Reserve: Stories by the Original Inhabitants and Former Residents*, Dubbo Regional Gallery, Dubbo, New South Wales, 1999, n.p.

⁵¹¹ Michael Riley, 'Yarns from the Talbragar Reserve 1998', artist statement, viewed 20 November 2017, <<http://www.michaelriley.com.au/yarns-from-the-talbragar-reserve-1998/>>.

facing the camera. Even though his eyes are obscured, it is evident that they are touched by the understated smile that sits on the subject's face. His clothes are his own. This portrait represents a significant community member connected with Talbragar Reserve, who has personal and collective memories of that place.⁵¹² Tucker Taylor recalled the floods of 1954 and the environmental impact this had on the Reserve and consequently his family's move from the area.⁵¹³ Together Riley's images and his subjects' recollections across the project express the cultural, historical and familial ties to Talbragar Reserve.⁵¹⁴ The project was presented as a photo essay in which Riley's images, combined with oral histories, convey the dignity and pride of his subjects. Riley's photographing of Dubbo's Aboriginal elders and families in a sensitive, candid way, left no room for the colonial gaze.

Riley's two series are indicative of the portraiture genre, but they offer an aesthetic counterpoint to the well-established colonial stereotypes familiar through the documentary processes of earlier times. Theorist Nikos Papastergiadis explains that Riley has removed the 'jagged edges' of the world faced by his sitters, capturing the dignity with which they faced that world, and despite the softness of scenes, artifice is kept at bay.⁵¹⁵ This aesthetic balance of setting, light, contrast, body language, viewing distance and the deliberate, lingering documentary gaze allows the artist to convey pride in Indigenous heritage. Through each series, Riley commands solidarity amidst communities of Indigenous people, while his works are politicised through the immutable presence of Indigenous identity and culture that fills each frame.

⁵¹² Brenda L Croft, 'Up in the Sky, Behind the Clouds', in Kathryn Favelle (ed.), *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. 19.

⁵¹³ Tucker Taylor in Pinchin, *Yarns from the Talbragar Reserve: Stories by the Original Inhabitants and Former Residents*, op. cit., n.p.

⁵¹⁴ See appendix for an additional example.

⁵¹⁵ Nikos Papastergiadis, 'The Meek Michael Riley', in Favelle (ed.), *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, op. cit., p. 67.

Contemporary Indigenous Experience as Authentic and Diverse

In the urban Indigenous art that proliferated during the 1990s, artists were conscious of how visual representation had contributed greatly to non-Indigenous perceptions about Indigenous identity, Aboriginality and authenticity. By 1985, according to the Australian National Opinion Polls (ANOP), a standard perception of what was implied as 'authentic' in the national consciousness was discernible as 'tribal' and 'traditional' Aboriginal people who inhabited the 'outback'.⁵¹⁶ The ANOP report highlighted that Aboriginal people were distinguished by the public as having rights to land, and that 55 per cent of respondents affirmed that 'full bloods' or 'tribal, rural, outback Aborigines' should be entitled to land rights. An 'inauthentic' figure was perceived as those Aboriginal people who were not 'full bloods' or who lived in cities and towns.⁵¹⁷ This meant that only those Aboriginal people who met the standard eugenic classification of 'full blood' or fulfilled a seemingly impossible pre-contact lifestyle were 'authentic'. Those who did not meet the standards were rendered cultureless.

These findings from the 1985 poll are disturbing. For social historian Tim Rowse, such an 'approved', 'authentic' Aboriginal person is fantastical. He has likened it to the legendary Loch Ness monster.⁵¹⁸ He considers such an Indigenous figure a constructed perception, associated with the 'outback', which is a primeval region pertaining to a mythically delineated area of nationhood.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ Australian National Opinion Polls (ANOP), *Land Rights: Winning Middle Australia, An Attitudes and Communications Research Study*, ANOP, Crows Nest, Sydney, 1985, cited in Tim Rowse, 'Middle Australia and the Noble Savage: A Political Romance', in Jeremy R Beckett (ed.), *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, p. 174.

⁵¹⁷ Australian National Opinion Polls, cited in Rowse, op. cit., 174–175.

⁵¹⁸ Rowse, *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ Rowse, *ibid.*

Brenda L Croft's series *The Big Deal is Black*, 1993, addressed this challenging concept of authenticity lingering from decades past, for reasons argued above by Rowse. *Thea, Hetti and Tyson Perkins*, 1993 (fig. 56), presents a scene of everyday family life. Just as any mother would sit with her children upon her lap, Croft captures curator Hetti Perkins, an Arremte/Kalkadoon woman, at her city home with Thea and Tyson, in a 'family snap' dedicated to presenting a 'realistic portrayal of contemporary Aboriginal life'.⁵²⁰



Figure 56:
Brenda L Croft,
Thea, Hetti and Tyson Perkins,
from the series
The Big Deal is Black, 1993,
R3 colour photograph,
99.5 x 120.5 cm (sight)
AGNSW.

Formally, Croft composed her sitters in a way that draws the viewer into an intimate and affectionate scene that is closely cropped. In this way, as Garden has observed, the subject is brought '... into a more immediate engagement with the viewer'.⁵²¹ The background allows viewers to acknowledge the setting as urban residential and counters pervading ideas about Rowse's 'outback'. Croft's presence as an artist and an insider allows her to produce personal scenes that offer alternative perspectives to the many homogenised mainstream views of Aboriginality. She has said of this series that she was permitting viewers to see images of her

⁵²⁰ Art Gallery of New South Wales, 'Thea, Hetti and Tyson Perkins, from the series *The Big Deal is Black*', Art Gallery of New South Wales, viewed 20 November 2017, <<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/392.1993/>>.

⁵²¹ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 259.

people in her own terms.⁵²² Although the responsibility is not hers alone, she challenges and attempts to 'reverse the expected'.⁵²³ She achieves this reversal by way of utilising the relationship that she shares with the Perkins family. Therefore, the candidness and closeness she is able to capture transposes accessibility to viewers.

Croft facilitates a process that allows viewers to familiarise themselves with subject matter that allays stereotypes and misperceptions about authenticity. This relates back to the point in the previous chapter about the potential of artwork to enable a translation of experience through its aesthetic dimension.⁵²⁴ As Croft employs the photographic medium, she is diversifying the representation of Aboriginal people, and through this, forging new and revised understandings of Aboriginality. She explains that in her portraiture practice she represents Indigenous people who 'come from every background and experience'.⁵²⁵ Nobody is confined to the 'outback' or diminished through geographic location, such as a city locale. Croft instead affirms that '... there is no single Indigenous way of being'.⁵²⁶

Croft has argued that a misconceived view of Indigenous culture is of a 'pre-contact' people.⁵²⁷ She explains that subsequent definitions of 'authenticity' were generated from the ahistorical images promoted by colonisers, and the collections of material culture amassed by colonisers

⁵²² Croft, quoted in Art Gallery of New South Wales, 'Mary Mumbulla and Murri Craigie, from the series *The Big Deal is Black*', Art Gallery of New South Wales, viewed 9 January 2018, <<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/391.1993/>>; see in appendix *Mary Mumbulla and Murri Craigie*, also from the same series, *The Big Deal is Black*, 1993.

⁵²³ Brenda L Croft, artist's statement, in Anthony Bond (ed.), *9th Biennale of Sydney: The Boundary Rider*, exhibition catalogue, The Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 1992, p. 192.

⁵²⁴ Robyn Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 58.

⁵²⁵ Brenda L Croft, quoted in Karina Marlow, 'The 2015 National Indigenous Arts Award fellowship winner, Brenda L. Croft talks to NITV about her work, influences and family', NITV, 16 February 2016, viewed 21 November 2017, <<http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2016/01/18/brenda-l-croft-my-work-about-giving-voice-voiceless>>.

⁵²⁶ Croft, *ibid*.

⁵²⁷ Croft, *ibid*.

and subsequently displayed and studied.⁵²⁸ The paradox, is that such concepts of 'pre-contact' or 'pre-colonial' are themselves terminated by virtue of colonisation. However, the foundation of representation remained steadfast, trapping imagery of Indigenous culture in pre-colonial stasis, such as in the photographic works by Lindt. This continuum of representation of Aboriginality has failed to penetrate perceptions of what 'authentic Aboriginality' means. As an identifier, it carries weight in the Australian vernacular, ultimately establishing a binary between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic'. Despite cultural evolution and social change that has occurred in the shared space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the task of overturning this classification is a particularly arduous one.



Figure 57:
Lin Onus,
Fruit bats, 1991,
polychromed fibreglass,
polychromed wooden disks, Hills
Hoist clothesline, installation,
250 x 250 x 250 cm (overall),
AGNSW Collection.

Lin Onus has approached this binary with an element of humour in the work *Fruit bats*, 1991 (fig. 57), an installation selected for *Australian Perspectives 1991*. Onus created a colony of fibreglass fruit bats that bear Murrungun-Djinang designs from Miwimbi, Northern Territory, crosshatched upon their backs. The many embellished, small circular disks with dotting and flower-like motifs beneath are indicative of the bats' droppings. The artist was given permission to use these designs following his honorary familial acceptance by central Arnhem Land elder Jack

⁵²⁸ Croft, *ibid.*

Wunuwun.⁵²⁹ From the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, Onus made the journey across Lake Eyre to Arnhem Land sixteen times, building his spiritual knowledge of Wunuwun's Murrungun people.⁵³⁰

While the installation suggests fauna, ecology and biodiversity, it is the central Hills Hoist that disrupts the reading of the work. Not unlike Brook Andrew's work discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the viewer of Onus's *Fruit bats* finds that there is a rupture and an ambiguity of the referent in the work. MacNeill explains that this ambiguity emerges when contrary impressions exist together in a single work.⁵³¹ In this case, the work's decorative element is one referent; it denotes particular local significance encapsulating a language group and their associated custodial and ceremonial responsibilities. In contrast, the Hills Hoist clothesline is a secular, domestic icon. Viewers are thus forced to reason with Onus's would-be nature scene and may deduce that the installation is in fact a socio-political comment. Through this process, the stereotype of identity is confounded.⁵³² The artist therefore brings into focus the contrasting ideas outlined above about pre-colonial versus post-colonial Indigenous culture. Yet, despite the aesthetic contrasts that exist in this work, the implication is that cultural presence, habitation, place and location, that is, whether Aboriginality is located in the Top End or in suburbia, authenticity is preserved.

Entrenched perceptions about Indigenous authenticity have been underpinned by an exclusiveness that stemmed from the repudiation of a non-desert, non-remote Indigenous identity. As a result, the urban Indigenous person has been overlooked in the context of cultural

⁵²⁹ Margo Neale, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p. 273. See also George Alexander, 'Lin Onus', in Julie Donaldson & Theresa Willsted (eds), *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, revised edn, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2013, p. 122.

⁵³⁰ Neale, 'United in the Struggle: Indigenous Art from Urban Areas', op. cit., p. 273.

⁵³¹ MacNeill, 'Undoing the Colonial Gaze: Ambiguity in the Art of Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 184.

⁵³² MacNeill, *ibid.*, p. 185.

authenticity. As a rejection of these confronting lingering attitudes of exclusiveness, artist Darren Siwes turned to the individual, to himself and his setting, to assess what contemporary Aboriginality meant and looked like.



Figure 58:
Darren Siwes,
Stand (monument), 1999,
direct positive colour photograph
on aluminium,
100 x 120 cm,
AGSA Collection.

Siwes's *Stand (monument)*, 1999 (fig. 58), takes the viewer into the urban environment where the artist appears as a ghostly presence. In the image above, he stands like an apparition, beside a World War I memorial. There are many conceptual layers to his night works, with an overt sense of the surreal in play courtesy of the transparent figure. The artist questions perceptions about the 'Aboriginal person', which have been predicated on stereotypes.⁵³³

Curator Hannah Fink has expanded on this, stating that:

For most Australians, Indigenous people are purely figural, existing either as media caricatures ... or as representations itself, as art and design and didgeridoo music. This version of the Aboriginal person presents a largely unpeopled culture; if there are people, they are performers who exist for a white audience, staging a culture of defunct otherness in the theatre of the national imaginary.⁵³⁴

Aesthetically, Siwes's settings resist stereotypes about where Aboriginal people exist. He underscores the point raised previously about the fabled outback, full of 'authentic Aborigines'

⁵³³ Hannah Fink, 'Darren Siwes', in Brenda L Croft (ed.), *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000, pp. 79–80.

⁵³⁴ Fink, *ibid.*

fixed to such a remote setting. Instead, in *Stand (monument)*, the figure is present in an urban and a populated space rendered by the pedestrian crossing sign in the background. It is a space that has a memorial monument erected; a space revered in terms of Australian history and its European alliance, and Siwes intervenes, rejecting Aboriginal invisibility in that colonial narrative, by placing himself within the frame.

Figure 59:
Darren Siwes,
Yellakiana Beginnings, c. 1998,
cibachrome print, edition of 6,
100 x 120 cm,
courtesy of the artist and
Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide.

NOTE: This image has been removed
according to the author's instructions

Similarly, in *Yellakiana Beginnings*, c. 1998 (fig. 59), produced as part of the exhibition *Three Views of Kaurna Territory Now*, 1998, Siwes responded to the Adelaide Festival Centre, located in Kaurna country, in the region of Tamda Kanya.⁵³⁵ Again he inserted himself into the frame, this time beside the iconic city landmark, which amplifies the irrevocable environmental change to Kaurna land. In this narrative of urbanisation the Indigenous subject has historically been forgotten; Siwes's ghostly presence is a reminder for viewers of this forgetting. Cultural theorist Chris Healy has explained, forgetting emerges as the product of the performance and organisation of social memory, which for the settler nation suited the colonial condition.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ Lance Campbell, *Heart of the Arts: The Adelaide Festival Centre at 40*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, South Australia, 2013, p. 106.

⁵³⁶ Chris Healy, 'Forgetting Aborigines', in *Forgetting Aborigines*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008, p. 10.

In his photographic work, Siwes tends to counter preconceived ideas about authenticity and what an Aboriginal person looks like by employing the 'suited figure'. The artist demonstrates this by illustrating himself within the image. In doing so, he presents a contemporary view of authenticity. Furthermore, his ghostly presence is unsettling, and like the splitting device employed by Andrew, this transparent form results in viewers not being able to settle their gaze on the subject. While this isolates viewers from projecting a colonial gaze, it also engages them in Siwes's concept of 'intertemporality'. Siwes has explained this as the visual possibility of being in time and space at different moments.⁵³⁷ Whilst this technique is achieved via the capacity for lengthy exposures through the photographic medium, it is also a visual metaphor for expressing the past, present and future simultaneously.⁵³⁸ Siwes's ghostly figure represents a temporal synthesis, portraying a cultural affinity with place that extends beyond physical structures that delineate time. The two scenes posit ideas about representation that draw from the temporal spectrum, as Siwes conveys the ephemeral nature of the present. Via the ambiguity of time, or the absence of its specificity promoted in the image, the artist generates an insight to a future that is potentially unrestricted by the colonial gaze and singular notions of 'authenticity'.

Toward the end of the 1990s, Brenda L Croft joined in discussions about authenticity, pointing out that prejudices against Indigenous authenticity was not isolated to the late twentieth century. She explained that such prejudice dated back to the nineteenth century, where it was directed initially toward the works of artists such as William Barak (c. 1824–1903 Wurunderi/Woiwurung) and Tommy McRae (c. 1840–1901 Kwatkwat).⁵³⁹ She claimed that such bias persisted into the twentieth century, where discrimination continued against artists whose works did not fulfil the

⁵³⁷ Darren Siwes in conversation, artist talk program, *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, March 2000; Darren Siwes, artist talk, *How to Teach Aboriginal Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia Education, Adelaide, January 2018.

⁵³⁸ Siwes, *ibid*; also, Fink, 'Darren Siwes', *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁵³⁹ Brenda L Croft, 'Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow', in Luke Taylor, *Painting the Land Story*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 1999, p. 98.

accepted Indigenous art stereotypes. A mid-twentieth century character to surface in respect to this discussion was Albert Namatjira (1902–1959) (Western Arramta people), who was discredited by the Australian art world for being merely assimilationist, in that he was perceived to have utilised the techniques and copied the style of his teacher Rex Battarbee (1893–1973).⁵⁴⁰ Yet, at around the same time, Arnhem Land artists during 1947 and 1948 were actively commissioned to produce crayon drawings and works on bark for anthropologists Ronald Berndt and Charles Mountford respectively.⁵⁴¹ The discrepancy between what was (or is) considered ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ Indigenous art is profound. In a creative context, what is observable is that the artists and their works discredited by mainstream art hierarchies were those who expressed contemporary Indigenous experience as a product of Australia’s colonising culture. Consequently, urban Indigenous artists and their artwork were thus considered hybrid and therefore degraded as not fully Aboriginal, and yet not European.⁵⁴²

This sentiment was publically articulated by critic Rob Miller in his review of *Koori Art '84*, as noted earlier in Chapter 2, in spite of the fact that this exhibition challenged discriminatory notions of Indigenous art.⁵⁴³ Long-time Indigenous art manager Andrew Crocker described such concerns about authenticity to be the product of judgements prescribed by a perception of urban Indigenous artists’ ‘tenuous traditional links’ or their art simply being ‘reconstituted’, as if it was a

⁵⁴⁰ It was thought at the time of the rise of his success that Albert Namatjira was ‘copying’ the styles and techniques of his tutor Rex Battarbee. This is discussed further in Alison French, *Seeing the Centre: The Art of Albert Namatjira 1902–1959*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002.

⁵⁴¹ See Gillian Hutcherson, *Djalkiri wānga = The Land is My Foundation: 50 Years of Aboriginal Art from Yirrkala, Northeast Arnhem Land*, University of Western Australia and Berndt Museum of Anthropology, Nedlands, Western Australia, 1995; John E Stanton, ‘Singing the Land: the Crayon Drawings on Brown Paper Collected by Ronald M and Catherine H Berndt’, in Margie West (ed.), *Yalangbara: Art of the Djang’kawu*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2008, pp. 116–137; Margo Neale, ‘Charles Mountford and the “Bastard Barks”: A Gift from the American-Australian Expedition to Arnhem Land, 1948: Mountford Expedition Works’, in Lynne Seear & Julie Ewington (eds), *Brought to Light: Australian Art 1850–1965*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 1998, pp. 210–217.

⁵⁴² Andrew Sayers in Croft, ‘Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow’, op. cit., p. 97.

⁵⁴³ See additional discussion in Catriona Moore, ‘Fiona Foley: Interviewed by Catriona Moore’, May 1992, in Catriona Moore (ed.), *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970–90*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1994, p. 209.

step removed from being truly authentic.⁵⁴⁴ Ian McLean, similarly, has explained that Indigenous art was ultimately structured around Western theories preoccupied with the opposition of primitive and modern art.⁵⁴⁵ He said that:

... these Western theories created two categories of Indigenous art: authentic primitive Indigenous art on the far side of the frontier in central and north Australia, and inauthentic Westernized (or modern) Indigenous art made in the white southern regions.⁵⁴⁶

Croft considered the Koori artists based in Australia's urban east, those who participated in *Koori Art '84* and who subsequently established Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in 1987, to be 'first wave' contemporary Indigenous artists who made a discrete contribution to the urban Indigenous art movement.⁵⁴⁷ They were artists who utilised a range of media that was alternative to the generally accepted acrylic on canvas and pigment on bark painting modes synonymous with desert and remote communities. Croft stated, 'Critics labelled it "second-rate" white art (that is, Black artists wanting to be white, or not being Black enough), a "passing fad", and of momentary "novelty value."⁵⁴⁸ She added:

The work of urban and rural Indigenous artists was considered to be the antithesis of the work being created by their peers in traditional communities which, by virtue of the geographical location of its production, was deemed 'authentic'.⁵⁴⁹

Perceived as not measuring up to an authentic standard, urban Indigenous art had been effectively excluded from the Indigenous art paradigm.

⁵⁴⁴ Andrew Crocker, 'Potential and Pitfalls: Directions and Dangers in Aboriginal Art' in Janet Maugham & Jenny Zimmer (eds), *Dot and Circle: A Retrospective Survey of the Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings of Central Australia*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 45-49.

⁵⁴⁵ Ian McLean, 'Indigenous Art in White Australia, 1900-1970' in *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, Reaktion Books, London, 2006, p. 70.

⁵⁴⁶ McLean, *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ See Sayers in Croft, 'Boomalli: From Little Things Big Things Grow', *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁵⁴⁸ Croft quoted in *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ Croft, *ibid.*, p. 102.

For contemporary Indigenous artists based in urban locales, their expression has been precisely a product of postcolonial engagement with the dominant culture. In other words, urban Indigenous art is engendered by life and interaction that has occurred within a continuum of cross-cultural experience that began with settlement. These artists have worked hard to negate perpetuated perceptions of 'authenticity', subscribe to modes of representation that contest stereotypes of Aboriginality and to promote an aesthetic beyond the conventions generally accepted by mainstream and institutional audiences regarding Indigenous art. In spite of the various misconceptions characterising the urban versus remote dichotomy, the movement has maintained authenticity solely because it is united by Indigenous artists who engage in the socio-politics that arise precisely in reference to that authenticity. In other words, if an artist identifies as Aboriginal, then neither geography nor cultural experience should be used to discriminate against the authenticity of the art they produce. Despite a general history of resistance to this notion, urban Indigenous art remains as authentic as its remote or desert counterpart.

What is evident, however, is that socially, it is challenging to alter stereotypes, as they are a result of ingrained attitudes and beliefs comprising ideology that has been internalised over a number of generations.⁵⁵⁰ Typically there is a broad acceptance of stereotypes by the dominant culture because of this process of ideological internalisation.⁵⁵¹ This is directly related to representation and in an Australian context, colonial representations of Indigeneity specifically. However, there is a pattern of subcultures asserting cultural identity when awareness about the negative attitudes of the dominant culture is heightened.⁵⁵² What may occur is that perceived ideas about the cultural 'other' are challenged via the offering of alternative views, and during the 1990s in particular, urban Indigenous art found a foothold in defining its own authenticity and

⁵⁵⁰ Steven Leuthold, 'Aesthetics and the Expression of Identity', in *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art Media and Identity*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1998, p. 23.

⁵⁵¹ Leuthold, *ibid.*

⁵⁵² Leuthold, *ibid.*

diversity across the representational field of Indigeneity. Steven Leuthold, theorist in Indigenous aesthetics, explains how aesthetics are important to the 'reconstruction and transformation of cultural identity because of their persuasive appeal for identification with a new frame of reference'.⁵⁵³ He says that this persuasive appeal is only achievable by a juxtaposition of styles, as together these stimulate a comparative process in which symbolic responses are provoked.⁵⁵⁴ Style, he contends, emits perceptions of familiarity and unfamiliarity in a viewer as social and personal meanings are produced.⁵⁵⁵ The tensions created through this process are reconciled when the unfamiliar stylistic elements generate a new symbolic association for the viewer.⁵⁵⁶ What occurs in this instance is that the viewer's frame of reference is shifted and the stylistic elements of aesthetics impel communication of the subculture.⁵⁵⁷

The history of urban Indigenous art is one that has consistently presented alternative views about Indigenous culture in order to challenge viewers about representation. This has been assisted precisely by the stylistic breadth that Leuthold describes necessitating the symbolic translation process, as demonstrated in each substantive chapter so far.

⁵⁵³ Leuthold, *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ Leuthold, *ibid.*; see also Robert Francesconi, 'Free Jazz and Black Nationalism: A Rhetoric of Musical Style' in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1986, pp. 36-49.

⁵⁵⁵ Leuthold, 'Aesthetics and the Expression of Identity', *op. cit.*

⁵⁵⁶ Francesconi, 'Free Jazz and Black Nationalism: A Rhetoric of Musical Style', *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁵⁵⁷ Leuthold, 'Aesthetics and the Expression of Identity', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Figure 60:
Destiny Deacon,
My living room, Brunswick, 3056, 1996,
installation comprising mixed media, found
objects, photography, dimensions variable,
courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9
Gallery, Sydney.



Figure 61:
Destiny Deacon,
My living room, Brunswick, 3056, 1996/2004,
installation view,
Destiny Deacon: Walk & don't look blak,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2004,
image courtesy and © the artist



Destiny Deacon has also contributed to this translation process in a manner somewhat similar to Siwes's aesthetic technique, by visually referencing herself within contemporary Koori experience in particular.⁵⁵⁸ Although she does not appear in person in *My living-room in Brunswick, 3056*, 1996 (figs 60 and 61), the installation is indicative of her residence and the reality of an Indigenous person living in inner-city Melbourne.⁵⁵⁹ The artist's suburban living room was initially presented within the Queensland Art Gallery as part of *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*.⁵⁶⁰ The familiar features in the living room, such as furniture, interior decorations and other living accessories, were combined with elements specific to the artist. These latter items were sourced through Deacon's studio practice, which drew on

⁵⁵⁸ Note that although Deacon references her Melbourne Koori experience, she also descends from the Torres Strait region.

⁵⁵⁹ See Destiny Deacon artist floor talk in Queensland Art Gallery, 'APT2 | Destiny Deacon | My living room in Brunswick 1996', 27 September 1996, video, 00:13:54, QAG|GoMA APT Archive, viewed 13 September 2017, <<http://tv.qagoma.qld.gov.au/2012/11/08/apt2-destiny-deacon-artist-talk/>>.

⁵⁶⁰ Clare Williamson, 'Destiny Deacon', in Caroline Turner & Rhana Devenport (eds), *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1996, p. 112.

education, performance, radio, photography, film making, kitsch and mass culture.⁵⁶¹ Deacon, like Siwes, challenged the stereotypical view that her contemporary Indigenous identity was somehow 'inauthentic' because of where and how she lives.

However, while viewers are confronted with aspects of the familiar and the personal, Indigenous anthropologist Marcia Langton has suggested that an average viewer may not be equipped to interpret Deacon's 'deconstructionist reading of urban Aboriginal survivors of the colonial wars', or to understand Aboriginal oppression and marginalisation 'from the discourses of power'.⁵⁶² In this respect, Deacon's interior alludes to the narrative of displacement and disenfranchisement for urban Aboriginal people as a result of colonialism. This potential lack of interpretation is also linked to the common rhetoric of the modernising (colonial) society, which presumes its way of life to be superior to that of others.⁵⁶³

Deacon's interior reminds viewers that despite such rhetoric and homogenisation associated with the project of rationalisation and assimilation of Aboriginal culture, equality remains inaccessible. She communicates this with the many props in the domestic space – the kitsch objects displayed in the room such as her collection of black dollies and wall hangings described as 'Aboriginalia'.⁵⁶⁴ Visually, the domestic configuration of the space appears comfortable, but it is underscored by satire.⁵⁶⁵ In particular, Deacon's amassing and exhibition of these objects was directed by, and responded to, the way the Aboriginal subject has been pictorially degraded

⁵⁶¹ Williamson, *ibid.*

⁵⁶² Marcia Langton, 'The Valley of the Dolls: Black Humour in the Art of Destiny Deacon', *Art and Australia*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1997, p. 100.

⁵⁶³ See Franke Wilmer, 'Preface' in *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*, SAGE Publications, 1993, Newbury Park, California, p. xi.

⁵⁶⁴ Museum of Contemporary Art, 'Destiny Deacon: Walk & Don't Look Blak', Museum of Contemporary Art, viewed 13 September 2017, <<https://www.mca.com.au/collection/exhibition/341-destiny-deacon-walk-dont-look-blak/>>. Several Indigenous artists as well as art commentators including Hetti Perkins, Christine Nicholls and Tony Albert have used the term 'Aboriginalia'.

⁵⁶⁵ Natalie King, 'Episodes: A Laugh and a Tear in Every Photo', in Destiny Deacon et al., *Walk and Don't Look Blak*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2004, p. 19.

within the building of a national Australian identity.⁵⁶⁶ In colonial, post-war Australia, 'Aboriginalia', which included ash trays, garden ornaments, tea towels and other souvenir items that appropriated Aboriginal motifs and imagery, represented the debased Aboriginal stereotypes that were projected by the dominant culture. Langton has explained that these kitsch representations of Aboriginal culture, based on a history of bigotry and disempowerment, have remained consistent in constructing Australian identity that exploited 'the vanquished native'.⁵⁶⁷

Deacon's installation was exhibited on several more occasions between 2004 and 2006 as part of the artist's retrospective exhibition *Walk and don't look blak* that toured to Sydney, Wellington, Noumea, Tokyo and finally Melbourne.⁵⁶⁸ It is a dialectical work. As the artist exemplifies authenticity in terms of contemporary Indigenous experience, she also illuminates how the project of rationalisation and appropriation of Indigenous culture and imagery has driven stereotypical representations. The viewing experience of Deacon's installation is tantamount to this relationship as it mobilises alternative understanding to those that have been promoted by the historical imaginary.⁵⁶⁹ In this case the viewer is repositioned in such a way that the previous prescriptions of Indigenous authenticity are displaced.

