Beyond the Aesthetic
A STUDY OF INDIGENEITY AND NARRATIVE IN
CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN ART

– VOLUME ONE –

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December 2016

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

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INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS NAMES AND IMAGES OF DECEASED PERSONS.
THE TERM ‘INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS’ HAS BEEN ADOPTED AND MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THIS THESIS. THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT DISPLAYS OF THIS TERM, HOWEVER THIS TERM IS USED AS IT INCLUDES THOSE WHO IDENTIFY AS ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER.
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is wholly my own original work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

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Catherine Slocum

December 2016
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A very special thanks to Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Brook Andrew, Daniel Boyd, Dianne Jones, Christopher Pease and Christian Thompson whose work I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to study at length.

The project would not have been possible without the specialist Indigenous Australian collection at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Library in Canberra.

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, some of the most celebrated art to emerge from Australia has been the work of a group of Indigenous artists whose practice has been instrumental in relocating Indigenous experience and establishing an Indigenous sense of place within the complex social, political and cultural landscape of contemporary Australia. Their work is rooted in the urban Indigenous art movement that swept across the southeast of Australia in the mid-1980s. Like many artists once on the periphery of mainstream artistic narratives, however, these artists have benefited from globalisation, and they now find their work in the evolving discussions of contemporary art worldwide. No other group of artists has offered a more thorough or far-reaching artistic investigation of the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation, yet their work continues to be overlooked as a core area of academic inquiry. This thesis seeks to both illuminate its cultural significance and to state the case for continued art historical research on work tied to the narrative of Australia’s shared history. It does so through an in-depth reading of artworks produced by Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Brook Andrew, Daniel Boyd, Dianne Jones, Christopher Pease and Christian Thompson since 2000. At the forefront of these pieces are narratives underlining the subjugation of Australia’s Indigenous history, the intergenerational impact of colonisation and its legacy and the continued misrepresentations by others of Indigenous people and culture.
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAMU</td>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Utrecht (The Netherlands)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>Australian Football League</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANZAC</td>
<td>Australian and New Zealand Army Corps</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARU</td>
<td>Australian Rugby Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>COFA</td>
<td>College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales (Sydney) — changed to UNSW Art and Design in 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAAO</td>
<td>Design and Art Australia Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCP</td>
<td>International Studio and Curatorial Program (New York)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NADOC</td>
<td>National Aborigines Day Observance Committee — changed to NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) in 1991.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATSIAA</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Torres Strait Island Art Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORFORCE</td>
<td>North-West Mobile Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGV</td>
<td>National Gallery of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>NITV</td>
<td>National Indigenous Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAKA</td>
<td>Ruth Adeney Koori Award</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales (Sydney)</td>
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VOLUME TWO

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INTRODUCTION

We tend to think of narrative as a written or spoken account of events or experiences. This thesis demonstrates an example of how art is an effective means of telling stories, documenting history and recounting lived experience. The research emerged from an interest in art produced by Indigenous Australian artists living in the towns and cities of Australia. The work of these artists is sometimes referred to as “urban Indigenous art,” however the term has its difficulties because the practices of urban-based Indigenous artists flow into different, and increasingly global, networks. It is also a form of categorisation some of the artists refute. While the discourse and debates that surround the work of urban-based Indigenous artists forms part of this study, it is not the focus. Attention is directed to the art object, and more specifically, the narrative within. This is a narrative that offers extraordinary insight into the history and lived experiences of Indigenous Australians since colonisation, and conveys a sense of what it means to be Indigenous in the complex social, political and cultural landscape of contemporary Australia.

Notwithstanding the critical acclaim and meteoric rise of many urban-based Indigenous artists to the forefront of contemporary art practice in Australia and abroad, their practices have received little scholarly attention and art history more or less ignored. My research is an attempt to remedy this omission through an in-depth reading of work produced by seven artists whose practices are rooted in the unique history of Indigenous art making outside the remote communities in the desert and far north of Australia. It explores art making in what are in some respects previously unimagined spaces. A criticism of this study might be that bringing together the work of seven Indigenous artists is contrary to their expressed desire to see themselves and their practices assessed in broader terms. It is, as Bernice Murphy suggests, “grossly inadequate to speak of the
work of Indigenous artists within the framework of Indigenous art exclusively.”\(^1\) In one sense then I am operating within a category of convenience. Notwithstanding the difficulties of all forms of categorisation — and this in particular — I would argue that a study such as this offers vital insight. The evidence of the aesthetic and conceptual development of the artists’ practices and links that emerge from their work place it (and them) in dialogue with a broader discourse and produce new sites of inquiry.

**AIM AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH**

The artists whose work is brought together are: Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Dianne Jones, Christopher Pease, Daniel Boyd, Brook Andrew and Christian Thompson. Their Indigeneity is certainly a defining factor, however as we shall see, they are also bound by the way they express universal ideas through an Indigenous cultural lens and aspire to tell their stories, recount their history and share their experiences through art. To quote Brenda L. Croft, they are also typical of a growing pool of contemporary Indigenous Australian artists who are “seasoned overseas travellers, undertaking countless residences and participating in highly significant global cultural events annually.”\(^2\) At the forefront of the study are artworks produced by the artists between 2000 and 2015. As we shall see, these artworks are rich in narrative and require the viewer to look beyond the aesthetic. The thesis argues that when brought together the work forms a narrative that conveys the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation. The aim of the study is two-fold: to offer in-depth readings of the artists’ work and to identify and interrogate common threads in it.

The thesis is presented in two volumes. *Volume One* encompasses the written component of the thesis and *Volume Two*, the list of illustrations and reproductions of the artworks on which the study is based. The written volume has been organised into three parts. Part One seeks to put the research into context by offering a brief history of

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the urban Indigenous art movement. An outline of the current debates surrounding Indigenous Australian art and its makers and a critical analysis of the existing literature follows. It will point to the scholarly bias, lack of art historical research and the disciplinary approaches and classificatory models that have tended to underpin previous studies. The complications and challenges of undertaking research in this area, namely the need to build a dialogue around the work that does not replicate colonial and/or economic imperatives or reduce the artists’ collective identity to limiting adjectives, are also laid bare. A broader aim of Part One is to situate the work within an art historical context, and more specifically, show that the practices of these artists are deeply rooted in the history of the urban Indigenous art movement, which gained momentum in the mid-1980s.

Part Two comprises seven chapters — one for each of the artists. Each chapter offers a brief biography, a sketch of their practice, as well as a chronological reading of work produced between 2000 and 2015. Several artists were prolific during this period, and thus it was necessary to exclude some output from the study. For this reason the chapters are not offered as complete compendiums of work produced during this period. The readings are intended to familiarise the reader with the artists’ practices and illuminate the narratives that reoccur in their work. These are identified and brought together in Part Three of the thesis, the aim of which is to underline the significance of the work and state the case for further research and analysis. Because this is art that asks us to play an active role in the interpretation and reconstruction of the narrative, the authorial role of the viewer and creative processes used by the artist to aid the telling of the story form part of the discussion. Here common threads and linkages emerge. As we shall see, the linkages both in terms of theme and practice, offer new insight not only into how to read their work, but also into their experiences and motivations.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

The research involves close examination of the several hundred artworks set out in *Volume Two* of the thesis. By artworks, I mean those produced by the artists, those they have appropriated and those tied to the history of the urban art movement more generally. The artworks encompass a wide range of mediums, genres and styles including but not limited to photography, painting, digital media, sculpture, bricolage,
video and performance. As such, the work challenges conventional ideas about Indigenous Australian art, which for most people is dot or bark paintings made by artists living in remote communities such as those in the Western Desert or Arnhem Land in the far north of Australia. Likewise, in contrast to artists working in remote Australia, Indigenous artists in urban areas have a high level of formal art training and, it is plain to see, for the most part borrow from the standard artistic traditions often grouped under the broad heading of the West. The primary research tool was a database, which from the early stages of the study made possible the collation and organisation of the works. As you might expect, this image library was painstaking to complete but it offered a vital platform to index, annotate and ultimately select the work for discussion. This database is itself offered as a contribution to knowledge.

Once completed, preliminary analysis revealed a number of changes, stylistic and thematic, in the work of urban-based Indigenous artists since 2000. First, it became clear that work made since 2000 was characterised by the lack of scholarly attention it had received. Second, a striking feature of the post-2000 work is the multi-disciplinary approach utilised. Of course, this is not to say that artists pre-2000 did not draw upon multiple mediums, but there was a significant expansion after the turn of the century. In particular, and in keeping with developments overseas, post-2000 the artists’ engagement with non-traditional arts such as video, digital media and performance was more prevalent. As can be seen, advances in technology have given rise to new creative processes and steered artists towards previously unimagined paths, the fruits of which can be seen in this study. Moreover, the effect of globalisation, which is reflected in the artists’ participation in new international circuits of exhibition, was also a determining factor in the decision to focus on work produced post-2000.

A case study approach was chosen. As well as being the only effective way to allow me to undertake an in-depth reading of work, the approach was essential for a comparative analysis. Moreover, it introduced the vital biographical dimension. The starting point for the selection of the artists was their Indigeneity and context of their practice (e.g., “urban” rather than “remote”). The artists’ engagement in a fine art practice, as opposed to craft or applied art, was a further consideration. Due to the large pool of artists who fitted that criterion a decision was made to focus early career artists who had produced a sufficient volume of work, but whose work had also not been the subject of
a similar inquiry. The artists’ geographical ties were also taken into account. It was hoped that by selecting a group of artists with cultural and social ties to different parts of Australia, a broader view of Indigenous history and lived experience would be achieved. Notwithstanding, an obvious weakness of the study is the gender imbalance in the selection of the artists. Ostensibly, there would seem to be a large pool of female artists to choose from. However many, including Destiny Deacon, Fiona Foley and Brenda L. Croft, were mid-career with established practices; Yhonnie Scarce, Bindi Cole and Megan Cope were in the infancy of their careers and had not at that time produced a sufficient volume of work.

Subsequent to the selection of the artists, the existing literature on their work was collected. This is extensive and comprises primary sources such as artist talks, interviews and statements, and secondary sources that included exhibition catalogues, journal articles and publications on Australian and Indigenous Australian art. As the research progressed, the scope of literature was broadened to include readings on Australian history, and in particular, those related to the governance of Indigenous Australians since colonisation. This was due to the artists’ engagement with historical narratives and frequent references to the impact and legacy of colonisation; the broader context of which was not well documented in the existing literature. The extant literature on narrative art was also reviewed. It was somewhat surprising to learn that comparatively little has been written on the narrativity of works of art, or as Richard Brilliant puts it, “the peculiar properties of visual narratives.” Of the studies that were reviewed, literary theory was typically adopted as a critical framework. Despite this not being a perfect pairing, the approach is favoured by art historians because the traits producing literary narratives are similar to the pictorial.

Because artworks do not naturally lend themselves to narrative (“the order of telling is not always clear, the order of reading is not always clear, nor is the order of occurrence always clear”\(^4\)), a deconstructive approach was used to interpret the works. The process was lengthy and complicated as it involved grappling with varying degrees of narration and often multiple narratives occurring within the same work. Of course, the interpretation of an artwork tests the proficiency of the artist. As art historian


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Paul Wood puts it: “without skill and accomplishment of some kind, there would be nothing to communicate.”

Be that as it may, in my view, once it has been displayed for public consumption, an artwork is not, at least in part, limited to what is intended by the artist. The approach taken in this thesis is that for the viewer the meaning might be far broader than the artist intends or acknowledges. As Terry Barrett argues, there can be “different, competing, and contradictory interpretations of the same work.”

For this reason the interpretations laid out in Part Two are effectively often multi-authored and are threaded together with insights from the artists, those in the existing literature and those emerging from this study. As you would expect with a project of this scale, the commentary in the existing literature has been pushed further and new links forged across the work, some of which present opportunities for future research.

**RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH**

Notwithstanding the long overdue increase in broadly-based scholarly attention given to Indigenous Australians, there is still a need for more research and analysis. One area in which the need is apparent is the history of Indigenous Australian art. This thesis responds by offering an in-depth reading of work produced by seven artists whose practices are in dialogue with the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation and offer a cultural self-portrait of urban Indigeneity. A comprehensive survey of the existing literature revealed a dearth of art historical research on Indigenous Australian art. Of the many studies that have been undertaken on the art of Indigenous Australians, most are of an anthropological nature. What is more, in the seminal publications on Indigenous Australian art and Australian art, there is a clear bias towards art produced in remote communities in the desert and far north of Australia. Anthropology and art history are, as explained by Howard Morphy, complementary disciplines that can work side by side to deepen our understanding of the art object.

However, we must not forget that by the very nature of their respective disciplines, the anthropologist and art historian ask different questions and follow different lines of inquiry.

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In this way scholarship has tended to overlook the long history of Indigenous art making outside remote Australia, and the fact that it was from within a supportive urban Indigenous art context that some of Australia’s most successful contemporary artists established a strong foothold in the artworld. Examples of these are Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley, Richard Bell, Destiny Deacon, Gordon Hookey and Michael Riley. The artists whose work is the subject of this study are further examples, as are their contemporaries such as Michael Cook, Yhonnie Scarce, Danie Mellor, Bindi Cole, Darren Siwes, Reko Rennie and Megan Cope. The thesis looks to advance understanding about the practices of these artists and the context from which the work emerges. It is also an attempt to add to a historical understanding and uncover pathways to new ones. There are two other compelling reasons to look beyond the current perimeters of inquiry. First, it is important to highlight the fact that for the majority of Indigenous Australians their lived experience is tied to an urban rather than remote landscape. As Djon Mundine reminds us, “it is through art that most non-Indigenous Australians have their first contact with Aboriginal people.” In other words, their understanding of Indigenous people and culture is mediated by the art they see.

The second reason relates to the narrative within the work, which as previously stated, offers rare insight into the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation, and by extension, historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This insight is important because it reaffirms an Indigenous perspective where it has often been absent in the public domain. Of course, the artists’ engagement with historical narratives, and their recasting of those narratives through an Indigenous lens has implications that resonate far beyond the realm of art history — it adds to the discourse of Australia’s shared history. As we shall see, their work also reaffirms Indigenous perspective on the question of identity and offers critical responses to the colonisers’ misrepresentation of Indigenous Australians as a subject. Equally important is the way the work challenges conventional ideas about Indigenous Australian art, and more importantly, prompts a rethink of its boundaries and the narratives built into it, which are not fixed and should be allowed to evolve over time.

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Part One
THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT
CHAPTER ONE
SITUATING URBAN INDIGENOUS ART

It might be unwise to seek some ‘national’ tradition in Australian art; however, the multiculturalism, hybridity and the constant dialectic that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art have given, and continue to give, the best of Australian art its unique and distinctive voice.

— Sasha Grishin, Australian Art: A History

The premise of the research was to gain a better understanding of art produced by Indigenous Australians whose lives and professional practices are tied to an urban rather than a remote landscape. The work of these artists is often collectively referred to as “urban Indigenous art.” For reasons outlined in this chapter, however, contemporary use of the term is problematic because it fixes these artists to prescribed margins and carries with it questions of authenticity. Although the work of many of them embodies an extraordinary narrative conveying the history and lived experience of their people since colonisation, scholars have been slow to recognise their practices as a core area of academic inquiry. Through close examination of the current literature’s debates and discourses, this chapter sets out the reasons why the practices of these artists have languished on the margins of mainstream artistic narratives. However, it is important to place the research in context first, with a brief history of the urban art movement. As we shall see, the work at the nexus of this study is deeply rooted in the urban art movement that swept across the southeast states of Australia in the mid-1980s, and it is now featured in evolving conversations on contemporary art worldwide.

1.1 THE HISTORY OF URBAN INDIGENOUS ART

Art writer Susan McCulloch argues that one of the greatest strengths of Indigenous Australian art and culture has been its constant ability to adapt.¹ That of Indigenous

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Australians living in urban regions of Australia is certainly no exception (as noted by Peter Sutton, they “have been exposed for a much longer time to non-Aboriginal society and culture and have experienced much more profound cultural changes”\(^2\)). In fact, their ability to adapt has been key to both their survival and the continuance of their culture. These changes are reflected in the artistic output of Indigenous Australian artists since colonisation. Evidence abounds in the work of nineteenth-century Indigenous artists such as Tommy McRae, William Barak and Mickey of Ulladulla, who used Western materials such as ink and paper to record the lives of Indigenous Australians on the precipice of significant change. Because it is recounted from an Indigenous perspective, the resultant work offers rare and exceptional insight into the social, cultural and political upheaval brought on by the processes of colonisation. Prior to their work being recognised as significant in the late twentieth century (which Andrew Sayers calls “the result of several connected factors”\(^3\)), audiences had to look to the work of non-Indigenous artists for readings of the cross-cultural exchanges and encounters of this period.

When Howard Morphy wrote, “urban Aboriginal art is not new and has been around for as long as Aboriginal artists have been producing works in urban settings,” he was clearly referring to the work of these artists.\(^4\) Of course, in the context of Indigenous Australian art (the category in which the work of Indigenous artists living in the cities and towns of Australia tends to be ensconced, albeit uncomfortably), the “urban” prefix refers to the style of art and social milieu of the artist. It is the culmination of the many cross-cultural exchanges and encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people since colonisation. Thus, despite the term having been introduced in the 1980s to “counter the perception that the only authentic art was ‘tribal’ art from the desert and the top end” (in the words of Hannah Fink),\(^5\) the work of nineteenth-century artists such as Tommy McRae, William Barak and Mickey of Ulladulla forms part of the unique art history of Indigenous art making outside of “remote” Australia. For reasons outlined later in this chapter, despite making “a necessary statement at a particular time,” the

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\(^3\) Andrew Sayers, Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century (Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press in association with the National Gallery of Australia, 1994), 9.


lingering use of the “urban” prefix and the categorisation of the artists solely on the basis of their ethnicity are fraught with difficulty.⁶

Contrary to the long history of Indigenous Australian art outside of remote Australia, it was not until the 1980s that the work of Indigenous artists living in urban regions came to be recognised as a movement. A contributing factor was the changing sociopolitical climate under the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s, which gave greater visibility to Indigenous culture and boosted arts funding. As noted by art historian Wally Caruana, the latter led to the establishment of community-based print workshops around the country, in which the practices of Avril Quail, Alice Hinton-Bateup and Kevin Gilbert flourished.⁷ The creation of these workshops was consistent with broadening definitions of art and with growing acceptance of the so-called “lesser” arts of printmaking, photography and performance.⁸ It was not only in printmaking, however, that Indigenous artists in the towns and cities were making their mark. Adelaide-born painter Trevor Nickolls and ceramic artist Thanakupi (who in 1971 flew from her home in far north Queensland to study ceramics at East Sydney Technical College in Sydney) were establishing a space for artists outside of “the classical Aboriginal traditions.”⁹ Notably, Thanakupi and Nickolls were among the first Indigenous artists to explore art making in a formal art school setting.¹⁰ The first was Harold Thomas, a Luritja-Wombai man from Alice Springs, who designed the Aboriginal flag.¹¹ Many peers have followed in their footsteps, to the extent that such a path has become a defining characteristic of urban-based Indigenous artists.¹²

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⁶ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid., 199.
¹⁰ Natasha Brook, “Thanakupi,” in Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia, eds. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Revised ed. (Sydney, NSW: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2013), 144; and Tess Allas and Joanna Mendelssohn, “Trevor Nickolls,” in Design and Art Australia Online (DAAO), first published 2011, last updated 2013, https://www.daao.org.au/bio/trevor-nickolls/. Art schools at this time were skill-based, however since the 1980s (as more art schools became attached to universities and pressures placed on them to fit within conventional scholarship frameworks) art students have been required to undertake written research activities alongside skill-based training.
¹² A 2009/10 study found that 35 percent of Indigenous artists working outside of traditional art-producing areas in the geographically remote regions of Australia had attained university qualifications and 37 percent TAFE or College of Advanced Education certification. See Vivien Johnson, Tess Allas, and Laura Fisher, This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report (Sydney, NSW: College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 2009), 25, http://www.storylines.org.au.
For many years artists like Thanakupi and Nickolls worked in relative isolation, unaware of the many other Indigenous artists in the towns and cities of Australia. This situation changed in the mid-1980s with *Koori Art '84*, a landmark exhibition at Artspace in Sydney that brought together the work of these artists and opened a new chapter in Australian art history. To quote participating artist Arone Raymond Meeks: “it was only since 1984 that we realised that there were other Koori artists out there doing the same thing.”\(^{14}\) The exhibition was instrumental in launching the careers of some of Australia’s most celebrated artists, including Fiona Foley, Lin Onus and Michael Riley.\(^{15}\) Momentum continued to build with *NADOC '86*, the first contemporary art exhibition of Indigenous photography. Curated by Anthony “Ace” Burke, it showcased the emerging talents of Mervyn Bishop, Tracey Moffatt and Brenda L. Croft.\(^{16}\) The fact that these artists established a strong foothold in the artworld through a supportive Indigenous art context is not unique to their practices. As noted by Marianne Riphagen, Brook Andrew and Christian Thompson sought the advice and company of more established Indigenous artists early in their careers.\(^{17}\)

As was the case with *Koori Art '84*, *NADOC '86* became the launching pad for high-art Indigenous photography, helping to raise the profile of Indigenous artists living in urban areas and to broaden the established narrative of Indigenous Australian art. Of course, it also disrupted the narrative of Indigenous lived experience, which for the majority of Indigenous Australians is tied to an urban rather than remote landscape. The significance of these exhibitions, and the many others before and during the 1980s, is that they allowed the artists to operate on their own terms. As photographer Michael Riley said of the exhibition:

> I think it was the first group show of Aboriginal artists/photographers in the country, so it was an important show in that respect and people still refer to it.

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\(^{13}\) *Koori*, or *Koorie*, is a term used to describe Indigenous people from New South Wales and Victoria.


\(^{15}\) The participating artists were Banduk Marika, Darren Beetson, Euphemia Bostock, Peter Chester, Isabell Coe, Ian Craigie, Ermabella Arts, Fiona Foley, Warwick Keen, Fernanda Martins, Raymond Meeks, Murijama, Ida Nabunanka, Trevor Nickolls, Lin Onus, Avril Quaill, Michael Riley, Wenton Rubuntja, Jeffrey Samuels, Andrew Saunders, Terry Shewring, Jim Simon, Gordon Syron, Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula and Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula.

\(^{16}\) The exhibition also featured the work of Tony Davis, Ellen Jose, Darren Kemp, Chris Robinson, Terry Shewring and Ros Sultan.

The photographers were all Aboriginal and they were dictating what they wanted to show and how they wanted to show images of their own people.  

Critical response to the exhibitions was lacking, however, with the press all but ignoring them. Vivien Johnson, one of the *Koori Art ’84* organisers, wrote the only review of it, while *NADOC ’86* curator Gael Newton writes that Tracey Moffatt was the only artist approached by the mainstream media for an interview. Although it was Moffatt’s first public “write-up” and as such was a cause for celebration, Newton called it a missed opportunity.

The formation of Sydney-based Indigenous art collective Boomalli in late 1987 solidified the burgeoning urban art movement, and its founding members are well-known in art circles (Brenda L. Croft, Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Fiona Foley, Arone Raymond Meeks, Avril Quill, Jeffrey Samuels, Michael Riley and Tracey Moffatt). Most of them had met through their association with *Koori Art ’84* and *NADOC ’86*. Boomalli responded to the disproportionate representation of Indigenous artists from the towns and cities within the Australian art scene, and it sought to confront stereotypical representations of Indigenous people and culture “created through a lack of knowledge and the harvesting of historically based preconceived ideas.” The sentiment is reflected in the cooperative’s name. Drawn from the languages of the Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri and Bundjalung people, *boomalli* means “to make a mark,” “to strike back” and “to light up.” Since its inception in the late 1980s, the cooperative has provided successive generations of Indigenous artists from New South Wales with a meeting place, support system and exhibition space. Almost thirty years on, it continues to promote the original objectives of its founding members and to deliver their work to a wider audience.

Curator Jonathan Jones’ description of Boomalli as “one of Australia’s most important cultural institutions” is apt. As well as launching the careers of some of the most

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21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
significant figures in Australian art today, the cooperative has steadfastly advocated for social reform and change, particularly with regard to the issues facing Indigenous Australians in urban centres. Equally important is its role in regenerating Indigenous culture and in establishing a place for Indigenous artists operating outside of remote Indigenous communities. Yet while Boomalli was arguably the epicentre of the urban art movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the movement was not confined to New South Wales. The changing social and political climate had empowered and inspired Indigenous artists in other urban regions to use art to document their history and lived experience. As Fink notes, for example, Tasmanian-born photographer Ricky Maynard “has produced some of the most compelling images of contemporary Aboriginal Australia over the last two decades.”

In the mid-1980s, Maynard embarked on an extraordinary project to document the lives and cultural traditions of the Indigenous people in his home state of Tasmania. One of several photographic series that emerged is *Moonbird People* (figs. 1.1–1.2). This pictorial essay traces the annual muttonbirding harvest on Flinders Island, a tradition practiced by the Indigenous people in the region for centuries. Maynard’s choice of medium during this period was in keeping with the popularity of photography among urban-based Indigenous artists. Whether used to record long-held cultural traditions, to document untold histories or to reimagine Indigenous identity, the camera proved to be a powerful means of self-representation. A noteworthy example of the last approach is Michael Riley’s black-and-white “Hollywoodesque” portraits of Kristina Nehm (fig. 1.3), Tracey Moffatt (fig. 1.4) and Avril Quaill (fig. 1.5). Riley had set out to contemporise Indigenous identity by casting Indigenous women in an unfamiliar light, the subtext being (to quote Ace Burke) that “black girls weren’t meant to be beautiful or seriously chic.” Although Maynard and Riley’s works are different, parallels can be drawn between their use of the photographic medium to “present a new vision — a self-truth — imagined and determined on their own terms.”

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25 Riley, *NADOC ‘86.*


While the photographic medium dominated the practices of urban-based artists during the 1980s and 1990s, many others worked outside this medium, including Gordon Bennett, Judy Watson, Robert Campbell Jnr and Lin Onus. Their use of art for documentation and social commentary is a common thread. Another is their collective engagement in postcolonial discourse and in narratives relating to Australia’s past in relation to its treatment of Indigenous Australians. In the mid-1980s, Campbell Jnr produced a series of paintings (two being *Barred from the Baths* and *Roped off at the Picture Show*; figs. 1.6 and 1.7) in dialogue with the racial segregation in rural New South Wales exposed in 1965 by a group of university students known as the “Freedom Riders.”

Likewise, Onus recounted the trials and tribulations of forgotten Indigenous resistance fighters such as Musquito. He had been introduced to politics at an early age through his father’s activism, and he often used to his practice to articulate the social and political concerns of his people.

Also in the 1980s, a number of urban-based Indigenous artists embarked on personal pilgrimages to reconnect with their Indigenous culture and history and to make new connections. Colonisation, which severed vital social, cultural and familial links, had left scores of Indigenous Australians with little or no knowledge of their heritage and identity. Lin Onus, Judy Watson and Trevor Nickolls were among the artists. Onus travelled to Maningrida in Arnhem Land, where he forged a close friendship with artists Jack Wunuwn and Johnny Bulunbulun. He later paid homage to them by immortalizing them through portraiture (figs. 1.8–1.9). Watson returned to her great-grandmother’s country around Lawn Hill Gorge in northwest Queensland, where she “learned from the ground up” and became immersed in the land. The history and landscape of her Waanyi ancestors is now deeply embedded in the narrative of her work. Likewise, Nickolls’ quest to “deepen his connection with ‘traditional’ Aboriginal art” took him to the Northern Territory, where he spent several years living in Darwin. Nickolls has also travelled to Papunya, Melville Island and Turkey Creek, and he cites a

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31 Ibid., 387.
meeting with Papunya artist Dinny Nolan in 1979 as a turning point in his life and career as an emerging artist.\[34\]

In the 1990s, the “history wars” further fuelled these artists’ engagement with historical narratives. This debate centres on the extent to which the colonisation of Australia was marked by violence and conflict, and on the dissemination of Australian history itself. Critics argue that the dominant historical discourse fails to adequately acknowledge Australia’s shared and pre-colonial Indigenous history. The debate raised serious questions not only about the legitimacy of Australia’s colonisation and the narratives used to justify legal settlement, but also disrupted its overdeveloped sense of national identity, elements of which are out of step with Australia’s increasingly multicultural populace. These debates play out in the work of Leah King-Smith, Julie Gough, Karen Casey, Gordon Bennett, Destiny Deacon and Rea, with each of them recalling historical narratives and re-presenting them from an Indigenous perspective. (The word “re-present” refers to the way they depict the past from the perspective of the colonised, as opposed to the coloniser, as a means of reinstating an Indigenous perspective where it has been historically absent.)

In their investigations into the past, many artists turned to the photographic archive and began incorporating visual references to it in their work. An early example is King-Smith’s 1991 photographic series Patterns of Connection (figs. 1.10–1.13), which draws on a collection of nineteenth-century photographs of Indigenous Australians held in the archives of the State Library of Victoria. Of her engagement with the archive, King-Smith has said:

This photo-composition series is essentially about renewing people’s perceptions of Aboriginal people … by re-placing the Koories in my work, I am showing my concerns about how the original photographs, and those generally of Indigenous peoples in the 19th century, are evidence of the cultural bias of the civilization which produced them, and in so being, generate an inaccurate version of the presence of Aboriginal people from this point of view.\[35\]

The popularity of the archive can be understood in terms of the way it offers the visual artist entry points into the past, and multiple pathways to explore it. As explained by


\[35\] Leah King-Smith, artist statement in Patterns of Connection: An Exhibition of Photo-Compositions by Leah King-Smith, 2nd ed, exhibition catalogue (Sydney, NSW: Australian Centre of Photography, 1992), 8.
Ian McLean, the archive is also a pliable tool for redressing the cultural bias and inconsistencies of the colonisers’ accounts of people, time and place.36

A defining characteristic of the practices of many urban-based Indigenous artists in the 1990s was the predilection towards undertaking an extensive period of research, in Australia or abroad, as part of the creative process. Tasmanian-based artist Julie Gough’s 1998 installation *The Whispering Sands (Ebb Tide)* (figs. 1.14–1.15) was the result of an investigation into British “collectors” of Indigenous Australian material culture in the name of science, power and curiosity.37 The sixteen individuals she identified through her research formed the basis for her installation, located in the tidal flats at Eaglehawk Neck in Southern Tasmania. As she explained, the British collectors accumulated what they could from the local Indigenous people to increase their personal status and power.38 Their trophies included artefacts, cultural regalia, human remains, anthropological and medical information, and more.39 The installation is in dialogue with the commodification of Indigenous people and culture for profit and gain, clarifying the power structures that operate in society and breed indifference. Gough subverts these power structures by reducing the individuals to the “nameless conglomerate mass” they imposed on the Indigenous people of Tasmania.40

The artists’ preoccupation with narratives tied to Australia’s colonial history during the 1990s is notable; however, attention was also paid to contemporary issues, such as the alarmingly high rate of Indigenous Australian deaths in custody and the removal of Indigenous children from their families. Both of these issues were at the forefront of Australian politics during this time. In 1991, the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was published, and, in 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (now the Australian Human Rights Commission) released its report *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.*41

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36 Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears*, 211.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
in Custody (fig. 1.16) quotes a photograph the artist came across in a Brisbane newspaper of an Indigenous Australian man held in a cage.42 (The painting also hints at the spiralling rate of Indigenous incarceration.) Clearly in dialogue with the “Stolen Generation” is Deacon’s Adoption (fig. 1.17), which offers a terse critique of the paternalistic policies that removed thousands of Indigenous children from their families and placed them with white ones.43

The relocation of Indigenous people and culture to the burgeoning towns and cities of Australia was another strong conceptual thread, particularly among the cohort of photographers. Examples can be found in the work of Brenda L. Croft and Peter Yanada McKenzie who, like Maynard years earlier, set about documenting Indigenous people in their communities. Croft took to the streets of inner Sydney, where she photographed members of Redfern’s Indigenous community. Her 1992 series Conference Call (figs. 1.18–1.21), which she produced with renowned African-American conceptual artist Adrian Piper, offers a positive, realistic portrayal of urban Indigeneity. For a later series called The Big Deal Is Black (figs. 1.22–1.23), Croft showed family life and the strong familial connection her Indigenous female friends Mary Mumbulla and Hetti Perkins have with their children.44 Links can be made with McKenzie’s 1991 series It’s a Man’s Game (figs. 1.24–1.26), which takes us into the inner sanctum of the La Perouse Panthers (a rugby league team) in their winning season and offers audiences a unique cultural self-portrait of the La Perouse Indigenous community.

As we have seen, the social and political climate of the 1980s and 1990s shaped contemporary Indigenous artistic production and was favourable to the development of the urban art movement. This freedom is reflected in the way urban-based Indigenous artists established networks to promote and exhibit their work and began to colonise

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42 Wally Caruana, “Deaths in Custody,” in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights, eds. Franchesca Cubillo and Wally Caruana (Canberra, ACT: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 231.
43 These are the children of Indigenous Australian decent who were forcibly taken from their families by welfare agencies, the church and Federal and State government agencies under official Australian Government policy between 1909 and 1969. However, it should be noted that in some areas of Australia the practice began prior to 1909 and continued into the 1970s.
previously unimagined spaces. As explained by Marcia Langton, still lacking were the “theoretical and aesthetic grounds for understanding it.”⁴⁵ The collective identity that began to form around the practices of urban artists was however met with opposition from those who took it to be a by-product of assimilation rather than the contemporary manifestation of an age-old culture born out of a distinctive experience.⁴⁶ Not only did the work not conform to what audiences had come to recognise as Indigenous Australian art, but also the artists did not fit the ideological or geographical stereotype of the “Indigenous Australian artist.” Some artists sought to correct and subvert the characterisation from within a supportive Indigenous network, whereas others marked their frustration by working outside the boundaries of critical containment.

It was not anticipated that the collective identity that had empowered urban-based Indigenous artists in the late 1980s and 1990s would quickly become a disabling and prescriptive point of reference and means of identification. Yet despite the continued opposition to and marginalisation of their work, their practices continued to flourish and manifest in new and interesting ways. The increasing influence of postmodernism and the shift towards a multi-disciplinary art practice were contributing factors, as were advances in technology that gave rise to new creative processes and means of expression. Likewise, while many artists continued to engage with postcolonial discourse and to reassert an Indigenous perspective on the question of identity, others found new narratives and points of convergence. By 2000 the effect of globalisation was being felt, providing new arenas for artistic reception and pathways for marginalised artists to reposition their practices as part of the global art world.⁴⁷ As Daniel Browning has written, “a local movement within the borders of a nation state had become transnational and intercultural: that is global.”⁴⁸ Today’s urban artists (to quote McLean) “comprise less a movement and more a mix of singular artists in the contemporary art scene.”⁴⁹ Yet, with “no secure boundaries,” as McLean describes it, their work is not easily placed within the discourse of Australian art history.⁵⁰ The varied and complex reasons for this dichotomy inform the remainder of this chapter.