However, while the expression of cross-cultural, postcolonial experience has petitioned the acceptance of urban Indigenous art as being equally 'authentic' to its remote or desert counterpart, this engagement in socio-politics is just one part of a much larger emphasis on overcoming colonial determinants about Indigenous culture. The creative pursuits of urban Indigenous artists position both authenticity and the resistance to colonial representation as

⁵⁶⁶ Langton, 'The Valley of the Dolls: Black Humour in the Art of Destiny Deacon', op. cit., p. 104.

⁵⁶⁷ Langton, *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ Megan Backhouse, 'Destiny Wants her Baby Blak', *The Age*, 22 August 2006, viewed 13 September 2017, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/arts/destiny-wants-her-baby-blak/2006/08/21/1156012468369.html>>.

⁵⁶⁹ Garden, 'Ethical Witnessing and the Portrait Photograph: Brook Andrew', op. cit., p. 262.

central themes within their artworks. This becomes more evident when considering artists' works in the following section as dissemination of views began to have a greater impact on the art world.

Summary

This chapter set out to establish how urban Indigenous artists used a socio-political aesthetic to affirm authenticity and diversity across the spectrum of Aboriginality. It has been argued that one of the key ways artists achieved this, as they moved into the 1990s, was to respond specifically to colonial representations of the Indigenous subject. Many of these responses were resistant in nature, committed to examining and exposing how the colonial concepts of 'other', the 'dying race', and 'cultureless outcasts', have been established or perpetuated. The examples discussed have demonstrated a socio-political aesthetic concerned with undermining the subjugating power of the colonial gaze in relation to these concepts. Artists such as Brook Andrew, Fiona Foley, Richard Bell and Michael Riley have effectively used the photographic medium to confront discourses of viewing from the nineteenth century, premised on bias and racial prejudice deemed normative within Australian settler society. It has also been shown that installations by artists Gordon Bennett and Julie Gough employed spatial dynamics and historical and scientific narratives that were equally concerned with overturning roles of power inherent in looking at and positioning the Indigenous subject.

The expression of contemporary Indigenous experience as authentic and diverse has also been a focus of this chapter where artists Lin Onus, Brenda L Croft, Darren Siwes and Destiny Deacon have demonstrated that Indigenous authenticity is not determined simply by the ideals, impressions and perceptions held and espoused by the dominant culture. Again, photographic

and installation media have been instrumental in illustrating the contemporaneity of Indigenous culture as it both challenges and expands viewers' understandings about authenticity and diversity of culture. Discussion in this respect has been supplemented by the views of various commentators such as Brenda L Croft, Ann-Marie Willis and Tim Rowse, among others, who have edified the scope of reference pertaining to authenticity and assisted urban Indigenous artists to establish legitimacy, notably in relation to their desert-remote counterparts. As artists and commentators have together challenged the notion of 'other' – a concept sustained throughout histories dominated by particular representations of Aboriginality – they have ultimately released understanding from previously perceived norms and stereotypes.

Chapter 5

Recovering the Indigenous Subject: Exposing Colonial Narratives and Practices

Introduction

This chapter contends that narratives and practices of colonialism have shaped the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art. Concepts of affect and representation that were central to analyses in the preceding two chapters are expanded upon here to include aspects of decolonial theory concerned with recovering and reconstructing the Indigenous subject.⁵⁷⁰ The socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art continues to be defined as artists are identified as agents who present histories and truths as alternatives to those within the colonial paradigm. These ultimately form a counter-narrative that is expressed aesthetically.

Characteristics of this socio-political aesthetic are clearly visible in the context described as artists engaged in two critical issues: the Stolen Generations, and sovereignty, incorporating Native Title, that took place during the proliferation phase of the 1990s. The deeply affecting nature of these issues compelled urban Indigenous artists to expose the realities and the responses associated with them. These incorporate narratives of trauma, dislocation and disenfranchisement connected with both family and place. Indigenous voices have often been absent, omitted or obscured within dominant discourse. It is argued that a process of exposure allows urban Indigenous artists to recover a collective Indigenous voice within the historical frame. With the process of recovery comes the projection of Indigenous perspectives as valuable and necessary for historical transparency and restitution.

⁵⁷⁰ See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Introduction', *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2012, p. 8, as outlined in Chapter 1, p. 8.

I have selected the Stolen Generations and sovereignty specifically, as artworks pertaining to these two issues demonstrate very clearly the ways in which urban Indigenous artists connected aesthetics with their socio-political environment as it unfolded during the last decade of the twentieth century. The inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families commenced mid-decade, following the *Going Home Conference* held in Darwin in 1994. The final report of the inquiry was submitted in April of 1997, in which it was revealed that that many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were impacted by forced removal, including artists, whose connections to the subject were both personal and collective.⁵⁷¹ This chapter establishes that urban Indigenous artists remained committed to the issue of the Stolen Generations for the duration of the decade (and beyond), suggesting that the matter remained consistently influential.

Similarly, in regard to sovereignty and Native Title, it is argued that the general issue of land rights remained current for artists throughout the 1990s, having already emerged in relation to the socio-political aesthetic as raised in Chapter 3. For instance, artworks from the 1980s advocated for land rights in relation to 'Treaty '88' and the Bicentenary while further artworks were developed in the 1990s as a result of the very public *Mabo v Queensland* High Court land rights case.⁵⁷² The decision made by the High Court of Australia in 1992 to recognise Native Title was a landmark. Its profile was extended further in 1996 by the *Wik Peoples v Queensland* High Court pastoral lease case.⁵⁷³ The Howard Government's implementation of the 'Ten Point Plan' following the 'Wik' decision, through its 1998 amendments to the *Native Title Act*, fuelled further

⁵⁷¹ The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by forced removal is documented in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, HREOC, Sydney, 1997, viewed 6 August 2014, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf>.

⁵⁷² *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* [1992] HCA 23; (1992) 175 CLR 1.

⁵⁷³ *Wik Peoples v Queensland* (1996) 187 CLR 1.

debate regarding land rights during this decade.⁵⁷⁴ This chapter demonstrates the aesthetic attunement of urban Indigenous art that visually augmented the socio-political environment throughout the last decade of the twentieth century.

Both the Stolen Generations and sovereignty are inextricably linked to past colonial practices with which Australia's narratives of nationhood, identity and history have been forged. However, as expressed in the next section of this chapter, Australia's dominant narratives are based on a predilection that has denigrated and forgotten the Indigenous subject. An outline of this predilection is presented below, balanced by an account of Indigenous counter-narratives in which the socio-political aesthetic comes into play. The latter account provides a segue into understanding urban Indigenous artists' role in recovering and reconstructing histories lost and neglected within the legacy of colonialism.

Narratives and Practices of Colonialism: Forgetting the Indigenous Subject

Chris Healy argues that Indigenous people are typically absent from historical narratives of Australia.⁵⁷⁵ This is a trope that is both dominant and ubiquitous.⁵⁷⁶ Its genesis can be located at the very beginning of this nation's story, when the claim, 'Terra Nullius', or land belonging to nobody,⁵⁷⁷ was the premise of colonisation. Community cultural heritage and development researcher Steve Kinnane observes that while much was known by colonists about Aboriginal people, languages, cultures, laws and ownership, this knowing turned to forgetting.⁵⁷⁸ Urban

⁵⁷⁴ David Martin, 'Native Title', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Victoria, 2000, pp. 659–660.

⁵⁷⁵ Chris Healy, 'Forgetting Aborigines', in *Forgetting Aborigines*, UNSW Press, 2008, p. 11.

⁵⁷⁶ Healy, *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁷ See Rob Wellington, *Mabo – The Native Title Revolution*, website, Film Australia Digital Learning, undated, online, viewed 7 February 2018, <http://www.mabonativetitle.com/tn_01.shtml#Info>.

⁵⁷⁸ Steve Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', in Kaye Price (ed.), *Knowledge of Life: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2012, p. 5 (1-25)

Indigenous artists have been acutely aware of this. Fiona Foley (Badjala) has reflected on this absence, stating:

Largely the premise behind my public art is to write Aboriginal people, Aboriginal nations and Aboriginal history back into the Australian narrative. I do this because we have been written out too often.⁵⁷⁹

Forgetting, Kinnane claims, is engendered by 'history anxiety', which for Australia, has resulted in the 'air-brushing of thousands of years of occupation and ownership'.⁵⁸⁰ Historian Ann Curthoys asserts that in the twentieth century, the traces of Australian Aboriginal people very nearly disappeared from the historical archive.⁵⁸¹ For colonial Australia, this commenced with the British settlement at Sydney Cove, which marked the beginning of Australia's history.⁵⁸² Curthoys explains that how despite interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people taking place, the documentation of such, including various nineteenth century frontier and captivity narratives, simply vanished.⁵⁸³ Consequently, dominant narratives have historically obscured Indigenous stories including personal ones and those belonging to families and communities.⁵⁸⁴ It is a history in which the displacement of Australia's First Peoples from the centre to the periphery, typically attained through violence and oppression, has been sanctioned by the narrator of that history – the coloniser.

Forgetting and the peripheral positioning was aided by government policy and law-making that dominated the socio-economic control of Indigenous Australia. It was typical that in settler societies, configurations such as these regarding policy and law, embedded racial thinking into

⁵⁷⁹ Fiona Foley, 'The Elephant in the Room: Public Art in Brisbane', *Artlink*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2012, p. 66.

⁵⁸⁰ Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', op. cit.

⁵⁸¹ Ann Curthoys, 'Mythologies', in Richard Nile (ed.), *The Australian Legend and Its Discontents*, University of Queensland Press in association with the API Network, St Lucia, Queensland, 2000, p. 31.

⁵⁸² Curthoys, *ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Curthoys, *ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

⁵⁸⁴ Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', op. cit., p. 3.

history.⁵⁸⁵ In an Australian context, narratives of the nation's racist past have been ignored by broader society. Instead, occupation, as well as settler life in general, has been mythologised into a narrative that memorialises non-Indigenous suffering, heroic struggles, sacrifice and courage.⁵⁸⁶

The previous chapter discussed the term the 'dying race' – a social Darwinist perspective that conceived of primitive cultures becoming extinct.⁵⁸⁷ This racially-based perception informed the making of Australia's constitution, which did not recognise or count Australia's First Peoples as its country's citizens.⁵⁸⁸ From the first days of Federation, Indigenous Australians were not adequately represented, given the prevalent view that Indigenous populations would decline, and therefore did not need to be included. However, in the years around the turn of the twentieth century, Indigenous populations increased, exceeding expectation and suggesting that 'extinction' was a moot point. In response, various State Acts were implemented in order to manage Indigenous Peoples.⁵⁸⁹ In what appears as an about-turn, state governments subsequently formed, 'Protection' Acts, which were intended to 'protect' Indigenous Peoples from aspects of colonial society deemed detrimental to their survival.⁵⁹⁰ However, in adhering to laws that were, in essence, entrenching racial segregation within a legalised authoritarian framework, as mentioned above, various burdens remained for those Indigenous Peoples facing these policies.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵ Curthoys, 'Mythologies', op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁸⁶ See Curthoys, *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁸⁷ See Anna Haebich, 'The Battlefields of Aboriginal History', in Martyn Lyons & Penny Russell (eds), *Australia's History: Themes and Debates*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁸⁸ See *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, section 126, online, viewed 7 February 2018, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/coaca430/s126.html>.

⁵⁸⁹ Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance: The Nation's History', op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁹⁰ Kinnane, *ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ See Kinnane, *ibid.*; also Bain Atwood & Andrew Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999; Anna Haebich & Steve Kinnane, 'Indigenous Australia', in Alison Bashford & Stuart MacIntyre (eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia. Volume 2: The Commonwealth of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria, 2013, pp. 332-357.

The overarching practices that Aboriginal people were subject to under such legislation included: forced dwelling sites on missions and reserves, the governmental monitoring of employment and movement, the governmental overseeing of marriage and travel, the prohibition of alcohol consumption and the prevention of parents acting as legal guardians of their own children.⁵⁹² Non-Indigenous administrators, official Chief Protectors and superintendents, local police officers, station owners, missionaries, or other government workers carried out management and control of these practices.⁵⁹³ Various aspects of these practices are known within the dominant historical narrative. However, the intricacies and the detail embedded within the irrevocable process of transformation for Indigenous Peoples as a consequence of these practices, remain untold, and therefore, in many cases unknown.

What of the Indigenous translations of colonial encounters that began in the first instances of contact? Are there Indigenous accounts of how Aboriginal people were driven from country, violently or otherwise, in order for settlers to have access to the land and its resources?⁵⁹⁴ Also, what are the Indigenous perceptions of how Indigenous pastoral labour was traded for access to lands rather than wages?⁵⁹⁵ What remains unanswered is how this exploitation of Indigenous labour persisted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the presence of Christian missions increased, and the settler economy expanded.⁵⁹⁶ It is not prominent in the national consciousness that those under the Protection Act mentioned above, were subject to police harassment and control.⁵⁹⁷ Maltreatment and introduced diseases led to widespread illness and death of Indigenous people. Furthermore, the Frontier Wars, spanning the years 1788 until

⁵⁹² Kinnane, *ibid.*

⁵⁹³ Kinnane, *ibid.*; See also Anna Haebich & Steve Kinnane, 'Indigenous Australia', *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁵⁹⁴ Christ Healy, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Scenes: Colonial Continuities and Discontinuities: Captain Cook: Between Black and White', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-95.

⁵⁹⁵ Healy, *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ Healy, *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ Healy, *ibid.*

around 1934, resulted in an estimated 20,000-60,000 Indigenous deaths, with massacres documented in all states and territories.⁵⁹⁸ While these statistics have not stirred much attention when compared to those of the nation's wars fought overseas, some commentators have compared this genocide to practices undertaken in Germany from the 1930s.⁵⁹⁹

Under the assimilation policy, adopted by the Aborigines Protection Board officially in 1951, the already established practice of removing fair-skinned Aboriginal children from their families was increased in a 'lawful' manner.⁶⁰⁰ This practice of forced removal was administered with the intention to reduce and assimilate the population of mixed heritage Aboriginal children.⁶⁰¹

Professor Peter Read explains that the numbers of children removed from families is not accurate, given the poor record management and lack of documentation throughout that period.⁶⁰² However, in New South Wales alone, he estimates that over 6,000 children were removed.⁶⁰³ The deaths and diaspora of Aboriginal people and communities as a result was severe. How might the historical record be reconciled when people's stories have been made invisible?

⁵⁹⁸ Judy Watson, *The Names of Places*, website, c.2017, viewed 8 February 2018, <<https://namesofplaces.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=1fca23b6fd87494e8f98ff2e29c71b4b>>; Ceridwen Dovey, 'The Mapping of Massacres', *The New Yorker*, 6 December 2017, online, viewed 8 February, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/mapping-massacres>>.

⁵⁹⁹ Also those in Cambodia (1975-1979) or Rwanda (1994), see Colin Tatz in John Pilger, *Welcome to Australia*, 1999, videorecording, viewed 8 February 2018, <<http://johnpilger.com/videos/welcome-to-australia>>; Phillip Knightley, 'Black Australia', in *Australia: A Biography of a Nation*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2000, p. 107.

⁶⁰⁰ See Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, op. cit.; also Karen George & Gary George, 'Assimilation Policy', *Find & Connect*, Find & Connect Web Resource Project for the Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, viewed 8 February 2018, <<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/sa/biogs/SE00796b.htm#tab5>>.

⁶⁰¹ Peter Read, 'Stolen Generations', in Richard Nile (ed.), *The Australian Legend and Its Discontents*, op. cit., pp. 242-243.

⁶⁰² Peter Read, 'The Number of Children Taken', in *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883-1969*, New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Surry Hills, New South Wales, 2nd edn, 2006, pp. 10-11, viewed 8 February 2018, <https://daa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Reading-7_StolenGenerations.pdf>; See statistics also in Coota Girls Corporation and the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, *Inquiry into Reparations for the Stolen Generations in New South Wales*, submission no. 50 to New South Wales Parliament, received 31 March 2016, pp. 20-21, viewed 12 February 2018, <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquirySubmission/Body/54078/0050%20Coota%20Girls%20Corporation%20and%20the%20Kinchela%20Boys%20Home%20Aboriginal%20Corporation.pdf>>; see also Knightley, 'Black Australia', op. cit., p. 112.

⁶⁰³ Read, *ibid.*, p. 11.

This lack of visibility feeds into the practice of forgetting. Australian journalist Rosemary Neill claims that Australia as a nation is guilty of misremembering the past.⁶⁰⁴ She accounts for this in a contemporary context, believing that politics and terminology have assisted in contributing to this practice. Neill cites media and senate submissions that have referred to removed children as 'rescued' rather than 'stolen', and text that reported on the practice of removal as 'fallacy' altogether.⁶⁰⁵ She also reflects on how former Prime Minister John Howard used the understated term 'blemishes' in reference to the atrocities faced by Indigenous Peoples, such as massacres, or 'regret' in relation to the generations of forcibly removed children.⁶⁰⁶ Howard, in his capacity as Prime Minister, made no apology for either the past practice of removal, or the way he referred to the subject. He has also stated that he 'sympathised fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told that we have a racist, bigoted past'.⁶⁰⁷ Curthoys suggests that Australia's dominant society does not wish to acknowledge that the nation was built on 'a process of invasion and child theft; they want, instead, to reassert pride in their history, institutions and culture'.⁶⁰⁸ Ultimately, it appears that Australia's colonial practices, including the narrative of forgetting, have been a deliberate part of social and governmental agendas.

The colonial narrative has dominated history and the distribution of power has impeded and limited any prevalence of Indigenous historical narratives. However, various events have occurred throughout the nation's history, especially in the twentieth century, which have mobilised Indigenous counter-narratives. In terms of a decolonial agenda, these are predominantly political and include, but are not limited to: Indigenous voting rights granted in

⁶⁰⁴ Rosemary Neill, *White Out: How Politics is Killing Black Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 2002, p. 14.

⁶⁰⁵ Neill, *ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

⁶⁰⁶ Neill, *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁰⁷ John Howard quoted in Curthoys, 'Mythologies', *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁰⁸ Curthoys, *ibid.*, p. 12.

1962 and 1965;⁶⁰⁹ the 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petition in which the Yolngu claimed rights to lands and traditions; the Wave Hill 'walk off' of 1966 protesting work and pay conditions in the pastoral industry;⁶¹⁰ the 1967 Referendum acknowledging Aboriginal people as part of the country's population; the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy; the Noonkanbah Dispute in 1978;⁶¹¹ Anti-Bicentenary protests in 1988, including the Barunga Statement that followed up the Yirrkala Bark Petition; the Mabo case in 1992; and various other events leading up to the twenty-first century such as reconciliation marches, blockades, petitions, freedom rides, media campaigns and legal action.⁶¹²

Whilst an Indigenous counter-narrative suggests a dialectical condition of history, it exposes a distinct engagement that has taken place within the shared space of colonised Australia that is composed of both colonial and Indigenous narratives. Homi Bhabha, describes this space as a 'third space'.⁶¹³ He explains that rather than the expression of two opposing narratives, the causality of events effected by such historical opposition is considered in this 'third space'.⁶¹⁴ What emerges from this space are new terms of generality.⁶¹⁵ In other words, as narratives from the 'third space' surface, they become known and accepted. Bhabha also explains how translation in this context is a move of resistance.⁶¹⁶ Urban Indigenous artists translate history visually, expressing causality aesthetically with an Indigenous perspective. In this way they recover and reconstruct narratives as a process of agency that mobilises the authority of the Indigenous subject. Power is embedded in this translation, which along with causality is critical to

⁶⁰⁹ National Archives of Australia, 'The 1967 Referendum – Fact Sheet 150', National Archives of Australia, Canberra, undated, online, viewed 10 February 2018, <<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>>.

⁶¹⁰ See National Archives of Australia, 'The Wave Hill 'Walk-Off' – Fact Sheet 224', National Archives of Australia, Canberra, undated, viewed 10 February 2018, <<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs224.aspx>>.

⁶¹¹ Stephen Hawke & Michael Gallagher, *Noonkanbah: Whose Land, Whose Law*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 1989.

⁶¹² See timeline in Kinnane, 'A Long, Slow Dance', op. cit., pp. 14-15.

⁶¹³ Homi Bhabha, in conversation with WJT Mitchell, in William John Thomas Mitchell, 'Translator Translated', *Artforum International*, vol. 33, no. 7, March 1995, n.p.

⁶¹⁴ Bhabha, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ Bhabha, *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Bhabha, *ibid.*

an Indigenous counter-narrative of history, all of which is pertinent to the practice of urban Indigenous artists.

Recovering the Indigenous Narrative

Stolen Generations

Colonialism was fundamental to the government's execution of power over Indigenous communities that resulted in the forced removal of children from their families. The Stolen Generations refers to children removed from their families by the Australian Government from settlement to the 1970s.⁶¹⁷ In broad terms, this separation was driven by the nation's assimilation policy, which deemed mixed heritage Aboriginal children to be better off and 'absorbed' within 'white', Australian society.⁶¹⁸ In 1995, the National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (Bringing them Home) was actioned by the federal Attorney-General, following increased concern by Indigenous communities and agencies that such separation practices had never formally been examined.⁶¹⁹ Visual examples produced in the early phase of urban Indigenous art can be found, in particular by Sally Morgan (Palyku); however, responses throughout the 1990s increased in number, which as observed, were produced both prior to the National Enquiry and following it. Its continued reference throughout the 1990s, evident in urban Indigenous art, confirms artists' ongoing engagement within creative domains of the socio-political environment.

⁶¹⁷ Peter Read, 'Stolen Generations', in Kleinert & Neale, op. cit., p. 702.

⁶¹⁸ See Anthony Moran, 'White Australia, Settler Nationalism and Aboriginal Assimilation', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2005, pp. 168-193; also Peter Read, 'The Stolen Generations: Playing with Words, Destroying Lives', *Arena Magazine*, no. 47, 2008, p. 8.

⁶¹⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, op. cit.

Literary theorist Leo Bersani has contended that aesthetics may be redemptive and that art has a corrective virtue in the context of a philosophical discourse of truth.⁶²⁰ Art, he claims, faithfully adheres to experience and through this, the repetition of experience in art may repair damaged experience.⁶²¹ Bersani has explained that art can 'master the presumed raw material of experience in a manner that uniquely gives value to, perhaps even redeems, that material'.⁶²² In terms of history and its catastrophes, art provides compensation as it communicates experiential material.⁶²³ Bersani's concept of art as redemptive is particularly efficacious when considering works produced in relation to the Stolen Generations. As will be shown, urban Indigenous artists' engagement with this subject, allow truths, concerns and responses to emerge. Through the process of exposing personal and collective histories and experiences, narratives of the Stolen Generations are recovered. Moreover, the raw material of experience in connection with the subject is given value and redeemed.



Figure 62:
Michael Riley,
film still from *Poison*, 1991,
film, 29 mins 30 secs,
ABC Television – Indigenous
Production Unit
© Michael Riley Foundation/
Copyright Agency, 2018.

The above still image is from the award winning film *Poison*, 1991 (fig. 62), written and produced by Michael Riley (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi).⁶²⁴ The production and dissemination of the film *Poison*

⁶²⁰ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, 1990, p. 2.

⁶²¹ Bersani, *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶²² Bersani, *ibid.*

⁶²³ Bersani, *ibid.*

⁶²⁴ Riley won the 'Golden Tripod Award' and 'Bronze Award for Best Short Television Drama' for *Poison* at the New York Film Festival, 1991. See Michael Riley, 'Poison', viewed 26 September 2014, <www.michaelriley.com.au/poison/>; See Riley, 'Poison', *op. cit.*

preceded the Inquiry into the Stolen Generations, contributing, at the time, to the accumulating concerns that led to the inquiry. The film is a harrowing portrayal of a group of three Indigenous women and an Indigenous man suffering the effects of heroin addiction in Redfern, Sydney.⁶²⁵ The themes of adoption and assimilation are presented in conjunction with the primary theme of substance abuse, along with references of sexual abuse. In the scene depicted above, a voice-over is heard saying, 'Your new mummy and daddy want to give you everything that coloured children can never have ... it's okay to be proud of them ... but you're different.'⁶²⁶ It is a patronising tone that implies personal improvement is achievable via an assimilated life of adoption and that 'coloured' or Aboriginal children are endemically disadvantaged. The film ends with the main character overdosing in a phone booth, followed by a scene change where she is returned to her childhood, pre-adoption, and reunited with her birth mother and Country.

Despite Riley's fictitious characters, they give expression to the acute traumatic experiences rooted in the narrative of forced removal of children from their families. This is enhanced via the medium of film. As a viewer of this experience, one takes on the role of witness. This is a significant position, because as psychoanalyst Dori Laub has explained of collective traumatic events such as the Stolen Generations, 'History was taking place with no witness'.⁶²⁷ Moreover, the colonial narratives had no place for such a role. In relation to the Stolen Generations, the role of witness is doubly affected: first through its very position in the midst of the trauma; and second, by the historical obscuring exercised by the dominant culture. Riley's filmic device of a flashback to the halcyon past amid a desperate rendering of the present enables the viewer to witness multiple states of the Stolen Generations. For the viewer, feelings of empathy and complicity confuse the psyche because Riley's characters are '... dealing with 20th-century White

⁶²⁵ Riley, *ibid.*

⁶²⁶ Michael Riley, *Poison*, videorecording, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1991.

⁶²⁷ Dori Laub, quoted in Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1995, p. 7.

Australia'.⁶²⁸ *Poison* pictures Indigenous culture as fractured, due to the colonial practice of removing children. Two years after the film was produced, it was included in the Australian contemporary art survey exhibition *Australian Perspectives 1993*.

In a similar vein to Bersani, critical theorist Dominick LaCapra has outlined how various manifestations of experience have the potential to desist past narratives as they provoke alternative possibilities for the present and the future.⁶²⁹ Again, this idea draws on the concept of the 'third space' and the transcendence of cultural assumptions pertaining to history. For LaCapra, experience may be considered an event by which an individual is affected, or as an event that has occurred within the knowledge of a community, whether during a particular period or in general.⁶³⁰ This definition, while a simplification of experience as a multifaceted concept, is applicable to the experience of collective trauma engendered by the Stolen Generations. LaCapra expands on Laub's idea of witnessing, explaining that art bears witness to or testifies to the past.⁶³¹ Moreover, through the transmission of trauma, one may be affected by symptoms of experiences and events that were not necessarily directly lived through.⁶³² In this sense, both artist and viewer are complicit in the act of witnessing trauma. Riley's film operates in this way. The artist presents content that is recognisably derived from the Stolen Generations narrative. This content emerges from the community's knowledge of the event, and at the same time expressly testifies to it. As art, it enables an affective response in viewers, who are aroused by the trauma to which it relates.

⁶²⁸ Michael Riley, interview with Sandra Phillips, 1992, in Sandra Phillips (ed.), *Racism, Representation and Photography*, pp. 146–147, cited in Hetti Perkins, *Art + Soul*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2010, p. 220.

⁶²⁹ Dominick LaCapra, 'Experience and Identity', in *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2004, p. 43.

⁶³⁰ LaCapra critiques the Oxford English Dictionary definition of experience in *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶³¹ LaCapra, *ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶³² LaCapra, *ibid.*

The sculptural installation below by Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta), *They Took the Children Away*, 1992 (fig. 63), functions in the same way as Riley's film, but accentuates a different part of the narrative of the Stolen Generations.⁶³³ It portrays the point of forced removal, rather than the outcomes endured later in life.



Figure 63: Lin Onus, *They Took the Children Away*, 1992, fiberglass and pigment, 4 figures, dimensions variable, Private Collection.

This seminal work was shown at the Painters Gallery in Sydney c.1992, and acquired by a private collector.⁶³⁴ The installation captures the cultural incongruities entangled in the Australian pursuit of separating Indigenous families for assimilative ends. Onus used life-size models to convey a young girl being escorted from her mother, who covers her face in despair. The authority conveyed in the two policemen is enhanced by their sense of emotional detachment. The figure on the left does not console the grieving mother, while on the right, the custodial

⁶³³ The installation does not include the background painting by Onus, *And on the Eighth Day*, 1992.