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⁴⁶ See Johnson, Allas, and Fisher, This Side of the Frontier, 31; Caruana, Aboriginal Art, 194; and Jones, essay in Boomalli: 20 Years On, n.p.
⁴⁷ It is important to point out that globalisation also negatively impacts indigenous peoples. However, in saying that, art is certainly one platform on which indigenous causes can be circulated.
⁴⁹ McLean, Rattling Spears, 231.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 245.
1.2 THE CULTURAL DILEMMA IN AUSTRALIAN ART

A longstanding debate pervades the categorisation of Indigenous Australian art and the way it is written about in Australia’s art history: should it be a stand alone-category or should it be contained within the broader category of Australian art? This highly contentious question continues to divide academics, art writers, curators, artists, art patrons and the viewing public. A review of the literature on the topic indicates a multiplicity of viewpoints. Art historian Susan Lowish cites Christopher Allen’s *Art in Australia: From Colonization to Postmodernism* (1997) and Andrew Sayers’ *Australian Art* (2001) as demonstrating the two main approaches.\(^51\) Sayers’ book is “inclusionist” because it recognises Indigenous Australian art as part of Australian art, and Allen’s “exclusionist” because it treats them as separate entities.\(^52\) The difficulty with the inclusionist approach is that it advocates the assimilation of Indigenous Australia art into Australian art. As explained by Lowish, the drawback of the exclusionist approach is that it “enforces a view of ‘Aboriginal art’ as having outsider status.”\(^53\) Of course, one could also argue that Indigenous Australian art, being the oldest ongoing tradition of art in the world and the expression of a distinct culture, is indeed a special case and should be treated separately.\(^54\)

While Sayers brings together readings of Australian and Indigenous Australian art under a single title, he does so without assimilating one into the other. Instead, he takes the position that there is a duality in the art of Australia, and thus two art histories:\(^55\)

> To treat ‘Australian art’ as a subject which encompasses both these traditions of visual culture is not easy; in fact there are significant conceptual difficulties in this approach. The largest difficulty lies in the definition of the word ‘art’ when applied to Aboriginal culture and definitions of the word in the fundamentally (though not exclusively) Western culture of settler people.\(^56\)

Art historian Sasha Grishin makes a similar observation, adding that the exclusionist approach (or “apartheid model,” as he calls it) is the result of non-Indigenous Australian art being viewed through the lens of European art historical methodologies, and the art

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\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 140.

\(^{55}\) In this context, Sayers’ argument presumes a narrow definition of Indigenous Australian art.

of Indigenous artists from within an anthropological framework.\textsuperscript{57} It should be noted, however, that in his 2013 publication \textit{Australian Art: A History}, Grishin rejects the exclusionist approach and any model that attempts to “assimilate or integrate different conventions into contemporary practice, either through absorbing Indigenous art into a European tradition, or conversely, trying to absorb non-Indigenous art practice into an Indigenous Australian art.”\textsuperscript{58}

The “apartheid model” Grishin refers to is manifest in the seminal publications on Australian art, such as those authored by art critics Robert Hughes and Bernard Smith. Hughes’ 1966 publication \textit{The Art of Australia} contains visual depictions of Indigenous Australians by non-Indigenous artists, but it has no visual depictions by Indigenous Australians\textsuperscript{59} — the inference being that as recently as the mid-1960s, the artistic endeavours of Indigenous Australians had not conformed to European definitions of art. Smith’s \textit{Australian Painting}, which has been updated and reprinted three times since it was first published in 1962, paints a similar picture.\textsuperscript{60} Because there are four editions, Smith’s book is still a valuable resource that puts into context the changing status of Indigenous Australian art over an extended period. In the first edition, for example, the conversation about Indigenous art is bound to its influence on the practices of non-Indigenous artists, including Margaret Preston and Ian Fairweather.\textsuperscript{61} A decade on, Smith refers to Indigenous art, but only to say that it has “evolved in isolation from the rest of the art world.”\textsuperscript{62} Not until the third edition of 1991 is Indigenous Australian art recognised as a legitimate subject of academic inquiry. This acknowledgment comes via a chapter on the painting movement in the desert communities and developments in urban areas, such as the formation of Boomalli and the work of Tommy McRae and William Barak.\textsuperscript{63}

In the intervening years, the art of Australia has undergone radical transformation, not only in relation to the status of Indigenous Australian art, but also in terms of critical

\textsuperscript{57} Sasha Grishin, \textit{Australian Art: A History} (Carlton, VIC: The Miegunyah Press, 2013), x.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} The 1966 edition of Hughes’ book was withdrawn from sale shortly after it was published. The book was rewritten and re-released in 1970.
\textsuperscript{60} The four editions were published in 1962, 1971, 1991 and 2001 and collectively cover the period 1788 to 2000.
discourse. For example, Grishin’s 2013 publication begins the conversation with a simple but pertinent question: what is Australian art?\textsuperscript{64} The answer might seem obvious, but in the context of Australia’s evolving multicultural identity it raises more questions than it does answers. Of concern here, however, is whether Australian art, as a category, has the capacity to include the art of Indigenous Australians without “one being absorbed into the other.”\textsuperscript{65} Grishin believes that it does, because “much of the art in Australia has been involved in a continuous dialectic between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.”\textsuperscript{66} Contrary to its depiction in popular literature as a “completely insular tradition,” he further argues that the art of Indigenous Australians did not exist in isolation, even in the years prior to European colonisation in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{67} In other words, to quote Grishin, “at no stage was Australia completely cut off from the outside world.”\textsuperscript{68}

In his 2008 publication \textit{Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories}, anthropologist Howard Morphy explains how changing definitions of art have led to greater acceptance of art produced by Indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{69} Of these changes he writes: “in world-art discourse there has recently been a significant shift away from the European canon toward a more encompassing conception of art, enabling very different artistic traditions to be included within the same broad frame.”\textsuperscript{70} It is for this reason, he adds, that it is increasing difficult “to deny the Indigenous artists the right to share the same gallery spaces as non-Indigenous.”\textsuperscript{71} In the case of Australia, the shift away from the “European canon” has implications that extend beyond the realm of Indigenous Australian art, for Australia’s non-discriminatory immigration policy has broadened its cultural landscape and given rise to new cultural identities. As noted by curator Nick Waterlow, “the conditions that create contemporary art in one country differ considerably from those in others.”\textsuperscript{72} The art of Australia has unique aspects that distinguish it from the art of other nations, so the challenge ahead is how to bring them together under the auspices of a single entity.

\textsuperscript{64} Grishin, \textit{Australian Art}, 3.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., x.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 5–6.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Howard Morphy, \textit{Becoming Art: Exploring Cross Cultural Categories} (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press 2008), 3.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 3.
In the case of Indigenous Australian art, Morphy believes in adopting a cross-cultural definition of art that would “encompass the many differences that exist and existed between Aboriginal and European art” but would also recognise “the differences that exist with European art and the ways in which both art traditions have changed over time.” However, such an approach overlooks the fact that the cultural dilemma in Australian art extends beyond art objects to their makers, some of whom sit more comfortably (for critics at least) in the margins of mainstream artistic narratives. The marginalisation of urban-based Indigenous artists, a discussion of which is to follow, is a case in point. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the existing literature on Indigenous Australian art, where the story of Indigenous art making in urban areas is dwarfed by other art histories, such as those relating to the painting movements in Hermannsburg in the 1930s and Papunya in the early 1970s. The challenge ahead is how to best negotiate the complexities of Australia’s unique and changing cultural identity and history — and specifically in relation to its representation through art — without assimilating one into the other.

1.3 REVIEWING THE EXISTING LITERATURE

Morphy’s *Aboriginal Art* (1998), Wally Caruana’s publication of the same name (the most recent edition of which was published in 2012) and Ian McLean’s *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art* (2016) are the seminal books on the topic, and “Indigenous Australian art” is the category in which the work of urban-based Indigenous artists tends to be placed. Other notable books include Andrew Sayers’ *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century* (1994), McLean’s *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal Art* (2011), Fred Myers’ *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art* (2002), Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale’s *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (2000) and Susan McCulloch and Emily McCulloch Childs’ *McCulloch’s Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guide* (2008), which has been revised and reprinted several times. The work of urban-based Indigenous artists is discussed in the seminal publications; however, in most cases the text is heavily weighed towards art produced in remote Indigenous communities in the desert and far north regions of Australia. This

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73 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, 3.
observation is particularly true of Morphy and Caruana’s publications. Also significant is the arrangement of text, which in the case of Indigenous Australian art tends to be organised thematically or geographically — Morphy’s being an example of the former and Caruana’s the latter. By way of contrast, McLean’s recent publication offers a chronological reading of the history of Indigenous Australian art.

Of the these approaches, Caruana’s is the most widespread, as Indigenous art is frequently discussed in terms of regional developments or geographical areas (the most commonly cited are Arnhem Land, the Central and Western Deserts, the Kimberley, Queensland, Torres Strait Islands and Urban or City-based). In relation to Australia’s geographic expanse and the distribution of Indigenous Australians, it makes sense to approach Indigenous Australian art in this way. One major drawback is that many Indigenous Australians have ties to more than one geographical location, which makes it difficult to locate individual artists. Many urban-based Indigenous artists, for example, live in towns and cities but maintain strong ties and cultural connections to country. As Brenda L. Croft has written, “it is ridiculous that urban Aboriginal artists are seen as not having links to anywhere and float round in this space which is seen as metropolitan when they still have links to their land, through birth, family and emotion.”\textsuperscript{74} She further questions whether there is such a place as “urbania.”\textsuperscript{75} Curator Djon Mundine has made similar representations.\textsuperscript{76} A further difficulty with the geographical approach is the omission of key sites of production. As an example, McCulloch and McCulloch Childs’ 2008 publication omits New South Wales and Victoria, home to 38 percent of Australia’s Indigenous population.\textsuperscript{77}

Contrary to their focus on remote Indigenous art, one thing in common between Morphy and Caruana’s publications is their treatment of urban Indigenous art, which includes a brief history and outline of contemporary developments. McLean pushes the commentary further, as do Kleinert and Neale in their extensive offering of scholarly essays and artist biographies. Their companion to Indigenous Australian art is notable for its broad scope, which extends beyond visual art and includes discussions on film, film, film.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Djon Mundine quoted in Fink, “Cracking Up,” n.p.
literature, music, performance, poetry and architecture. It is one of the few publications to chart the rise of the urban art movement from invisibility in the early 1970s to prominence in the 1990s and to engage with key developments, such as the dominance of the photographic medium. A weakness, however, is the lack of discussion on the art of nineteenth-century artists such as William Barak, Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla, whose practices inform the early history of the urban art movement. Sayers’ inspiring publication on Indigenous artists of the nineteenth century fills the gap. As well as offering biographies, Sayers details their use of Western materials such as ink and paper and their frequent exchanges with the European settlers. As we shall see, these exchanges continue to inform the work of today’s urban-based Indigenous artists.

What the existing literature tells us is that the history and development of urban Indigenous art is yet to be told in its entirety. As noted by art historian Susan Lowish, very few art historians have researched Indigenous Australian art in any substantial way.78 Her observation mirrors the findings of Storylines, a major research project carried out by Vivien Johnson, Tess Allas and Laura Fisher from the University of New South Wales between 2007 and 2009 that offered the first comprehensive assessment of Indigenous art making in urban areas.79 As part of the project, researchers interviewed hundreds of artists and collected data on gender and age breakdowns, occupations the artists had engaged in over their lifetimes, the percentage of artists with art training, media the artists worked with and recognition they had received from the Australian art world. The data were used to compile biographies, which were later added to the Dictionary of Australian Artists Online (DAAO). However, the primary concern of the project was the “repositioning of Indigenous artists from ‘settled’ Australia as part of both Indigenous art and Australian contemporary art.”80

A key finding of the project was that urban Indigenous art was still being ignored by sections of the Australian art world, particularly by those who “tend to regard ‘Indigenous art’ as only that produced in remote community art centres.”81 They noted that this misperception contradicted the findings of the 2007 Senate Inquiry into the Indigenous Art Visual art and Craft Sector that the “maintenance of links to cultural and heritage, often through family” was a shared concern for both remote and urban-based

79 The project was supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant.
81 Johnson, Allas, and Fisher, This Side of the Frontier, 31.
artists. Likewise, they concurred with Morphy that the history of urban Indigenous art goes back much further than the mid 1980s and the groundbreaking exhibition *Koori Art ’84.* Equally important were the diverse forms of art making observed that “challenged the paradigms of ‘remote’ versus ‘urban’ that underpins the way Indigenous art is perceived in the mainstream art world.” Such diversity can be attributed to the fact that the majority of artists surveyed were working outside the realm of conceptual contemporary art that dominates the practice of high-profile artists such as Fiona Foley, Danie Mellor, Richard Bell and Bindi Cole. The finding has implications on further research because it tells us that urban Indigenous art is far more diverse than previously thought.

As noted by McLean, close attention must be paid to “how” and “where” urban Indigenous art is written about. In his 2008 anthology on Indigenous Australian art, McLean makes the startling revelation that in the 1990s, 30 to 40 percent of articles on Indigenous art in Australian art journals were devoted to the work of urban artists. This, he adds, is “well above their comparative presence in the art world.” For evidence, McLean cites Morphy and Caruana’s publications on Indigenous art: he calculated that only 15 percent of the reproduced artworks were attributable to urban-based artists. It is apparent from this study that the representation of urban-based Indigenous art in Australian art journals continues to be disproportionate to its representation in books on Australian and Indigenous Australian art, with notable exceptions being exhibition catalogues and books published on individual artists. Journal articles are, however, limited in scope and tend to over look the broader context of the artists’ practice. This was found to be the case with the primary artists in this study, whose practices are informed by and deeply ensconced in the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation. That being said, journal articles remain a very important means of distributing information.

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83 Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier,* 7 and 40; and Morphy, *Aboriginal Art,* 355.
Morphy cites the postcolonial context in which William Barak and Tommy McRae worked and made use of introduced forms and materials as an example.
84 Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier,* 40.
86 Ibid., 57.
87 Ibid., 58.
The exhibition catalogue, and more specifically, the curatorial essay, is a vital and rich form that also warrants consideration. Exhibitions are “the medium through which most art becomes known” and have been hugely significant in terms of the broadening appreciation of Indigenous art in Australia and abroad. When given the space and time within an exhibition project, the curatorial essay furthers understanding of the art objects and their makers. The exhibition catalogue is also an important historical record and research tool; one that preserves the memory of an exhibition long after it is removed from the gallery walls. Seminal examples in the field of Indigenous Australian art include Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia (1989), the catalogue published in conjunction with the hugely influential exhibition of the same name curated by anthropologist Peter Sutton. Dreamings (to quote Ian McLean) “effortlessly presented Aboriginal art as a continuity of traditional and contemporary practices that engaged with Aboriginal relations to the land in religious, colonial and postcolonial contexts.” It also played a pivotal role in the way Indigenous art was perceived outside Australia.

A major drawback, however, was the curatorial focus, which was “firmly rooted in the classical, pre-European past of Aboriginal tradition.” This, Sutton noted, was in part due to there being no written study on urban Indigenous to draw from, and thus “left a vacuum to be filled by another kind of exhibition and book.”

Exhibitions such as Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial (2007), Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia (2008) and Undisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial (2012) have gone some way towards filling the gap. The curatorial essays in the publications attached to these exhibitions (written by Brenda L. Croft, Jonathan Jones and Carly Lane) demonstrate the importance of the

90 The exhibition toured the United States, as well as Australia.
91 Peter Sutton, ed., Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia (Ringwood, VIC: Viking in association with the Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1988), 213. In their curatorial essay Peter Sutton, Philip Jones and Steven Hemming acknowledge developments in the cities and pay attention to the impact of Indigenous Australian art on non-Indigenous Australian artists, however artworks illustrating these advances did not form part of the exhibition.
92 Ibid.
exhibition catalogue as an alternative platform. Of course, exhibitions are also a platform for presenting (and representing) Australian art histories. *Black, White and Restive: Cross Cultural Initiatives in Australian Contemporary Art* (2016), a significant exhibition surveying cross-cultural engagements between Australia’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, is a recent example. While a single exhibition “can only scratch the surface of engagements between Western and Indigenous traditions,” the essays in the accompanying exhibition catalogue (written by Una Rey, Margo Neale and Ian McLean) add to the issues raised, and to the evolving conversation and existing literature on collaboration and transculturation in Australian art.

The question of authorship also warrants attention. It is apparent from the existing literature that scholars working outside of art history, theory and criticism have done the majority of writing on Indigenous Australian art. In his review of McLean’s anthology, John Carty noted that anthropologists had written almost one third of the contributions. As might be expected, issue of authorship extends to “who” is writing about Indigenous Australian art — Indigenous or non-Indigenous writers. Indigenous art historians, writers, academics, critics and curators such as Marcia Langton, Djon Mundine, Hetti Perkins, Margo Neale and Brenda L. Croft have provided a much needed Indigenous voice and perspective on Indigenous art. As explained by McLean, the appointment of Indigenous curators and critics following a period of “consolidation and readjustment” in the 1980s and the desire for “authentic Aboriginal voices” helped bring them to the fore. The voices of Daniel Browning, Carly Lane, Dianne Jones, Julie Gough, Clothilde Bullen, Jonathan Jones, Glenn Iseger-Pilkington and Stephen Gilchrist are contemporary additions to this burgeoning list. Their work is evidence of the significant contribution Indigenous voices make to the telling of life through art.

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1.4 THE DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS ART

The study of Indigenous Australian art has long been dominated by anthropological discourse. Evidence can be found in scholarly research and, as indicated above, in the existing literature on the topic. There is no identifiable reason why anthropologists continue to maintain their stronghold in the field, particularly given the changing discourse around Indigenous art over the past two decades. Compared with anthropologists, who have been active in the field for many decades, art historians were slow to recognise Indigenous art as a legitimate area of study. One thing in common between McLean and Lowish is that both lament the dearth of art historical research on Indigenous Australian art, with Lowish describing the need for it as “acute.”

The lack of such research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be explained by the fact that art historians adhered to fairly narrow definitions of art and were inclined to disregard what lay outside prescribed boundaries. To quote Morphy, “they did, literally fail to see Aboriginal art.” In recent years Indigenous art has been thought of in broader terms and has been included in the same frame as European art, yet scholarship continues to lag behind.

In contrast to art historians, who looked to traditional models and definitions of art, anthropologists looked outside them. In doing so, they were the first to recognise the work of Indigenous Australians as “art.” “To the artworld’s great discredit,” writes McLean, “it was anthropologists who first systematically collected and studied Aboriginal art, and organised its first exhibition, *Australian Aboriginal Art*, held in 1929 at the National Museum of Melbourne.”

McLean refers here to Baldwin Spencer and Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who were key players in the early collection of and research into Indigenous art. Through sustained research efforts, anthropologists have significantly enhanced our understanding of Indigenous art and material culture. Of course, one of the reasons is that many Indigenous Australians do not speak English as their first language, particularly those living in the remote “art producing” communities in the desert and far north of Australia. As Morphy writes, “anthropology

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is a mediating discipline concerned as much with cultural translation as with interpretation of cultures.”