⁶³⁴ Though it is stated that Lin Onus's sculptural piece was shown at the Painters Gallery, Sydney, c.1992, in Jo Onus & Tiriki Onus, 'Chronology', in Margo Neale (ed.), *Urban Dingo: The Art and Life of Lin Onus, 1948-1996*, Craftsman House in association with the Queensland Art Gallery, 2000, pp. 116-128, other sources suggests that this gallery closed in 1990. See for example Susan McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 3rd edn, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1994, p. 831; also Alan McCulloch, *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 4th edn, Australian Art Editions in association with The Miegunyah Press, Fitzroy and Carlton, Victoria, 2006, p. 1145; also 'Painters Gallery Australia', *Australian Prints + Printmaking*, Centre for Australian Art, online, viewed 23 February 2018, <<http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au/galleries/742/#>>. Alternative documentation places the work at the Ian Potter Gallery at the University of Melbourne, May-June 1993, see John Mangan, 'They Took the Children Away: A Response to Separation', *The Age*, 13 May 1993, p. 5. Provenance of the work remains inconclusive.

figure firmly clutches the child's right arm. Originally the policemen were painted in red, white and blue, implying imperial values and colonial dominance.⁶³⁵

Onus emits sincere personal concern about the subject of the Stolen Generations in *They Took the Children Away*, just as he did with *Accidental Death*, 1989 (see fig. 42 in Chapter 3), in reference to Indigenous deaths in custody. The artist has prioritised emotion in this work through the mother and child, which provokes an affective response from viewers as they comprehend the trauma of the scene. This response is enabled via the physicality expressed in the installation, in seeing a forced removal. French author Charlotte Delbo, in writing about her Auschwitz experience, has explained that memory registers the physical imprint of a traumatic event, even if that event has occurred in the past.⁶³⁶ Jill Bennett has described Delbo's memory register of a physical imprint as 'sense memory', which is different to 'common memory' that operates within linguistic and narrative frameworks.⁶³⁷ Sense memory, Bennett explains, can be communicated through art, as physicality seen in an artwork may affect the body as pain encapsulated in an associated memory register is released.⁶³⁸ In Onus's work, the authoritative grip sensed on the child's arm and the mother's body on the ground in grief, transcend affectively to the viewer. The physical sensations of being tugged or withheld by another person, combined with the emotional sensations of tension and grief associated with losing a loved one can be, to some degree, recollected by the viewer in this moment of witnessing separation.

⁶³⁵ The installation figures having been painted red, white and blue is documented in Onus & Onus, 'Chronology', op. cit., p. 125.

⁶³⁶ Charlotte Delbo, in Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1991, pp. 1-38; See also Jill Bennett, 'Trauma, Affect, and Art', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005, p.p. 25-26.

⁶³⁷ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶³⁸ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 26.

Onus believed that the sculptural medium allowed viewers a unique interaction with art, given its three-dimensionality and the ways it may be situated within a space.⁶³⁹ Moreover, he saw in sculpture the capacity to effectively comment on Australia's colonial history, and that the medium could present an aesthetic with socio-political impact.⁶⁴⁰ This particular installation won Onus the 1993 Kate Challis RAKA Award for Visual Arts in recognition of his mission for cultural reconciliation.⁶⁴¹

While Riley and Onus convey aspects of the Stolen Generations that pertain to the collective experience of the event, Rea (Kamilaroi/Wailwan) has drawn directly from her familial knowledge and experience of the subject. In *Slave*, 1992 (fig. 64), Rea references her grandmother's story, but incorporates the stories of other women who were also taken to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.⁶⁴² The girls' home, which was maintained by the Aborigines Welfare Board and operated from 1911 to 1968, came under the *Aborigines Protection Act* of 1909.⁶⁴³

Slave is one of ten images from the series *Look Who's Calling the Kettle Black* in which an Aboriginal figure in servant attire, is a woman who was removed to the domestic training home.⁶⁴⁴ Each figure is printed black and white and shares the frame with a coloured electrical appliance.⁶⁴⁵

⁶³⁹ As explained in Margo Neale, 'Lin Onus', *Artlink: Reconciliation: Indigenous Art for the 21st Century*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2000, pp. 30-31 (28-31)

⁶⁴⁰ Neale, *ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ School of Culture and Communication: Australian Centre, 'Kate Challis RAKA Award', viewed 8 October 2014, <<http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australian-centre/prizes/past-winners/kate-challis-raka-award/more-past-winners>>.

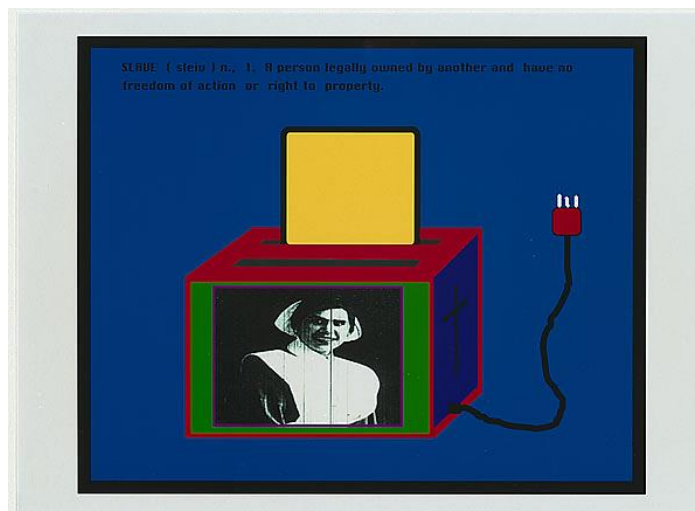
⁶⁴² Rea, in conversation with Hetti Perkins, in Hetti Perkins & Jonathan Jones (eds), *Half Light Portraits from Black Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2008, p. 105.

⁶⁴³ Leonarda Kovacic, 'Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls (1911–1986)', *The Australian Women's Register*, viewed 2 October 2014, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0979b.htm>>.

⁶⁴⁴ Rea, in Perkins & Jones, *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ See Appendix for additional examples from this series.

Figure 64:
 Rea,
Slave, 1992,
 from the series *Look Who's
 Calling the Kettle Black*,
 Kodak continuous tone XL7700
 dye-sublimation print,
 edition of 10,
 20.3 cm x 25.3 cm (image),
 22.4 cm x 30.6 cm (sheet),
 NGA Collection.



Rea's grandmother, who trained as a domestic servant at the home, passed on the colonial values espoused through that experience to her daughter, who in turn passed them on to Rea.⁶⁴⁶ The experiences of the training home that extended to Rea's family signal that the indoctrination of domestic ideas and practices persisted beyond the institution itself. For those families who lost women who passed away at the Cootamundra facility, their experiences encountered and suffered continue in memory.⁶⁴⁷ Rea's incorporation of text and language within the images in her series attest to the devalued and denigrated positions of these women forced into domestic servitude.

An unnamed survivor of the Cootamundra facility made a verbal submission to the New South Wales government in 2016, stating that:

The mental, physical and spiritual effects that are suffered by us have been life-long. What was imposed upon us as children was inhumane and dishonorable. Our children, through no fault of their own, are struggling with the effects of trans-generational trauma.⁶⁴⁸

With regard to trauma theory, Professor Cathy Caruth explains that recovering the past is inhibited by access to it and by the lack of integrating a trauma-connected event into

⁶⁴⁶ Rea, in Perkins & Jones, *ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

⁶⁴⁷ Rea, in Perkins & Jones, *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ Coota Girls Corporation and the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, *Inquiry into Reparations for the Stolen Generations in New South Wales*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

consciousness.⁶⁴⁹ This may be in connection with the individual specifically, but also more broadly in relation to community.⁶⁵⁰ Even though the victim statement above, and Rea's work in relation to her grandmother's experience two generations later, are very different, both contribute to the known history of the Stolen Generations. Art, such as that by Rea, assists with integrating this history into popular consciousness. Of the series above, Rea has said that, 'The women in the little domestic icons were about the past and the images were about the present ... bringing the past into the present in a contemporary, colourful kind of collage style'.⁶⁵¹ Aesthetically, Rea references people affected and the traumas encountered and recovers narratives of the Stolen Generations. This process ultimately presents opportunities for current and future narratives about the traumatic past to be engendered by truthful exposure and potentially repaired, or at the very least, better understood.

Rea's interest in her grandmother's story continued to fuel her engagement with the Stolen Generations. She took up the 'hypocrisies of religion' to which Michael Riley referred, in her *Suitcase of Hope, Books of Empty Words*, 1994 (figs 65 & 66).

⁶⁴⁹ Cathy Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

⁶⁵⁰ Caruth, *ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁵¹ Rea, in conversation with Hetti Perkins, in Perkins & Jones, *Half Light Portraits from Black Australia*, op. cit.



(L–R) Figures 65 & 66: Rea, *Suitcase of Hope, Books of Empty Words* (detail), 1994, wood, fabric and paper installation, dimensions variable, Powerhouse Museum Collection.

Again Rea has referenced the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, which is depicted in text on the suitcase in the foreground (fig. 55). As alluded to, Aboriginal babies and girls forcibly removed from their families were sent to the Home with the intention that their domestic training would enable them to assimilate into mainstream Australian society.⁶⁵²

The paper ribbon traversing Rea's installation carries the handwritten words, 'With bibles in their hands and dressed in their sunday [sic] best they lost all they had ever known and so did I'. Religiosity encountered at the Home is represented by the bibles and other types of religious paraphernalia displayed within the open blue suitcase and on the plinth (fig. 66). These items imply the loss of Indigenous culture as a result of Western religion being enforced upon the occupants of the Cootamundra institution. The hypocrisy is writ large in the space where the biblical message meets the historical atrocity of forced removal and familial separation due to assimilationist ideologies. Under the lid of the blue suitcase are black and white photographs of

⁶⁵² Kovacic, *ibid.*

the artist's grandmother dressed as a domestic servant.⁶⁵³ Whilst it is implied that the handwritten words 'and so did I' originate from Rea's grandmother, the implication is that these words double as the artist's own. Rea's trans-generational approach presents the historical context yet she is critiquing how her own identity has been shaped by her grandmother's experience. In expressing the lived reality of the colonial past, Rea attempts to recover its associated trauma in the present.⁶⁵⁴

Figure 67:
Brenda L Croft,
*My mother recognised the man
in the little boy*,
from the series
In my father's house, 1998,
colour ilfachrome photograph,
49 x 75 cm (sheet),
AGNSW Collection.

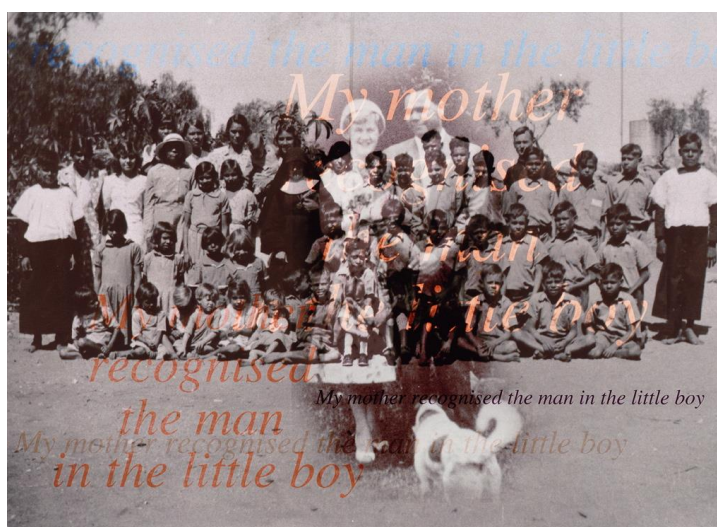


Figure 68:
Brenda L Croft,
She Called Him Son,
from the series
Colour B(l)ind, 1998,
colour ilfachrome photograph,
66 x 93 cm,
Private Collection.



The two images above by Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinarra), *My mother recognised the man in the little boy* from the series *In my father's house*, 1998 (fig. 67), and *She*

⁶⁵³ Powerhouse Museum, 'Collection Search 2.53', Powerhouse Museum, viewed 2 October 2014, <<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=147616>>.

⁶⁵⁴ For further discussion on this process see Heather Igloliorte, 'No History of Colonialism: Decolonizing Practices in Indigenous Arts', in Heather Igloliorte, Brenda L Croft & Steve Loft, *Decolonize Me*, Ottawa Art Gallery and The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Ottawa and Oshawa, Ontario, 2012, p. 21.

Called Him Son from the series *Colour B(l)ind*, 1998 (fig. 68), also explore Aboriginal familial separation. Croft employs images of her own family from her archive of photographs, generating personal introspection and reflections, which adds a layer of autobiography to the artworks. Further meaning is achieved visually with collage and text to provide viewers entry points into each image and narrative of the Stolen Generations.

Hetti Perkins has described aspects of Croft's art practice as a way of coming to terms with her father's history.⁶⁵⁵ These two works by Croft reference the story of the artist's father discovering that his mother was still alive when he was in his late 40s, despite being previously advised that she had passed away.⁶⁵⁶ Croft's father had been separated from his sister and mother when he was only a young boy of eighteen months.⁶⁵⁷ Croft said of the series that it is:

... a memorial not only to my father and brother but a memorial to all those children stolen from their families and denied knowledge of their heritage. This work is about chasing and catching those memories as they fall.⁶⁵⁸

Peter Read has described how it was not just those Aboriginal people separated who were denied knowledge of their heritage, but also their children and grandchildren.⁶⁵⁹ This was a result of the intended institutional assimilation and acculturation. Croft acknowledges this loss in the memorial message of her work.

Like that of Rea, Croft's aesthetic communicates the trans-generational ramifications of the Stolen Generations as also affecting those in the present. As these personal and collective accounts of history and experience are transacted with the viewer, the affective emotions of loss

⁶⁵⁵ Hetti Perkins, 'Dreams and Nightmares', in Perkins, *Art + Soul*, op. cit., p. 125.

⁶⁵⁶ Perkins, *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ Perkins, *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ Brenda L Croft, artist statement, 'Collection', Art Gallery of New South Wales, viewed 1 October 2014, <<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/252.2007.12/>>.

⁶⁵⁹ Peter Read, 'Stolen Generations', op. cit., p. 341.

and trauma are conveyed.⁶⁶⁰ Croft's images of her father, firstly in the group photographic collage as a child separated, and then as an adult reunited with his mother, disrupt the normative impressions of family. The temporal gap between the two moments triggers an affective response in viewers as they confront what separation might look and feel like, symbolised by the age of the figures and the recognition of how a relationship between the pair was forfeited. Whilst Croft's father's history is expressed through her own engagement with the personal and the political, and leads to an exploration of her own identity, she recovers narratives of the Stolen Generations that are embedded within the present dialogue of that history.



Figure 69:
Julie Dowling,
Her Father's Servant, 1999,
synthetic polymer paint, red ochre
and blood on canvas,
100 x 120 cm,
NGA Collection.

Another artist interrogating the subject of Stolen Generations in a personal manner is Julie Dowling (Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi), who, similarly to Rea and Croft draws from known family narratives. In *Her Father's Servant*, 1999 (fig. 69), Dowling visually recovers aspects of her great-grandmother's story. Mary, separated from her birth mother, was a servant for her non-Indigenous father and his new wife until the age of sixteen.⁶⁶¹ She is depicted centrally in the above image that utilises the schema of portraiture to convey the class and power imbalance in this family setting.

⁶⁶⁰ See Jill Bennett's discussion of transactive and communicative modes of trauma-related art in Jill Bennett, 'On the Subject of Trauma', in *Empathic Vision*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁶⁶¹ Julie Dowling, artist statement, in Anne Gray (ed.), *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002, p. 413. See also biography in Amy Jackett, 'Julie Dowling's Celebration of Aboriginal Women through Portraiture', *Women's Art Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, pp. 3-7.

Mary was later separated from her father, following her stepmother's anger with her, and later in life experienced yet another level of familial removal when her former non-Indigenous husband placed their two children into an orphanage.⁶⁶² Though Mary's children were not forcibly removed, they were remanded in religious institutional custody. Due to Mary's lack of rights as a non-citizen, she was powerless to oppose her ex-husband's decisions or keep her children.

Dowling's quasi-fairytale image captures unfairness and misconduct such as that of her stepmother's, whose punishment was never redressed. There is no happy ending, just the ceaseless emotions of deep grief, loss and suffering that are echoed in the oral histories expressed by victims of the Stolen Generations.⁶⁶³ These emotional wounds are further pronounced by Dowling's incorporation of blood within her composition.



Figure 70:
Julie Dowling,
A welcome of tears, 1999,
Synthetic polymer, red and white
ochre and silver on canvas,
100 x 120 cm,
Collection of Karen Hughes.

Dowling's *A welcome of tears*, 1999 (fig. 70), continues the narrative of familial separation. The image depicts the children taken from Mary, Dowling's great-aunt Dot and grandmother Mollie. The painting references an incident at St Joseph's mission orphanage in Subiaco, where these

⁶⁶² Dowling, *ibid.*

⁶⁶³ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, *op. cit.*

children were sent.⁶⁶⁴ Here Dot is performing a funeral ceremony for one of the girls' close friends who died of pneumonia as a result of hard work, starvation and exhaustion.⁶⁶⁵ The young girls wished to send their friend back to her spiritual ancestors.⁶⁶⁶ Dowling said of this work, 'I wanted to paint this event as a message to my family of what my family had to endure and how many in our community grew up within prejudice'.⁶⁶⁷ In a similar way to Croft's, Dowling's work is a memorial to those affected by separation.

Each of the works discussed in this section demonstrate the aesthetic recovery of the past. This past to which they refer is a traumatic one in which personal and collective impressions circulate with trans-generation meaning. Paradoxically, however, while the works pertain to the past, they are actually allied with the present. LaCapra has said that traumatic memory must be worked through, so that the past may be 'remembered with some degree of conscious control and critical perspective that enables survival and, in the best of circumstances, ethical and political agency in the present'.⁶⁶⁸ The work of artists Riley, Onus, Rea, Croft and Dowling, haunts viewers with the trauma of the Stolen Generations. As they recover and release true and associated details, they insist on acknowledgement of that past, the fulfilment of which is the project of the present.

Sovereignty

As observed at the beginning of this chapter, sovereignty is a socio-political issue that pervaded urban Indigenous art in both its foundation and proliferation phases. In Chapter 3, it was

⁶⁶⁴ Varga Hosseini, 'The Art of Translating: Contemporary Representations of Christianity in Holy Holy Holy', in Stephanie Radok (ed.), *Holy Holy Holy*, Flinders University City Gallery, 2004, p. 62.

⁶⁶⁵ See Julie Dowling, artist statement in Hosseini, *ibid.*, p. 61. The oral history of the scene attests to mistreatment, power, and prejudice under the guise of faith, as so many institutions are documented to have administered in relation to the Stolen Generations, see Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶⁶ Dowling in Hosseini, 'The Art of Translating: Contemporary Representations of Christianity in Holy Holy Holy', *op. cit.*

⁶⁶⁷ Julie Dowling, personal correspondence quoted in Hosseini, *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶⁶⁸ LaCapra, 'Experience and Identity', *op. cit.*, p. 56.

established how land rights featured aesthetically in urban Indigenous artworks, particularly within the photo-documentary idiom and printmaking media. As noted, there was an emphasis on the 'Treaty '88' campaign, administered and promoted by activist and artist Kevin Gilbert (Wiradjuri). Gilbert's engagement with Australia's socio-political environment continued into the 1990s. On 27 May 1992, in his role advocating for Indigenous rights, Gilbert delivered a speech at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. It was a protest and marker of the 25th anniversary of the 1967 referendum entitling Aboriginal people to be counted in Australia's census. The speech was a political affirmation of the artist-activist's views on Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Gilbert stated:

At the end of twenty-five years, we have seen the Australian Government and the Australian people try to get off the hook of responsibility by saying, ten years down the track, we'll have Reconciliation. And Reconciliation doesn't promise us human rights, it doesn't promise us our Sovereign rights or the platform from which to negotiate, and it doesn't promise us a viable land base, an economical land base, or a base in which we can again heal our people, where we can carry out our cultural practice ... Australia is calling for a Republic and a new flag, a new vision. It cannot have a vision. It cannot have a new flag. It cannot have a Sovereign nation until it addresses the right of Aboriginal People, the Sovereign Land Rights of Aboriginal people.⁶⁶⁹

Gilbert's voice was one of many in the reconciliation debate.⁶⁷⁰ His sentiment continued to align art and politics with a particular emphasis on the recognition for Indigenous people. Various other key events had also taken place in the early years of the decade that contributed to the socio-political environment of the time, notably the commencement of the federal government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in March 1990.⁶⁷¹ The Aboriginal Provisional Government (APG) was also formed in 1990, which comprised a group of Indigenous

⁶⁶⁹ Kevin Gilbert, originally published in Bain Attwood & Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum, or, When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, reproduced in Kleinert & Neale, *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

⁶⁷⁰ For an overview of the debate, see for example Mark McKenna, *This Country: A Reconciled Republic*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2004; also Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 2007; and Paul Newman, 'Reconciliation', in Kaye Price (ed.), *Knowledge of Life: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia*, op. cit., pp. 26-38.

⁶⁷¹ Jeremy Beckett, 'Art and Culture in Unsettled Australia', in Kleinert and Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., p. 84.

state representatives.⁶⁷² While ATSIC had various governmental objectives to fulfil relating to governance, management and administration, the independent APG campaigned for self-determination and self-government. The latter campaigns were based on the principle of Indigenous sovereignty.⁶⁷³ In 1991, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established by the Commonwealth Parliament, with the objective of promoting the 'process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community'.⁶⁷⁴ Despite the establishment of this Council, a persistent hurdle in the process of reconciliation has been that, as succinctly alluded to by Gilbert, Australia has not recognised its Indigenous citizens as the country's First Nations people.⁶⁷⁵ Furthermore, Australian law has not adequately acknowledged that the settlement and colonisation of Australia dispossessed its First Nations people of their land rights as well as their civil and political rights.⁶⁷⁶

Despite the lack of a treaty, sovereignty and land rights continued to be approached aesthetically by urban Indigenous artists throughout the proliferation phase of the 1990s. During this decade, the importance of recognising and promoting an understanding of Indigenous occupation of Australia prior to Cook, along with Indigenous land rights, peaked. In addition to the formation of those organisations mentioned above, momentum was influenced by the public and controversial developments stemming from four key proceedings: the High Court *Mabo* decision in 1992, the

⁶⁷² See Angela Pratt & Scott Bennett, 'The End of ATSIC and the Future Administration of Indigenous Affairs', Parliament of Australia, 9 August 2004, viewed 21 February 2018, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/Current_Issues_Briefs_2004_-_2005/05cib04#establish>; see also Aboriginal Provisional Government, 'Aboriginal Provisional Government', viewed 21 February 2018, <<http://apg.org.au/>>.

⁶⁷³ Aboriginal Provisional Government, *ibid*.

⁶⁷⁴ The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 'Vision Statement', The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, archive online, viewed 21 February 2018, <http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/council/spl98_20/council.htm>.

⁶⁷⁵ This issue is currently being worked through, see Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, *A First Nations Voice in the Constitution*, Report to the Referendum Council, June 2017, viewed 23 February 2018, <https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-07/Report%20to%20the%20Referendum%20Council-%20First%20Nations%20Voice%20Design%20Report_0.pdf>.

⁶⁷⁶ Regarding civil and political rights see Hilary Charlesworth, 'Australia's Accession to the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights', *Melbourne University Law Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1991, pp. 428-434; also Office of the High Commissioner, 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Part 1 Article 1', United Nations Human Rights, c. 1966, viewed 23 February 2018, <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>>.

Native Title Act of 1993, the High Court *Wik* decision of 1996 and the *Native Title Amendment Act* of 1998.⁶⁷⁷ Whilst it is not within the scope of this thesis to deliver a detailed account of the intricacies of the four key proceedings, they will, however, be briefly summarised below.

The High Court case *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* of 1992 overturned the previously upheld doctrine of terra nullius, on which British possession of Australia resided.⁶⁷⁸ The case legally established that the Meriam people had retained their land title through traditional rights and that Native Title effectively existed for all Australian Indigenous people prior to Cook's declaration of possession in 1770.⁶⁷⁹ The *Native Title Act* (1993), confirmed that Native Title may exist where it has not been legally extinguished.⁶⁸⁰ The Act allowed that Indigenous people could seek recognition of their Native Title rights by way of a codified legislative regime.⁶⁸¹ The *Wik* decision of 1996 acknowledged that Native Title rights and interests may coexist with land that has been subject to pastoral lease and other property rights, but held that pastoralist rights would prevail over Native Title rights and interests.⁶⁸² In 1997, the 'Ten Point Plan' was released by the Australian Federal Government in response to the *Wik* decision, which resulted in the *Native Title Amendment Act* of 1998.⁶⁸³ The 'Plan', it was deemed, would deal with acts affecting Native Title, as well as those concerning the interaction between Native Title rights and interests and those of others with rights and interests.⁶⁸⁴ Many people criticised the Ten Point Plan, especially for the way it undid the 'good' achieved through the *Native Title Act*.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁷⁷ See *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*, op. cit.; *Native Title Act* (1993) (Cth); *Wik Peoples v Queensland & Ors* (1994) 120 ALR 465; *Thayorre People v State of Queensland & Ors* (1996) HCA Trans 227, 229, 231 & 533; and *Native Title Amendment Act* (1998) (Cth).

⁶⁷⁸ See *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* op. cit.; AIATSIS, 'Overturning the Doctrine of Terra Nullius: The Mabo Case', viewed 3 September 2014, <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/_files/ntru/resources/resourceissues/mabo.pdf>, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁹ AIATSIS, *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁰ AIATSIS, *ibid.*

⁶⁸¹ AIATSIS, *ibid.*

⁶⁸² *Wik Peoples v Queensland & Ors*, op. cit.

⁶⁸³ See *Native Title Amendment Bill* (1997).

⁶⁸⁴ *Native Title Amendment Bill* (1997); see also, *Native Title Act* (1993) (Cth), op. cit.

⁶⁸⁵ Paul Keating, 'The 10-Point Plan that Undid the Good Done on Native Title', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 2011, viewed 16 September 2014, <<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/the-10point-plan-that-undid-the->

The duration of time between the *Mabo* decision and the commencement of the *Native Title Amendment Act* was approximately five and a half years. Within this time frame and beyond, urban Indigenous artists found the subject politically provocative, and created various responses to it. Whether implicitly or explicitly referred to, the specific themes of Native Title, land rights, and the overarching context of sovereignty fundamental to the entire debate, pervaded much urban Indigenous art throughout the 1990s. The attention given to the expression of politics, encompassing Indigenous empowerment, continued this dominant theme of the foundation phase from the previous decade. This continuing engagement served to reinforce just how urban Indigenous artists were branding their aesthetic.

Various urban Indigenous artists were occupied with these issues pertinent to the socio-political environment throughout the 1990s. An early example is a painting by Bronwyn Bancroft (Bundjalung) titled *Treaty*, 1991 (fig. 71). Even though the presence of the 'Treaty '88' campaign appeared to have dissipated somewhat in the public domain by the end of the 1980s, Bancroft continued to engage aesthetically with the issue. In the work below, she has reflected on the aspirations of the anticipated 1988 event, projecting the impression of disappointment at the campaign's ineffectual outcome. This is illustrated by how pages of the document held by the black figure float away, rather than it being held by both parties.⁶⁸⁶

good-done-on-native-title-20110531-1feec.html>; Laura Tingle & Ben Mitchell, 'Wik Plan Faces Legal Test', *The Age* (Melbourne), 10 May 1997, p. 9.

⁶⁸⁶ Figure 71 is similar to another work by the artist, also entitled *Treaty*, 1988, watercolour on paper, 127.5 x 59 cm, see Contemporary Australian Visions: *Contemporary Australian Visions: Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Fine Art Gallery*, website, viewed 22 February 2018, <http://cavisions.wixsite.com/aboriginalart/_p/prd1/1285352511/product/bronwyn-bancroft---treaty-88>.

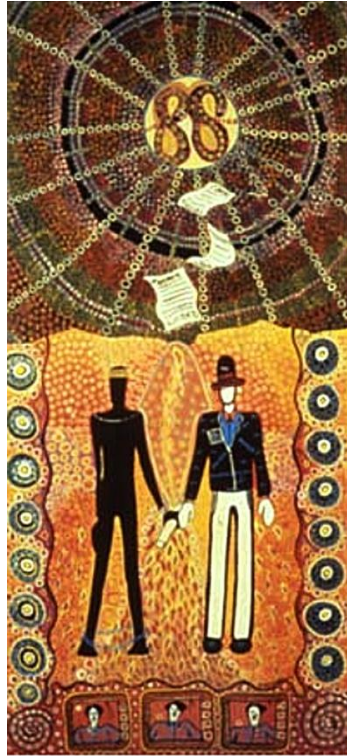


Figure 71:
Bronwyn Bancroft, *Treaty*, 1991,
gouache on paper, dimensions
unknown, location unknown
Source: Philip John Crosskey Dark &
Roger G Rose, *Artistic Heritage in a
Changing Pacific*, Crawford House,
Bathurst, New South Wales, 1993.

As Jenifer Borum observed, Bancroft's scene 'alludes to the two hundred years of broken promises and genocide that has characterized the Aboriginal experience in colonial Australia'.⁶⁸⁷ Whereas artworks produced during the mid-1980s asserted 'Treaty' as a forthcoming possibility, by 1991, Bancroft's *Treaty* no longer portrays anticipation of the event. Rather, and with overt reference to the year '88' in her composition, depicted as a pair of serpentine motifs, she allows viewers to reflect on the futility of what transpired.