The anthropological zest for Indigenous art shows no signs of abating: scholarship flourishes as researchers look to new sites and areas of interest. A notable weakness, however, is the continued bias towards art produced in remote communities (a recent exception being the work of Riphagen, whose research is in dialogue with urban-based Indigenous artists working across photography and video). The reason why anthropologists continue to overlook the “urban” centre as a legitimate site for inquiry is unclear, particularly as Indigenous Australians living within this context have experienced profound cultural changes and yet retain a strong sense of their cultural identity. The imbalance is problematic because it reinforces a narrow, homogenous view of Indigenous Australian art and, by extension, of Indigenous people and culture. Likewise, it places the work of urban-based Indigenous artists on the periphery and upholds the view, albeit unintentionally, that the only “authentic” Indigenous art is that produced in a remote community setting. Notwithstanding, the issue of categorisation must be approached with caution because many urban-based Indigenous artists prefer to be thought of in broader terms and, as noted by Johnson, Allas and Fisher, “want nothing to do with the generalised and generic image of what ‘Indigenous art’ is.”

A compelling reason for more art historical research is that anthropologists and art historians ask different questions and follow different lines of inquiry. If, as Lowish suggests, the question of upmost importance for the anthropologist is “how can the study of art contribute to an understanding of human cultures?,” what can the art historian offer that the anthropologist cannot? As explained by Kleinbauer and Slavens, the goal of art history is to “first place the work of art in history, and then assess it in light of its unique position.” The job of the art historian, they argue, is to “analyse, interpret, and evaluate works of art by identifying their materials and techniques, makers, time and place of creation, and meaning and function.” Of

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102 See also Sylvia Kleinert and Grace Koch, *Urban Representations: Cultural Expression, Identity and Politics* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, c.2012), 9.
103 Sutton, *Dreamings*, 32.
104 Johnson, Allas, and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier*, 42.
107 Ibid.
course, since the 1970s the discipline of art history has undergone fundamental change.\textsuperscript{108} The turn of the so-called “new art history” (a phrase A. L. Rees and Frances Borzello say “sums up the impact of feminist, marxist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, and social-political ideas on a discipline notorious for its conservative taste in art and its orthodoxy in research”\textsuperscript{109}) has seen art history become very interdisciplinary.

The new, interdisciplinary art history benefits research on the topic of Indigenous Australian art in several ways. To start with, compared with the traditional approach, which limits the work of the art historian to questions of “attribution, dating, authenticity and rarity,”\textsuperscript{110} the new art history offers broader terms of reference and new platforms for critique. As Jonathan Harris writes: “included are forms and objects that would not have been recognised to be within the ‘canon’ of traditional art-historical study before the 1970s.”\textsuperscript{111} The artworks at the fore of this study neither conform to the canonic traditional notion of art, nor do they (to quote Selma Kraft) “fit the subsequent notion that the value of art is commensurate with its degree of stylistic innovation.”\textsuperscript{112} What is studied about works of art and the methodologies of studying them have also changed.\textsuperscript{113} Fundamentally important to this study is the recognition of art as intimately linked to the society that produces and consumes it. Anne Marsh explains:

The new art history considers art in its social context, it critiques the institution of art as well as the art itself, it looks for trends, movements, connections and tries to put art within the bigger picture of culture. It often critiques the past and presents revisionist histories from particular ideological points of view.\textsuperscript{114}

This approach, Marsh argues, “creates a broader and more intellectually stimulating field” and, she adds, allows art history be more than just a “tool for capitalism” because the aim is not to “prove provenance and attribute value.”\textsuperscript{115} Likewise, and as the thesis

\textsuperscript{110} Mark Roskill, \textit{What is Art History?}, 2nd ed. (Amherst, US: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 12.
\textsuperscript{111} Harris, \textit{The New Art History}, 10.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. Marsh is not saying that issues of provenance and value are unimportant; she is simply acknowledging the shift in attention to the different aspects of art now studied.
title suggests, it is an approach that prioritises meaning (i.e., what an artwork tells us) over aesthetic form.

Obviously, art history frequently intersects with other disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology and sociology. Among the many examples to choose from, Morphy’s anthropological research on Yolngu art is the most obvious. Fred Myers’ writing on the art of the Pintupi people (and how it achieved the status of high art) is another. Whilst it is generally agreed that art history and anthropology are complementary disciplines, Schneider and Wright report that from an art perspective, anthropology is often perceived negatively as a “science” ruled by a strict set of principles and conventions.\(^{116}\) Along with the fact that anthropologists use the art object as a conduit to understanding culture rather than as an object of inquiry, that perception helps explain why the two disciplines are often viewed in opposition. To the contrary, art scholar Donald Preziosi argues that rather than being diametrically opposed, anthropology and art history share “fundamental epistemological assumptions regarding the meaningfulness of artefacts with respect to the individuals or groups who produced them.”\(^ {117}\) An enthusiastic advocate for the coming together of the two in the reading of and discourse on Indigenous Australian art, Morphy holds a similar view.\(^ {118}\) He argues that knowledge of an artist’s cultural background, in which anthropology has a role, can significantly enhance our understanding and appreciation of their art.\(^ {119}\) While this is certainly true, the argument may be more applicable to art produced in remote communities than in the towns and cities.

Although few people would take issue with the characterisation of anthropology and art history as complementary disciplines (particularly in the case of remote Indigenous art), we should not lose sight of their differences, or of the need to strike a better balance. One upside to the dearth of art historical research on the art of Indigenous Australians is that innumerable opportunities await for art historians to add to the available data on their practices. Obviously, an area acutely in need of art historical research is urban-based art. Despite its long history and the vocal advocacy of artists and curators such as Brook Andrew, Richard Bell, Carly Lane and Djon Mundine, the call for an adequate


\(^{118}\) Morphy, Becoming Art, 146.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.
framework for critically engaging with the work and practices of urban-based Indigenous artists has yet to be answered. This is not to say that such research is not without its complications, among them being the artists’ desire to be thought of in broader terms. Research such as this can help build this framework by identifying unforeseen links and connections and providing new ways of looking at and thinking about their work — some of the many things the art historian is equipped to deal with.

1.5 MARGINALISED AND ON THE PERIPHERY

A longstanding issue central to the discourse on Indigenous Australian art is the construction and contestation of identities fashioned by others and imposed on Indigenous artists — which many of them steadfastly reject. The ambiguity of the term “Indigenous Australian art” and the historical displacement of Indigenous perspectives on race and identity are contributing factors. In the case of the term “Indigenous Australian art,” it is not entirely clear whether it extends to all Indigenous artists, regardless of where they live or work. Likewise, it is unclear whether it includes artworks executed in a recognisably “Western” style or that do not imply an Indigenous theme or narrative. It is also unclear whether the term is broad enough to accommodate artworks produced by non-Indigenous artists whose work bears the influence of or engages with Indigenous art and culture. (The practices of Margaret Preston and Imants Tillers are notable examples.) The answers might seem obvious; however, the history of urban Indigenous art suggests the opposite is true. It tells us that Indigenous art, as it has become known, brings to mind a certain type of art and artist, to which not all conform. As Tony Albert has stated: “I think it is very clear within the Australian psyche what constitutes Aboriginal art, or what is thought to be Aboriginal art — the idea of dots and raaking.”

As we can see, while it is generally accepted that Indigenous Australian art is art made by Indigenous Australians, the categorisation is problematic because not everyone fits within the prescribed margins, nor do they want to be pigeonholed there. The reasons why are complex and varied. The most problematic of them stem from the way we look at race and identity and continue to measure Indigenous Australians and their art against

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“white” cultural norms. Equally compelling is the fixed narrative built around Indigenous art. The failure to recognise it as a multiplicity of cultural spaces, the boundaries of which are constantly being renegotiated and renewed, has been detrimental to the many Indigenous artists whose practices fall outside prescribed margins and fail to comply with white cultural norms imposed upon them. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the practices of urban-based Indigenous artists. Rather than their art being seen reflecting “a unique perspective born out of a distinctive experience”\textsuperscript{121} (to quote Caruana), the criticism levelled at them was that it was not Indigenous enough. Caruana explains: “when seeking to accept Aboriginal art, Australian society at large perceived traditional forms alone as the authentic expression of Aboriginality.”\textsuperscript{122} For this simple and exceptionally flawed reason it failed to garner the same attention as forms of Indigenous art steeped in tradition or believed to have a spiritual connection to the past.\textsuperscript{123}

Dissatisfied with being placed on the periphery of Indigenous art practice, artists at the forefront of the urban art movement in the late 1980s (namely Tracey Moffatt, Gordon Bennet and Trevor Nickolls) marked their resistance to what this implied by rejecting the categorisation of their work as “Indigenous.”\textsuperscript{124} Others have since followed. As well as rejecting categorisations based on ethnicity, they also renounced the “urban” prefix that had been attached to their work to differentiate it from other forms of Indigenous art and, as Fink writes, “to counter the perception that the only authentic Aboriginal art was ‘tribal’ art from the desert and the top end.”\textsuperscript{125} Of this Djon Mundine says:

By defining what was ‘authentic’ Indigenous art, white Australia defined who in effect was indigenous. Thus the art of the people of the south-east would be seen as something less than indigenous. The only ‘authentic’ indigenous art was defined as being created in the remote, largely northern communities; the others were somehow less pure and even contaminated.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{121} Caruana, Aboriginal Art, 194.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Marianne Riphagen, “Contested Categories,” 94.
\textsuperscript{125} Fink, “Cracking Up,” n.p.
As noted by McLean and Riphagen, the characterisation persists — despite the artists’ continued opposition.\textsuperscript{127} A number of scholars (including Caruana, Riphagen, McCulloch and McCulloch Childs) have replaced the “urban” designation with “city-based” when discussing the work of such Indigenous artists.\textsuperscript{128} It is a judicious way of re-approaching the work; however, a criticism is that it does not renegotiate the boundaries of the art in question.

That said, it is difficult to avoid all forms of categorisation; however when removed from discussions that equate authenticity with tradition or cast doubt on the legitimacy of urban Indigenous art and culture, both terms are useful as signposts. One reason for this is (to quote artist Yhonnie Scarce) “there are people who don’t really understand that there are [Indigenous] artists living and working in the cities here in Australia.”\textsuperscript{129} Of course, the criticism of urban Indigenous artists in the 1980s was not new. In his foreword to Rex Battarbee’s 1951 publication \textit{Modern Australian Aboriginal Art}, Ted Strehlow wrote that one of the “chief complaints” levied against Albert Namatjira was that he was a “copyist” because he painted “exactly like a European artist!”\textsuperscript{130} However, as Mundine reminds us:

\begin{quote}
This same criteria was, of course never applied to Western art; Picasso was not contaminated when he was influenced by African art imagery but Albert Namatjira was producing a pale imitation of Western art when he completed his water colour landscapes.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

Moreover, as artist Richard Bell writes: “Westerners drooled at Picasso’s originality — to copy the African artists while simultaneously ignoring the genius of the Africans.”\textsuperscript{132}

Contrary to the significant role Indigenous artists from urban areas have played in the regeneration of Indigenous culture and dissemination of their history, they continue to be displaced by the fiction of the “real Aborigine.”\textsuperscript{133} The displacement is even more

\textsuperscript{127} McLean, \textit{Rattling Spears}, 225; and Riphagen, “Contested Categories,” 94.
\textsuperscript{129} Yhonnie Scare quoted in Daniel Browning, “A Lens and Mirror,” \textit{Artlink} 34, no. 2 (June 2014): 44.
\textsuperscript{130} Ted Strehlow, forward to Rex Battarbee, \textit{Modern Australian Aboriginal Art} (Sydney, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1951), 6.
\textsuperscript{131} Mundine, “Negotiating Co-existence,” 193.
\textsuperscript{132} Richard Bell, “Bell’s Theorem, Aboriginal Art: It’s A White Thing,” in \textit{Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award: Celebrating 20 Years}, compiled by Margie West, ed. Maureen Mackenzie, exhibition catalogue (Darwin, NT: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 2003), 20.
\textsuperscript{133} Carly Lane, “Truth Is Better than Fiction.” \textit{Artlink} 34, no. 2 (June 2014): 24.
acute for the many artists who do not bear the obvious physical signs of their Indigeneity through the colour of their skin. In an essay for *Artlink* in 2014, art curator Carly Lane (who is a Murri woman from Queensland) reconstructed a conversation she and many other Indigenous people often encounter, which brings into context the marginalisation of urban-based Indigenous artists and their art:

“Where are you from?”
“Australia,” I regularly reply though I know what they mean.
“Where are your parents from?” they persist — my olive skin, brown eyes and hair are at odds with their vision of a typical Australian resplendent with ‘blonde hair, blue eyes and pale skin’.
Again I say, “Australia” and to put them out of their misery I add, “I’m Aboriginal.”
“Oh!,” they say with obvious surprise, then they blurt, “You don’t look Aboriginal.”
I smile or grimace depending on my mood. And sometimes, I politely reply, “No. I don’t.”
“How much Aboriginal are you?” is usually the next question.
“It doesn’t work like that,” I say. “If you are Aboriginal, you’re just Aboriginal.”
“We don’t use parts,” I hasten to explain. The ‘we’ isn’t a reference to anyone in particular; it’s an inclusive, non-offensive and educational ‘weapon’ to stymie the use of quantifications like half and quarter caste, and full blood, which makes me cringe.
“Can you speak an Aboriginal language?” This is often the last attempt to connect me with what they know about Aborigines.
“No,” I reply, “I grew up in the city.” This is usually brings the questioning to a close.134

What Lane describes is our continued failure to recognise Indigeneity as a multicultural space and to legitimise urban representations of Indigenous culture. This failure is problematic because it places an unnecessary onus on urban-based Indigenous artists to navigate between two different cultural sites and establish a third space.

Because the artist does not act alone, the role that publicly funded art galleries and cultural institutions play in the dissemination of Indigenous Australian art must also be examined. This factor is important because, as Mundine has written, they provide most non-Indigenous Australians (and thousands of international visitors) with their first — and perhaps only — contact with Indigenous people and culture.135 How these institutions deal with the artists’ resistance to ethnic categorisation and their desire to be thought of in broader terms than their Indigeneity is one of the many challenges they face. In contrast to commercial art galleries, publicly funded institutions must play an

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134 Ibid.
active role in art education and, more broadly, in the promotion of Australian life, history, culture and values. They can also be agents of change; however, if we take the display of Indigenous Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia as an example, we can see that this approach is not without difficulty. The purpose-built gallery housing the Indigenous art collection promotes a broader understanding of Indigenous culture by placing the work of “urban” and “remote” artists in dialogue with each other. While this approach complies with artists’ call for broader representations of Indigenous people and culture, critics argue that it simply “acquiesces rather than contests the Western worldview that is still virulent in the discourse of contemporary art.” As Tony Albert has stated:

In Australia, in the context of art you’re considered an Aboriginal artist, and Aboriginal art falls under the larger grouping of Australian art, so Aboriginal art isn’t autonomous as an entity in itself. There are special dedicated galleries to showing your work. This does us great injustice as people. For us to get anywhere as people our work has to sit on a parallel with contemporary art. We have to sit alongside our contemporaries no matter what race or religion or ethnicity they come from. This is a global problem, it’s something where the framework of institutions that were set up by white people for white people and the work I’m doing or the philosophy behind an Aboriginal way of being doesn’t fit within that Western framework of institutions that were set up by white people for white people.

Rather than testing the boundaries of the art in question, the National Gallery maintains the status quo. And yet, as we have seen, their approach is not new, but instead mirrors the way Indigenous Australian art is (for the most part) written about.

The approaches these institutions use to organise their collections also warrants attention. A survey of the online collections of the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery revealed a lack of uniformity in indexing the art of urban-based Indigenous artists, making it difficult to locate their work. For example, the National Gallery of Australia place the work of Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Kee and Gordon Bennett in the category “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art,” yet that of Brook Andrew, Tracey Moffatt, Lin Onus and Christian Thompson is assigned to both “Aboriginal and

Likewise, at the Queensland Art Gallery Ah Kee’s work is attached to “Indigenous Australian Art” and Moffatt’s to “Contemporary Australian Art.” In fact, there is no mention of Moffatt’s name in the “Indigenous Australian Art” collection, despite the work of Fiona Foley, Richard Bell, Archie Moore, Michael Riley and Genevieve Grieves being placed there. Although these inconsistencies may be the result of changing collection management practices or even human error, Andrew, Moffatt, Onus and Thompson have been quite vocal in their opposition to ethnic categorisation of their work.

Of course, Indigenous artists are not the only ones refuting these terms of reference. Art curators Glenn Iseger-Pilkington and Stephen Gilchrist also reject such prescriptive terms and limiting adjectives. Moreover, Iseger-Pilkington questions whether the commercial value placed on Indigenous Australian art makes it possible for Indigenous curators and artists to “escape the ever-strengthening grip of ethnographic prescription” and to rebrand it as something more inclusive. According to Riphagen, this rebranding is easier said than done: “first impressions remain resistant to change … and once a reputation as an Aboriginal artist has been established, it is difficult to move away from the ‘label’ Aboriginal.” It is presumably even more difficult for artists who began exhibiting in an Indigenous art context via group shows or artist cooperatives such as Boomallli and ProppaNOW. In contrast, positive developments include the rise of publications recognising individual rather than collective achievement and the fact that Indigenous artists no longer have to seek representation with specialist Indigenous art galleries. What remains uncertain, however, is how the artists’ resistance to the labels and identities foisted on them by others might eventually play out in terms of art funding, which currently awards separate grants to Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

In light of artists’ resistance to the categorisation and framing of their work solely on the basis of their Indigeneity, what do they propose in terms of best practice? How do they believe we can move the conversation from one of authenticity to the acceptance of difference while speaking about their work contemporaneously? As an active participant in the discourse and debate on urban Indigenous art, Brook Andrew believes that international perspectives can offer new ways of engaging with and approaching Indigenous art, and by extension, Australian art. His approach would involve looking at the way other countries and cultures deal with these issues, particularly those with comparable histories such as New Zealand and Canada. New perspectives could emerge from the Maori and First Nations art worlds, and how these nations are rewriting their art histories. Another focus could be the African diaspora, which has spawned “black art movements” in the United States and United Kingdom and has clear parallels with urban Indigenous culture. As explained by art historian Richard Powell, “black diaspora cultures are characterised by forms that are not only alternative to mainstream counterparts, but proactive and aggressive in their desire to articulate, testify, and bear witness to that cultural difference.”

Equally important is how the artists see themselves and how they want to be seen by others. Of this Andrew says:

I prefer my art to be thought of as work created by myself as an artist, not simply as “ Aboriginal art.” Other artists are extended this honour regardless of their cultural background. For example, take Australian and international artists such as Yinka Shonibare, Isaac Julien, Yee I-Lann, Tracey Moffatt, Ah Xian, Berni Searle and Patricia Piccinini.

His thoughts are echoed by Christian Thompson, who also looks to international perspectives to gain a greater understanding of his practice and place within the art world. Thompson steadfastly rejects classificatory models that do not recognise Indigeneity as a multicultural concept:

I have a worldview now. I think of how my work fits into a world context. I have been educated in the Netherlands and in England. A third of my life experiences

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143 Brook Andrew quoted in Peter Minter, “Telling Our Own Stories [Peter Minter Talks to Artist Brook Andrew],” *Meanjin* 65, no. 1 (2006): 143.
145 Andrew quoted in Minter, “Telling Our Own Stories,” 146.
and memories are attached to Europe. There was a generation of artists in America and England who considered themselves post-black — Yinka Shonibare, Renée Green, et al. I think of myself in the same way from an Australian point of view. My work does not need to be read through the optical lens of my race, although it can be framed in that way. My work is about lots of things, kinship, belonging, and place: universal ideas that we all have a yearning for, or are grappling with.\footnote{Christian Thompson quoted in Janet McKenzie, “Christian Thompson Interview: ‘My Work Does Not Need To Be Read Through The Optical Lens Of My Race,’” \textit{Studio International}, November 10, 2014, http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/christian-thompson-australian-indigenous-interview.}

Andrew and Thompson are not alone: Fiona Foley, Dianne Jones, Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Kee, Brenda Croft, Gordon Hookey, Richard Bell, Jenny Fraser, Nic Cumpston, Bindi Cole, Reko Rennie, Beaver Lennon, Rea, and Julie Dowling are part of a larger group who insist on their right to self-identify.\footnote{Iseger-Pilkington, “Branded,” 38; Daniel Browning, “The Politics of Skin: Not Black Enough,” \textit{Artlink} 30, no. 1 (Mar 2010): 28; and Riphagen, “Contested Categories,” 100.} As beneficiaries of globalisation, these artists no longer have to work solely within a national context, but are instead free to occupy new, previously unimagined spaces. Like all Australian artists, they are simply striving to be seen as “legitimate participants in the world of art,” which curator Julie Ewington argues is something they must be free to do without “surrendering one iota of what makes their work distinctive, different, irreducibly local.”\footnote{Julie Ewington, “Symbols, Metaphors, Sorrow and Joy: Australian Artists in the Global Frame,” in \textit{21st Century: Art in the First Decade}, ed. Miranda Wallace, exhibition catalogue (South Brisbane, QLD: Queensland Art Gallery, 2010), 58.} However, for this ideal to be realised, a robust critical framework must first be built around their work.
Part Two

THE WORK
PREFACE TO THE WORK

There should be a representation in art of Aboriginal people that is full of depth and sophistry and complexity and emotion and anger and joy and passion and pleasure and sadness and sorrow — things that everybody else is allowed to be, but that blackfellas aren’t.

— Vernon Ah Kee, *Vernon*

The following chapters offer a biographical sketch and in-depth reading of artworks produced by Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Dianne Jones, Christopher Pease, Daniel Boyd, Brook Andrew and Christian Thompson since 2000. The readings are ordered chronologically and bring together multiple voices and interpretations. One of the voices belongs to the artist. A chronological approach was favoured as the means of organising the readings because it follows the order of production and makes obvious recurring themes and patterns. By reason of the fact that, to quote Terry Barrett, “the meaning of an artwork should not be limited to what was intended by the artist,” their voices sit alongside my own and are threaded together with interpretations extracted from the existing literature on the artists’ work.1 Because the latter are limited to journal articles and essays in exhibition catalogues, it was necessary to push the commentary further and to build a historical context around the work. In fact, in numerous instances an artists’ work is linked to a particular history or event, but the broader context or implications of these does not form part of the commentary. Moreover, in contrast to the existing literature, which tends to focus on individual works, the thesis brings together a significantly larger volume of artworks. It also considers the artists’ work over an extended period of time.

In line with the thesis argument, being that the work forms a narrative that conveys the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since colonisation, the readings prioritise the narratives conveyed through the work. This is not to suggest that the

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aesthetic properties of the art object are not important; they are simply not the focus of this inquiry. The readings are the outcome of close examination of work produced by the artists between 2000 and 2015. It was from 2000 that most of the artists began exhibiting their work. Due to the high volume of work produced by several of the artists, it was necessary to exclude some output from the study. For this reason the chapters, of which there is one for each artist, should not be interpreted as a complete compendium of works produced over this period. From these chapters will emerge the key narratives found to recur throughout the corpus of work. These narratives will be identified and discussed in the final chapter of the thesis, along with the creative processes the artists use to convey narrative through works of art and, more specifically, to overcome the issues of dealing with time and representationality, which is problematic for some artistic mediums, including visual art.
Vernon Ah Kee was born in Innisfail, a small town in North Queensland in 1967. He descends from the Kuku-Yalanji, Yidinji, Waanyi, Gugu Yimidhirr and Koko Berrin peoples, and currently lives in Brisbane. Ah Kee discovered art early in life, and as a child he would scour bookshops in Innisfail and Cairns for material to help him learn to draw. He honed his skills reproducing Spiderman comics and then moved on to anatomical drawings. Ah Kee’s interest in life drawing led to portraiture, which has become a defining aspect of his practice. His formal art training began in 1986 with a screen-printing course at Cairns Technical and Further Education (TAFE), after which he spent several years as a commercial printer. A move to Brisbane saw Ah Kee enrol at the Queensland College of Art at Griffith University, and he graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Indigenous Australian Art in 1998. An honours degree in Fine Art was followed by a Doctorate in Visual Arts in 2007. Outside of his own practice, Ah Kee is also a founding member of the Brisbane-based Indigenous art collective ProppaNOW.

Ah Kee arrived at art school inspired by the activism and writings of African American figures such as Malcolm X and James Baldwin. What attracted him to Malcolm X was the human rights activist’s advocacy for the rights of African Americans in the 1950s and ‘60s and his fight against racial segregation. Malcolm X was a well-known exponent of Black Nationalism, and Baldwin was an influential writer and social critic who fled the United States in 1948 to escape the prejudice against African Americans.

3 Ibid.
and homosexuals. Despite living in exile for most of his life, Baldwin continued to reflect the pain and suffering of African Americans in his writings. Closer to home, the writings of Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi author Kevin Gilbert inspired Ah Kee and provided a local context for him to draw on. Gilbert’s writing offers an Indigenous perspective on Indigenous sovereignty and race relations in contemporary Australia. The writings and political activism of these men inspired Ah Kee to think of ways he could incorporate his ideas and point of view as an Indigenous Australian into his practice.

The “masked” activist collective the Guerrilla Girls and American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger are further influences. Reflected in Ah Kee’s adoption of text as a medium, their influence also extends to their use of text and image to articulate social concerns such as the need for racial and gender equality. Links can also be made with the Russian Constructivism aesthetic of the early twentieth century, which dominates the practices of the Guerrilla Girls and Kruger and now underlies Ah Kee’s work. He was introduced to Russian Constructivism at art school, where its characteristic bold colours and angular and geometric shapes caught his eye. Also at play was the Constructivists’ rejection of “art for art’s sake” and their promotion of art as a practice directed at social change. The appeal of Constructivism and the contemporaneity of the Guerrilla Girls and Kruger’s work was so great that it led Ah Kee away from life drawing, which until then had been the foundation of his practice and art training. The fact that Indigenous Australian artists Richard Bell and Gordon Bennett also influenced the conceptual development of Ah Kee’s work demonstrates the interconnectedness between the practices of urban-based artists.

Even though Ah Kee fits the description of a multi-disciplinary artist, he is best known for his large-scale text works and charcoal portraits of family members past and present (he also works across photography and video). A consistent feature of Ah Kee’s practice is his adherence to a minimalist approach. Regardless of the medium, he reduces the surface to a basic form and uses only what is necessary to convey a message. Ah Kee’s minimalist approach is also reflected in his use of colour. Like Kruger, he works almost exclusively with a palette of red, black and white. In a 2008 interview, Ah Kee explained that adopting a minimalist approach prevented the work

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
from becoming too conceptual or theorized. Moreover, by stripping it of unnecessary detail, he is able to execute his message clearly and ensure that a wide audience can understand it. Ah Kee’s experience as a commercial screen-printer is also reflected in his work. This background is particularly evident in the execution and display of his text works and extends to his use of slogans, catchphrases and puns.

The narrative of Ah Kee’s work draws heavily on the history of Indigenous Australians in Queensland. In the 1970s and ‘80s, Ah Kee and his family bore the brunt of state discriminatory laws under the governance of Queensland Premier Johannes (Joh) Bjelke-Peterson. Bjelke-Peterson’s failure to comply with the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act (1975) is one such example. Another was his attempt to quell political activism in the lead up to the 1982 Commonwealth Games by declaring all political protests and slogans on tee-shirts illegal. The history and lived experience of Australia’s Indigenous people on Palm Island is also a recurring narrative. Palm Island (or Bwgcolman as it is also known) is an island off the coast of North Queensland with a high Indigenous population, and Ah Kee has a familial link to it. His family history there demonstrates the institutional racism and discriminatory behaviour that Indigenous Australians in Queensland have been subjected to over time. This view is upheld by Garry Jones, who writes of the artist’s work: “Ah Kee’s staunchness was no doubt forged through an acute awareness of the corruption of political institutions and the overtly paternalistic and discriminatory treatment of Indigenous people in that state.”

The minimalist aesthetic typical of Ah Kee’s work does not reflect his creative process, which is slow and laborious. It is not unusual for a work to undergo multiple drafts and revisions before it reaches a satisfactory conclusion. This process aids the development of his ideas, which are often complex and difficult to express. An example is *If I Was White* (fig. 2.1), a series conceived during the artist’s third year at Queensland College

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9 Johannes (Joh) Bjelke-Peterson served as the Premier of Queensland from August 8, 1968 to December 1, 1987.
11 This was administered under the *Commonwealth Games Act* and enforced between September 17, 1982 and October 10, 1982.
12 Jones, “Vernon Ah Kee,” 46.
of Art and remade in 2002 after its debut at Metro Arts, Brisbane, in 1999. Ah Kee was rewarded for his effort: both the National Gallery of Australia and the National Gallery of Victoria acquired editions of the series for their collections. The series, which comprises thirty A3 size text panels, speaks of racial inequality and articulates the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Directed at a “white” audience, the didactic and anecdotal text is clearly designed to make them cognisant of the effect of their whiteness and of the privileges they derive from the colour of their skin. The strength of the work is Ah Kee’s ability to turn history on its head and, as Gary Jones has said, to “make the coloniser feel colonised.”

Each panel begins with the preface “If I was white.” The run-on text, the tenor of which is reflective and matter of fact, relays the experience of being “black” in a predominantly “white” culture. The narrative is underlined by examples of the manifold ways racism plays out in society. Some are obvious and everyday, others subtle and oblique. The text on Panel 15 (fig. 2.2) is an example of the latter:

If I was White I could buy bandaids
the same colour as my skin.
What if all bandaids were black?
If I was White
and in an accident, I would be
wrapped in white bandages.

Even though the text is broad reaching and can be read as an allegory for “black” experience, specific reference is made to the effect of whiteness on Indigenous Australians. One such example is the invisibility of Indigenous faces in Australian television soaps and in advertising, which hints at the sense of cultural alienation and displacement scores of Indigenous people feel as a result of their Indigeneity. Also divulged are the everyday things “white” Australians take for granted but are made difficult for Indigenous Australians, such as getting a job, renting a property and owning luxury goods without attracting suspicion.

The complexities of Indigenous identity are also conveyed. Particular attention is paid to the way Indigenous Australians, particularly those with mixed heritage and those whose lives are tied to an urban rather than a remote landscape, are frequently called

13 Ibid., 46.
upon to quantify their Indigeneity. Their failure to comply with the fixed notions of identity imposed by others is articulated in Panel 16 (fig. 2.3). The narrative is a salient reminder that the colour of one’s skin is often the first and only thing some people see. It reads as follows:

If I was White
I wouldn’t be asked if I was
Fullblood, Half-caste, or part White
If I was White
I would not hear other White People
say to me You don’t look like you
have a lot of White in you, or
You don’t look White
If I was White
my fair skin
would not be such an issue
with other White People.15

The third line (“Fullblood, Half-caste, or part White”) plays with ideas of assimilation and miscegenation. Contrary to the ideology of racial purity that emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century, a key contributor being French theorist Arthur de Gobineau who argued miscegenation was detrimental to civilisation, Auber Octavius Neville (the Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940) controversially argued its advantages.16 A proponent of biological assimilation, Neville sought to eradicate “half-castes” through the separation and institutionalisation of mixed-descent and full-descent Indigenous Australians at internment camps such as the Moore River Settlement in Western Australia.17 Although the theory has long since been discredited, the text is certainly suggestive of its continued influence.

The notion of white privilege that underpins the text and submits that there are certain social, economic and political advantages to being “white” in Western society is not

17 Anna Haebich, For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900–1940, 2nd ed. (Perth, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1992), 156.
new. As Elizabeth Geyer has written, however, it is more commonly discussed in relation to the American social condition or to apartheid in South Africa.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, Ah Kee holds that non-Indigenous Australians are largely unaware of its prevalence in society. The chorus of “black” voices makes them aware of its existence and of the countless ways it occurs. These sentiments are echoed through the narrative that runs underneath the central text on each of the panels: “White people in particular have little understanding of Whiteness even though every White person in the country is an experienced practitioner. Black people however, do have some understanding of Whiteness.”\textsuperscript{19} The directness of the language commands viewers’ attention and prompts them to consider the statement’s veracity. This dramatic measure has the desired outcome of making viewers aware of their “whiteness” in the same way that Indigenous Australians have been made to be aware of their “blackness.”

The series \textit{This Man Is... This Woman Is...} (fig. 2.4) was also conceived while Ah Kee was at art school and was his second major work. Like \textit{If I Was White}, the series was also remade several years after it was originally shown.\textsuperscript{20} The work is a further set of panels combining text and image. Before it reached a satisfactory conclusion, the number of panels was reduced from 140 to 60, a move clearly designed to maximise the impact of the narrative.\textsuperscript{21} The panels are hung linearly, in a format resembling a series of film stills. Closely cropped headshots that bring to mind a police mug shot, the images are of Ah Kee and his friend Belinda Miller. This approach might be a comment on the high incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians or a subtle reference to the demonisation of them, ideas regarding which recur throughout the artist’s work.\textsuperscript{22} Jones suggests it is the latter and references Richard Bell’s 1992 \textit{Pigeon Holed} (fig. 2.5), in which six identical headshots hung side by side offer a critique of the negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous men.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, the composition might

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ah Kee in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 20. The series was initially produced in 1999 as screen-prints, it was remade in 2003 as digital prints.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 21.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Indigenous Australians account for 26 percent of the national prison population, yet comprise only 2.5 percent of the nation’s population. See Law Council of Australia, \textit{Indigenous Imprisonment Fact Sheet} (Canberra, ACT: Law Council of Australia, 2013), http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/lawcouncil/images/LCA-PDF/Briefs_Fact_Sheets_and_Publications/Indigenous_Imprisonment_Fact_Sheet.pdf.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Jones, “Vernon Ah Kee,” 46.
\end{enumerate}
also critique ethnographic practices that saw Indigenous Australians proffered in photographs as objects of scientific curiosity.^{24}

The linear format is designed to let viewers walk through the series at their own pace.^{25} As viewers move across the panels, they are forced to meet the subject’s gaze, the intensity of which elicits a sense of unease and discomfort. The gaze pulls into focus the underlying texts of personal anecdotes and terse statements about historical injustice and Indigenous lived experience since European colonisation. The tone is direct and unapologetic. The texts are the outcome of historical research Ah Kee conducted as part of the creative process, and some of them relate to members of his own family.^{26} For this reason, the recurring image of Ah Kee can be read as a visual metaphor for the legacy of colonisation on successive generations of his family. Symbolism also informs the use of the colour red, which manifests as a veil of shame over Australia’s colonial past and marks Ah Kee’s anger and frustration at the abuses and indignities Indigenous Australians have endured since colonisation.

The dispossession of Indigenous Australians from their traditional lands, the removal of Indigenous children from their families, the decimation of the Indigenous population through frontier violence and disease and the unacceptably high rate of Indigenous incarceration and deaths in custody are examples of these abuses and indignities. They echo throughout the text, alongside anecdotes relaying everyday experiences of racism and commentary about the systems of privilege that maintain the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The following passage is once such example:

“This woman is 36 years old and is Aboriginal. She is married to a White Man. Their children have fair skin. When they ask why they cannot be both Black and White she tells them that if racism didn’t exist in this country it wouldn’t matter, but it exists, it matters, and you cannot let convenience determine when to be Black or White.”^{27}

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^{24} Jane Lydon, “Introduction: The Photographic Encounter,” in *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies*, ed. Jane Lydon (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 3. The spreading dogma of Social Darwinism and growing belief that Indigenous Australians were a dying race created a market for images of Indigenous people “untouched” by European civilisation for the scientific community and general public.