Bancroft explained recently that she is motivated by politics and that her art is a vehicle through which she can attempt to overcome confronting issues.⁶⁸⁸ She has said that art and creativity allows her to connect with social change and make a difference in society.⁶⁸⁹ Bancroft, like Gilbert, is an activist, whereby her aesthetic output is designed with a purpose that transcends visuality.

⁶⁸⁷ Jenifer P Borum, 'The Urban Aboriginal', *Artforum International*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1993, p. 83.

⁶⁸⁸ Bronwyn Bancroft, 'Being Aboriginal is not a Lifestyle Choice', Art Talks Program, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, 19 August 2015.

⁶⁸⁹ Bancroft, *ibid.*

While Bancroft referred to aspects of Treaty and reconciliation current at the time of painting, Gordon Bennett took viewers back in time. He engaged socio-politically with a key identity-defining moment in the dominant historical narrative that has been forged in the Australian collective unconscious regarding nationhood – Captain James Cook taking possession of ‘Terra Australis Incognita’. Bennett has deliberately drawn from Samuel Calvert’s engraving of John Gilfillan’s painting *Captain Cook taking possession of the Australian continent on behalf of the British Crown AD 1770*, 1865 (not shown), and made his own additions to disrupt a reading typical of the source image.⁶⁹⁰ Rather than the clear, serene portrayal of Cook claiming Australian land for Britain as depicted by Gilfillan and Calvert, *Possession Island*, 1991 (fig. 72), is instead spattered with the paint drips synonymous with the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock, and covered in dotting that is indicative of Western Desert works. These obscure the picture plane and challenge the visibility of much of the painting’s detail. What remains central to the image is the young dark-skinned figure, dressed in yellow and red, standing with a serving tray positioned in front of a grid. Bennett’s grid is conceptualised as a colonising force; a tool that prescribes all perspective as European. This operates similarly to the way Bennett visually articulates language as a colonising force that dominates the ‘other’, as explained in the previous two chapters.

⁶⁹⁰ The John Gilfillan painting from which Samuel Calvert created his engraving is lost, see National Gallery of Victoria, ‘Borrowed Images and Styles’, in *Gordon Bennett*, education resource National Gallery of Victoria, 2007, online, viewed 26 February 2018, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/gordonbennett/education/04.html>>.



Figure 72:
Gordon Bennett,
Possession Island, 1991,
oil and synthetic polymer
paint on canvas,
(a-b) 162 x 260 cm
(overall),
Museum of Sydney
Collection
© The Estate of Gordon
Bennett.

The central figure, made clear amidst the density of visual data, is depicted to amplify the role of servitude illustrated in the original works.⁶⁹¹ For Bennett the original Gilfillan and Calvert images and their repeated viewing has been complicit in constituting a particular narrative: 'It's like images become part of the Australian unconscious ... these images still support contemporary stereotypes'.⁶⁹² In other words, visual repetition assists in constructing the dominant narrative, which has multiple associated impacts. In terms of a decolonial framework that reconstructs such narratives, Bennett employs the styles of others, so that the Pollockesque paint drips and Western Desert dotting confront viewers with the concept that appropriation is a deliberate process of reference and reworking.⁶⁹³ As the originals are transformed visually, Bennett asserts that meaning too may be transformed. In other words, Bennett argues that while Calvert's image is ingrained within the imagination of Australia's historical narrative, alternative viewpoints are possible. Its narrative may be approached from alternative perspectives and the Aboriginal figure need not be reduced to servitude in perpetuity, simply because early visual impressions have predetermined it so. Bennett's version presents the idea that the historical narrative is not static, that translation is open and therefore powerful; and that perspective is everything.

⁶⁹¹ National Gallery of Victoria, 'Borrowed Images and Styles', op. cit.

⁶⁹² Gordon Bennett quoted in Gordon Bennett & Chris McAuliffe, 'Interview with Gordon Bennett', in Rex Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art in the 1980s & 1990s*, 2nd edn, IMA Publishing, 2004, p. 273; see also National Gallery of Victoria, 'Borrowed Images and Styles', ibid.

⁶⁹³ National Gallery of Victoria, ibid.

This viewpoint is evident in several of Bennett's works from around the same time that are executed in a similar style.⁶⁹⁴ *A Selector (This Is How Land Ownership Is Determined)*, 1992 (fig. 73), is a much more graphic portrayal of the 'acquisition' of Australian land. Rather than the well-known historical moment associated with Cook, here Bennett has expressed the Aboriginal carnage of the colonial frontier.



Figure 73:
Gordon Bennett,
*A Selector (This Is How
Land Ownership Is
Determined)*, 1992,
oil and synthetic polymer on
canvas,
162 x 130 cm,
USQ Art Collection
© The Estate of Gordon
Bennett

It is a confronting piece and works affectively, given the violence inflicted on the foregrounded Aboriginal figure by the lasso-wielding horseman behind, however Bennett intends for the trajectory of interpretation to transcend personal and emotional readings alone.⁶⁹⁵ He is interested in how 'the personal, the aesthetic and the political meet' within the realm of

⁶⁹⁴ See in particular *The Nine Ricochets (Fall Down Black Fella, Jump Up White Fella)*, 1990, private collection, Brisbane; *Possession Island (Abstraction)*, 1991, MCA Collection, Sydney; *Myth of the Western man (White man's burden)*, 1992, AGNSW Collection, Sydney; *Haptic Painting Explorer (The Inland Sea)*, 1993, in Ian McLean & Gordon Bennett, *The Art of Gordon Bennett* Craftsman House, Sydney, 1996, p. 44 (illus.).

⁶⁹⁵ Gordon Bennett, 'Aesthetics and Iconography: An Artist's Approach', in Bernard Lüthi & Gary Lee (eds), *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and Du Mont Buchverlang, Düsseldorf and Cologne, 1993, pp. 85-91, quoted in Georges Petitjean, 'An Introduction to the Art of Gordon Bennett', in Georges Petitjean, Kitty Zijlmans & Ian McLean, *Outsider/Insider: The Art of Gordon Bennett*, Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Utrecht, 2012, p. 17.

'postmodern concerns and postcolonial discourses'.⁶⁹⁶ Bennett combines aesthetic modes as a visual nod to the postmodern world of art, but, the subject of the work and the postcolonial context in which it operates are significant. As with the works exemplified in relation to the Stolen Generations, Bennett's *A Selector*, exposes the violence of land attainment in a revision of history. Gone are the compositional emphases of *Possession Island* suggesting that appropriation and perspective offer alternative readings of the past. Here Bennett's aesthetic is comprised of a revisionist technique that deliberately interrogates the principal values and ideologies that emerge from that colonial past.⁶⁹⁷ These are allied with the legacies of racial extermination and genocide that have resulted in the erasure and dispossession of Australia's First Nations people from the land and from history.

Harry J Wedge (Wiradjuri) also reflected on sovereignty in the work *Captain Cook Con Man*, 1991 (fig. 74), referencing narrative aspects familiar in Cook's proclamation of Australia, and as endorsed by Calvert's engraving.



Figure 74:
Harry J Wedge,
Captain Cook Con Man, 1991,
synthetic polymer paint on
Masonite, 58 x 93 cm,
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists
Co-operative Collection.

Wedge, in portraying Cook as having proudly stolen new land for the Empire said: 'The British Empire should be ashamed of itself for sending a con man like Captain Cook out to swindle the

⁶⁹⁶ Pettjean, 'An Introduction to the Art of Gordon Bennett', *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ Pettjean, *ibid.*, p. 19.

natives of their homeland.’⁶⁹⁸ In a manner similar to how Bennett introduced violence into the visual narrative of history, Wedge has introduced threat and menace as features of his red-coat figures who dominate the picture plane. Wedge’s ‘*Mabo Country*’ *Kingsize* (triptych), 1993 (fig. 75), complements *Captain Cook Con Man*, depicting in three parts the traditions upheld by Indigenous people in the first panel, their ownership and the arrival of foreigners in the second panel, and a hostile take-over in the final panel. When read as a storyboard, Wedge has reconstructed a visual narrative of Native Title that affirms Indigenous rights and exposes the myth of Terra Nullius.



Figure 75: Harry J Wedge, ‘*Mabo Country*’ *Kingsize*, triptych, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, location unknown. Source: Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, Phaidon Press, London.

Both of the above works by Wedge travelled internationally and nationally, including parts of the United Kingdom and several Australian capital cities. This is noteworthy as their dissemination coincided with the changes that were taking place within government at the time regarding Indigenous activity, as well as the building momentum surrounding Native Title. Just as Kevin Gilbert had relied on the timing of events such as the Pope’s visit and the Bicentenary in the 1980s to propagate his views on a Treaty, Wedge also utilised the socio-political exchange occurring at the time in Australia regarding *Mabo* and Native Title to appeal to audiences in both Australia and abroad.

⁶⁹⁸ Harry J Wedge, *Wiradjuri Spirit Man*, Craftsman House, Roseville East, NSW, 1996, p. 46.

The paintings appeared in the 1994 exhibition *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag*, which took sovereignty and history as its main themes.⁶⁹⁹ However, it was formulated around ten ‘myths’, ‘white lies’ and ‘truths’ that drew from various historical events beginning with Cook’s ‘discovery’ of and proclamation of Australia.⁷⁰⁰ The artists involved in the exhibition considered the impact of history and the way Indigenous narratives have been marginalised. Richard Bell (Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang) proposed a new Australian flag, *The New One*, 1993 (fig. 76), which offered an alternative to the Union Jack.

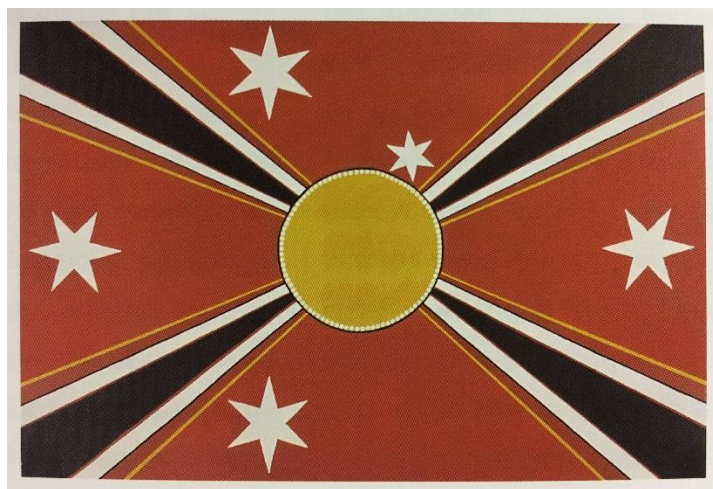


Figure 76:
Richard Bell,
The New One, 1993,
acrylic on canvas,
122 x 183 cm,
Collection of the artist

For Bell the Australian flag represents a version of history that is ‘sanitized and sterilized’.⁷⁰¹ It is a view similar to that held by Bennett. Bell said he wished to expose this version of history and its construction of truth as a lie.⁷⁰² In a similar vein for the exhibition, Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri), presented 200 screenprinted tea towels, one for each year since ‘invasion’ in 1788 to the Bicentenary in 1988.

⁶⁹⁹ Wedge’s two works were shown in Liverpool, South London and Leicester, as well as Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane as part of the exhibition *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag*. This exhibition was a collaborative effort between Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative and Bristol based visual artists, writer and curator Eddie Chambers, who together were concerned specifically with showing work in the United Kingdom. Eddie Chambers is an advocate of Black British art, see Eddie Chambers et al., *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Chippendale, NSW, 1994.

⁷⁰⁰ See exhibition catalogue, Eddie Chambers, *True Colours: Aboriginal Artists Raise the Flag*, ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Richard Bell, artist statement in Chambers, ibid., n.p.

⁷⁰² Bell, ibid.



Figure 77:
 Brook Andrew,
*Reconstructing more
 whiteman's kitsch:1788-?*
 (detail), 1994,
 screenprint on cotton,
 one of 200 tea towels,
 each 47 x 72 cm,
 QAG|GoMA Collection.

His *Reconstructing More Whiteman's Kitsch: 1788-?* (detail), 1994 (fig. 77), critiques the way kitsch paraphernalia pertaining to Aboriginal identity has been complicit in promoting a false identity for Aboriginal people, while simultaneously promoting Australian nationalism. The artist stated:

I have given the space for an Aboriginal voice to reclaim and reconstruct false histories and identities perpetuated in Australian/Aboriginal history ... Each year on each tea towel represents the reclamation of Aboriginal re-representation of our history.⁷⁰³

Andrew is confronting the colonial construct of Aboriginal people as a primitive race, with no position within postcolonial Australia. His series is pertinent to the debate surrounding land rights and Native Title, as the history referred to by the artist denies Aboriginal people access to their sovereign rights.

However, it was a pair of works by Judy Watson (Waanyi) in the exhibition that communicated so poignantly the contradictions and ironies in the debate surrounding sovereignty.

⁷⁰³ Brook Andrew, artist statement in Chambers, *True Colours: Aboriginal Artists Raise the Flag*, op. cit.

Figure 78:
 Judy Watson,
Butcher's Apron Series
Flag 1, 1994,
 synthetic polymer paint and
 collage on fabric with
 eyelets,
 87 x 150cm,
 Collection of the artist



Figure 79:
 Judy Watson,
Butcher's Apron Series
Flag 2, 1994,
 synthetic polymer paint
 and collage on fabric with
 eyelets,
 87 x 150 cm,
 Collection of the artist



Watson's *Butcher's Apron Series Flag 1* and *2* reference in their title the colloquial name given to the Union Jack, which is ironic given the violent history, of 'butchery' that took place on the Australian frontier. This brutality is exposed in the three words, 'rape slaughter dispossession', painted on *Flag 2*. Watson presents an alternative response to the customary patriotic pride encapsulated by Australia's flag. Instead, her aesthetic alerts audiences to a history of violence and theft. The artist said of *Butcher's Apron Series Flag 1*, 1994 (fig. 78), and *Butcher's Apron Series Flag 2*, 1994 (fig. 79):

I was responding to an article I had read, from the leader of Australia's Save Our Flag group, who said in 1992 that among their aims was 'to leave our country in the way we received it'. My answer to this was Rape, Slaughter, Dispossession ... stabbing a bit of ground, raising the flag, claiming ownership, terra nullius, lest we forget.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰⁴ Judy Watson & Louise Martin-Chew, *Blood Language*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2009, pp. 94–95.

This exposure was pertinent to the postcolonial discourse of the 1990s that revealed the marginalised voices of cultures affected by colonialism. Furthermore, the quoted statement on *Flag 1* from Bob Hudson, leader of Australia's Save Our Flag Group, refers to the Crown, and to Australia as a 'received' nation, as if this was a conciliatory exchange that took place between the British and Australia's First Nations people; Watson accentuates the mockery. Although flags are not typical of Watson's oeuvre, conceptually they align with the underlying themes of history, family, culture and place that inform her practice.⁷⁰⁵

The *True Colours* exhibition was timely. It followed a similarly curated exhibition *Black People and the British Flag* that challenged the ethics of the empire and toured Britain in 1993.⁷⁰⁶ This was not coincidental. The black artists who participated in this earlier exhibition were first generation British whose families had immigrated from Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean and who felt that the British flag had come to symbolise 'bigotry, racism, [and] intolerance'.⁷⁰⁷ With the assistance of this exhibition's curator Eddie Chambers, art historian and champion for artists of colour, who is active within the black Afro-Indian diaspora in Britain, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative coordinated and toured *True Colours*. It is interesting that within the Commonwealth, first generation black artists in Britain practising in the 1990s and Indigenous artists from Australia shared similar views on the British flag. The mobilisation of ideas set about by the exhibition *Black People and the British Flag*, and the creative exchange that they engendered for the urban Indigenous artists involved in *True Colours*, was a powerful one. Across two countries, audiences were exposed to ideas that focused on invasion, frontier violence, genocide, murder, sovereignty, Native Title, unfair employment, citizenship,

⁷⁰⁵ Judy Watson's work *Contact*, 1994 (see Appendix), also incorporated the Union Jack. It is badged with a Jolly Roger, and is juxtaposed with the Aboriginal flag. *Contact* expresses a narrative of colonial contact through simple symbolism indicative of life and death as a result of irrevocable change.

⁷⁰⁶ Jackie Laurie, 'Flag of Many Colours', *TNT* (London), issue 567, 1994, pp. 40–41.

⁷⁰⁷ Laurie, *ibid.*

construction of identity and nationalism, racism, reconciliation and the bias of history.

Furthermore, as the exhibition was shown in Britain, the home of the Union Jack, geography empowered rather than marginalised those artists involved.



Figure 80:
Gordon Hookey,
Ten point scam, 1998,
oil on canvas,
223 x 178 cm,
AGWA Collection.

The final work of focus for this section of the chapter is the explicit, politically charged *Ten point scam*, 1998 (fig. 80), by Gordon Hookey (Waanyi). His image contains many of the stylistic trademarks of his oeuvre, which are composed here to convey the animosity felt by the artist toward the Federal Government's 'Ten Point Plan', implemented through the *Native Title Amendment Act*. In his artist's statement, Hookey said:

This government and its people are so blind with greed they cannot see how their present actions destructively impact on lands they hold in trust for generations to come. Agriculture, mining, pastoralism, primary industry, jobs and money are weak excuses when it comes to the kind of destruction they cause. They're killing our lands; they're still killing our people. My art comes from the passion I feel for my country and my people. Sadly, it also reflects my frustration with the spiritless, small-minded people that ultimately hold power over our lands and lives.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁸ Gordon Hookey artist statement in Brenda L Croft, *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000, p. 34.

Hookey's work is a graphic portrayal of federal government actors, at Parliament House, Canberra, who have been deliberately cast as animals of an introduced species. In opposition are the native animals that have rallied together at the Tent Embassy communicating their demands for sovereignty. Hookey's text and symbols assist viewers to identify imperialist ideologies of Britain and the USA that have a negative impact on Australia's environment. The swastika implies John Howard's link with fascism.

Text, setting, characterisation and iconography transport viewers into the socio-political milieu of the time. These elements are typical of Hookey's aesthetic. In this case, he is critical of the government and its industry affiliations that prioritise the national economy at the expense of cultural and heritage issues associated with First Nations people. The Ten Point Plan had introduced challenges for Native Title claimants, so from a decolonial perspective, Hookey's work acts as socio-political intervention.⁷⁰⁹ He reassigned imagery associated with Native Title in order to reconstruct the narrative of colonialism and its legacy which persistently divested Indigenous communities of rights. Instead the artist shames the Howard Administration. On this kind of intervention, Jill Bennett claims that rather than art simply providing an account of an event, it has the potential to 'generate a set of possibilities, which may in turn inform political thinking in regard to particular circumstances'.⁷¹⁰ Bennett has suggested that rather than representing political content in works, it is the artist's mode of expression that may be political.⁷¹¹ Thus the socio-political aesthetic resides in the visual transmission of criticism and mockery elicited by *Ten Point Scam*.

⁷⁰⁹ See discussion in Brenda L Croft, 'Gordon Hookey: Flash Gordon's Message – Language is a Virus – the King's English (not)', *Artlink*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1990, pp. 52-55.

⁷¹⁰ Jill Bennett, 'Migratory Aesthetics: Art and Politics After Identity', in Ian North (ed.), *Visual Animals: Crossovers, Evolution and New Aesthetics*, Contemporary ArtCentre of South Australia Inc., Parkside, South Australia, 2007, p. 132.

⁷¹¹ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 133.

Summary

It is not unusual for artists to creatively respond to pressing current issues, nor is it unusual for artists to be influenced by the environment in which they operate. What is unique, however, is that urban Indigenous artists consistently responded to issues, such as those outlined above, in ways that recovered and reconstructed Indigenous narratives that had typically been excluded or dominated by European colonial ones. These latter narratives are constitutive of a past of colonialism in which the forced separation of Aboriginal children from their families and the refusal of Indigenous sovereignty, in all its associated guises, have been traumatic and divested Indigenous communities access to truths, reparation and rights. This lack of access has occurred in the context of history as well as in the lived experience of present times.

In looking at how the Stolen Generations and sovereignty have been approached by urban Indigenous artists, a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art is given room to surface. The synthesis of visibility with issues affecting Indigenous culture creates an aesthetic that is inherently rooted to the socio-political climate. The works cited above demonstrate that across a range of media, urban Indigenous art during the proliferation phase of the 1990s amplified what had been initiated in the previous decade. It is evident that over time, the expanding body of work centred on these processes of synthesis and amplification also distinguishes the movement.

Analysis of the socio-political aesthetic in urban Indigenous art reveals an unabating activism whereby artists seek to elicit a broad awareness of issues in the public domain. This awareness ultimately promotes the less exposed Indigenous perspectives. This chapter has demonstrated that artists have been consistently occupied with using their work to speak up, to act against, to

alter, and to renew perspectives of the past. In reaching audiences in Australia and abroad, urban Indigenous art has essentially 'spread the word' of its engaged artists. This in turn has allowed viewers to reflect on what the art portrayed, make tangible associations between artworks and artists, perceive alternative ways visual content has been expressed, and recognise how these expressions by urban Indigenous artists may essentially confirm, deny or complement particular narratives held within Australia's popular imagination.

Chapter 6

Control: Indigenising the Curated Space, Critique and Self-Determination

Introduction

Around the last decade of the twentieth century and gaining momentum heading into the twenty-first century, categories and definitions of global contemporary art were evolving.⁷¹² Urban Indigenous art became couched within these revised parameters of contemporary art, but it maintained its own aesthetic links with the socio-political milieu. Set within this new, global phase of contemporary art, urban Indigenous art contributed to the growing destabilisation of the institutionalisation of knowledge.⁷¹³ In the context of contemporary art, this destabilisation related to a negation of hegemonic and epistemic discourses of knowledge and producers of power that had previously constructed concepts of 'other' that were supported in the visual realm. This was a status that Indigeneity had historically been assigned to by the producers of colonial knowledge.⁷¹⁴

This chapter contends that urban Indigenous art had an active role in three key aspects of destabilisation. First, the Indigenisation of the curated space, which saw urban Indigenous art engaged in the process of a decolonial gesture to delink from coloniality. Second, critique and

⁷¹² See critical commentary in Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood & Anton Vidolke (eds), *e-flux journal: What is Contemporary Art?*, Sternberg Press, New York, 2010; Stephen Zepke and Simon O'Sullivan (eds), *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2010; Terry Smith (ed.), *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2011; Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, United Kingdom, 2011; Zoya Kocur & Simon Leung (eds), *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, 2nd edn, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, West Sussex, 2013; Peter R Kalb, *Art Since 1980: Charting the Contemporary*, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2013; Jean Robertson, *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art After 1980*, 4th edn, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017.

⁷¹³ Teun Adrianus van Dijk defines institutionalised knowledge as knowledge criteria developed and controlled by authorities or institutions and their discourses. These include academies, schools, laboratories, universities, and their teachers, textbooks, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and scholarly publications. Van Dijk explains that the association of knowledge and power is generally based on such a model of institutional knowledge, yet it is reproduced in everyday life by all members of society and its groups, institutions and organisations, see Teun Adrianus van Dijk, 'Knowledge, Discourse and Domination', in Michael Meeuwis & Jan-Ola Östman (eds), *Pragmaticizing Understanding*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam & Philadelphia, 2012, pp. 152-153.

⁷¹⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Introduction', in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, Zed Books & Otago University Press, London, New York & Dunedin, p. 8.

continued criticality by urban Indigenous artists shifted knowledge of the past to an engagement with the present. Finally the self-determined position of urban Indigenous artists established, managed and reinforced the representation of the Indigenous subject to be distinctly Indigenous and contemporary. The artists' collective proppaNOW is proposed as a key exemplar. While destabilisation was the objective of urban Indigenous artists, the purpose of undermining colonial knowledge was simultaneously to present alternative knowledge. Curator Ivan Muñiz Reed describes a shift in knowledge in this context as a means to 're-inscribe histories and perspectives, which [had] been devalued'.⁷¹⁵

The chapter demonstrates that the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art was significant to the processes of destabilisation and the execution of knowledge. Art, fundamentally, transformed knowledge production and urban Indigenous art played a role in this. The artworks included in the chapter are those that appeared in the public domain in reference to the projects that are presented and they are indicative of the conceptual frameworks applied to those projects. In terms of proppaNOW, the images included reflect the ideas and concerns that motivated the artists involved. The chapter provides further insight to the socio-political aesthetic, as it was maintained by urban Indigenous artists in the twenty-first century.

Indigenising the Curated Space

The socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art to date, was paramount to the movement's incorporation within contemporary Australian art leading into the twenty-first century. This was achieved primarily through the artists' aesthetic expression of the contemporaneity of Indigenous experience, which was intrinsically socio-political in nature. While curatorial and institutional roles

⁷¹⁵ Ivan Muñiz Reed, 'Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn', *Broadsheet Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, p. 15.

in support of urban Indigenous art had previously occurred, especially around 1988 and in the proliferation phase that followed, a shift in around 1990 took place in which Eurocentric discourses exercised by institutions and their gatekeepers faced epistemic change.⁷¹⁶ Social theorist Anibal Quijano and Ivan Muñiz Reed refer to this change as a 'decolonial turn in the domain of knowledge'.⁷¹⁷

In urban Indigenous art, this change accounted for how the socio-political aesthetic confronted modern aesthetics.⁷¹⁸ This confrontation fulfilled what is described by Professor Walter D Mignolo as a decolonial gesture. To contextualise, for Mignolo, the term decolonial belongs to a genealogy of meanings, processes and contexts of which colonialism informs content, the 'de' in decolonial referring to the confrontation with the colonial.⁷¹⁹ Mignolo considers decoloniality as the third part of a complex concept of power: modernity/coloniality/decoloniality.⁷²⁰ Quijano has expanded on this concept of power, believing it can be summarised as 'domination/exploitation/conflict'.⁷²¹ For Mignolo, the decolonial gesture is aligned with a performative operation, and in being a gesture it conveys a feeling, a sentiment or an intention that is decolonial.⁷²² In essence, a decolonial gesture alludes to modernity/coloniality yet it severs the link, it 'delink[s] from it'.⁷²³ In breaking with coloniality, decolonial gestures are both analytic and prospective.⁷²⁴ They permit alternative knowledge systems to materialise, previously denied by the static projections by colonial knowledge and power systems. The process of

⁷¹⁶ Reed, *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷¹⁷ Quoted in Reed, *ibid.*, p. 15; see also Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla: Views from South*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp. 533-580.

⁷¹⁸ Reed, *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷¹⁹ Walter D Mignolo, 'Looking for the Meaning of "Decolonial Gesture"', in Maria Hlavajova & Simon Sheikh (eds), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, BAK basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2016, pp. 85-86.

⁷²⁰ Mignolo, *ibid.*

⁷²¹ See discussion of this concept in Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *op. cit.*, pp. 548-549, 555 & 561; also Mignolo, *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁷²² Mignolo, *ibid.*

⁷²³ Mignolo, *ibid.*

⁷²⁴ Mignolo, *ibid.*

materialisation encapsulates 're-existence, re-surgence, and re-emergence' which become the project and processes that shape 'decolonial global futures'.⁷²⁵

Mignolo's decolonial gesture relates to aesthetics in connection with the institutional space, that is, the traditional art gallery, the colonial space in which the actions of exhibition and curation take place. The exhibition of urban Indigenous art within the colonial art institution demonstrates the decolonial gesture because in the space itself, as a contributor to the regime of knowledge production, it has the capacity to disrupt the continuum of colonialism. Aesthetics are key, because in urban Indigenous art, they are inconsistent with colonial knowledge and its visual hierarchy.

While it could be argued that all exhibited urban Indigenous art confronts colonial knowledge and power within the institution, this does not account for the Eurocentric philosophy, frameworks, agendas and practices that such an institution adheres to.⁷²⁶ The confrontation with colonial knowledge works best in an institution, when the curation itself of urban Indigenous is a decolonial gesture. This is where the shifting field of global contemporary art has an impact.

To contextualise, art historian Albert Alberro, has contended that changes in contemporary art were evident as a result of the inevitable flow of time and as cosmopolitanism advanced, which stimulated paradigmatic tensions that would eventually alter the movement permanently. He explains it this way:

The years following 1989 have seen the emergence of a new historical period. Not only has there been the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states and the heralding of the

⁷²⁵ Mignolo, *ibid.* pp. 87-88.

⁷²⁶ Reed, 'Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn', *op. cit.*, p. 16.

era of globalisation, but technologically there has been the full integration of electronic or digital culture, and economically neoliberalism, with its goal to bring all human action into the domain of the market, has become hegemonic. Within the context of the fine arts, this new period has come to be known as the contemporary.⁷²⁷

Alberro contends that this new historical period encapsulating digital culture, economic liberalism and human action outline the parameters of global contemporary art, which differs decisively from the previous art historical demarcations. While the period's espousal of newness bound it characteristically to past art movements, such as the avant-garde, its demonstration of global cultural hegemony expanded it beyond any simple modern iteration. This key aspect of global cultural hegemony was oppositional to colonial hegemony.

Art historian and critic, Terry Smith, concurs, explaining that in late modern art, a change commenced that was followed by a 'boom' in the development of global concerns.⁷²⁸ He has suggested that this transitional phase, discernible by the 1990s, emitted an identifiable contemporary 'brand', which extended the principles of 'late modern' or 'postmodern' art.⁷²⁹ This shift was caused primarily by temporal breadth, in which there were no restrictions to geographic and cultural diversity. The implication of Smith's definition is that the geographic and cultural demarcations established by the colonial art institution were in jeopardy.

In the Australian art world, from the 1990s onward, contemporary art, in the shifting context described above, was engendered most obviously in the art biennial, triennial, survey exhibition, festival and expo of contemporary art. These temporary exhibitions have been described by curators as 'the locus for contemporary culture's most engaged debates and host to some of its

⁷²⁷ Alexander Alberro, 'Periodising Contemporary Art', in Zoya Kocur & Simon Leung (eds), *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, op. cit., p. 64

⁷²⁸ These are all subheadings specified by the author in Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

⁷²⁹ Smith, *ibid.* p. 11.

most thought-provoking art-works'.⁷³⁰ The growth of such exhibitions offered more opportunity, additional exposure and a broader contribution by contemporary artists working in Australia than had occurred previously. At the same time, the number of art spaces engaging with contemporary art multiplied, which allowed curatorial practices to broaden. Curatorship was prioritised as curators became institutionally recognised as art world experts.⁷³¹

The success of these exhibitions in non-Western cities, as well as in the West, and in locations outside the traditional art centres, was vital to the restructuring of the art world on a global scale.⁷³² Some of these global exhibitions remained committed to extending the Western artworld aesthetic, while others circumvented or challenged it, to present an alternative hub of artistic concentration to those dominant in Euro-America.⁷³³ The latter would have the biggest impact on epistemic change. The decolonial gesture can be discerned most clearly as curators and their institutions, through biennials and similar types of exhibitions, presented art from the periphery that attenuated the centre.⁷³⁴

This reversal was significant for urban Indigenous art, as prior to the 1990s, opportunities to Indigenousise the curated space in the context of biennials and surveys was limited. For example, in Australia there was only one early instance in 1986, Nick Waterlow's *Origins, Originality + Beyond: 6th Biennale of Sydney*, in which urban Indigenous artist James Simon (language group

⁷³⁰ Barbara Vanderlinden & Elena Filipovic, 'Introduction', in Barbara Vanderlinden & Elena Filipovic (eds), *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Roomade and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005, p. 13.

⁷³¹ Mari Carmen Ramirez, 'Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson & Sandy Nairne (eds), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996, p. 22.

⁷³² Thomas Boutoux, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Manifesta in Rotterdam and Ljubljana', in Vanderlinden & Filipovic (eds), *The Manifesta Decade*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁷³³ Alberro, 'Periodising Contemporary Art', op. cit. p. 67.

⁷³⁴ In Australia, a shift from the former to the latter was noted, particularly with regard to the *Biennale of Sydney*, which in previous decades promoted 'world art' with a distinctly Western bias.

unknown) participated.⁷³⁵ It was on the cusp of the 1990s that a change is identified, with *Australian Perspecta '89*, co-curated by Victoria Lynn and Tony Bond. Despite the inclusion of both Gordon Bennett and Fiona Foley (Badtjala) within this biennial of contemporary Australian art, it was Artspace's contribution to *Australian Perspecta '89*, in which the primary decolonial gesture took place.⁷³⁶ Artspace presented *A Koori Perspective*, curated by Avril Quail (Noonuccal). The venue's director at the time, Sally Couacaud, has explained that the exhibition:

... constituted the first exhibition of Koori art selected by a Koori curator to be included in any major survey exhibition, and confirmed Artspace's commitment to encouraging appreciation and understanding of Koori art, as well as focusing on issues of visibility and marginalisation.⁷³⁷

Artspace, as a contemporary art institution, was delivering on its mission and vision statement, providing the opportunity for audiences to 'encounter the artists and ideas of [the] times', without cultural or geographic exclusion.⁷³⁸ The gesture of selecting Aboriginal curator Quail to survey contemporary Koori art was a bold move in agency that specifically brought attention to urban Indigenous art.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁵ Note that Nick Waterlow had also curated *European Dialogue: 3rd Biennale of Sydney*, 1979, which was a watershed moment for remote Australian Indigenous art, in which Ramingining artists John Banguwuy (Gupapuyngu people), David Malangi Daymirringu (Manharmgu people) and George Milpurrruru (Ganalbingu people), for example, were included.

⁷³⁶ Though *Australian Perspecta '89* ran from 31 May – 23 July 1989 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, *A Koori Perspective Tour* toured to six venues from October 1990 until August 1991 including Campbelltown Bicentennial Art Gallery, Moree Plains Regional Gallery, Dubbo Regional Art Gallery, Broken Hill City Art Gallery, Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute, and Bendigo Art Gallery.

⁷³⁷ Sally Couacaud quoted in Avril Quail, *A Koori Perspective Tour: An Artspace Touring Exhibition*, Artspace, Sydney, 1990, n.p.

⁷³⁸ See Artspace's Vision and Mission statement, in Artspace, 'About Us', 2018, viewed 9 April 2018, <<https://www.artspace.org.au/about/about-artspace/>>. Also, Artspace intensified its commitment to contemporary Indigenous art, having already set a precedent with the 1984 exhibition *Koori Art '84* and the inclusion of Koori artists within the exhibition of international contemporary art entitled *Paraculture* earlier in 1990, which ran from 18 January to 24 February 1990.

⁷³⁹ The term 'Koori' is applicable in more than one context. It may refer generally to Aboriginal language groups in New South Wales and Victoria, however, more specifically it refers to the language groups of the Mid North Coast and Hunter regions of New South Wales. The slightly differently spelled word 'Koorie', which is one alternative spelling of 'Koori', is also used to identify, in general terms, Victorian Aboriginal people. See Flinders University, 'Appropriate Terminology, Indigenous Australian Peoples', Flinders University, Bedford Park, Adelaide, c.2004, viewed 17 May 2018, <https://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/10043/appropriate_indigenous_terminology.pdf>; also John T Patten, 'Aboriginal History – Why Koori History', *Koorihistory.com*, 2018, viewed 17 May 2018, <<http://koorihistory.com/about/>>; and State Library Victoria, 'Koori Victoria', 2018, State Library Victoria, viewed 17 May 2018, <<https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/search-discover/explore-collections-theme/koori-victoria>>.



Figure 81:
Sally Morgan,
Citizenship, 1987,
screenprint from one stencil,
edition 19/30,
58.6 x 36.4 cm (image),
76.3 x 56.8 cm (sheet),
NGA Collection.

NOTE: This image has been removed according to the author's instructions

Figure 82:
Robert Campbell Jnr,
Charlie Perkins, 1986,
acrylic on canvas,
91 x 120 cm,
Courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney.

The two works above from *A Koori Perspective* demonstrate socio-political aesthetics most notably. The pair call into question citizenship and land rights ahead of the Bicentenary. As expressed in the lower section of *Citizenship*, 1987 (fig. 81), Sally Morgan (Palku-Nyamal) refers specifically to the Native (Citizenship Rights) Act of 1944, whereby Aboriginal people were not

recognised as citizens without a magistrate's approval.⁷⁴⁰ 'Dog tags' or citizenship papers were approved when Aboriginal people could demonstrate that they were 'civilised'.⁷⁴¹ 'Civilised' was a euphemism for adhering to the ways of European settler life, in essence, assimilation, which denied Aboriginality. The artist has explained that members of her family jokingly referred to the formal certificates of citizenship as a Dog License, believing this to be more indicative of the treatment that accompanied life at the time.⁷⁴² The artist is highly critical of Australia's treatment of its First Nation Peoples. Her jackal-headed Anubis (the Egyptian god) also implies that dogs were given better treatment than Aboriginal people.⁷⁴³ In terms of composition, Morgan has elaborated on her use of text, stating that it allows her to add explicit meaning to an image.⁷⁴⁴ Her combination of simple iconography and text, in bold contrast, allows her political message about racism and inequality to be dramatically conveyed. *Citizenship* was originally produced for the exhibition *Right Here, Right Now Australia 1988*, which presented alternative views about celebrating Australia's 200 years of settlement.⁷⁴⁵ Morgan's aesthetic, like that of her 1980s peers, draws attention to matters of discrimination, which in retrospect, underscored the socio-political relevance of this work beyond its production date.

Meanwhile, in *Charlie Perkins*, 1986 (fig. 82), Robert Campbell Jnr (Ngaku) honours the man (Arremte/Kalkadoon), who in 1965 drew attention to the racial intolerance that was rife within Australia through his involvement in the historic Freedom Ride.⁷⁴⁶ Perkins was the Chairman of

⁷⁴⁰ Steven Miller, 'Sally Morgan', in Julie Donaldson & Theresa Willsted (eds), *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*, revised edn, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2013, p. 96.

⁷⁴¹ Chris Cunneen, 'Framing the Crimes of Colonialism: Critical Images of Aboriginal Art and Law', in Keith J Hayward & Mike Presdee (eds), *Framing Crime: Cultural Criminology and the Image*, Routledge, Abingdon, United Kingdom & New York, 2010, p. 130.

⁷⁴² Quoted in Miller, 'Sally Morgan', op. cit.

⁷⁴³ Miller, *ibid.*

⁷⁴⁴ Sally Morgan, 'Sally Morgan', in Sylvia Kleinert & Margo Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Victoria, 2000, p. 648.

⁷⁴⁵ Miller, 'Sally Morgan', op. cit.

⁷⁴⁶ The Freedom Ride is discussed in the autobiography, Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1975. The historical event is believed to have been a catalyst in the positive outcome of the 1967 Referendum that recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australian citizens in the Australian Constitution; see Kaye Price (ed.),

the group 'Student Action For Aborigines' (SAFA), based at Sydney University, which was established following student demonstrations against racial segregation that had taken place in 1964 in the United States of America.⁷⁴⁷ The members of SAFA staged a bus trip to western New South Wales in order to see for themselves the conditions faced by Aboriginal people, while at the same time campaign against racial discrimination.⁷⁴⁸ The event was covered by state print media and radio, and reached an international audience via *The New York Times*.⁷⁴⁹ Perkins became the spokesperson for the group during the Freedom Ride and later spoke up for the rights of Australia's First Nations people who experienced inequality and social injustices that were a result of the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act.⁷⁵⁰

In Campbell Jnr's image, Perkins is presented in activist mode, holding a microphone and leading a land rights rally. He is emblazoned with the Aboriginal Flag as supporters express their views in the background. It is notable that Perkins visited the artist's community near the regional town of Kempsey.⁷⁵¹ Twenty years later, Campbell Jnr painted this portrait and has stated that, 'I am painting to show people, Aboriginal people and even the whites, what truths took place in my life ... I am telling the stories, the struggle of Aboriginal people, tribal and others, through my

Knowledge of Life: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria, 2015, pp. 33-34.

⁷⁴⁷ See Charles Perkins, 'Student Action for Aborigines Report', Conference on Aboriginal Affairs, 1965, pp. 47-48, AIATSIS Collections, 2015, viewed 17 May 2018, <<http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/collections/freedom-ride/safa-report-charles-perkins.pdf>>; also Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Commemorating the 'Freedom Ride': New South Wales, 12-26 February 1965*, virtual exhibition, AIATSIS, viewed 17 May 2018, <<http://aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/1965-freedom-ride>>.

⁷⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *ibid.*; see also Sydney Morning Herald, 'Country Tour in Bid to Aid Aborigines', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 1965, n.p., Victorian Aboriginal Group Press Clippings Collection 1965 Album, viewed 18 May 2018, <<http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/collections/freedom-ride/country-tour-bid-to-aid-aboriginals.pdf>>.

⁷⁴⁹ See Tillman Durdin, 'Sydney Students on Freedom Ride to Aid Natives', *The New York Times*, 26 February 1965, p. 4, The New York Times Archives, viewed 18 May 2018, <<https://www.nytimes.com/1965/02/26/archives/sydney-students-on-freedom-ride-to-aid-natives.html>>; also Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ See Martin Corben, 'Exhibition Allows Freedom to Ride Again', *ABC Sydney*, 8 July 2011, viewed 9 April 2018, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/07/08/3264676.htm>>; the Aborigines Protection Act is also discussed in Chapter 5 with regard to artist Rea.

⁷⁵¹ Bronwyn Watson, 'Charlie Perkins Portrait Captures the Bureaucrat and the Activist', *The Australian*, 6 August 2011, n.p., viewed 19 May 2018, <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/visual-arts/charlie-perkins-portrait-captures-the-bureaucrat-and-the-activist/news-story/b03f1121ae8e54b10eaa8045dbaa7fe9?sv=d799ff833ace276772538e39845e8a0b>>.

life'.⁷⁵² Campbell Jnr's image of Perkins in his activist role references Australia's socio-political past and highlights how certain people and moments can make an impact.

To return to the exhibition, Avril Quail said of the artists in *A Koori Perspective*, that their 'sources, aesthetics, subject matter and inspiration are firmly in an art heritage outside the mainstream influences of other Australian artists'.⁷⁵³ This is evident in *Citizenship* and *Charlie Perkins*, which are both provoked by the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience. As established in the previous chapters, it is also important that the memories and the narratives associated with such experience, often omitted by the dominant producers of knowledge, are brought to the surface for remembering and working through.⁷⁵⁴ Morgan plays a role in this process by presenting a testimonial image that reminds viewers of the inequalities faced by Indigenous people. Campbell Jnr has immortalised the Aboriginal leader Charlie Perkins through portraiture, a genre that has generally not been friendly to Aboriginal people. As part of the *Australian Perspectives '89* exhibition, Artspace's gesture was a bold one in which the curation of Koori art was amplified against the colonial and cultural authority of the biennial's principal institution, the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Another decolonial gesture occurred at the Art Gallery of New South Wales two years later in the summer of 1992/1993 with the exhibition *The Boundary Rider: 9th Biennale of Sydney*.⁷⁵⁵ This exhibition included Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffatt and the Campfire Group (Brisbane), and was curated by Tony Bond, also Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of New South

⁷⁵² Campbell Jnr quoted posthumously in Watson, *ibid.*

⁷⁵³ Avril Quail, *A Koori Perspective*, *op. cit.*, n.p.

⁷⁵⁴ See discussion in Chapter 3 around testimony and the theory of Gayatri Spivak; also the working through of memory in Chapter 5 citing Dominik LaCapra.

⁷⁵⁵ The exhibition ran 15 December 1992 until 14 March 1993.

Wales.⁷⁵⁶ Bond's rationale was calculated, and aligned with both Alberro's and Smith's ideas outlined above. The exhibition looked beyond the centres of the West, giving artists from alternative art centres, not previously shown in biennials, an opportunity to exhibit.⁷⁵⁷ This innovative move bolstered the affirmation of previously marginalised artists and their work.

A satellite component of *The Boundary Rider*, called *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery)*, coordinated by Boomalli and curated by Hetti Perkins (Arremte/Kalkadoon) and Liliana E Correa (Latin American) featured art with a strong socio-political aesthetic at Sydney's Performance Space. Its rationale centred on the 1992 Quincentenary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the 'New World', the Americas. Contemporary Latin American voices were included in this narrative so that parallels could be drawn with contemporary Australian Indigenous voices regarding the Bicentenary.⁷⁵⁸ As such, the entire exhibition was dedicated to works that asserted authority in identity, in spite of the artists' typically marginalised positions within the domains of history, religion, culture and gender.⁷⁵⁹ As curators brought the works of Latin American and Australian Aboriginal artists into dialogue with one another, their status within the colonisation narrative was fortified. Perkins and Correa observed that although Indigenous and immigrant peoples share experiences when they exist together under a cultural majority, they do not need to assimilate or be homogenised within the mainstream.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁶ Note that the *Biennale of Sydney* exhibitions extended to international contemporary art, in contrast to *Perspecta* exhibitions that surveyed the most recent Australian contemporary art.

⁷⁵⁷ See Anthony Bond (ed.), *The Boundary Rider: The 9th Biennale of Sydney*, The Biennale, Sydney, 1992; Andrew Frost, 'Biennial of Sydney: The Boundary Rider', *Scanlines*, University of New South Wales, viewed 7 January 2016, <<http://scanlines.net/event/biennale-sydney-boundary-rider>>; Vivien Johnson, 'The Unbounded Biennale: Contemporary Aboriginal Art', *Art and Australia*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1993, pp. 49-56.

⁷⁵⁸ See Brenda L Croft, 'To the Native, Born(e)', *Periphery*, no. 36, 1998, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁹ See Hetti Perkins, Liliana E Correa & Billy Crawford, 'Margin – A White Space for Black People', in Hetti Perkins & Liliana Correa, *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by Aboriginal and Latin American Artists*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Sydney, 1992, pp. 6-10.

⁷⁶⁰ Hetti Perkins & Billy Crawford, 'Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery)', in Bond, *The Boundary Rider*, op. cit., p. 266.

In keeping with Bond's vision of diversity in contemporary art, *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery)* presented the work of urban Indigenous artists Bronwyn Bancroft (Bundjalung), Brenda L Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara), Fiona Foley, Judy Watson (Waanyi) and Harry Wedge (Wiradjuri), along with Latin American artists Diogenes Farri, Eliana Madrid, Mauricio Novoa and Gonzalo Mella, in a gesture that clearly rejected art from the dominant centre.⁷⁶¹ As the curators said, 'Marginalisation describes the relationship and position of certain groups within society to a dominant hegemonic power'.⁷⁶² Instead, they challenged marginalising discourse allowing artists to declare their distinctive identity within social and cultural groups.⁷⁶³

Figure 83:
Harry J Wedge,
Immaculate Conception – What Hypocrisy!, 1992,
mixed media, figures: synthetic polymer
paint on plywood,
dimensions variable (installation)
213.5 x 102.8 cm (Man),
203.5 x 100.5 cm (Nun),
NGV Collection.
Photo: Greg Weight



Figure 84:
Judy Watson and Gonzalo Mella,
A Brief History of Colonization (detail), c. 1992,
powder pigment, charcoal, scenic paint, oil
stick, mediums, enamel and gold leaf on
canvas, with rope and eyelets,
280 x 800 cm,
location unknown.
Source: Hetti Perkins and Liliana E Correa,
*Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery):
A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by
Aboriginal and Latin American Artists,
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative,
Sydney, 1992.*



⁷⁶¹ Perkins & Correa, *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by Aboriginal and Latin American Artists*, op. cit.

⁷⁶² Perkins, Correa & Crawford, 'Margin – A White Space for Black People', op. cit., p. 6.

⁷⁶³ See Gayatri Spivak, 'Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value', in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Arnold, London, 1999, pp. 198-222.

All of the works included in *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery)* presented a socio-political aesthetic in which artists expressed views on the pervasive issue of colonisation and its flow-on effect on individuals and communities. The works above by Harry J Wedge and Judy Watson, the latter collaborating with Gonzalo Mella, are just two examples responding to the issue of colonisation.⁷⁶⁴ In the case of Wedge's *Immaculate Conception – What Hypocrisy!*, 1992 (fig. 83), the artist wrestles with how Christianity introduced to Aboriginal people has resulted in the loss of traditional spirituality and the consequent breaking down of ancestral bonds.⁷⁶⁵ Wedge employs allegory to expose this loss. He also satirises his experience of growing up on Erambie Mission, Cowra, where adherence to colonial religion and culture was expected.⁷⁶⁶ He has cast the male character as natural and untainted, indicative of Aboriginal life prior to colonisation. His nun, on the other hand, is cast as a snake, the teller of lies, whose religion makes no sense in spite of the fact that it maintained colonial authority.⁷⁶⁷

Meanwhile, in *A Brief History of Colonization*, (fig. 84) Judy Watson reflects on the frontier violence that took place at Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill), in her great grandmother's country.⁷⁶⁸ She depicts various visual elements relating to the death of Waanyi people in Queensland as a result of punitive retaliation raids.⁷⁶⁹ Viewers are assisted in piecing together the visual data by historical documentation that accompanies the work. A journal entry taken from the C. W. Teece and Glenville Pike publication, *Voice of the Wilderness*, 1978 (not shown here), recalled the 40

⁷⁶⁴ Unfortunately visual documentation of the five artists' works in this exhibition is limited, however, catalogue images of the artworks by Bancroft, Croft and Foley are available in the Appendix.

⁷⁶⁵ Harry J Wedge in Perkins & Correa, *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by Aboriginal and Latin American Artists*, op. cit., p. 32.

⁷⁶⁶ Judith Ryan, 'The Art of H J Wedge', in H J Wedge, *Wiradjuri Spirit Man*, Craftsman House in association with Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Roseville East, New South Wales, 1996, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁶⁷ Wedge, *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ Judy Watson & Louise Martin-Chew, *Judy Watson Blood Language*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Victoria, 2009, p. 141.

⁷⁶⁹ See Watson & Martin-Chew, *ibid.*; also Judy Watson in Perkins & Correa, *Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by Aboriginal and Latin American Artists*, op. cit., p. 30.

pairs of Aboriginal ears nailed around the walls of a colonial Lawn Hill homestead.⁷⁷⁰ Watson expresses trauma affectively as she contributes to the politics of testimony.⁷⁷¹ Physicality and sensation are also projected onto the viewer through the depiction of the Aboriginal woman who stands restricted with hands behind her back, and the multiple ears that float around the canvas. These elements are arresting as viewers contemplate the pain of the sufferers.

Wedge's and Watson's autobiographical works are provoked by Australia's narrative of colonisation, incorporating dispossession, loss, introduced religion, imposed culture, trauma and conflict. Perkins and Correa enabled the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art to penetrate an eminent art event, delivering a strong message about marginality at the Performance Space. This inclusion complemented Bond's gesture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

That same year, Victoria Lynn curated *Australian Perspectives 1993*, which she linked to the International Year of the World's Indigenous People by selecting eleven Indigenous artists.⁷⁷²

The regional and urban Indigenous artists included were Ian Abdulla (Ngarindjeri), Richard Bell (Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang), Destiny Deacon (Ku Ku/Erub/Mer), Judy Watson and Harry J Wedge. This was a significant gesture that again promoted Indigeneity within the curated space, and urban Indigenous art was well represented. Two years later, *Australian Perspectives 1995* broke with the tradition of having a curator from within the institution and instead

⁷⁷⁰ Cecil William Teece & Glenville Pike, *Voice of the Wilderness*, C W Teece, Rockhampton, Queensland, 1978, quoted in Perkins & Correa, *ibid.*

⁷⁷¹ See discussion in Chapter 3.

⁷⁷² See United Nations, *International Year of the World's Indigenous People, 1993*, General Assembly, A/RES/47/75, 85th plenary meeting, 14 December 1992, viewed 20 August 2014, <<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r075.htm>>; also Keating, Paul, 'Transcript of Redfern Speech (Year for the World's Indigenous People)', delivered in Redfern Park, 10 December 1992, viewed 9 August 2012, <http://antar.org.au/sites/default/files/paul_keating_speech_transcript.pdf>.

commissioned independent curator Judy Annear. Annear followed Bond's biennale.⁷⁷³ Annear's rationale centred on hybridity and diversity.⁷⁷⁴ The exhibition included Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri), Fiona Foley, Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway) and Tracey Moffatt. Each of these four artists subscribed to Annear's vision that within a society in flux, the collisions between people, ideas and technologies can have a constructive rather than a negative effect.⁷⁷⁵ This was a vision urban Indigenous artists had articulated at the beginning of the movement, and it was finally penetrating the institution via the curated space.



Figure 85:
Brook Andrew,
I'll Give You Propaganda, 1995,
computer-generated text piece, telephones,
sound recording, dimensions variable,
installation,
location unknown.
Source: Alex Gawronski, 'Brook Andrew:
Seeing Black', *Globe*,
issue 10, 1999, online,
<http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/globe/issue10/batit.html>.

Brook Andrew's *I'll Give You Propaganda*, 1995 (fig. 85), is one example from the exhibition. It conveys the idea of identity as a viable consumerist product, which he markets with billboard advertising. Underlying this conceptually is Andrew's view that mainstream Australian identity is premised upon 'colonialist ideologies of ownership'.⁷⁷⁶ Andrew is critical of the way Indigenous culture is taken advantage of by dominant Anglo-Australian culture when it suits, such as in tourism, to reflect a 'national' identity.⁷⁷⁷ As a counter move, he engages in a process of language reclamation, employing the Koori word 'Gwangne', to signify the affirmation of Indigenous culture while, at the same time, revealing the trajectory of colonial ascendancy with

⁷⁷³ Judy Annear, 'Partial Cultures', in Judy Annear (ed.), *Australian Perspectives 1995*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1995, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁴ Annear, *ibid.*, pp. 7–10.

⁷⁷⁵ Annear, *ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

⁷⁷⁶ Hetti Perkins, 'Brook Andrew', in Annear, *Australian Perspectives 1995*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁷⁷⁷ Perkins, *ibid.*

regard to language and culture.⁷⁷⁸ The importance of art such as Andrew's was that via its aesthetic, it began to dilute accepted hegemonic knowledge that had emanated from the art institution for so long.

In addition to the premier Sydney-based contemporary art surveys discussed above, a key event exhibiting the decolonial gesture was the *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT1)* at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1993. The triennial situated Australia as part of the Asian and Pacific art region, demonstrating the shift in geographic borders in terms of the global contemporary art context, noted above.⁷⁷⁹ A total of 76 artists presented contemporary Asia-Pacific art, without the dominating lens of Euro-America.⁷⁸⁰ Complementing the exhibition, an international conference staged by the Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, Brisbane, was held at Brisbane's Cultural Centre, where 450 delegates attended.⁷⁸¹ *APT1* was the first of its kind to focus exclusively on contemporary art from the Asia-Pacific region, recognising the rise in geo-political importance of the region, both in terms of Australian and global contexts.⁷⁸² Several Australian Indigenous artists were included, with Judy Watson representing urban Indigenous art. In subsequent stagings of the *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, urban Indigenous artists continued to be promoted with Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta), Destiny Deacon and members of the Campfire Group selected for *APT2*, 1996–1997, with an emphasis in each case upon installation and performance.⁷⁸³ For the third *APT* in 1999–

⁷⁷⁸ Gwangne may be interpreted as 'crazy', possibly to be used in a playful context, personal email correspondence with Laura Thompson, personal assistant to Brook Andrew, 3 October 2017.

⁷⁷⁹ Andrea Buddensieg, 'Mapping: The Biennials and New Art Regions', in Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg & Peter Weibel (eds), *Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, Centre for Art and Media, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 112.

⁷⁸⁰ Buddensieg, *ibid.* See also Suzanne Grano (ed.), *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1993.

⁷⁸¹ Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, 'The 1st Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT1): Opening and Public Programs', Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, viewed 15 October 2014, <http://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/apt/apt_1_%281993%29>.

⁷⁸² Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, 'The 1st Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT1): Opening and Public Programs', *ibid.*

⁷⁸³ Sadly Lin Onus passed away on 24 October 1996, during the run of *APT2* (22 September 1996 to 19 January 1997).

2000, curated by five teams, Karen Casey (Tasmanian Aboriginal people) and Gordon Bennett were selected to address the theme 'crossing borders', focusing on cultural experience outside their country of origin.⁷⁸⁴

Bennett investigated this theme with his first *Notes to Basquiat Series*, 1998-1999, which took his practice in a new direction. The series of works on paper consists of appropriated imagery from the American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988).⁷⁸⁵ This aesthetic technique, cultivated an entry point for conceptual interaction with Basquiat whose style he mimicked.⁷⁸⁶ As part of the series, Bennett wrote an open letter to Basquiat explaining how the late artist's aesthetics affected him.⁷⁸⁷ Bennett considered how the visual elements in Basquiat's work, phenomenologically reflect the layers of shared histories and experiences of individuals that exist despite people's varying proximities in time, space and cultural context.⁷⁸⁸ Bennett said of his work:

... appropriation and citation, sampling and remixing are an integral part, as are attempts to communicate a basic underlying humanity to the perception of 'blackness' in its philosophical and historical production within western cultural contexts.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁴ See Doug Hall, 'Foreword', in Jennifer Webb (ed.), *Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 1999, p. 19; Rhana Devenport, 'The APT3 Curatorial Process: Negotiating Cultural Moments', in Webb, *ibid.*, p. 25. Although the triennial exhibitions were temporary, various works included have entered the permanent collection of the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

⁷⁸⁵ For an overview of the life and work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, see *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat, 2016, viewed 5 April 2018, <<http://www.basquiat.com/index-new.htm>>.