^{27} Vernon Ah Kee, *This Man Is...This Woman Is...*, 2003, inkjet on polypropylene, satin laminated, in *Borninthisskin: Vernon Ah Kee*, ed. Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane, QLD: Institute of Modern Art, 2009), 26.
This passage relaying the complexities of contemporary Indigenous identity is underpinned by a history in which many Indigenous Australians were forced to deny their cultural heritage. The confession of a twenty-year-old Indigenous woman who says she is afraid and is ashamed of her culture brings home the impact of racism on successive generations of Indigenous Australians.28

The exclusion of an Indigenous perspective on the colonisation of Australia and the subjugation of Indigenous history and lived experience in readings of Australian history is also exposed. Ah Kee furnishes us with many examples, one of the most compelling of which recounts the fate of a young Indigenous man who was killed and left to hang as a warning to his people:

This man was 19 years old and Aboriginal. After being shot and killed by British soldiers, his body was hung from a tree as a deterrent to other people in his clan who would resist settler expansion throughout the Sydney basin in 1816.29

The contemporaneity of some of the abuses and indignities is also unsettling. The story of a thirty-six-year-old Indigenous woman who was not recognised as an Australian citizen at birth is one such example.30 The year of the Referendum that saw Indigenous Australians finally included in the national census (1967) was also the year of Ah Kee’s birth, so he had a personal connection to the woman’s story.

In his further series of panels called He Said… She Said… (fig. 2.6), Ah Kee continues the conversation about racism and its manifestation in Australian society. The format and the combination of text and imagery align with the previous series. Ah Kee and Miller return as the central figures in the work, but a key difference is the intentionally more conversational tone of the text. The images of Ah Kee and Miller suggest that they are deep in conversation, while the underlying text relays the nature of their exchange and makes the viewer privy to what would otherwise be private. Yet although the series was shot in various locations around Brisbane, and the nondescript setting gives the impression of an everyday conversation between two people, it is not the type of conversation non-Indigenous Australians are used to hearing (or even want to hear).31

28 Ibid., 25.
29 Ibid., 24.
30 Ibid., 27.
31 Ah Kee in conversation with Perkins, Half Light, 23.
Although conversational, the text is candid and matter of fact; its short statements are in keeping with the artist’s minimalist approach. Alliteration and repetition aid the narrative by setting the tone and catching the reader’s attention (e.g., he begins each statement with the phrase “He says” or “She says” and repeats individual words and phrases): “He says black people have been conditioned to blame and downgrade themselves. She says people have been conditioned to blame and downgrade others.”

The words and phrases Ah Kee chooses are also deliberately loaded. Examples include “eliminate,” “evil,” “war,” “conquered people” and “colour barrier.” In a 2008 interview, Ah Kee explained that this was intentionally designed to throw up different connotations. It could also be argued that his use of emotive language is an effective means of persuasion and of accentuating his point of view, which he induces the viewer to adopt.

The text articulates everyday experiences of racism. According to Ah Kee, Indigenous Australians rarely express these experiences publicly, but they are never far from their minds. By letting viewers in on his conversation with Miller, Ah Kee breaks with convention and displays it for everyone to see. The outcome depends on the viewer: some will find it confronting, while others (e.g., those who have experienced racism) will surely draw a sense of comfort from the familiarity of Ah Kee and Miller’s exchange. The conversation also sees Ah Kee vent his frustration at the continued denial of racism in Australia. An extension of this is his belief that “white” people have different ideas about what constitutes racism or racist behaviour. Illustrative of his hard-line approach is the panel that reads “He says the obviousness of the Aboriginal condition is the most telling indictor of the level and nature of racism in Australia.” In effect, the statement is a plea to non-Indigenous Australians to become more accountable for who and what they see. It also suggests that racist behaviour is not only...

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34 Ibid., 23.
the result of a deliberate act: it also comes about via ignorance and an individual’s failure to act or speak out.

The viewer’s attention is also directed to the way Ah Kee says “white” people are often unwilling to see their behaviour as racist and often “qualify their position by firstly demonstrating how racist they are not.”37 They do this by prefacing their statement with the phrase “I’m not racist but…,” which was made famous during a heated conversation between former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating and a talkback caller on John Law’s morning radio show on 2UE in 1993. Keating had been invited to address public concern about the 1992 Mabo ruling that overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* and recognised the rights of Indigenous Australians to Australian land.38 Opposed by the mining and pastoral industries, the decision caused widespread concern in the community, particularly among some homeowners in affected areas who feared they would be forced to surrender their homes. Keating was asked by the caller why his government regarded Indigenous people as “a much more equal people than the average white Australian.”39 The Prime Minister’s response was that he did not believe they were more equal, and he put it to the caller that the question implied that non-Indigenous Australians should have preferential treatment.40

To this the caller replied: “Not whatsoever, I don’t see that at all. But myself and every person I talk to, I am not racist, every person I talk to….”41 Keating responded to the man’s attempt to quantify how racists he was not with the following statement:

That’s what they all say, don’t they? They put these questions, they always say, I’m not racist but, you know “I don’t believe that Aboriginal Australians ought to have a basis in equality with non-Aboriginal Australians.” Well of course that is part of the problem.42

It is not known whether Ah Kee is aware of this exchange. Either way, his conversation with Miller offers a critique of the caller’s way of thinking, which regards Indigenous Australians as lesser and “other.” The simple fact that Indigenous Australians are not

37 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
formally recognised in the Australian Constitution is contemporary evidence of this way of thinking.\textsuperscript{43} For Ah Kee, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in key areas such as health, education, employment and life expectancy are further examples.

Viewers of his work also become privy to some of the misconceptions held about Aboriginal people and the colour of their skin. These relate to the colour barrier and to false assumptions held of Indigenous people and culture (which it should be noted come from both within and outside of the Indigenous community). An example is Ah Kee’s suggestion to Miller that because her skin is fair, the colour barrier must be smaller. Miller’s unexpected retort “the smallest barrier is still a barrier” puts Ah Kee’s false assumption to rest.\textsuperscript{44} The conversation between Ah Kee and Miller reaches a conclusion with the sombre realisation that they are in a war and must fight it head on to survive.\textsuperscript{45} As a mark of solidarity and reminder to Indigenous Australians that it is not a war they have to fight alone, the final panel sees Ah Kee and Miller form a united front. With it, “he” and “she” become “we.” The turn of phrase might also have broader meaning, constituting Ah Kee’s way of implicating viewers and entreating them to join the fight against racism.

By 2004, Ah Kee had returned to drawing. The \textit{Fantasies of the Good} series (fig. 2.7), a suite of thirteen portraits of the male members of his family, was the first major body of work he produced in this medium. The title of the series plays with the way he says “Australia likes to think of itself as a good country, even though its human rights record in relation to black people is atrocious, and still is.”\textsuperscript{46} Ah Kee need look no further than the history and lived experience of his own family for evidence to support his claim. The suite of drawings forms part of a larger project that will also see the female

\textsuperscript{43} The Constitution, a document that came into effect on January 1, 1901 after the Australian colonies agreed to form the nation of Australia, makes no reference to Indigenous Australians, or of Australia’s history prior to British colonisation. Of concern to Indigenous Australians (and many non-Indigenous Australians) are the two sections that permit race discrimination: Section 25 (which allows the States to ban people from voting in State elections on the basis of their race) and Section 51 (xxvi) (which permits the government to enact laws that are racially discriminatory). Amendments to the Constitution would address the historical exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the nation’s story and enshrine principles of non-discrimination. A parallel debate relates to the absence of a treaty between the Australian Government and Indigenous Australians.

\textsuperscript{44} Vernon Ah Kee, \textit{He Said...She Said...}, 2007, ink on polypropylene, satin laminated mounted on PVC, in \textit{Half Light}, 22.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} “Artist Vernon Ah Kee discusses his work \textit{Fantasies of the Good} featured in the exhibition \textit{New Acquisitions 2006},” Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney).
members of his family, both living and deceased, memorialised through portraiture. The project derives from research Ah Kee began into his family history several years earlier. During the course of it, Ah Kee came across a set of photographs of his great grandmother Annie Ah Sam, his great grandfather Mick Miller and grandfather George Sibley taken in 1938 by Australian anthropologist Norman Tindale.

During the 1920s and 1930s Tindale visited various missions and reserves and recorded vast amounts of cultural and genealogical information about the Indigenous Australians living there. Tindale also joined the 1938–39 Harvard-Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition, through which he mapped tribal territories and collected genealogies, as well as photographing thousands of Indigenous men, women and children. The photographs of Ah Kee’s relatives were taken on Tindale’s visit to Palm Island. In recent years, the expedition and others like it have become controversial. In the early twentieth century, Palm Island was, as Ah Kee puts it, “the sort of place Aboriginal people were sent to when they did something wrong on one of the other missions or reserves.” Being an island, it made it an ideal place to confine Indigenous people. It was far from an island paradise, however, and its Indigenous population was subject to curfews and prevented from leaving without permission or supervision. Segregation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents was also enforced. Historian Joanne Watson, who correctly describes this paradigm as being akin to apartheid, writes that Indigenous children were separated from their mothers and that contact between young Indigenous men and women was prohibited until the late 1930s.

Watson writes that despite these authoritarian conditions, the island’s oral history is peppered with accounts of Indigenous tricksters who flouted the rules and regulations and outsmarted the authorities:

Some, for example involve a man dressed in a white shirt who was out walking after the evening curfew. When the police came along he hid his presence by standing under a clothesline, raising his shoulders and swaying his body so that he looked like a piece of laundry blowing in the wind. Others tell of men who would

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 41, 43 and 81.
51 Ibid., 87.
dress as women, raise their voices several octaves and in this way access their women friends in the dormitories.\textsuperscript{52}

These victories may have been small, but in the context of the conditions imposed on the island’s Indigenous population, they are evidence of courage and a willingness to fight back in whatever way they could. Ironically, these same characteristics saw Ah Kee’s great grandfather Mick Miller sent to Palm Island: “He never wanted to be under the [Aborigines] Act, and refused to be. Because he was assertive in wanting to be a man, he got sent to Palm Island.”\textsuperscript{53}

The portraits of Miller and the artist’s grandfather George Sibley came first. They were drawn from high-resolution copies of photographs Ah Kee obtained from the originals in the Tindale collection at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide. The images had been censored: they were closely cropped so that all that remained were the subject’s head and shoulders. Ah Kee marks his resistance to what this implies by rendering the portraits off-centre.\textsuperscript{54} The original images are in keeping with scientific methods of documentation. As well as being stripped of their identity and identified by number rather than name, Miller and Sibley are photographed from the front and side-on like shots of people under arrest. It appears that the men had been cleaned up for the camera, as if to conceal their desperate existence and the extreme conditions under which they lived. The truth of Miller and Sibley’s existence is also reflected through the intensity of their gaze, which is unavoidable and elicits a sense of discomfort and unease about Australia’s past in relation to its treatment of Indigenous Australians.

The other portraits are of Ah Kee’s cousins and uncles. Ah Kee says that although the series was inspired by investigations into his family history, he also wanted to alter the contemporary image of Indigenous Australians, in particular the men.\textsuperscript{55} He also wanted to subvert the idea of Indigenous people as a homogenous group and to offer a statement about diversity and difference. Central to this goal is portraying the idea that Indigenous Australians are, as Ah Kee puts it, “tall, skinny, short, have dark hair, light hair, light skin, dark skin.”\textsuperscript{56} In other words, they do not all look the same, even within

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ah Kee in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 24.
\textsuperscript{55} “Artist Vernon Ah Kee discusses his work \textit{Fantasies of the Good} featured in the exhibition \textit{New Acquisitions 2006},” Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney).
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
the same family. Continuity with the Tindale images was established through the creative process. Rather than having his cousins and uncles sit for him, he also drew portraits of the living members of his family from photographs. To replicate the intensity of Miller and Sibley’s gaze, Ah Kee asked his relatives to adopt the mindset “no pride, no courage.” The result is a uniform gaze that “communicates an immeasurable amount of sadness, weariness and suppressed anger.” According to Ah Kee, it is also a gaze of “endurance, persistence, intelligence, emotion and depth.”

Despite his renewed interest in drawing, Ah Kee continued his work with text. He experimented with layout and scale, and by the mid-2000s the panel installations that had dominated earlier work had been replaced by individual, large-scale text works. The shift from paper to canvas and to gallery walls led to the development of Ah Kee’s signature style of large, black lettering in boldface set off from a white background (to add emotion or highlight a particular word or phrase, he intersperses the black text with red and grey). As art writer Timothy Morrell observes, the technique is similar to a painter’s use of perspective to advance an object. Helvetica is the favoured font, with the clarity of the typeface making it ideal for large-scale works. The new format also gave rise to a more straightforward literary style. Direct quotes, puns, double entendres and wordplay were favoured over lengthy prose. Ah Kee had also begun to appropriate a wider range of literary sources, such as extracts from poems, political speeches and plays.

*War Race* (fig. 2.8) is typical of Ah Kee’s text work since 2005. It also demonstrates the artist’s use of coloured text, in this case red, as a literary device. At the centre of the work is bold text that reads “mythunderstanding.” The word “myth” is executed in red, and “understanding” in black. The change in colour creates a natural division and allows for multiple interpretations (e.g., the text might be a play on “misunderstanding,” “mythmaking” or both). The same is true of *Austracism* (fig. 2.9), a text work also based on wordplay. The text plays with “ostracism,” a word that conjures ideas of exclusion and isolation. Ah Kee gives it a local context by replacing the “ost” with “aust.” He then uses it as a catchphrase to deliver a terse statement about race relations.

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57 Ibid.
59 “Born in this Skin,” *Message Stick*.
60 Leonard, “Your Call,” 7.
in Australia and to prompt viewers to question what Tina Baum has described as their “inner narrative about race, equality and identity.”

In contrast to War Race, tone rather than colour marks the distinction between words, the lighter tone being a metaphor of the continued denial of racism in Australia. The underlying text is a series of statements prefaced with the phrase “I’m not racist but…,” which also appeared in the series He Said…She Said... and in both instances exposes the naïve assumptions held of Indigenous people and culture. The statement “I’m not racist but… Aboriginal people weren’t doing anything with the land before we came here and…,” is one such example. Others such as “I’m not racist but… you just can’t expect too much of them really…” are indicative of the attitudes Ah Kee says Indigenous Australians are exposed to daily. When read alongside He Said…She Said, the individual statements offer evidence of the attitudes Ah Kee and Miller allude to but do not substantiate with concrete examples.

Not an Animal or a Plant (fig. 2.10) is both a statement and a declaration. Of it, Ah Kee says: “I am declaring on my own behalf and that of my family and my people that I am not an animal or a plant.” The text refers to the exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the Australian Constitution when it came into effect on January 1, 1901. As previously mentioned, this document saw Indigenous Australians excluded from the national census, in effect giving them a less than human status. Many of them, including Ah Kee, describe it as likening them to the native flora and fauna. It is an extreme description, but one that begs the following question: if Indigenous people were not included in the census with non-Indigenous Australians, the implication being that they were not equal, then what were they? Although they were granted citizenship in 1949, not until the 1967 Referendum were the discriminatory sections of the Constitution that excluded them from the census removed. Even so, Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians is yet to be realised. This is important because Constitutional recognition would formally reinstate Indigenous people as the First Australians, offer them a more equitable stake in the future of Australia and promote a collective national identity.

62 Tina Baum, “Australicism,” in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights, eds. Franchesca Cubillo and Wally Caruana (Canberra, ACT: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 227.
64 Ibid.
Stolen Removed (fig. 2.11), a text work from 2006, involves a double entendre. Demonstrating the potency of the written word, it shows how words with similar meaning can be understood in different ways. In the context of Ah Kee’s work, it also demonstrates the way words can influence and determine our understanding of history. Here the choice of words relates to the ongoing debate about the “Stolen Generation.” These are the children of Indigenous Australian descent who were forcibly taken from their families by welfare agencies, the church and Federal and State government agencies under official Australian Government policy between 1909 and 1969. The debate centres over the correct terminology (whether the children were “stolen” or “removed”), and it extends to how many were taken and for what reasons. The actual number will never be known, with varying estimates ranging from thousands to tens of thousands. As well as prompting viewers to assume their own point of view, the work can be seen as an attempt by the artist to reconcile the differing perspectives of coloniser and colonised.

By the end of the decade, Ah Kee’s text works bore the influence of a wider range of literary sources. An example is 2009’s becauseitisbitter (fig. 2.12). The text is a direct quotation of American writer and poet Stephen Crane’s In the Desert of 1895, published in his second book of poems, The Black Riders and Other Lines. It reads as follows:

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, “Is it good, friend?”
“It is bitter — bitter,” he answered;
“But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart.”

The poem implies that humans are inherently sinful and corrupt, and that we must accept the evil within us to become more enlightened. Ah Kee may have seen the desert setting as a link to the Australian government’s Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in 2007. Certainly in keeping with the narrative of his work are the

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66 It should be noted, however, that Indigenous children were removed from their families prior to 1909, and although the practice had slowed down by the late 1960s, in some areas of Australia it continued into the 1970s.

67 Stephen Crane, The Black Riders and Other Lines (South Bend, US: Infomotions Inc., 2001), 1, ProQuest Ebrary.
circumstances surrounding the “intervention” and measures undertaken to implement it, such as the government’s use of legislative powers to suspend the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act of 1975. The legislative changes saw Indigenous Australians living in certain parts of the Northern Territory subjected to “special measures” on the basis of their race that would otherwise have been prohibited under Australian law. According to Amnesty International, they were imposed without proper consultation with Indigenous leaders and groups.68

A further example of the artist’s rich depository of literary sources is Ah Kee’s quotation of a televised interview with Malcolm X, the radical advocate for Black Nationalism and racial pride. An excerpt of this early 1960s interview appears in thefox (fig. 2.13), a further black-on-white text work. Ah Kee’s use of kerning (a process in typography in which the spaces between two characters is proportionately adjusted so that the characters and words run on from each other) gives the text a sense of urgency. This artful means of recontextualisation allows Ah Kee to put his voice behind the text and alter its original meaning. However, the effect can be disorientating and, as Jones has written, requires a “double-take” to ensure the text has been read correctly.69 Used repeatedly by Ah Kee, the technique is particularly useful when appropriating long quotes and pieces of prose. It highlights the appropriation, also telling us that Ah Kee is not simply passing the original material off as his own and that more is at play than the quoted source.