⁷⁸⁶ Art Gallery of New South Wales, 'Notes to Basquiat (in the future art will not be boring)', Art Gallery of New South Wales, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/21.2014/>>.

⁷⁸⁷ Letter reproduced in Nicholas Thomas, 'Gordon Bennett', in Webb (ed.), *Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁷⁸⁸ Gordon Bennett, 'A Short Note to Basquiat', in Queensland Art Gallery, *APT3*, 1999, online archive, viewed 5 April 2018, <<http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/apt3/artists/default.htm>>.

⁷⁸⁹ Gordon Bennett, 'Notes to Basquiat', in *Gordon Bennett*, exhibition catalogue, Sherman Galleries, Paddington, New South Wales, 1999, n.p.

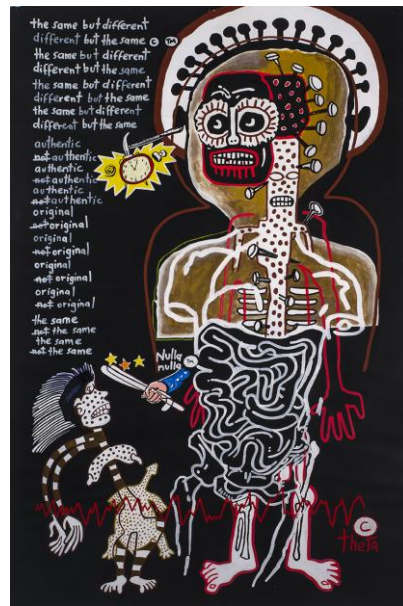


Figure 86:
Gordon Bennett,
Notes to Basquiat:
(ab)Original, 1998,
synthetic polymer paint
on paper,
120 x 80 cm (sheet),
Griffith University Art
Collection © The Estate
of Gordon Bennett.

In referencing Basquiat, Bennett was engaging in a global art historical network. The work *Notes to Basquiat: (ab)Original*, 1998 (fig. 86), is typical of the series as a whole.⁷⁹⁰ It incorporates text that refers to Bennett's musings about the shared phenomena of culture across borders, and iconography indicative of stereotyping that occurs in relation to blackness.⁷⁹¹ The image consolidates on Bennett's notion that Aboriginality engenders something of a universal sameness, yet simultaneously presents visual cues particular to an Australian audience. As explained in previous chapters, he was also acutely aware of the role of colonialism and how its language has determined the meaning of Aboriginality as something 'other'.⁷⁹² Here Bennett has reflected on the discourse of the 'other', along with the hierarchies of cultural authenticity associated with it.⁷⁹³ *Notes to Basquiat (ab)Original* is particularly effective as a gesture, posing questions of identity and meaning that challenge dominant knowledge and value judgements about culture.

⁷⁹⁰ See an alternative example from Bennett's *Notes to Basquiat* (works on paper) series in Appendix.

⁷⁹¹ Kelly Gellatly, 'Citizen in the Making', in *Gordon Bennett*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁹² Chris Saines, 'Vale: Gordon Bennett', Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, online blog, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/gordon-bennett-1955-2014/>>.

⁷⁹³ Refer to sub-chapter 'Toward Decolonisation' in Chapter 1 for more information on the 'other'.

Meanwhile, in Sydney, *Australian Perspecta* continued with iterations in 1997 and 1999, in each case promoting urban Indigenous artists.⁷⁹⁴ Artists in each of these 1997 and 1999 instalments were curated into a number of separate exhibitions as the event took place across several venues as part of a more expanded approach to presenting and offering access to contemporary art. This mirrored earlier multi-venue engagement, noted in relation to Artspace's *A Koori Perspective*, and aligned with Tony Bond's rationale for *The Boundary Rider* having satellite venues. The added effect at the end of the twentieth century was that venues were seamlessly Indigenous as urban Indigenous art fulfilled accepted notions of contemporary art.

At the turn of the millennium, following the collapse of geographic and temporal divisions characteristic of the 1990s, a multipolar, regional world began to synthesise, conveying a general shift toward a distinct contemporaneity.⁷⁹⁵ In an art world context, this shift was thought to be the consequence of how artists within decolonised cultures were engaging with issues concerning ideology, translation, nationality, identity and rights.⁷⁹⁶ The ideological and issue-based current of contemporary art ascended predominantly in places previously under colonial rule and where the pursuit of economic and political independence had resulted in the collision of ideologies, issues and experiences.⁷⁹⁷

For urban Indigenous artists around the year 2000, the 'localised' world at this time engendered acute specificity pertaining to place, politics and identity (thematic areas that have been noted

⁷⁹⁴ The 1997 version, subtitled *Between Art & Nature*, was again curated by Victoria Lynn, and featured Rea (Kamilaroi/Wailwan) and Leah King-Smith (language group unknown). The 1999 version, subtitled *Art and Politics Living Here Now*, was co-curated by Joanna Foster, Bronwyn Clarke-Coolee and Cara Pinchbeck and featured the work of yet another record number of urban Indigenous artists including Destiny Deacon, Michael Riley, Darren Siwes, Brenda L Croft, Alice Hinton-Bateup, Gordon Bennett, Brook Andrew, Karen Casey, Fiona Foley, Tracey Moffatt, Trevor Nickolls, Jeffrey Samuels and Judy Watson.

⁷⁹⁵ Terry Smith, 'General Introduction: Contemporary Art in Transition', in *Contemporary Art: World Currents* op. cit., p. 11.

⁷⁹⁶ Terry Smith, 'The Transnational Transition: Introduction', in *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, op. cit., p. 82.

⁷⁹⁷ Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, op. cit., p. 10.

earlier in this thesis) that were explored under the banner of experience. Experience was shared, emitting a 'collectivity' among artists, or a pan-Aboriginality. This was relatively conceptual in nature, complementing the physical community of artists that were drawn together, as described in the earliest phase of the movement prior to 1990.

Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art

What had been building throughout the last decade of the twentieth century in regard to the Indigenisation of the curated space, culminated in March 2000, with *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*. This was Adelaide's sixth biennial of contemporary Australian art and it was comprised wholly of Indigenous content. This made for a powerful decolonial gesture. Furthermore, it marked the first time that the Art Gallery of South Australia had commissioned an Indigenous curator – Brenda L Croft.⁷⁹⁸ The biennial aligned ideologically with Eddie Chambers's prerogative of promoting 'Black art' and recognised that there must be more support of 'Black' actors within the contemporary art world.⁷⁹⁹ Ron Radford, Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia at the time, said, '*Beyond the Pale* deliberately challenges notions about Australian Indigenous culture' and that:

The Biennial, however, was never intended as a mere standard survey of recent Australian art but an exhibition showing some of the most interesting, vital and challenging aspects of recent art. And to ensure a different perspective a different curator is chosen each time.⁸⁰⁰

A curator of a biennial is in a position of influence, as art critic Brois Groys has explained in reference to their responsibilities in the context of authorship:

⁷⁹⁸ The 1994 *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* drew on the expertise of Indigenous Curator Doreen Mellor, who participated in a shared curatorial role in *Adelaide Installations*, alongside Alison Carroll and John Barrett-Lennard. See Penelope Curtin (ed.), *Adelaide Installations, Incorporating the 1994 Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1994.

⁷⁹⁹ Eddie Chambers, '2000's Got to be Black', in Brenda L Croft (ed.), *Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2000, p. 15–19.

⁸⁰⁰ Ron Radford, 'Foreword', in Croft (ed.), *ibid.*

In many cases, the curator recontextualises and also redefines the already existing art production by putting it in the context of an international project or exhibition. But in an even greater number of cases, a new work is produced by an artist in collaboration with a curator, with a conscious goal to be placed in a certain theoretical, political or artistic context.⁸⁰¹

For Croft, her biennial was consciously political. Her curatorial rationale was based on overturning preconceived notions about contemporary Indigenous art and challenging the 'perceptions and misconceptions' that impact on Australian Indigenous Peoples.⁸⁰² She incriminated colonialism, exposing Australia's history of building empires 'on the bones of the dispossessed'.⁸⁰³ She was conscious of presenting Indigenous artworks that reflected on this historical narrative and specifically drew attention to the key themes of colonisation, the impact of the church, mission life, Indigenous communities as dispossessed and outcast peoples, and Indigenous resistance and cultural continuity.⁸⁰⁴

In selecting Indigenous artist Croft as curator, Radford acknowledged the potential of her rationale to deliver an exhibition that deliberately engaged the viewer with her political position. As expected, the urban Indigenous artworks reflected her sentiments. A total of 25 Indigenous artists featured in the biennial, with nine of those working within a framework of regional and urban Indigenous art: Ian W Abdulla, Destiny Deacon, Julie Dowling (Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi), Gordon Hookey (Waanyi/Waanjiminjin), Clinton Nain (Meriam Mer), Rea (Kamilaroi/Wailwan), Michael Riley (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi), Darren Siwes (Ngalkban), and Judy Watson.

⁸⁰¹ Boris Groys, 'Multiple Authorship', in Vanderlinden & Filipovic, *The Manifesta Decade*, op. cit., p. 94.

⁸⁰² Croft offered a historical context for this rationale in her exhibition catalogue essay, 'Beyond the Pale: Empires Built on the Bones of the Dispossessed', in Croft (ed.), *Beyond the Pale*, op. cit., pp. 8-14. She reflected on the various meanings of the word 'pale', discussing some of the ongoing effects of colonisation, the impact of the church, mission life, Indigenous communities as dispossessed and outcast peoples, and also Indigenous resistance and cultural continuity.

⁸⁰³ Croft, 'Beyond the Pale: Empires Built on the Bones of the Dispossessed', op. cit., pp. 8-14

⁸⁰⁴ Croft, *ibid.*

Croft's selection of the works for *Beyond the Pale*, was strategic, and can be aligned with Michel Foucault's definition as 'rationality functioning to arrive at an objective'.⁸⁰⁵ Expanding on strategy, Foucault has explained that one designates the manner in which an opponent's actions should be, and designates procedures used in confrontation to deprive that opponent of power.⁸⁰⁶ In other words, strategy is based on foresight and on locating an advantage.⁸⁰⁷ Croft consolidated on perceptions of contemporary Indigenous art as being radical and socially significant, particularly in regard to examples of urban Indigenous art.⁸⁰⁸ By including examples of urban Indigenous art, she designated particular aesthetics to the exhibition that confronted viewers and challenged them to contemplate how and why popular accepted notions of Indigeneity had come to pass. The objective for Croft was the recognition of Indigenous perspectives, effectively reducing or 'depriving' a colonial frame of understanding. It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss all of the regional or urban Indigenous artworks that were included in *Beyond the Pale*.⁸⁰⁹ Instead, just a few will be focused upon in order to underscore how the socio-political aesthetic was consonant to Croft's vision of agency.

⁸⁰⁵ Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' op. cit., p. 793.

⁸⁰⁶ Foucault, *ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ Foucault, *ibid.*

⁸⁰⁸ See Catherine De Lorenzo, Joanna Mendelssohn & Catherine Speck, '1968-2008: Curated Exhibitions and Australian Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 4, 2011, p. 14.

⁸⁰⁹ Artworks by most of the rural or urban Indigenous artists who were included in *Beyond the Pale* have been discussed elsewhere in the thesis or will follow in this section. An example of Ian W Abdulla's artwork that appeared in the exhibition is included in the Appendix.



Figure 87:
Julie Dowling,
Melbin, 1999,
synthetic polymer paint, red ochre and plastic
on canvas,
120 x 100 cm,
Collection of Sir James and Lady Cruthers.

Julie Dowling uses autobiography to accentuate the socio-political aesthetic though personal experience in the work *Melbin*, 1999 (fig. 87). The image, is reminiscent of a work discussed earlier in relation to the Stolen Generations titled *Her Father's Servant*, 1999 (fig. 69, Chapter 5). *Melbin*, similarly, was related to Julie Dowling; she was the artist's great-great-grandmother and the family's oral history describes how *Melbin* was transported to England to be exhibited.⁸¹⁰ Dowling has explained that *Melbin* was shown in men's clubs, carnivals and sideshows in England and Wales before falling pregnant and returning with her husband to Perth.⁸¹¹ The display of Indigenous Peoples and cultures in Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was general practice within the context of natural history exhibitions. These showcased European discoveries made abroad, which propagated the concepts of scientific racism, extending the principles of the Enlightenment, and justified the practices of colonisation.⁸¹² In today's socio-political climate, the above practice is acknowledged as having promoted and entrenched racism, where a colonial gaze applied to non-European peoples and

⁸¹⁰ Julie Dowling, artist statement, *see|me*, online, viewed 9 December 2014, <https://julie-dowling.see.me/post/2786556?tab=image>; also Jeanette Hoorn, 'Julie Dowling's *Strange Fruit*: Testimony and the Uncanny in Contemporary Australian Painting', *Third Text*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2005, pp. 286-287.

⁸¹¹ Dowling quoted in Hoorn, *ibid.*

⁸¹² See Sadiyah Qureshi, 'Robert Gordon Latham, Displayed People, and the Natural History of Race, 1854-1866', *The History Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2011, pp. 143-166; see also Katherine Gregory, 'The Human Zoo: Documentary Sheds Light on Aboriginal People 'Treated as Animals'', *ABC News*, 28 January 2017, viewed 24 May 2018, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-28/the-human-zoo-documentary-aboriginal-people-forced-exhibits/8219116>>; and Hoorn, *ibid.*, pp. 283-296.

cultures was paramount in the process of 'othering'. By illustrating components of her family narrative, viewers are exposed to this past practice.

Melbin is venerated by Dowling, however, as demonstrated by the gold outline and halo that encapsulates her figure. The halo has been employed by the artist in many works, symbolising the tradition of icon art and figures of reverence.⁸¹³ The artist's ancestors are illustrated in the faces of Indigenous people who form a background to *Melbin*. At the same time these faces are the Indigenous contingent Dowling ultimately represents in the present. In this way the artist underscores how the connectivity of culture spans time and generations, despite the impact of colonialism. This figurative pairing is punctuated, however, with rows of ships, shackles and European objects, which compete with ancient Indigenous iconography to create a visual narrative demonstrating how the onset of colonialism would depleted the bonds of heritage and the loss encountered by the artist's kin. Together, these autobiographic and visual cues illustrate Dowling's socio-political aesthetic, exposing colonisation as fuelling the ultimate power structures that have impacted upon Indigenous culture.

Croft believes that choosing to remain ignorant of the history of this country is a crime.⁸¹⁴ Dowling's artwork *Melbin* contributes to this strategy of exposure, in referring to a colonial past and its effect on the individual Indigenous person, and those in subsequent generations. The strategy is one in which the exhibition space becomes a zone of contact, not only between artist and viewer, but between viewer and narrative, viewer and culture, viewer and Indigeneity. Croft is equally aware that temporally, not only has the past been framed by colonialism, but the present

⁸¹³ See Julie Dowling, 'Icons', in *Julie Dowling*, website, viewed 24 May 2018, <<https://www.juliedowling.net/icons.html>>.

⁸¹⁴ Croft, 'Beyond the Pale: Empires Built on the Bones of the Dispossessed', op. cit., p. 14.

has too. This is addressed with Gordon Hookey's installation piece, the overtly political *King hit (for Queen and country)*, 1999 (fig. 88).



Figure 88:
 Gordon Hookey,
King hit (for Queen and country), 1999,
 synthetic polymer paint and oil on leather
 punching bag and gloves with steel swivel
 and rope noose bag,
 96 x 34 cm (dia.), gloves 29 x 16 x 12 cm
 each, rope noose 250 cm,
 QAG|GoMA Collection.

Hookey's painted boxing bag and gloves specifically expresses the artist's antipathy toward the Australian Howard Government and its Liberal policies. The artist holds the government accountable for the dire state of Indigenous affairs that has resulted in the destruction of Indigenous culture. These were interpreted as on-going, from a lack of perceived change relating to Indigenous deaths in custody and the exclusion of criminal sanctions regarding the Racial Hatred Act (1995), to restrictions placed upon the Native Title Act (1993), which affected communities directly, and a general expenditure reduction for Indigenous affairs.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁵ See John Howard, 'Wik 10 Point Plan', media statement, The Department of The Prime Minister and Cabinet Wik Task Force, 1 May 1997, viewed 29 May 2018, <<https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00010323.pdf>>; also John Gardiner-Garden, 'Overview of Indigenous Affairs: Part 2: 1992-2010', Parliament of Australia, 2011, viewed 29 May 2018, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/1011/Indigenous_Affairs2#_Toc295218057>; also *Native Title Amendment Bill* (1997).

In an act of resistance, Hookey juxtaposes his quintessential imagery of political leaders and police – those who are charged with political authority – as porcine, with a biting text that conveys the tensions of a given situation. The socio-political aesthetic is writ large where a pair of boxing gloves will make physical blows in a round with Prime Minister Howard – the figure of Hookey’s effigy. The act of a knock-out ‘king-hit’ is emotionally charged and retributive in nature, fuelled by ‘... the passion [Hookey feels] for [his] country and [his] people’.⁸¹⁶ The artist says, ‘... it reflects my frustration with the spiritless, small-minded people who ultimately hold power over our lands and our lives.’⁸¹⁷ The gloves are the colours of the Aboriginal flag, empowering the Indigenous subject in a reversal of the typical roles of power. More recently, curator Julie Ewington has asked viewers to consider whether the gloves symbolise the same thing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers.⁸¹⁸ Within the curated space, *King hit (for Queen and Country)* is a symbolic sculptural object attuned to obvious Indigenous subjectivity, but it has the capacity to elicit contemplation regarding Indigenous issues that have ascended at points of contact with the government.

Eddie Chambers has noted that in terms of the institution, ‘for black artists, the struggle remains the same: art establishment racism firmly in place and white folks still ahead’.⁸¹⁹ For Croft, Clinton Nain addressed this issue of racism in the institutional context Chambers described, as well as in terms of Indigenous culture.

⁸¹⁶ Gordon Hookey, artist statement, in Trevor Smith, ‘Gordon Hookey’, in Croft, *Beyond the Pale*, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

⁸¹⁷ Hookey, *ibid.*

⁸¹⁸ Julie Ewington, ‘Objects and Contexts: Where Do You Stand’, in Nicholas Chambers (ed.), *Sculpture is Everything: Contemporary Works from the Collection*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, South Brisbane, 2012, p. 41.

⁸¹⁹ Chambers, ‘2000’s Got to be Black’, op. cit., p. 16.



Figure 89:
Clinton Nain,
King dick, 1999,
bleach and beeswax on linen,
91 x 182 cm,
location unknown.
Source: Brenda L Croft (ed.),
*Beyond the Pale: 2000 Adelaide
Biennial of Australian Art*, Art
Gallery of South Australia,
Adelaide, 2000.

Nain's *King dick*, 1999 (fig. 89), incorporates genital iconography to comment, symbolically, upon dominant authorities and structures of power where racism dwells.⁸²⁰ Nain subverts the socio-cultural constructs of power that extend from within the system of differentiations that typically privilege the white, middle-class male, as well as the sexual dominance belonging to this demographic.⁸²¹ Nain presents an alternative power structure, an uncut, black penis, bigger and stronger than its white counterpart. Nain's pairing of these phallic symbols attempts to destabilise the foundation upon which attitudes and stereotypes regarding racial, cultural and sexual hierarchies have operated. These same subversive intentions have been previously referred to in this thesis in relation to artists such as Gordon Bennett and Richard Bell.⁸²² The artist's use of bleach, shown above, is pivotal to the body of work that *King dick* is a part of, and is a medium used in other early works by the artist.⁸²³ It is an unorthodox visual art medium employed to underscore the point that, despite the stains and shadows created when bleach is applied to black acrylic paint, in essence, the black is not entirely suppressed.⁸²⁴ Nain's aesthetic equally references colonisation. Just as the stringent chemical bleach was designed to kill bacteria, colonisation was calculated to quash Indigenous language, pride and culture.⁸²⁵ Moreover, the ideas of cleanliness and sterility hark back to governmental policies surrounding the objectives of

⁸²⁰ Structures of power are covered in Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 793-795.

⁸²¹ Freud, *ibid*, p. 792; also Gary Lee, 'Clinton Nain', *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

⁸²² See Chapter Four.

⁸²³ Another example is included in the Appendix.

⁸²⁴ Lee, 'Clinton Nain', *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

⁸²⁵ John Harding, 'Clinton Nain: Whitens, Removes Stains, Kills Germs!', Sherman Galleries, viewed 27 November 2014, <http://www.shermangalleries.com.au/artists_exhib/artists/nain/internal.html>.

missions and assimilation, a subject taken up by several artists in relation to the Stolen Generations, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Beyond the Pale was the first of its kind. Croft's biennial broke with tradition by limiting the scope of Australian art to contemporary Indigenous works, which effectively Indigenised the curated space. Adelaide's biennial survey of Australian art presented only Indigenous art, carefully selected by Croft to deliver a socio-political agenda that challenged audiences. This was a profound decolonial gesture at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Curatorial decisions and rationales at this gallery and other prominent institutions, have played large roles in delinking contemporary art from the typical colonial narratives and representations that had ensued almost into the twenty-first century.

The role of curators within galleries and institutions has been an important factor in the Indigenisation of the curated space. There were myriad exhibitions of contemporary art around this time in which Indigenous art was shown, whether solely, or in conjunction with non-Indigenous art in state galleries and museums. For urban Indigenous artists whose work was selected for a range of survey exhibitions in Australia during the last decade of the twentieth century, their socio-political aesthetic was endorsed through the curatorial conceptualisation and thematisation of such events. Curators have played a unique part in the dismantling of normative, privileging processes.⁸²⁶ They were precise and intentional in selecting works that conveyed discrete Indigenous perspectives on citizenship, equality, religion, losses of culture, history and language, cultural solidarity, the Stolen Generations and contemporary political debate. The works in which these perspectives materialised as the socio-political aesthetic, assisted curators

⁸²⁶ Chandra Frank, 'Policy Briefing: Toward a Decolonial Curatorial Practice', *Discover Society*, 2015, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://discoversociety.org/2015/06/03/policy-briefing-towards-a-decolonial-curatorial-practice/>>.

in delinking the curated space specifically from colonial knowledge and authority. In other words, as urban Indigenous works were adopted and endorsed, they contributed to the advancement of a global future in which the colonial legacy of the institution was being interrogated and restricted.

Over the last decade, the series of National Indigenous Art Triennials have developed as significant Australian art events: *Culture Warriors* (2007), *unDisclosed* (2012), and *Defying Empire* (2017). Curators Brenda L Croft, Carly Lane and Tina Baum, respectively, have continued to Indigenise the curated space through such exhibitions at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, where histories, socio-political issues, the spoken and unspoken, collective experience, and, importantly, culture, are asserted through a broad range of contemporary Indigenous art.

A Socio-Political Platform: Critique and Criticality

The section above has focused on the penetration of urban Indigenous art into the curated space in key exhibitions. At the heart of this process is the subjugation of traditional and accepted modes of colonial authority. At the turn of the millennium, urban Indigenous artists and their works had infiltrated colonial spaces and networks through curated projects. Urban Indigenous artists remained committed to Indigenous subjectivities in which their socio-political aesthetic has been paramount to their perspectives of identity and rights, ideologies and cultural translation. Urban Indigenous artists persisted in applying a critical lens to life, as they consistently engaged with issues relevant to Indigenous individuals and communities. The national apology to the Stolen Generations is one of these issues and how artists critically engaged with it is investigated in what follows. The visual examples included are characteristic of those created by urban

Indigenous artists in response to an apology and demonstrate how critique and criticality of the subject shaped their socio-political aesthetic.

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art relating to the Stolen Generations was engendered by how Indigenous narratives may be recovered.⁸²⁷

Discussion centred on how an aesthetic provoked by the Stolen Generations assisted in recovering aspects of the past, by allowing memory and trauma to be worked through. In the twenty-first century, urban Indigenous artists expanded upon the subject, but with a much more critical approach than had been revealed in the previous decade.

The subject of the Stolen Generations, or, the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, relates to a period in Australian history from settlement to the 1970s.⁸²⁸ However, as established in Chapter 5, the loss and trauma associated with this practice of colonialism spans generations, into the present, as those children removed, and their families, are still affected. The *Bringing them Home* report, tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997, generated 54 recommendations intended to direct 'healing and reconciliation for the benefit of all Australians'.⁸²⁹ The report, contained Recommendation 5a, which stated that all Australian Parliaments:

1. officially acknowledge the responsibility of their predecessors for the laws, policies and practices of forcible removal,

⁸²⁷ See sub-chapter 'Recovering the Indigenous Narrative: Stolen Generations'.

⁸²⁸ Peter Read, 'Stolen Generations', in Kleinert & Neale (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, op. cit., p. 702.

⁸²⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997, n.p; see also Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples', viewed 23 August 2017, <<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/apology-australias-indigenous-peoples>>.

2. negotiate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission a form of words for official apologies to Indigenous individuals, families and communities and extend those apologies with wide and culturally appropriate publicity, and
3. make appropriate reparation as detailed in following recommendations.⁸³⁰

Following the report, a public campaign for an apology commenced. This was fuelled by the fact that then Prime Minister John Howard refused to make a formal apology, instead opting for reconciliation.⁸³¹ His refusal stirred a grassroots movement of public support for an apology across Australia, from which the Sorry Book campaign emerged in 1998.⁸³² In lieu of Howard's lack of commitment to the victims of the Stolen Generations by way of an apology, a broad section of Australia's population penned their apology in the Sorry Books. These were circulated around the country by the group, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation.⁸³³ Australia's first National Sorry Day followed on 26 May 1998, the anniversary of the tabling of the *Bringing them Home* report. At this event at Government House in Sydney, the Sorry Books were ceremonially distributed to a delegation of Indigenous Australians, some of whom represented the Stolen Generations.⁸³⁴

⁸³⁰ See 'Appendix 9: Recommendations', in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, op. cit.

⁸³¹ Transcript of John Howard's Motion to Parliament, 26 August 1999, quoted in The World Today, 'Howard Puts the Motion of Regret to Parliament', archive, viewed 13 April 2018, <<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/stories/s46879.htm>>.

⁸³² Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 'Explore the Sorry Books', viewed 6 April 2018, <<http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/explore-sorry-books>>.

⁸³³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *ibid.*

⁸³⁴ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *ibid.*



Figure 90:
Richard Bell,
Little Johnny, 2001,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
240 x 180 cm,
NGV Collection.

Richard Bell's response to John Howard's 1999 quoted refusal is expressed in *Little Johnny*, 2001 (fig. 90), above, and *Honest John*, 2003 (see Appendix). Bell explained of *Little Johnny* that 'A million people marched on Sorry Day 2000, but not little Johnny: this painting was a response to his "deep regret"'.⁸³⁵ The artist transforms Howard's unapologetic stance into a text-based work in which the socio-political aesthetic is delivered through quotation and irony. Embedded within the work is Bell's suggestion that Howard is colour-blind in relation to race, which is achieved aesthetically via the composition of dotting and text that allude to an Ishihara test.⁸³⁶ This work also demonstrates Bell's engagement with the socio-political issue of cultural authenticity. His dotting technique and style is also a deliberate visual criticism of the racist attitudes present within the art market and society that privilege desert-based Aboriginal people and artworks and ignore Indigenous cultural diversity.⁸³⁷

⁸³⁵ Richard Bell quoted in National Gallery of Victoria, 'Little Johnny', collection online, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/86137/>>.

⁸³⁶ An Ishihara test is a test for colour blindness. See also National Gallery of Victoria, *ibid*.

⁸³⁷ Richard Bell, 'Bell's Theorem Aboriginal Art – It's a White Thing', in Margie West (ed.), *Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award: Celebrating 20 Years*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 2004, pp. 20-29.

It took another decade for then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, to address members of the Stolen Generations from Parliament, who along with many others throughout the nation, had been waiting for such a landmark event.⁸³⁸ The National Apology to the Stolen Generations, delivered on 13 February 2008 was televised nationally, watched by many ordinary Australians who supported Rudd and were deeply sympathetic. The event was also attended by many people who gathered in front of Parliament House, Canberra, with banners, flags and t-shirts in support of the historical moment.⁸³⁹ Outside of Canberra, school students gathered in auditoriums to watch via video link and music performances took place in city centres.⁸⁴⁰ Rudd's Apology has since been classified as one of Australia's defining historical moments.⁸⁴¹

This subject of apology to the Stolen Generations, in all its iterations, has persisted for urban Indigenous artists into the twenty-first century. There is an evident shift, however, between artworks demonstrating aesthetics intent on recovering narratives of the Stolen Generations, as discussed in Chapter 5, and those that emphasise the gesture of the apology itself, and its history and networks of meaning associated with that gesture. In terms of this latter aesthetic mechanism, urban Indigenous artists have implemented two clear strategies. The first is critique: the apology is reviewed from a contemporary Indigenous perspective. The second is criticality: namely that the present awareness of and interaction with the apology is inherently connected with what is unveiled by its critique. Irit Rogoff expresses it this way:

⁸³⁸ Parliament of Australia, *Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, MP – Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples*, 4:03 video recording, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra, 13 February 2008, viewed 1 April 2016, <<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>>; see also Glenn Iseger-Pilkington, 'Sorry: Keeping our Histories Alive', in Queensland Art Gallery, *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2013, p. 131.