The text in thefox is part of a larger statement in which Malcolm X laments the hypocrisy of white liberals. It reads as follows:

There are many whites who are trying to solve the problem. But you never see them going under the label of liberals. That white person that you see calling himself a liberal is the most dangerous thing in the entire western hemisphere. He’s the most deceitful. He’s like a fox. And a fox is always more dangerous in the forest than the wolf. You can see the wolf coming. You know what he’s up to. But the fox will fool you. He comes at you with his mouth shaped in such a way that even though you see his teeth you think he’s smiling and take him for a friend.70

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Ah Kee has extracted the last sentence, the tenor of which is emotive and direct. The statement testifies to Malcolm X’s command of language, which clearly influenced Ah Kee’s work. Ah Kee does rely on our familiarity with Malcolm X’s activism and writings to link the work’s title and appropriated text, which is unclear when read of out of context. Indeed, those familiar with Malcolm X will recognise that not only has Ah Kee appropriated his literary style, he has followed his lead and become an advocate for racial equality and Indigenous rights. With this in mind, numerous links can be made between the hardships and struggles of African Americans and the plight of Indigenous Australians. Parallels can also be drawn between the inability of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the policy of multiculturalism in Australia to stamp out racism completely and close the racial divide.

In 2008, Ah Kee was invited to exhibit work at the 16th Biennale of Sydney. He responded with a further series of portraits (figs. 2.14–2.27) that extend the 2004 series Fantasies of the Good and include the female members of his family: his paternal great-grandmother Bella Ami, his maternal great-grandmother Annie Ah Sam and his daughter Annie Ah Kee. In keeping with the previous series, the new portraits are evidence of an ongoing familial connection. They also recall the history and lived experience of this family, particularly on Palm Island. The series title What Is An Aborigine suggests that the portraits are also designed to expand ideas about Indigenous people and culture. Scale is employed to create a visual impact and intensify the subject’s gaze, which is difficult to avoid. Viewers may feel a sense of discomfort, perhaps that of an accuser facing the accused. The inclusion of Ah Kee’s children hints at the repressive conditions Indigenous Australians continue to face. A more promising, additional interpretation is that they are a visual metaphor for the continuance of culture.

On a visit to Cockatoo Island,71 where he was to present the suite of drawings, Ah Kee came across an abandoned toilet block slated for demolition that was covered in abhorrent graffiti left by dockworkers in years gone by. The racist, homophobic and misogynist taunts, some of which were specifically aimed at Indigenous Australians,

71 Cockatoo Island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Sydney Harbour. The island was established as a penal settlement in 1839. Over the course of the nineteenth century it was also the site of a prison, an industrial school for girls and a reformatory. In 1913, Cockatoo Island became a Commonwealth Navy Dockyard. After the dockyard was closed in 1992, the island lay dormant for a decade until the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust began restoration work.
expose what French describes as “an everyday manifestation of racism” in society. The artist would arguably have been struck by the undeniable tension between what was being said on the walls and the portraits he would be exhibiting nearby. The site prompted him to seek permission from the organisers of the Biennale to take over the space and re-present it as an installation under his name. Permission was granted, and the work went on to become one of the most publicly discussed works at the Biennale (figs. 2.28–2.31). Ah Kee’s colonisation of the space was not without controversy: the work attracted criticism for its lurid content and from those who questioned whether it could even be considered art.

The debate was played out in the local newspapers. Elizabeth Fortescue, an arts writer for The Daily Telegraph, offered the following critique:

Ah Kee appears to have made no alteration to the block’s original state. The building remains simply a toilet block whose walls are smeared with phrases such as “Kill all f…en wogs, All blacks makes me sick, Kill wogs, and abbos, and Wogs f…dogs.”

A complaint from a member of the public prompted the Biennale to erect a sign at the entrance of the toilet block warning of its lurid content. Another complainant threatened Ah Kee, the Biennale of Sydney and Harbour Trust with legal action.

Ah Kee rightly lamented that this outrage was simply “shooting the messenger.” Comparison was made with Marcel Duchamp’s infamous porcelain urinal Fountain, which is not unexpected given that that Ah Kee’s work draws on the tradition of the “ready-made” (i.e., an object isolated from its functional context and elevated to the status of art). As curator Blair French has written, however, a point of difference worth noting is that while Duchamp “physically placed the toilet within the gallery — the art context — in order to designate it as art, Ah Kee exploited the occasion of the Biennale to designate the toilet as art by wrapping the art context around it.” In other words, while Duchamp sought to challenge the established definitions of art, Ah Kee was concerned with exposing the manifestations of racism in the everyday places we inhabit.

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75 Ah Kee quoted in Leonard, “Your Call,” 12.
76 French, “Born in This Skin,” 100.
A forceful statement about Ah Kee’s experience as an Indigenous man in contemporary Australian society, the toilet block was exhibited under the title *Born in this Skin*.

Because I am Aboriginal, because I was born with dark skin and dark curly hair, I’ve never had the opportunity to be perceived as anything other than Aboriginal, and it has never occurred to me that I could be anything other than Aboriginal. So everything I think, say and do is from that position. 77

As this quote makes clear, Ah Kee is acutely aware that his skin colour is the first and only thing some people see. He also knows that as an Indigenous man he is subject to increased scrutiny. A contributing factor to both is the demonisation of Indigenous men, particularly by the media. An extreme example is the characterisation of Indigenous men as perpetrators of abuse and violence in news reportage of the NTER, which has prompted outrage from Indigenous communities. 78 Links can be made with the work of artist Dianne Jones, who has also examined the false characterisation of Indigenous men. At any rate, the abhorrent graffiti scrawled on the walls of the disused toilet block comprise further evidence of Ah Kee’s claim and something he arguably wants us to consider. Notwithstanding, Ah Kee clearly wants us to compare this work with the charcoal portraits of his family, the contrast between which could not be greater, and decide which one is more representative of Indigenous people and culture.

In 2009, Ah Kee represented Australia at the Venice Biennale in Italy, one of the most prestigious exhibitions on the global art calendar. While it was not the first time Ah Kee had exhibited work overseas, his participation was a major milestone in his career. Ah Kee’s work formed part of the Australian group exhibition. His installation, known as *Cant Chant*, had been exhibited in 2007 at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane. One of his most recognisable works, it has three components: an installation of custom-made surfboards, a series of text works and a three-sequence video projection (figs. 2.32–2.34). Dave Verrall shaped the boards and filmmaker Suzanne Howard directed the video projection. *Cant Chant* demonstrates Ah Kee’s ability to work across multiple mediums and to combine new elements such as sound and image with those already familiar to audiences. At its root is the issue of race discrimination, which is


examined through the narrative of the beach as a site of conflict since Arthur Phillip (the commander of the First Fleet) staked a claim on Australia in the sand of Botany Bay in 1788.

The work’s narrative shuffles between past and present, offering both a critique of “white” Australian beach culture (in the wake of the so-called 2005 Cronulla Riots) and of conflict between Indigenous Australians and white settlers (controversially referred to as the “Frontier Wars”). Aileen Moreton-Robinson succinctly describes Ah Kee’s rendering of the beach as “being in opposition to its signification within popular culture as a site of everyday practices and representations of ‘Australian-ness.’” This stance is due to his recontextualisation of the beach as a cultural battlefield where not everyone shares the same proprietary rites, a point that was clear in December 2005 as tensions flared in the Sydney beachside suburb of Cronulla following the alleged assault of two off-duty volunteer lifeguards by a group of young men of Middle Eastern appearance. In the days after the incident, tensions escalated into violence as an estimated five thousand people, mostly of Anglo-Celtic Australian background, converged on Cronulla to show their support for the lifeguards and “reclaim their beach.” Fuelled by the toxic combination of alcohol and summer sun, they sought out anyone of Middle Eastern appearance and proceeded to inflict violence upon them. The outbreak of violence and the fear of retaliatory attacks was so acute that the New South Wales Police made the unprecedented move of placing Cronulla under temporary lockdown.

Broadcast around the world, footage of the riot exposed the falsehood of Australia’s reputation as a racially tolerant country. It also exposed the deep problems in Australia’s national identity and laid bare an underbelly of racism in contemporary Australian society. Ah Kee clearly wants us to think about the extent to which the rioters’ behaviour is at odds with the denial of racism he believes exists in Australia. He also wants to draw our attention to the absence of an Indigenous voice and perspective in the reportage and debates after the riot. His quotation of the rioters’ claims of “indigeneity” and ownership of the beach marks his response to what this

81 The emergency powers were enacted under amendments to the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002.
implies. The most potent of these is the riot’s catchphrase (“we grew here, you flew here”), an abbreviated version of which is quoted in the text work *We Grew Here* (fig. 2.35). The catchcry is emblematic of the continued denial of Indigenous sovereignty, of which Ah Kee has said: “I’m like WE grew here, say what you want, but we’re the fellas that grew here.”\(^{82}\) The appropriation is therefore a means of reaffirming Ah Kee’s Indigeneity, as well as of reinstating Australia’s Indigenous, pre-colonial history.

*First Person* (fig. 2.36) is a terse reminder that white Australia’s sense of entitlement was built on the dispossession and disavowal of Indigenous Australians. The text further affirms Ah Kee’s Indigeneity and is a means of subverting the position of those falsely claiming it. In particular, the affirmation calls to mind the doctrine of *terra nullius*, the grounds on which Australia was colonised. In other works, Ah Kee offers a right of reply to the continued subjugation of Indigenous Australians. Two examples are the text works that read “your duty is to accept me, my duty is to tolerate you” (fig. 2.37) and “not a willing participant” (fig. 2.38), which channel Ah Kee’s defiance of and unwillingness to accept the status quo. He breaks convention with *Hang Ten* (fig. 2.39), a simple black-and-white text work that is neither a statement nor affirmation. The text plays on surf culture through its association with the popular American clothing brand and surfing manoeuvre of the same name.\(^{83}\) A more sinister interpretation relates to the practice of lynching prevalent in the United States from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century.

The fact that incidents of lynching were mostly racially motivated and targeted at African Americans, particularly those living in the southern states, suggests the latter was at the forefront of Ah Kee’s mind. Morrell’s contention that the term “hang ten” takes on “new and disturbing meaning in the context of Australia’s Indigenous history” underlines Ah Kee’s appropriation of it.\(^{84}\) The conversation is continued through *Strange Fruit* (fig. 2.40), which bears the title of a famous song performed by African American jazz singer Billie Holiday in the 1930s. Abel Meeropol had written the original poem in protest over the lynching of African Americans.

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\(^{83}\) In this context, the term denotes the act of hanging all ten toes off the front of a long board while surfing a wave.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.  

Ah Kee’s quotation of it also ties in with the first sequence of the video, in which a surfboard hanging from a tree is shot at and then left discarded in a creek, as if to wash away the evidence of the past. The scene is an obvious metaphor for the massacres of Indigenous Australians.

The installation of surfboards bearing North Queensland Yidinji shield designs on the decks and portraits of the artist’s family on the undersides are a further reference. They recall the family’s warrior history and allude to its ongoing battle for rights and recognition in the landscape of contemporary Australia. The shield designs were drawn from a collection dating back to the 1800s held at the Australian Museum. Their rendering on the boards gives the impression of an adversary preparing for battle, and Ah Kee confirms this was his intention: “I was getting a little tired of seeing Aboriginal shields being displayed passively in galleries. Shields are meant to be articles of war, and they’re about combat and action.” As a symbolic gesture, the shield designs bear the colours of the Aboriginal flag — an effective way of asserting Indigenous sovereignty and of sending a strong message about cultural pride.

The second sequence of the video offers viewers a reprieve from the frontier violence that dominates the first. The footage shifts to Ah Kee’s cousins enjoying a day out at a city beach (fig. 2.41). They appear in brightly coloured surf wear with surfboards under their arms. The scene plays with the perception of Indigenous people as belonging to

86 Jones, “Vernon Ah Kee,” 50.
the remote interior of Australia, which is contrary to the lived experience of the majority of Indigenous Australians. Ah Kee explains: “These guys look like they really think they fit in, when black people don’t fit in. It’s about territory and belonging but not fitting in at all.” Yet while it is clear that Ah Kee is poking fun at their desire to assimilate into “white” Australian beach culture, the scene is also a sardonic play on the cliché of the “bronzed Aussie.” The value that has been attached to it exposes a double standard at odds with a history in which Indigenous Australians have been denigrated and racially vilified because of the colour of their skin. By the same token, Ah Kee is also playing with systems of privilege that operate in society, and is presumably calling on “white” Australia to become more cognisant of the benefits they derive from the colour of their skin.

In the final sequence, a lone surfer (played by Indigenous pro-surfer Dale Richards) glides across the screen as he takes command of a wave on one of Ah Kee’s shield-surfboards (fig. 2.42). The placement of Richards at the helm of Australian popular culture is tactical: as well as challenging the perception of Indigenous Australians as belonging to the interior, it offers a new context for them to be seen and reaffirms their place in mainstream society. What is more, his dexterity and domination of the waves sends a clear message to those claiming “white Indigeneity.” In this context, the footage subverts the iconography of the beach that, according to Morten-Robinson, “represents all that is Australian within white popular culture.” However, there is more at play. Ah Kee says that Richards’ inclusion not only marks his desire to expand ideas about Indigenous people and culture, but is also intended as a celebration of Indigenous athleticism. He is not the only artist pushing this agenda: Tony Albert and Brook Andrew have also lauded the sporting prowess of Indigenous Australians, such as Adam Goodes and Anthony Mundine.

The celebration is, however, short-lived. The theme of violence re-emerges in Tall Man, a seminal work comprising a twelve-minute multi-channel video (figs. 2.43–2.45), charcoal portrait (fig. 2.46) and large-scale text work (fig. 2.47). Here Ah Kee recounts a lesser-known race riot on Australian soil in the mid-2000s. It took place on Queensland’s Palm Island on November 26, 2004 (a year before the Cronulla Riots) and was sparked by community outrage after the death in custody of 36-year-old Indigenous

90 Ah Kee quoted in Atkins, “Vernon Ah Kee.”
man Cameron “Mulrunji” Doomadgee. He was the 147th Indigenous Australian to die in police custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991.\textsuperscript{91} Police had arrested Doomadgee for alleged public drunkenness on the morning of November 19, 2004.\textsuperscript{92} He was charged with the offence of public nuisance and lodged into custody; an hour later he was dead.\textsuperscript{93} Although the riot on Palm Island is not as well documented as Cronulla, for Ah Kee it is no less important. His mother was born on Palm Island, members of his family still live there and his cousin is Lex Wotton’s partner.\textsuperscript{94}

Wotton, the Indigenous man who appears in the portrait and whose ordeal Ah Kee relays through the work, was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for inciting the riot.\textsuperscript{95} Doomadgee’s death led to the first trial of a Queensland police officer over an Indigenous death in custody. It did not lead to a conviction, and Wotton remains the only person to have faced criminal charges in relation to the events that surround his death — despite three coronial inquiries, evidence of police collusion and the 2010 finding of the Crime and Misconduct Commission that two separate police investigations into Doomadgee’s death were flawed. Wotton’s fate is recounted through the video installation. The footage begins with news of Doomadgee’s official cause of death, which members of the Palm Island community have gathered around to hear. The coroner’s preliminary finding that Doomadgee’s death was accidental sparks an angry response from Wotton, who addresses the crowd and calls on them to take action by yelling “Come on people, we all wanted this, we wanted to know. Will we accept this?”\textsuperscript{96}

What the footage does not tell us is that the coroner’s finding was contrary to the post-mortem examination, which revealed that Doomadgee’s injuries included a cut above

\textsuperscript{91} The Royal Commission was announced by the Hawke Government and responded to increasing public concern that Indigenous deaths in custody were too frequent and poorly explained. The Commission investigated Indigenous deaths in custody between the period January 1, 1980 and May 31, 1989.
\textsuperscript{92} For an in-depth reading of the circumstances surrounding the death of Cameron “Mulrunji” Doomadgee, see Chloe Hooper, \textit{The Tall Man} (Camberwell, VIC: Penguin, 2009).
\textsuperscript{94} Vernon Ah Kee in conversation with Alisa Duff quoted in “Tall Man by Vernon Ah Kee,” \textit{Art Monthly Australia}, no. 239 (May 2011): 6.
\textsuperscript{95} Wotton was released on parole on July 19, 2010 after serving a nineteen-month sentence.
his right eye, four fractured ribs and a ruptured portal vein. What is more, Doomadgee’s liver had almost been “cleaved into two,” which injury lawyers working on the case suggest is consistent with a high-speed motor vehicle accident or plane crash. The footage of Wotton is compelling and emotionally charged, capturing the palpable tension and sense of desperation in the community following Doomadgee’s death. The video was pieced together with footage on public record used in the trial against Wotton and with recordings sent to Ah Kee anonymously after he visited Palm Island to sketch Wotton for the portrait after his release from prison. The video is an important narrative aid, particularly for viewers unfamiliar with the case. Ah Kee hopes it will challenge their understanding about racial privilege and race relations in Australia: “I think people who aren’t Aboriginal will look at it and just be dumbfounded. They will wonder why is this happening in a country that professes to itself to be something better.”

The sympathetic portrait of Wotton contradicts his criminal conviction, and Ah Kee presents him as a tragic hero who elicits the truth and who stood tall in the face of injustice. A strong sense of resilience emanates from his gaze, which is the gaze of an individual whose spirit has clearly not been broken. Similarly, it is also the gaze of an person who knows he cannot rest until justice is served, despite his imprisonment and the twenty-two parole conditions placed on him after his release — including a “gag order” preventing him from speaking to the media and attending public meetings on Palm Island until 2014 without permission from the Queensland Corrective Services. For this reason, Ah Kee’s portrait of Wotton (aptly named Tall Man) is more than an artistic representation or likeness: it is the artist’s way of breaking Wotton’s silence and giving him a voice. It also publically valorises him for his bravery and marks the artist’s respect for a man who knew he had to take a stand.