⁸³⁹ See Artplan Videographics, 'National Sorry Day 2008', *YouTube*, viewed 14 May 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBKGOND0jY>>.

⁸⁴⁰ See Tony Wright, '10 Years On: Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generation', *The Age*, 14 February 2008, reprinted 13 February 2018, viewed 14 May 2018, <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/10-years-on-rudds-apology-to-the-stolen-generation-20180213-h0vznh.html>>.

⁸⁴¹ See National Museum Australia, 'Defining Moment in Australian History: National Apology', National Museum Australia, viewed 14 May 2018, <http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/national_apology>.

In 'criticality' we have that double occupation in which we are both fully armed with the knowledges of critique, able to analyse and unveil while at the same time sharing and living out the very conditions which we are able to see through.⁸⁴²

For North American urban artist Swoon (Caledonia Curry), interaction and awareness is articulated this way:

I'm always asking myself how I can really be a part of the world as it's happening; as it's being lived? ... [it's] a really similar approach of that thing of interacting with and upon culture, and not just sort of commenting on culture ...⁸⁴³

Urban Indigenous artists are also engaging in this way, and the apology is just one socio-political issue that highlights critique and criticality in an Australian contemporary art context, in which artists interrogate everything the apology stands for. Furthermore, the visual responses they articulate direct current and future engagement with their referent, as a product of that critique.



Figure 91:
Tony Albert,
Sorry, 2008,
found kitsch objects applied to vinyl
letters, 99 objects,
200 x 510 x 10 cm (installed),
QAG|GoMA Collection.

This is illustrated in *Sorry*, 2008 (fig. 91), by Tony Albert (Girramay/Yidinji/Kuku-Yalanji). In the context of the day of Rudd's apology, Albert has shared that he watched the event on television in his living room beside Aurukun artist Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jnr (Wik-Mungkan

⁸⁴² Irit Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, January 2003, viewed 11 April 2018, <<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>>.

⁸⁴³ Swoon quoted in Pedro Alonzo, 'Anger is an Energy', in Robert Klanten et al. (eds), *Art & Agenda: Political Art and Activism*, Gestalten, Berlin, 2011, p. 217.

people).⁸⁴⁴ Albert has explained that it generated much emotion in himself, thinking about his grandfather, a member of the Stolen Generations taken from his mother and separated from his brothers and sisters.⁸⁴⁵ Despite others, including his friend Pambegan Jnr accepting the apology, Albert insists that the word 'sorry', is ultimately just a word.⁸⁴⁶ The artist explores this aspect within the gesture of an apology, emphasising the literal format, which is presented upon the gallery wall. However, in critiquing the apology, Albert has attached 99 kitsch objects to his vinyl lettering. These have been employed as objects of the past in the context of repatriation, and in bringing together these faces and people, he honours them as victims of the practice of forced removal; the people of whom the apology is made.⁸⁴⁷

However, his socio-political aesthetic extends beyond the issue of the Stolen Generations. He critiques the way the production and circulation of such objects endow Australia's First Nations people with primitive and exoticised identities and perpetuate racial hierarchies that have privileged the dominant culture. This critique is in itself knowledge producing, as the artist expands upon the materiality of the work.⁸⁴⁸ As Albert intimates at these deeper aspects of colonialism, primitivism and privilege, he simultaneously reflects these back on the viewer, directing their gaze upon the 99 faces. Gordon Bennett has often incorporated a mirror within his work to deliver this concept of reflection as a means of reducing the proximity of time and place.⁸⁴⁹ For Albert, the kitsch past is juxtaposed with the apology of the present in much the same way. Viewers are presented with the reality that the role of colonialism itself, must be

⁸⁴⁴ Tony Albert, 'Tony Albert', artist talk with introduction by Bruce McLean, Associated Curator, Indigenous Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 18 December 2010, video recording 10:46, *YouTube*, viewed 30 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Drb9RbW3Tw>.

⁸⁴⁵ Albert, *ibid*.

⁸⁴⁶ Albert, *ibid*.

⁸⁴⁷ Bruce McLean, 'Tony Albert: Sorry', in Ian Were (ed.), *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2008, pp. 43 & 45.

⁸⁴⁸ Rogoff, 'From Criticism to Critique to Criticality', *op. cit*.

⁸⁴⁹ See discussion in Chapter 4; also Jill Bennett, 'Global Interconnections', in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press, California, 2005, p. 134.

acknowledged in this shared apologetic experience.⁸⁵⁰ *Sorry* was commissioned nine months after Rudd's apology for the exhibition *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*.⁸⁵¹ Albert's iteration of the apology carried with it a sense that more than a word is needed for reparation and the fulfilment of hope. Criticality is found in this space of engagement, in which the effects of actions are deeply considered.



Figure 92: Bindi Cole, *I forgive you*, 2012, emu feathers on MDF board, 100 x 800 cm (installed, approx.), QAG|GoMA Collection.

Bindi Cole's (Wathaurung) *I forgive you*, 2012 (fig. 92), is also a response to Rudd's apology. It was produced four years after Albert's piece *Sorry*, so provided Cole with an additional period of time in which to consider Rudd's words and the effects of the event. In relation to the Stolen Generations and the lingering trauma of colonisation that manifest as pain and dysfunction, Cole has stated that:

... the Apology creates this space for healing. Having been apologised to, it's now my choice to respond. Will I continue to hold onto the pain, bitterness and resentment from the past or will I, while acknowledging that what has happened is not right, make a choice to free myself from that by releasing it through forgiveness – allowing me to focus on moving forward and work out how to make the community a better place?⁸⁵²

In this passage, Cole critiques an aspect of the apology that follows after the event, namely, forgiveness. She considers her own position, making it clear that there is a choice involved as to whether forgiveness will proceed. Aesthetically, as both Bell and Albert have done, Cole presents the words literally. Similarly to Albert too, she has employed materiality. Her letters are

⁸⁵⁰ Bennett, *ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸⁵¹ The exhibition ran 15 November 2008 – 22 February 2009, organised by the Queensland Art Gallery and held at the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

⁸⁵² Bindi Cole, quoted in an interview with Julie Ewington, March 2013, in Queensland Art Gallery, *My Country, I Still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2013, p. 146.

embellished with emu feathers that are uniquely Australian and are both beautiful to look at and soft to touch. There is a relationship between the materiality of the feathers and the way the words are read and taken in, which suggests gentleness, despite the severity of the primary issue referenced.

This materiality and gentleness is harnessed as an invitation, allowing viewers to feel something individual when they encounter the work, which may differ from the artist's own feelings about the apology.⁸⁵³ Cole says, 'People are going to feel something different when looking at the work, depending on their own personal set of circumstances. Some might be relieved, some might be angry and some might hate it'.⁸⁵⁴ As stated in Chapter 3, art and images are able to mobilise affects that can therefore shape identity and community.⁸⁵⁵ Cole's artwork is affective in that it projects thinking and active emotion.⁸⁵⁶ This is achieved by the lead the artist takes in forgiving, but also in how she implicates viewers in this process. What emerges from this scenario, is the potential for healing and reparation. This is ultimately a new space in which the effects of the apology are collectively encountered and shared.

⁸⁵³ See Cole, *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁴ Cole, *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁵ Robyn Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in Global Context*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 45.

⁸⁵⁶ Catherine Speck, 'Picturing War's Affects on the Homefront during the First World War', in Ann Murray (ed.), *Constructing the Memory of War in Visual Culture since 1914*, Routledge, New York, 2018, p. 29 (28-37); Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Althone Press, London, 1988, p. 273; Nigel Thrift, 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect', *Human Geography*, no. 86, 2004, p. 60.

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Figure 93:
Jennifer Herd,
We Deeply Regret, 2007,
silk organza, bamboo, pearls,
tobacco tin and text on tracing
paper,
102 x 20 x 22 cm,
courtesy of the artist
Photo: Vernon Ah Kee.

The final image selected in this group concerning the apology, or the anticipation of it, is the work by Jennifer Herd (Far North Queensland) *We Deeply Regret*, 2007 (fig. 93). Herd has similarly incorporated text and has emphasised materiality through the bamboo, pearls and silk organza that have been used to construct her small canoe. Above the statement 'we deeply regret', the word 'sorry' cascades in repetition, down from a tobacco tin. Between each iteration, in small letters read the phrases: about the invasion; about the stolen land; about the stolen lives; about the stolen children; about the stolen wages; about the deaths in custody; about the missions. These sentiments, presented as text, similarly to Bell's *Little Johnny*, 2001, reflect back on Howard's motion to Parliament in which at point six, he states that the House:

Expresses its deep and sincere regret that Indigenous Australians suffered injustices under the practices of past generations and for the hurt and trauma that many Indigenous people continue to feel as a consequence of those practices for steps toward reconciliation.⁸⁵⁷

It is not solely the lack of an apology to the Stolen Generations that Herd highlights in the aesthetic of her work, but the 'generations of human rights abuses' and what these related to

⁸⁵⁷ Transcript of John Howard's Motion to Parliament, 26 August 1999, transcript quoted in The World Today, 'Howard Puts the Motion of Regret to Parliament', archive, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, viewed 13 April 2018, <<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/stories/s46879.htm>>.

specifically.⁸⁵⁸ Howard's speech is general in its reference to 'disadvantages', 'wrongs' and 'injustices' and the practices that have produced these effects.⁸⁵⁹ Herd spells them out clearly, so that viewers may have some semblance from his inference. She brings criticality to viewers through these words, claiming that they define difference for those who have experienced the physicality of what they mean, but also indifference, by those who have abided by those definitions enmeshed in histories of colonialism.⁸⁶⁰ The notion of collectivity is harnessed by Herd in the word 'we', which Margo Neale explains is intentionally ambiguous.⁸⁶¹ It encompasses the speech made by Howard, the broad public, the artist and her community. Tense falls away as the past is critiqued in 2007, where moving forward from this point was contingent upon the knowledge exposed.

Self Determination: proppaNOW

In this final section of the chapter, the artists' collective proppaNOW is discussed in terms of a position of self-determination. This position, actively adopted by the urban Indigenous artists that comprise the collective, has developed in accordance with establishing and managing the representation of the Indigenous subject as one that is distinctly Indigenous and contemporary. Visual examples produced by its member artists will be addressed in order to demonstrate this.

As established in Chapter 4 regarding authenticity, urban Indigenous artists have used a socio-political aesthetic in their work to resist racial categorisation of heritage and culture that has lingered since colonisation. It has been recognised that those Aboriginal people living in city and regional centres have often been marginalised and made invisible as a result of their geographic

⁸⁵⁸ Margo Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective proppaNOW, *Artlink*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, p. 40.

⁸⁵⁹ Transcript of John Howard's Motion to Parliament, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶⁰ Jennifer Herd quoted in Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists', *op. cit.*

⁸⁶¹ Neale, *ibid.*

placement. Historically, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative was a pioneer group of Indigenous artists who shared a vision to promote art that did not project the narratives and specific clan or language group designs that were accepted by the artworld as being quintessentially Indigenous. Instead, their early examples of urban Indigenous art suggested the core influences of the personal, place and political issues, which at times borrowed stylistically from desert and remote sources for artistic impact. Urban Indigenous artists also participated in other artists' groups and collectives throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.⁸⁶² However, in 2004, the artists' collective proppaNOW,⁸⁶³ which had been imagined in the 1980s, was realised. The vision was one of demanding a much greater voice in the artworld for urban Indigenous artists.⁸⁶⁴ As demonstrated in this final section of the chapter, this voice was not only in the context of contemporary art, but also in terms of the socio-political environment in which its artists participated.

In its initial format, the collective had a membership of seven artists: Vernon Ah Kee (Kuku Yalanji/Yidinji/Waanyi/Gugu Yimithirr/Koko Berrin), Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, Laurie Nilsen (language group unknown) and Megan Cope (Quandamooka).⁸⁶⁵ This membership has expanded at times to include Bianca Beetson (Kabi Kabi) and Andrea Fisher (Birri Gubba).⁸⁶⁶ Senior humanities researcher Anna Edmundson and Margo Neale have asserted that proppaNOW's artists individually had reached their limit regarding discrimination as urban-based artists, but that by joining together, they used collectivity to 'activat[e] Indigenous

⁸⁶² For an overview of groups and collectives in the late 1980s, see 'Workshops and Collectives' in Chapter 2.

⁸⁶³ Etymologically, proppaNow comprises 'proppa' meaning an Aboriginal way that acknowledges protocols and community respect with regard to Aboriginal culture and 'now' referring temporally to the present, see Anna Edmundson & Margo Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective, ProppaNow', in Caroline Turner & David Williams (eds), *Thresholds of Tolerance*, Humanities Research Centre & School of Art Gallery, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2007, p. 29.

⁸⁶⁴ Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*

⁸⁶⁵ proppaNOW, 'About Us', viewed 26 March 2018, <<https://proppanow.wordpress.com/about-us/>>.

⁸⁶⁶ See Rex Butler, 'Where to put Aboriginal Art', in *Jus' Drawn*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, 2010, n.p., viewed 3 April 2018, <<https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:215535>>.

agency'.⁸⁶⁷ Arts and social sciences researcher, Caroline Turner, suggests that the impetus behind this collectivity is indicative of what she calls the 'existential Australian problem, that Indigenous realities are substantially obscured by non-Indigenous interpretations'.⁸⁶⁸ Edmundson and Neale have expanded on this concept explaining that the artists in proppaNOW strategised their collectivity as a means to oppose the racist belief that only remote-based Aboriginal people are 'real Aboriginals', or that urban Indigenous people are 'rendered invisible'.⁸⁶⁹ While their strategy was provoked by racism, in terms of art, socio-political concerns extended socio-economically as well. The proppaNOW group criticised the Queensland Indigenous Artists Marketing Export Agency for privileging remote regions with funding and promotion that were seen to perpetuate cultural stereotypes.⁸⁷⁰ Remote arts communities in Queensland were perceived to present collective identities with the advantage of working within art centres that were also governmentally funded and networked.⁸⁷¹ Those involved in proppaNOW anticipated that structurally, an urban-based collective would work in a similar manner, allowing access to opportunities of support and funding.⁸⁷²

As it has been established in earlier chapters, urban Indigenous artists have persistently challenged racist notions of authenticity since 1984. As Catherine De Lorenzo has pointed out, political art works well when it identifies an adversary, but transforming this identification into something productive is the challenge.⁸⁷³ Since Boomalli and the lead up to its formation, the socio-political issue of authenticity has remained an adversary of urban Indigenous artists. Transforming this issue into something productive was one of the key aims of Boomalli artists in

⁸⁶⁷ Edmundson & Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective, ProppaNow', op. cit.

⁸⁶⁸ Caroline Turner, 'Limiting Tolerance: Art and Human Rights', in Turner & David (eds), *Thresholds of Tolerance*, op. cit., p. 13.

⁸⁶⁹ Edmundson & Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective, ProppaNow', op. cit., p. 29.

⁸⁷⁰ Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁷¹ Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸⁷² Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*

⁸⁷³ See Catherine De Lorenzo, 'Remembering: Aboriginality, Public Art and Urban Design', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2000, p. 137.

the 1980s and during the 1990s, and this continues to motivate the proppaNOW group. Despite the growth and development of urban Indigenous art, the collective proppaNOW remained focused on claiming a 'space for marginalised and excluded peoples within the public spaces of mainstream cultural institutions'.⁸⁷⁴ Political art commentator, Mark Alice Durant, likens this approach to a number of Californian art collectives, explaining that a voice is given to the voiceless when projected through art collectives that are community based.⁸⁷⁵ As such, the project that proppaNOW commenced in the new millennium actively reclaimed a space for the voice of urban Indigenous people following their displacement and dispossession.⁸⁷⁶

In order to achieve this, the artists employed 'the most common and widely available cultural materials'.⁸⁷⁷ Also, in identifying as a collective, artists rejected the notion of individual identity, instead utilising the 'collectively shared reservoir of other art works, photographic archives, popular culture, even the language of abstract art understood as vernacular'.⁸⁷⁸ In his analysis of proppaNOW, art historian and writer, Rex Butler, has focused on an imperative political component, that is, the artists' denial of the definition of 'Aboriginal' in the stereotypical desert or remote context.⁸⁷⁹ As agents, ProppaNOW artists, like their predecessors in Boomalli two decades earlier, actively differentiated their aims and objectives from those of desert and remote Indigenous artists. This was achieved via an alternative aesthetic that collectively reflected contemporary practice in the city and regional loci.

⁸⁷⁴ Edmundson & Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective, ProppaNow', op. cit.

⁸⁷⁵ Mark Alice Durant, 'Activist Art in the Shadow of Rebellion', *Art in America*, vol. 80, no. 7, pp. 31-33; see also Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁶ Edmundson & Neale, *ibid.*, p. 30

⁸⁷⁷ Butler, 'Where to Put Aboriginal Art', op. cit.

⁸⁷⁸ Butler, *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁹ Butler, *ibid.*

Vernon Ah Kee has been a vocal and prolific member of the collective, persistently questioning classifications in Indigenous art and culture that deem one type of Aboriginality more authentic than another.⁸⁸⁰ His largest bodies of work are text based or figurative, and centre on the lingering discourses of colonialism.⁸⁸¹ His questioning is pronounced in the work below, titled *Annie Ah Kee/What is an Aborigine?*, 2008, (fig. 94). Ah Kee has employed portraiture as part of his practice to consider how ethnography and the gaze, in particular the work of Norman B Tindale, have influenced knowledge systems and contributed to the legacy of colonialism.⁸⁸² *Annie Ah Kee/What is an Aborigine?*, which depicts the artist's daughter, questions colonial projections of what it means, or looks like, to be Aboriginal. Instead of replicating the Indigenous subject of Tindale's works, Ah Kee personalises his subject in this larger than life-size work, the latter technique having also been employed by Brook Andrew, as noted in Chapter 4. The socio-political aesthetic is expressed through the illustration of the artist's own daughter, whose gaze engenders resilience and dignity.⁸⁸³ The portrait of Annie Ah Kee is imbued with criticality that acknowledges the place of the past in the formation of the present and future regarding the cultural status of Indigenous presence and diversity, and is at odds with Tindale's project of documenting 'a dying race'.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸⁰ Gary Jones, 'Vernon Ah Kee: Sovereign Warrior', *Artlink*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, p. 46.

⁸⁸¹ For an example of Ah Kee's text based work, see Appendix.

⁸⁸² Jones, *ibid.*

⁸⁸³ Jones, *ibid.*

⁸⁸⁴ Bruce McLean, 'Vernon Ah Kee', Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/goma10hub/artists/vernon-ah-kee>>.

Figure 94:
Vernon Ah Kee,
*Annie Ah Kee/What is an
Aborigine?*, 2008,
charcoal, crayon and synthetic
polymer paint on canvas,
180 x 240 cm,
QAG|GoMA Collection.



Richard Bell has been vocal on authenticity and bias, as discussed in earlier chapters. At times this is subtle, and at other times, it is revolutionary, as described by Daniel Browning.⁸⁸⁵ Browning notes how the tropes of Western art are recycled in Bell's activist works as an empowered act of calling out the politics of appropriation, and at the same time decolonising popular understandings about the dispossessed Australian Indigenous experience.⁸⁸⁶ This process may be compared to that of Gordon Bennett. Over his years in proppaNOW, Bell has continued to produce artworks that are informed by his activist agenda.



Figure 95: Richard Bell, *Free Lex Wotton*, 2009, synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
90 x 240 cm, courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

⁸⁸⁵ Daniel Browning, 'Decolonising Now: The Activism of Richard Bell', in Richard Bell, *Richard Bell: Lessons on Etiquette and Manners*, Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton, Victoria, 2013, p. 23.

⁸⁸⁶ Browning, *ibid.*

The three works, *Free Lex Wotton*, 2009 (fig. 95), *Admit it*, 2007 (fig. 96), and *An uppity schoolgirl*, 2008, (fig. 97) demonstrate Bell's preoccupation with the events surrounding the death in custody of Aboriginal Palm Island resident Mulrunji (Cameron Doomadgee). In November 2004, following the death of 36 year-old Mulrunji, another Palm Island resident, Lex Wotton, was arrested for inciting riot in response to what Aboriginal community members believed to be a police breach of the Racial Discrimination Act.⁸⁸⁷ Senior Sergeant Christopher Hurley was acquitted of manslaughter despite Mulrunji passing away in Hurley's custody, following a physical incident with the victim in which the medical coronial reports could not reasonably establish Hurley's specific role in the cause a death.⁸⁸⁸

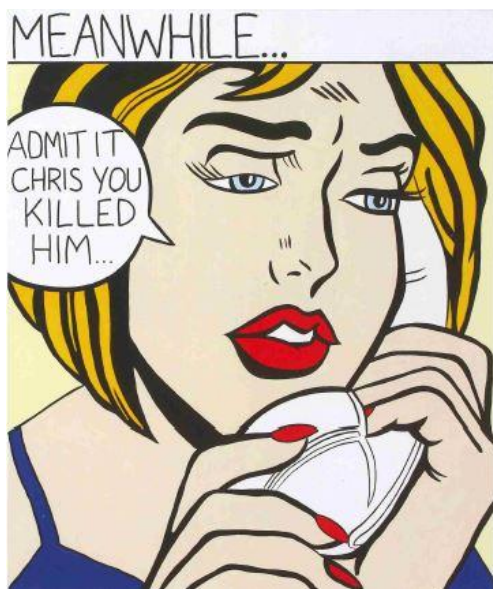


Figure 96:
Richard Bell,
Admit it, 2007,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
60 x 40 cm,
courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery,
Brisbane.

⁸⁸⁷ *Wotton v State of Queensland (No 5)* [2016] FCA 1457, 5 December 2016; also, *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* – section 9 Racial Discrimination to be Unlawful; see also Joshua Robertson, ‘“You’re My Warrior”: Lex Wotton and the Fight for Justice after the Palm Island Riots’, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2016, viewed 3 April 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/07/youre-my-warrior-lex-wotton-and-the-fight-for-justice-after-the-palm-island-uprising>>.

⁸⁸⁸ *Hurley v Clements & Ors* [2008] QDC 323, 18 December 2008.



Figure 97:
Richard Bell,
An uppity school girl, 2008,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
150 x 120 cm,
courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery,
Brisbane.

The two works, *Admit it* and *An uppity school girl*, appropriate Roy Lichtenstein's (1923-1997) comic-strip style and damsel character, complete with speech bubbles and areas of dotting akin to the Pop artist's magnified Ben-Day dots. However, Bell's technique of appropriating the appropriator is not simply a postmodernist exercise. Instead, he '... subverts the colonial and aesthetic paradigm, it is appropriation in reverse. [He] talks back and [he] challenges the history of stealing'.⁸⁸⁹ This history of stealing is intrinsically linked to Australia's colonial past, but it is the dispossession of Indigenous rights in the context of the Palm Island case, that is addressed by Bell in these works.

⁸⁸⁹ Browning, 'Decolonising Now: The Activism of Richard Bell', op. cit., p. 24.

Figure 98:
Gordon Hookey,
*Blood on the wattle, blood
on the palm*, 2009,
oil on linen,
285 x 500 cm,
The James C Sourris, AM,
Collection, Queensland Art
Gallery.



Figure 99:
Gordon Hookey,
Wrekconin, 2007,
oil on canvas,
168 x 152 cm,
courtesy of the artist and
Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Gordon Hookey, also a member of Boomalli in the early 1990s, presents a socio-political aesthetic loaded with satire. *Blood on the wattle, blood on the palm*, 2009 (fig. 98), references the 2004 death in custody on Palm Island and the unrest that followed leading to the arrest of Lex Wotton.⁸⁹⁰ He also associates the work, through its title, to Bruce Elder's 1998 publication about frontier violence in *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians Since 1788*.⁸⁹¹ For Hookey, 'Art to me is about our humanity, an expression of who

⁸⁹⁰ See 'Gordon Hookey: Blood on the wattle blood on the palm 2009', Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, viewed 5 April 2018, <<https://learning.qagoma.qld.gov.au/artworks/blood-wattle-blood-palm/>>.

⁸⁹¹ 'Gordon Hookey: Blood on the wattle, blood on the palm 2009', *ibid*.

we are at a place in time. My creativity resides on the interface where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures meet, I sought to address issues at this space'.⁸⁹² This approach to temporality and cultural contact is evident in the many historical and contemporary references that surface on his canvases.

Hookey's figurative work incorporates typical antagonists and anti-heroes whose hostility and courage respectively, play out visually and narratively in ways that challenge the socio-political status quo. His cast of native animals empowers the underdog – a metaphor for the marginalised, as they bring about a reckoning. In his critique of colonialism, he employs humour as an access point for viewers to read his work.⁸⁹³ *Wreckconin*, 2007 (fig. 99), illustrates Hookey's idiosyncratic use of language – 'street English' – and by employing pun, alliteration and onomatopoeia, he breaks down linguistic structures.⁸⁹⁴ This is a deliberate reclamation of heritage, as the artist has explained, 'English is my second language; I just don't have access to my first'.⁸⁹⁵ His use of language is fitting, and in this work his reference is to colonialism – its wreckage, and how being subverted by the dominant English language is a collective Indigenous experience. Visually, a reckoning is laid out in his work where retribution for one's actions is pending. Here a police officer faces trial. His judge and jury are unapologetically one-sided. Systems of colonial power are rebuked and viewers are reminded of the work by Gordon Syron *Judgement of His Peers*, c.1978-82 (fig. 3), included in Chapter 2.

⁸⁹² Gordon Hookey, 'Gordon Hookey', in *Deadly Stories*, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, 2017, viewed 12 April 2018, <<https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/be-involved/deadly-stories/deadly-stories-gallery/north-queensland/gordon-hookey>>.

⁸⁹³ Richard Bell, 'Richard Bell on Gordon Hookey: An Old Friend Muses on the Acerbic Wit of a Chili-Loving Aboriginal Artist', *ArtAsiaPacific*, no. 97, 2016, p. 41.

⁸⁹⁴ Brenda L Croft, 'Flash Gordon's Message: Language is a Virus – the King's English (not)', *Artlink*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, p. 52.

⁸⁹⁵ Gordon Hookey, quoted in Croft, *ibid*.

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Figure 100:
Laurie Nilsen,
Emu, 2007,
Barbed wire, steel and aluminium,
158 x 72 x 148 cm,
courtesy of Fireworks Gallery, Newstead,
QLD.

Much of Laurie Nilsen's work is sculptural. The emu in particular features prominently throughout his oeuvre, both in three-dimensional and in two-dimensional formats. The large Australian bird is approached by Nilsen in a number of ways. First, it is Nilsen's family totem, and he therefore connects personally with it, particularly through his mother's lineage.⁸⁹⁶ He has explained how his multiple reproductions of the birds are akin to producing family portraits, given their totemic significance.⁸⁹⁷ Second, Nilsen's sculpted emus are his way of restoring the bird and it is in this context that Nilsen is critical of the way fencing has impacted on the bird's native environment. *Emu*, 2007 (fig. 100), above, is deliberately constructed using barbed wire, a material that the artist has witnessed as the cause of death for many emus, particularly in Western Queensland.⁸⁹⁸ He has explained that emus will walk up and down a fence line in an attempt to find water, often pushing through and getting caught, where they perish.⁸⁹⁹ His sculptural production of the bird, larger-than-life size, is the artist's homage to the native animal, but also a

⁸⁹⁶ Chantelle Woods, 'Laurie Nilsen', in Nicole Foreshew & Brian Parkes (eds), *Menagerie: Contemporary Indigenous Sculpture in Australia*, Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design and Australian Museum, Sydney, 2009, p. 104.

⁸⁹⁷ Laurie Nilsen in Ashley Crawford, 'Laurie Nilsen: Birds on a Wire', *Australian Art Collector*, no. 42, 2007, pp. 148-155; see also Bruce McLean, 'Putsch', in Philip Watkins, et al, *Putsch: proppaNOW*, Tandanya– National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, 2010, pp., 5-11.

⁸⁹⁸ Laurie Nilsen, 'The Barbed Wire Emu Sculptures', artist statement, Fireworks Gallery, 1994, viewed 9 June 2018, <<https://www.fireworksgallery.com.au/artist/laurie-nilsen?page=1>>.

⁸⁹⁹ Nilsen, *ibid*.

statement about how wildlife is detrimentally impacted by agricultural imperatives. Nilsen has also investigated other environmental impacts, referring to introduced species and the practice of trapping within his work.⁹⁰⁰

The concepts of fencing, introduced species and trapping are also central to Nilsen's third approach, where metaphor is vital to his socio-political aesthetic. His use of barbed wire fencing, or alternatively, rabbit traps, is more than just a reference point to environmental factors. These materials allow him to comment metaphorically upon the division and cultivation of properties as a part of past colonial process, and the legitimacy of land tenures that ensued.⁹⁰¹ This process affected Indigenous communities living in rural areas, as groups were dispossessed and displaced from Country; a colonial legacy that continues to have an impact in present times, as observed in the Indigenous agency that fuels Native Title debate, Treaty discussion and constitutional recognition for Australia's First Peoples. Through the employment of metaphor, Nilsen reveals his concerns about environmental and cultural erosion, and like Gordon Hookey, subverts the status quo that is indebted, socio-politically to colonialism.

The environment, place and colonialism are also taken up in a variety of ways by Megan Cope, who often accentuates materiality within her practice too. Cope, who works across media, prioritises the reclamation of place by mapping particular areas and returning their Aboriginal names to the vernacular. In the sculptural work *RE FORMATION part 3 (Dubbagullee)*, 2017 (fig. 101), Cope's materiality is key, where she has individually cast in concrete 12,000 Sydney rock oyster shells to construct a midden.⁹⁰² There are multiple layers of socio-political meaning bound

⁹⁰⁰ For an example, see Appendix.

⁹⁰¹ See Woods, 'Laurie Nilsen', op. cit.

⁹⁰² Wayne Tunnicliffe, 'The National: New Australian Art', curatorial talk on the artist Megan Cope, 2017, viewed 12 April 2018, <<http://the-national.com.au/artists/megan-cope/re-formation/>>.

to the aesthetic of this work that reference habitation, loss and dispossession, colonisation and environmental change.



Figure 101:
Megan Cope,
RE FORMATION part 3
(*Dubbagullee*), 2017,
Sydney rock oysters, copper slag
and hand cast concrete,
500 x 700 x 150 cm (overall,
irregular),
courtesy of the artist and THIS IS
NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer
gallery, Melbourne.
Photo: Felicity Jenkins, AGNSW.

Curator Wayne Tunncliffe has explained that the word 'Dubbagullee' is the Eora name for Bennelong point. In the eighteenth century, many oyster shell middens were found by Europeans there, which were burnt down to make lime mortar used for the first housing in the city.⁹⁰³ The shiny, dark copper slag references mining and how middens were destroyed in this process.⁹⁰⁴ Cope brings the midden, as a material sign of Aboriginal habitation, into the present, resisting the colonial practices leading to the loss and destruction of culture. The work is beautiful and poignant in its use of detritus to acknowledge detriment. Contained in her aesthetic is her critique of 'seen and unseen' destruction delivered to First Nations territories.⁹⁰⁵ With agency and criticality, she pushes history into the time and space of the present, forcing viewers to consider a way forward with renewed knowledge about the past.

⁹⁰³ Tunncliffe, *ibid.*; for an earlier example on curatorial reflection on middens, see Marise Williams (ed.), 'Kurnell Midden', in *Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Art Centre, Gymea, New South Wales, 2008, p. 54.

⁹⁰⁴ Tunncliffe, *ibid.*

⁹⁰⁵ Léuli Eshraghi, 'Megan Cope: Melbourne', *The National: New Australian Art*, 2017, viewed 5 April 2018, <http://the-national.com.au/artists/megan-cope/re-formation/>.

Edmundson and Neale have explained that the proppaNOW artists, 'breach the thresholds of tolerance [and] are applying the brakes to further extinguishment of their rights to the urban expression of their aboriginality'.⁹⁰⁶ The self-determination of the proppaNOW artists is achieved by their collective aesthetics, which thrust socio-political issues to the forefront of art and culture. There are parallels to be made between proppaNOW and Boomalli in terms of activism and agency, however, the difference lies in the depth of criticality, which for proppaNOW artists, is acutely self-aware. ProppaNOW's aesthetics are determined by the role and the place occupied by its artists, where the promotion of Indigeneity is not just an aim, it is an urgency. De Lorenzo claimed that transforming the identification of an adversary into something productive is the challenge.⁹⁰⁷ ProppaNOW artists succeed in this challenge, where aesthetic and criticality are employed to subvert marginalisation and displacement.

Summary

As biennials, triennials and survey exhibitions multiplied throughout the 1990s so too did urban Indigenous art. Through the expansion of contemporary art there was an increased representation of urban Indigenous art within the curated space as the final lingering restrictions that had separated Australian Indigenous art from contemporary art dissolved. As such, curators within institutions, or as independently commissioned, played critical roles in including urban Indigenous art in their exhibitions. This was a process that within the institution, as it has been argued, manifested as a decolonial gesture. These gestures led to a destabilisation of knowledge produced by colonial power structures. As urban Indigenous artists adopted, adhered to and synchronised with global contemporary art as ideological and issue-based, the movement further advanced.

⁹⁰⁶ Edmundson & Neale, 'Learning to be Proppa: Aboriginal Artists' Collective, ProppaNow', op. cit., p. 37.

⁹⁰⁷ De Lorenzo, 'Remembering: Aboriginality, Public Art and Urban Design', op. cit.

Following on from this development, urban Indigenous artists began to incorporate more critique and criticality into their work, as demonstrated with regard to the events surrounding the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. No longer was the socio-political subject simply a reference point for aesthetic investigation and a call for change. Works deepened in terms of bringing the past and present into close proximity with one another. This effected the production of new knowledge and consequently, new ways of participating and interacting in the world.

This was the approach implemented by the artist collective proppaNOW. The ProppaNOW artists took Boomalli's lead, and worked the myriad facets that referenced colonialism into their socio-political aesthetic as they sought to establish a version of Indigeneity that answered the needs of the activist Indigenous artist who was not based in desert or remote regions. What proppaNOW delivered was an aesthetic manifestation of interactive contemporary Indigenous culture, from the perspective of a contemporary Indigenous artist. This was a self-determined image of life after colonisation, but also a product of it.

Conclusion

While the origins of the urban Indigenous art movement in Australia are relatively well documented, and a range of socio-political subject matter in artists' work is apparent and cited in art historical literature, the discrete aesthetic character of the movement has been much harder to determine. The question of what this aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art is has prompted my research and it has been established that not only is this aesthetic character socio-political, but that it engenders an Indigenist ideology.

It has been asserted in the thesis, that structurally, the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art unites socio-political subject matter and underlying socio-political principles with visibility and artistic impact to deliver Indigenist ideological objectives. The latter seek to acknowledge, restore and privilege Indigenous voices, knowledge, histories and experiences and to subvert Australia's colonial paradigm. The decolonial methodology that has been applied to the research in this thesis has assisted in exposing and understanding the inherent connection between aesthetic and ideology. I have argued that empowerment, defiance of colonial representation of the Indigenous subject, recovery of narratives and practices affected by colonialism, and a self-determined, totalising message of Indigeneity are key Indigenist catalysts within the socio-political aesthetic. An investigation of how artists portray the socio-political aesthetic, and accounting for its dynamic role within the movement of urban Indigenous art, have been aims of this thesis. Such an account of the aesthetic character of urban Indigenous art has been previously uncharted.

During the mid to late 1980s, artists established a foundation for production, where their art exceeded any visual expression of subject alone and instead became indicative of their active

engagement with the socio-political milieu. In other words, urban Indigenous art was not merely reflective of the socio-political environment, but participated within it. Empowerment was a key objective for artists at this time. By participating visually in the socio-political events and issues surrounding Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs (1986), Aboriginal deaths in custody (1987 onward), and Australia's Bicentenary 'celebrations' (1988), for example, artists became cultural agents who promoted alternative views of these events and issues. As artists drew on their visual repertoires to elicit Indigenous views, they simultaneously drew on affective and emotive strategies to stimulate and shape a new reality for audiences. This new reality questioned the assumed understandings of the histories, truths and effects surrounding the events and issues they interrogated. Artworks provoked in viewers material and sensate responses to the personal and collective experiences of the artists. Feelings including solemnity, despair, suffering, empathy, and exclusion were mobilised aesthetically, empowering the Indigenous subject.

In addition to sensation and affect elicited from politically engaged artworks underpinned by experience, artists employed documentary photography, text and colour configurations in compositions that were also narrative driven. These aesthetic elements were bound to an objective of subverting perceived notions of Indigeneity and affirming Indigenous positions. Together they provoked alternative readings of culture and produced a range of substitute visual resources and responses that further stimulated Indigenous empowerment.

The socio-political aesthetic was ubiquitous throughout the 1990s, in which there was a clear trend in urban Indigenous artworks that defied the prevailing colonial representations of 'other'. It has been demonstrated in this thesis how the socio-political aesthetic was employed by urban Indigenous artists to affirm authenticity and diversity across the spectrum of Aboriginality. The

socio-political aesthetic began to indicate much more convincingly than in previous years, how the expression of contemporary Indigenous experience expanded understandings about Aboriginality, again underscoring an Indigenist ideology.

Urban Indigenous artists established that theories around the colonial gaze and discourses on viewing that were rooted in nineteenth century representations of the Indigenous subject, needed to be addressed and could be done so aesthetically. Photography was a particularly effective medium that allowed artists to implement a variety of visual means including split imagery, embellishment, scale changes and techniques that reflected the viewer's own gaze, to interrogate colonial representations. In doing so, artists rendered the colonial gaze as inappropriate, undermining the colonial modes of viewing and exposing the politics of difference. This effectively reversed colonial gestures and stereotypes and disarticulated the voice of colonial authority. Spatial dynamics and language were considered within installations that rejected historical and scientific narratives as artists further developed the socio-political aesthetic to reject popular and misconceived ideas about authenticity and diversity of Indigenous culture. By identifying how artists returned the colonial gaze, restaged colonial source imagery and gave colonial images new and alternative contexts, it has been argued that a socio-political aesthetic was used to disempower and challenge how the Indigenous subject has been 'othered'. Moreover, the socio-political aesthetic persuasively appealed to viewers to acknowledge the immutable presence of Indigeneity.

What emerged in urban Indigenous art was the artists' clear preoccupation with assessing colonial narratives and presenting counter-narratives. This was evident in artworks that expressed Indigenous histories and truths that were alternative to those established within the

colonial paradigm. These related, for example, to the traumatic past, to the denial of sovereign rights, and to the false projection of Indigenous identities as being static. Artists used autobiography efficaciously in this regard, revealing oral histories and narratives of loss for viewers. Appropriation was employed to expose how visual repetition can construct meaning and equally that meaning may be transformed. Artists' incorporation of text, setting, characterisation and iconography also transported viewers directly into the socio-political milieu. It has been established in the thesis how artists were cultural agents who developed a socio-political aesthetic to interrogate specific subjects, such as the Stolen Generations, sovereignty and Native Title. Artworks expressed deeply affecting narratives incorporating dislocation and disenfranchisement. In addressing these narratives, artists were able to recover a collective Indigenous voice within the historical frame and transact this with viewers. Moreover, it has been argued in this thesis that this process of recovery, allowed historical transparency and restitution in the public domain and popular imagination, as Indigenous perspectives were exposed and renewed.

As the millennium approached, a freedom was extended to urban Indigenous artists as a result of the many art world changes that had taken place. This was a productive freedom, in which the benefits of years of hard work in the art world leading up to the twenty-first century were claimed. Artists and their work were supported in many different ways, not least of which came from the contemporary art itself. This facilitated much more exposure of urban Indigenous art under the umbrella of a global contemporary art. Curatorial rationales became more inclusive and specific projects were implemented that emphasised art from outside the Western centre and Australian mainstream. As a result of geographic and conceptual shifts in the definition of a global contemporary art, urban Indigenous art had an impact on the curated space. Art galleries and

institutions became Indigenised, infiltrated by the Indigenist ideology that underpinned the urban Indigenous art movement.

As a consequence, the socio-political aesthetic in contemporary urban Indigenous art became active in a process of destabilising hegemonic and epistemic discourses of knowledge, and in the producers of power associated with visual art institutions. This process was understood as a decolonial gesture, where the dominant institutional space and the colonial ideas that emanated from it were disrupted by urban Indigenous art and its socio-political aesthetic, because neither subscribed to Eurocentric discourse. As the movement developed into the new millennium, artists bolstered the socio-political aesthetic with critique and criticality, re-inscribing histories and perspectives into their work that had been devalued. Artists employed text in their works to be explicit and convey clear political messages about racism and inequality. They made reference to political figures to draw attention to the impact of governmental legislation on the lives of Indigenous people and communities. Allegory was used to expose narratives of loss and satire was a technique employed to accentuate Indigenous experience. Artists acknowledged that references made in urban Indigenous art to the past, were not simply critical of colonial history, but rather, were a product of it. They were acutely aware that all expressions of the past were a reflection of how artists engaged with that history, but in a present context. This thesis has established how a totalising message of Indigeneity, that is, the assertion of Indigenous authority and Indigenous identity, was advanced by the socio-political aesthetic of urban Indigenous art as artists shaped new, contemporary realities that privileged the Indigenous subject.

This shaping of new realities was actively taken up by the artists' collective propaNow, established in Queensland. The artists in this collective built upon critique and criticality in works

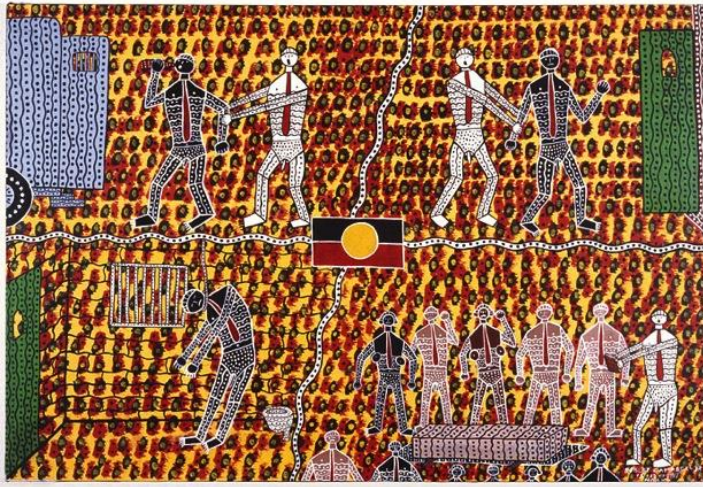
that expressed the Indigenous subject from a distinctly Indigenous vantage point. In doing so, they accentuated a lack of proximity between the colonial past and the contemporary present, questioning the classifications of Indigenous art and culture that have impacted on understandings of authenticity. By employing portraiture, narratives of ethnography and the colonial gaze, metaphor, humour, and linguistic devices, proppaNOW artists consolidated on the socio-political aesthetic concerned with exposing alternative truths and histories, and undermining colonial knowledge. They deprived their colonial opponent of power and instead privileged Indigenous knowledge that was totally self-determined.

This study of urban Indigenous art offers original and critical insight into a movement that until now has not been adequately investigated within scholarship. In surveying thirty-three years of urban Indigenous art, I have argued that the socio-political aesthetic is, in fact, the internal dynamic that moulds the movement. The socio-political aesthetic is comprised of many visual features that deliver maximum artistic impact concerning significant subject matter, and importantly, an underlying Indigenist ideology. The thesis has demonstrated how this socio-political aesthetic enables artists to fulfil ideological objectives of Indigenous empowerment, defiance, recovery and self-determination and subversion of Australia's colonial paradigm. The decolonial methodology applied to this research has been critical to analysis and understandings of the urban Indigenous movement, whilst the chronological approach to material and artists' interaction with their environment has also allowed for a logical and sequential investigation over time.

Artists' employment of the socio-political aesthetic for more than three decades suggests its continued value within contemporary urban Indigenous art, particularly as Australia's socio-

political future regarding its First Nations people remains unresolved. In the meantime, the socio-political aesthetic remains a vehicle of authority that carries with it the message: that Australian Indigenous culture, identity and representation be managed from a self-determined position that is distinctly Indigenous.

Appendix
Artworks from Chapter 3



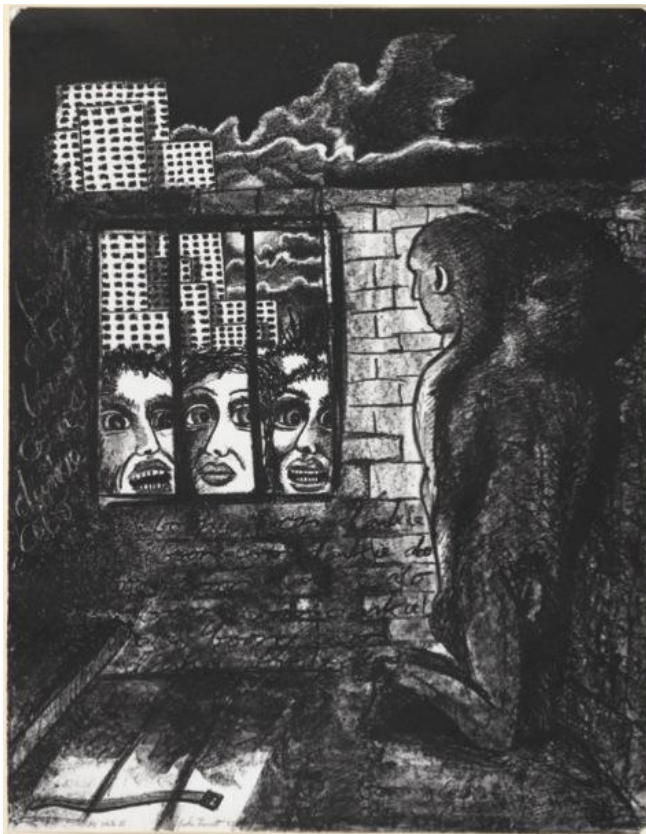
Robert Campbell Jnr,
Death in Custody, 1987,
synthetic polymer paint
on canvas,
82.2 x 120 cm,
Janet Holmes à Court Collection,
Cowaramup, Western Australia.

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according to the author's instructions

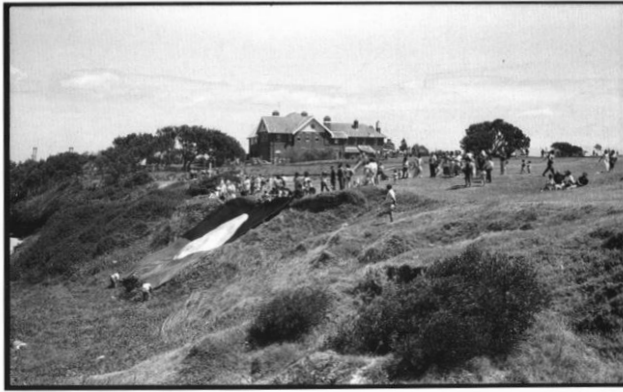
Robert Campbell Jnr,
*Why Weren't They Charged With
Perjury*, 1989,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
123 x 111 cm,
courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,
Sydney.

NOTE: This image has been removed according to the author's instructions

Robert Campbell Jnr,
Killed in the Line of Duties Led to Gundy's Innocent Killing (Who Me, Why Me?), 1990, 1990,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
93 x 120 cm,
location unknown.
Source: Deutscher and Hackett,
Melbourne.



Gordon Bennett,
Night Whispers, 1987,
lithograph printed in black ink from
one stone [or plate], State II, edition
1 of 3,
58 x 44.9 cm,
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra, Gordon Darling
Australasian Print Fund 1989,
accession number NGA 89.2076
© The Estate of Gordon Bennett



Peter McKenzie,
Protest against First Fleet re-enactment at Botany Bay, La Perouse, c. 1988,
silver gelatin print,
dimensions unknown,
Australian Institute of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Island Studies 'After 200
Years' Collection, Canberra.



Michael Aird,
Aboriginal protest gathering,
from the series
Portraits, 1988–1989,
type C photograph,
19.2 x 24.4 cm,
QAG|GoMA Collection, Brisbane,
purchased 1990 with funds from
ARCO Coal Australia Inc. through
the Queensland Art Gallery
Foundation, accession number
1990.320 © Michael Aird.

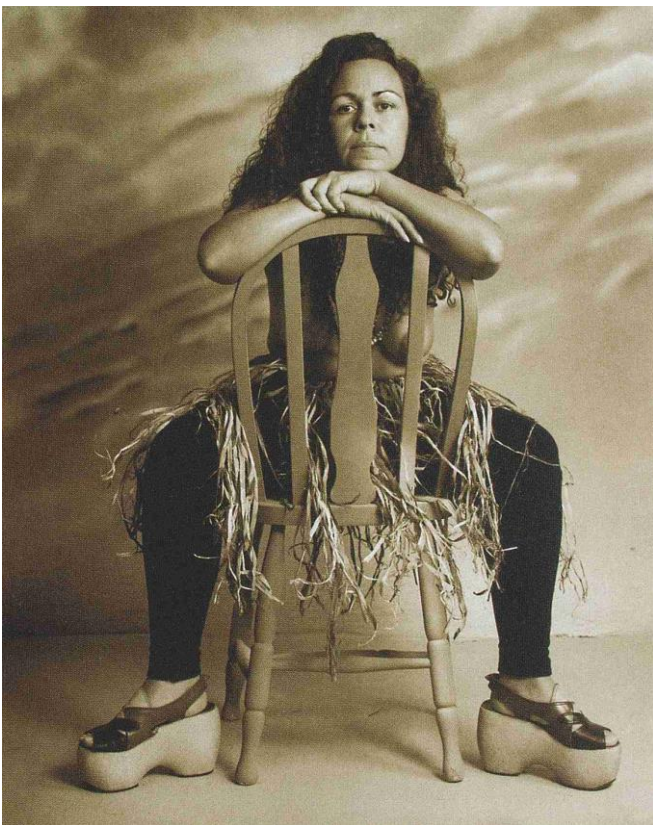


Brenda L Croft,
*Michael Watson in Redfern on the
Long March of Freedom, Justice
and Hope, Invasion Day, 26
January 1988*, 1988,
gelatin silver photograph,
50.4 x 36.2 cm (image),
50.4 x 40.5 cm (sheet),
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra, purchased c.1988
© Brenda L Croft/ Copyright
Agency.

Artworks from Chapter 4



Fiona Foley,
*Badtjala Woman (two sets of
beads)*, from the series *Badtjala
Woman*, 1994,
type C photograph,
45.5 x 35.5 cm,
Museum of Contemporary Art,
Sydney, purchased 1995,
accession number 1995.101A.



Fiona Foley,
Modern Nomad, 1994,
type C photograph,
edition of 14,
50 x 40.5 cm,
Private collection,
Melbourne.



Julie Gough,
Medical Series, 1994,
 ten case-studies of medical and
 anthropological measurements
 for indicating racial difference,
 mixed media,
 dimensions variable,
 Tasmanian Museum and Art
 Gallery Collection, Hobart.



Michael Riley,
Alma Riley, 1998,
 from the series *Yarns from the
 Talbragar Reserve*,
 gelatin silver photograph,
 51 x 61 cm,
 © Michel Riley Foundation/Copyright
 Agency, 2018.

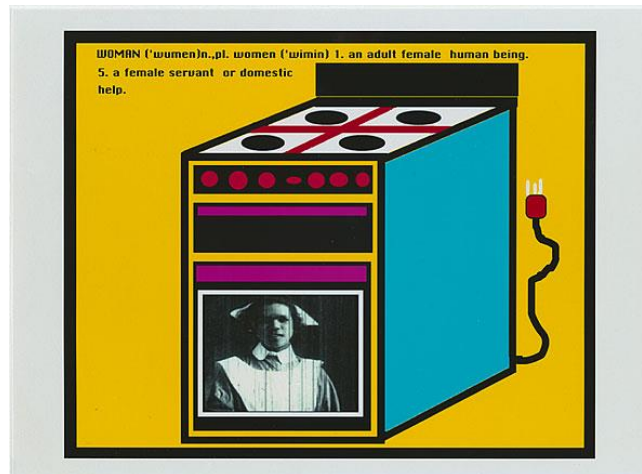
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Brenda L Croft,
Mary Mumbulla and Murri Craigie,
 1993,
 from the series, *The Big Deal is Black*,
 R3 colour photograph,
 99.5 x 120.5 (sight),
 Art Gallery of New South Wales,
 Sydney, purchased 1993, accession
 number 391.1993.

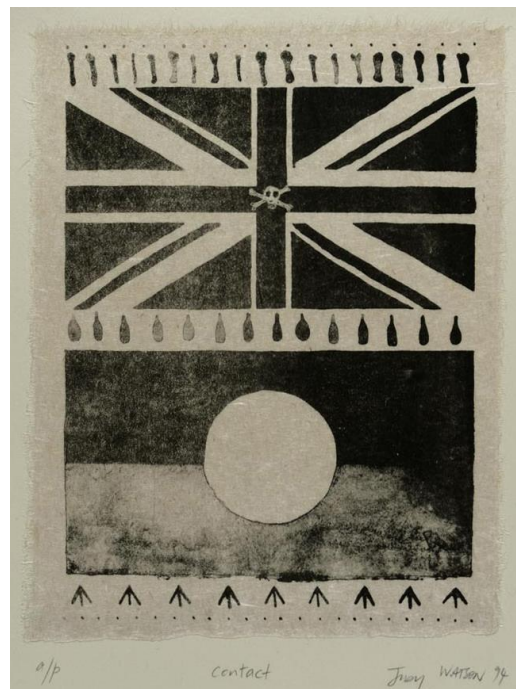
Artworks from Chapter 5



Rea
Domestic, 1992,
 from the series *Look Who's Calling
 the Kettle Black*,
 Kodak continuous tone XL7700
 dye-sublimation print,
 edition of 10,
 20.3 cm x 25.3 cm (image),
 22.4 cm x 30.6 cm (sheet),
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1998,
 accession number NGA 98.178.



Rea
Woman, 1992,
 from the series *Look Who's Calling
 the Kettle Black*,
 Kodak continuous tone XL7700
 dye-sublimation print,
 edition of 10,
 20.3 cm x 25.3 cm (image),
 22.4 cm x 30.6 cm (sheet),
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1998,
 accession number NGA 98.177.



Judy Watson,
contact, 1994,
 one-colour lithograph on plant-fibre
 paper collaged onto crême cotton-rag
 paper,
 23.5 x 16.8 cm (image),
 38 x 28 cm (paper),
 courtesy Milani Gallery,
 Brisbane.

Artworks from Chapter 6



Richard Bell,
Honest John, 2003,
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
90 x 90 cm,
courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



Bronwyn Bancroft
[Untitled] (detail), c.1992,
acrylic on hand dyed cotton, electrical
conduit, screenprint 'Billy Cobra' cotton,
cotton inserts, acrylic mirror
200 x 380 cm (dome diameter),
location unknown.
Source: Hetti Perkins & Liliana Correa,
*Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A
Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by
Aboriginal and Latin American Artists,*
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists
Co-operative, Sydney, 1992.

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according to the author's instructions

Brenda L Croft
[Untitled] (detail), c.1992,
four reverse black and white prints on
clear film, series of 79 slides and audio
installation,
170 x 106 cm (photographs),
location unknown.
Source: Hetti Perkins & Liliana Correa,
*Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A
Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by
Aboriginal and Latin American Artists,*
Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative,
Sydney, 1992.



Fiona Foley,
[Untitled] (detail), c.1992,
 three pastel on paper, larryless & botany
 sand and oxide sand sculpture,
 122 x 86 cm (works on paper),
 dimensions variable (sand sculpture),
 location unknown.
 Source: Hetti Perkins & Liliana Correa,
*Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery): A
 Collaborative Temporal Art Installation by
 Aboriginal and Latin American Artists,*
 Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative,
 Sydney, 1992.



Gordon Bennett,
Notes to Basquiat: Famous boomerang,
 1998,
 synthetic polymer paint on paper,
 120 x 80 cm (sheet),
 The Paul Eliadis Collection of
 Contemporary Australian Art, Brisbane
 © The Estate of Gordon Bennett.

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according to the author's instructions

Ian Abdulla
Beyond the pail, 1999,
mixed media installation, including
synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
dimensions variable,
courtesy Greenaway Art Galleries,
Adelaide.



Clinton Nain,
Big red cloud, 1999
bleach on Indian cotton,
198 x 124 cm,
courtesy of the artist.
Photo: Clayton Glen.



Vernon Ah Kee,
not an animal or a plant, 2006,
vinyl lettering on PVC,
300 x 300 cm,
Collection of the artist,
courtesy of Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

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according to the author's instructions

Laurie Nilsen,
Untitled, 2012,
mixed media on timber and metal trap,
111 x 64 x 10 cm,
courtesy of Fireworks Gallery,
Newstead, Queensland.

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