98 Ibid; and Andrew Bow quoted in *The Tall Man*, written and directed by Tony Krawitz, produced by Darren Dale (Sydney, NSW: Blackfella Films, 2011), DVD.
101 In 2012, Wotton lost a High Court challenge to have the terms of his parole changed so that he could speak to the media. He later commenced legal proceedings against the Queensland Police Service and State alleging institutional racism.
The third and final part of the installation is a text work that quotes a passage from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (Act 1, Scene 5) conveying Lady Macbeth’s willingness to do whatever is necessary to seize the throne:

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And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it!102
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As Reilly correctly suggests, Ah Kee’s quotation from her monologue offers “an allegory of man’s inhumanity to man, an age-old, seemingly endless cycle of cruelty begetting cruelty.”103 In the context of Doomadgee’s death and Wotton’s conviction, this cycle will only be broken when the truth of Doomadgee’s death is acknowledged and charges are brought against those responsible. That said, the tragedy that brought them together evokes an empathetic response that prompts the audience to consider how they would have acted and what action they would have taken if Doomadgee or Wotton had been one of their own. As we shall see, Tony Albert (who was close to the case because of his familial ties to Palm Island) marked his response by re-presenting one of his text works backwards.

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Currently based in Sydney, Tony Albert was born in Townsville in North Queensland in 1981. He spent his formative years in Cardwell, in the rainforest area of North Queensland and descends from the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. Albert undertook his formal art training at Queensland College of Art, from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts. This degree led to a job at the Queensland Art Gallery, which exposed him to an elite level of art and to a wide range of artistic practices. Albert has said that the period spent at the gallery was instrumental in bringing him closer to his own aesthetic style, which continues to evolve.\(^1\) It also gave him the confidence to look beyond painting, the discipline in which he trained. As social and political concerns began to inform his work, painting gave way to new creative processes and forms of expression.\(^2\) He found success with photography and large-scale wall installations of found objects featuring reductive representations of Indigenous people and culture. Although painting did find its way back into Albert’s practice, he says that nowadays the choice of medium is dictated by what he is trying to communicate through a work.\(^3\)

Albert is a member of the Brisbane-based Indigenous art collective ProppaNOW and cites group members Richard Bell, Gordon Hookey and Vernon Ah Kee as mentors and artists whose work he admires. Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett are further influences; in fact, Albert praises Bennett for transforming the way he thought about art and for sparking an interest in conceptual art.\(^4\) Albert explains that before learning of Bennett’s work through a teacher at his school, his experience of art had been limited to


\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Ibid., 31.

\(^4\) “Tony Albert,” *Colour Theory*, presented by Richard Bell, Season 1, Episode 2, aired February 26, 2014, on NITV, 25.02 mins, television broadcast.
“making beautiful pictures.” Beyond its aesthetics, what struck him about Bennett’s work was the content and theory behind it. Bennett was also one of the first Indigenous artists Albert had come across doing something other than “dot paintings.” Moffatt was another, and through their work Albert found a way to combine his love of art and burgeoning interest in politics and Indigenous Australian affairs.

The past decade has been the most formative period in his development. Albert has built his practice around found objects, which he brings together to form large-scale installations. His work plays with popular culture and with representations of Indigenous people and culture in mainstream Australian society, forming a dialogue that challenges the false assumptions held of them — in particular as cast through the eyes of others and represented in visual depictions of Australian life. His work oscillates between personal and collective memory: some pieces relate to his own experiences and others to those of his extended family. The urban landscape dominates his practice and is used to explore the complexities of urban Indigenous identity and culture. He further draws on it to relocate Indigenous experience and reaffirm the place of Indigenous Australians in the towns and cities of Australia where, contrary to popular thought, the majority of them now live and work.

Albert gained prominence with Gangsta Supastar (figs. 3.1–3.9), a photographic series for which he won the 2007 Sunshine Coast Art Prize. He was also invited to exhibit at the 10th Biennial of Havana in Cuba in 2009, the first time his work was shown overseas and a major coup for a young artist. The series offers a critique of race relations in contemporary Australia. At the forefront of the work is 50perCENT, a fictitious Indigenous hip-hop star Albert describes as his “alter ego” and an inspirational figure for Indigenous youth. The name was inspired by 50 Cent, the rapping alias of popular African American hip-hop star Curtis James Jackson III, whose fame was on the rise when Albert made the series. It is also a nod to Albert’s dual heritage (his father is Indigenous and his mother non-Indigenous). Albert’s use of the name is designed to move the conversation about his identity from one of authenticity to acceptance. It also reminds us of the need to look beyond fixed notions of identity and

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Bruce McLean, “We Are Hip Hop: Tony Albert and 50perCENT” (Brisbane, QLD: Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art, 2006), n.p.
to become more embracing of bi-culturalism so that Albert and others in his position are no longer called upon to quantify their Indigeneity.

The significance of hip-hop, which has its roots in African American culture, is its increasing influence on and resonance with Indigenous youth in both urban and remote communities. In contrast to the scores of Indigenous youth Albert has worked with who say they feel alienated and displaced in mainstream Australian culture, 50perCENT is a winner in a white man’s world. We learn this from the images, with his slick sportswear and gaudy bling being the tell-tale signs of his fame and success. His adoring posse, Notorious B.E.L.L, Murri J. Blige, Sissy and Lil’ Gin, solidify his reputation and celebrity status. Like 50perCENT, their names are based on real hip-hop stars familiar to Albert’s audience. While they are certainly comedic and entertaining, the portraits are more than just a parody of hip-hop culture. Contrary to its satirical undertones, as explained by Gordon Craig, the hip-hop theme is a conduit to Indigenous youth and a means of articulating the “disconnect” they feel within mainstream society because of their Indigeneity. Moreover, by placing an Indigenous figure at the helm of the works, the portraits are aspirational and offer Indigenous youth a positive statement about their identity.

Critics of hip-hop culture would argue that Albert has gotten it wrong and that, contrary to its representation in his work, the links to gang culture, violence and crime paint a conflicting view of its influence. Rather than entering into the debate, Albert looks to the way hip-hop has become the voice of disenfranchised youth. It was through his work with Indigenous youth that he came to understand why hip-hop had become such an increasingly visible aspect of their culture. To give some context, hip-hop culture emerged from New York in the 1970s and has its roots in African American history. Although the movement is now global and has wide appeal, it continues to be dominated by African American artists, many of whom Indigenous youth look up to and aspire to be like. The appeal of hip-hop music is that it extends from the spoken word, making it a universally accessible medium and an ideal platform for political advocacy and social issues. For Indigenous youth, it is a platform to convey the things Albert

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9 Music is one of the more dominant expressions of hip-hop culture; however, the movement also encompasses dance, graffiti and fashion.
says they relate to but seldom talk about, like drugs, suicide, racism and poverty.\textsuperscript{10} In this context, his emulation of hip-hop culture can be thought of as a cultural self-portrait offering rare insight into the lives of Indigenous youth and, more important, helping us understand their disenfranchisement.

For his second major work, \textit{Headhunter} (fig. 3.10), the photographic medium gives way to an assortment of found objects Albert calls “Aboriginalia.”\textsuperscript{11} He coined this word to describe the proliferation of mass-produced objects with caricatures of Indigenous Australians as the noble savage, brave warrior, little piccaninny and exotic other. Dating from the 1940s to 1970s, the objects were initially made to satisfy the burgeoning tourist market and became popular as household items, the most common being plates, tea towels, clocks, drink coasters, teaspoons and ashtrays. Although their popularity as such eventually waned (as Adrian Franklin notes), Indigenous iconography has persisted in the souvenir trade because Indigenous people, culture and motifs are a dominant representational form.\textsuperscript{12} Contrary to its racist undertones, however, there is a flourishing market for vintage Aboriginalia, and Albert is himself a collector. Indeed, he procured the objects that appear in \textit{Headhunter} in second-hand shops and online auction sites such as eBay.

Albert’s use of Aboriginalia is extensive, but he is certainly not the only Indigenous Australian artist to have tapped into and recommissioned objects of this kind for contemporary audiences.\textsuperscript{13} Destiny Deacon has been incorporating kitsch souvenirs, knick-knacks and black “dollies” in her practice to similar effect since the mid-1990s. Albert’s relationship with Aboriginalia goes back to his childhood, but despite its constant presence in his life, his relationship with it has changed over time.

My collection of Aboriginalia started as a young child and initially stemmed from something very innocent. I genuinely loved the iconography and imagery, particularly the faces, which reminded me of my family. When I was in high school I became much more aware of Indigenous issues — economically, socially and politically speaking — and found myself studying our history and leaders wherever possible. It was through this that I discovered the work of contemporary artists such as Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett. I think being confronted by their work really forced me to look at these objects in a new light. It was towards

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{11} The suffix “alia” denotes a collection or items associated with a particular area of activity or interest.
\item\textsuperscript{12} Adrian Franklin, “Aboriginalia: Souvenir Ware and the ‘Aboriginalization’ of Australian Identity,” \textit{Tourist Studies} 10, no. 3 (2010): 196.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 206.
\end{footnotes}
the end of high school that I really began to see these faces as problematic representations of my identity.\textsuperscript{14}

The fact that these objects were one of the few outlets in which Indigenous people and culture were being represented is a sad indictment on the past, and it underlines the sense of cultural alienation and displacement common to their experience in contemporary Australia. Albert has spoken publicly about the paucity of Indigenous Australian faces on commercial television, books and magazines while he was growing up.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the practice of artist Dianne Jones reminds us that this invisibility extends to significant periods of Australian art history and to most visual depictions of Australian life and endeavours.

*Headhunter* comprises ninety pieces of Aboriginalia (with images of Indigenous heads) affixed to black vinyl letters spelling the word “hunter.” Of it Albert says: “as a whole group, they reminded me of trophies from a long lost hunting expedition, hanging on the wall. What does it mean to hang an Indigenous head on the living room wall? Who does this, and why?”\textsuperscript{16} The installation, which dates back to 2007 and is now held in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, marks Albert’s response to what the objects and imagery imply. As indicated by Albert, the work the text conjures up ideas of warfare and refers to the hunting down of Indigenous Australians on the colonial frontier. Curator Jonathan Jones submits that it might also relate to the collection of Indigenous human remains for scientific research and advancement or as trophies of Empire.\textsuperscript{17} The plight of Indigenous resistance fighter Pemulwuy comes to mind (a bounty was placed on his head following a series of raids and retaliatory attacks on European settlers and their properties). After Pemulwuy was finally killed, his head was severed, preserved in spirits and sent as a reward for his scientific endeavours to Joseph Banks, a renowned English botanist and key figure in Australia’s colonisation. In his investigation of Australia’s colonial history, artist Daniel Boyd offers an in-depth reading of Banks’ role and Pemulwuy’s fate.


\textsuperscript{15}“Tony Albert,” *Colour Theory*.


\textsuperscript{17}Jonathan Jones, “Headhunter,” description of artwork retrieved from Tony Albert’s artist file at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney, NSW: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007), n.p.
Although a direct relationship exists between Pemulwuy’s story and the frontier violence and massacres that underscore Albert’s work, there are many other accounts to draw from. In his essay on Governor Lachlan Macquarie’s “war” on the Indigenous people of New South Wales in 1816, Michael Organ details the ruthless campaign Macquarie waged against the Indigenous population. Their terror is brought home in the following passage:

The bodies of slain warriors were also decapitated, though in secret, and their heads sent off to museums in Europe. Camps were created to house those people captured, whilst prisoners were transported to penal establishments such as Port Arthur and children were taken from families and tribes for re-education. Gatherings of six or more Aborigines were declared illegal, customary practice was outlawed, as was the carrying of spears, and the non-Aboriginal civilian population was granted permission to shoot and kill those Aborigines who did not adhere to the tenets of the various proclamations of the government.¹⁸

What Organ describes is not as widely known; however, for Albert it is certainly no less important. Artists Christopher Pease and Daniel Boyd have made similar representations through their artistic investigations: Pease in relation to the history of Indigenous Australians in colonial Western Australia and Boyd of the key figures of Australia’s colonisation.

In 2008, Albert was commissioned by the Queensland Art Gallery to create a work in dialogue with former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generation on February 13, 2008. He responded with Sorry (fig. 3.11), a large-scale installation of Aboriginalia affixed to black vinyl lettering. He used the same layout as in Headhunter but changed the text to “sorry.” Ninety-nine Indigenous faces dominate the surface and catch the viewer’s eye. They represent the members of the previously mentioned Stolen Generation, who are the Indigenous men and women taken from their families and displaced by Federal and State Government agencies, welfare bodies and church authorities under Australian Government policy. The commemorative artwork makes visible some of those who were stolen. In contrast, it is also a salient reminder of a dark period in Australia’s social history that evokes an empathic response from the audience, who are presumably disturbed by how recent the removals were (many having occurred in their own lifetime).

Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generation was heralded as a turning point in Indigenous affairs. Although not without controversy, it was a gesture of reconciliation marking the beginning of a new chapter for Indigenous Australians through official acknowledgment of the removal of Indigenous children from their families and recognition of the “profound grief, suffering and loss” they experienced under the laws and policies of successive governments. Many felt that the apology was long overdue. A contributing factor was former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard’s steadfast refusal to issue an apology during his eleven-year term in office, declaring on national television in 2000 that he did not believe it was “appropriate for the current generation of Australians to apologise for the injustices committed by past generations.”

Granted, there were critics of the apology on both sides of the debate. On the eve of Rudd’s apology, prominent Cape York leader Noel Pearson outlined his own misgivings about it in a column published by The Australian.

Rudd’s visionary apology looked to a future in which all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, would be “truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of Australia.” Despite the critics and those who questioned its sincerity and effectiveness in driving change, it was a gesture underscored by the optimistic belief that the situation for Indigenous Australians could and would change. With that in mind, while Sorry fulfills its obligation as a commemorative artwork, when read from both an Indigenous perspective and from Albert’s own viewpoint, a question mark lingers over whether it was simply a “symbolic” gesture. The reappearance of the work in late 2008 with the text running backwards was a clear indication Albert came to see it as such (fig. 3.12). The catalyst was a series of events in the aftermath of the apology, including the imprisonment of Lex Wotton for his role in the riot that followed the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee. Albert was close to the case because of his family ties to Palm Island, and he also shares a familial connection with Vernon Ah Kee.

22 Rudd, “Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples.”
In a 2009 interview, Albert revealed that he was so incensed about Wotton’s imprisonment that he literally wanted to “rip” Sorry off the gallery wall.23 His fury was compounded by the fact that police officers involved in Doomadgee’s death were awarded a medal for their supposed bravery.24 To add to the insult, two of them had faced misconduct charges in relation to his death.25 From Albert’s viewpoint, which as we have seen is shared by many Indigenous Australians, Wotton’s imprisonment and the medals awarded to the officers involved in Doomadgee’s death betrayed the very premise on which Rudd’s apology was based.26 They are typical of the injustices Indigenous people face, however, which is undoubtedly the point Albert sought to make through the work’s recontextualisation. Although it does channel Albert’s frustration at the ineffectiveness of the apology and underlines the skepticism felt by many who had been reluctant to embrace it without evidence of real change, what is unique about this work is the opportunity it provides audiences to re-examine their feelings and expectations of the apology in its aftermath.

The revised format draws on a proposal Gordon Bennett had submitted for the 2008 Biennale of Sydney. Bennett had sought permission from the Art Gallery of New South Wales to hang the artworks from the Australian colonial collection upside down.27 What is more (according to Albert), Bennett also sought to displace the colonial collection, which occupies a premium space on the gallery’s ground level, and rehang it in the basement where the Indigenous Australian art collection is housed. The idea was then to move the Indigenous collection upstairs and hang it in the space vacated by the colonial collection. Bennett’s proposal sought to subvert the gallery’s collection and exhibition policies and re-present their curatorial approach from an Indigenous perspective. The gallery did not share Bennett’s enthusiasm for the idea and rejected the proposal. All that remains is a scale replica of the galleries with miniatures of the artworks.28 Even so, while Albert’s recontextualisation of Sorry is not on the same scale as Bennett’s unrealised proposal, both are a form of protest and acts of passive

25 Ibid.
26 The apology was directed at the Stolen Generation; however, it was more broadly regarded as a gesture towards reconciliation.
resistance that seek to undermine and challenge established systems of power and authority.

Of all the works Albert has made using Aboriginalia, *ASH on Me* (fig. 3.13) most vehemently underlines and brings into focus the denigration and misrepresentation of Indigenous Australians by the dominant culture in postcolonial Australia. The work is another large-scale wall installation of Aboriginalia affixed to black vinyl lettering. What distinguishes it from previous installations is that instead of incorporating an assortment of Aboriginalia, it is composed entirely of ashtrays with disparaging imagery of Indigenous people and culture. The deliberate shift away from mixed assemblage is clearly designed to highlight the inappropriateness of the imagery on the ashtrays, which curator Tina Baum succinctly describes as “menacing symbols of racism.”²⁹ As such, they expose the reprehensible way Indigenous Australians are seen through the eyes of others. Albert has stated that he attempted to incorporate an ashtray into an earlier work but removed it because he felt that the idea of “butting out” a cigarette on an Indigenous face was so incomprehensible, extreme and perverse that it needed a work of its own.³⁰ He decided to continue collecting ashtrays until he had the right idea. What he did not expect was how easy it would be to amass a considerably large collection.³¹

The text, which reads “ash on me,” marks Albert’s refusal to tolerate the continued denigration of Indigenous people and culture by others. The use of a personal pronoun is a clever way of humanising the work, and more importantly, of reminding audiences that the imagery on the ashtrays is not fictitious but represents a real and living people. Contemporary relevance can be found in the way the ashtrays and other similar objects “use and misuse” images of Indigenous Australians as cultural icons of Australia.³² This practice is extremely divisive and politically charged because it exposes a double standard that sees Indigenous Australians celebrated on the world stage but denigrated on home soil. Equally disturbing is the commercialisation of Indigenous culture, and in particular, the way Indigeneity has become a dominant cultural product driven by economic imperatives. As Franklin has written:

²⁹ Tina Baum, “ASH on Me,” in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights*, eds. Franchesca Cubillo and Wally Caruana (Canberra, ACT: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 226.
³² Baum, “ASH on Me,” 226.
At almost all available contemporary tourist sites and places around Australia the travelling visitor wishing to sample what is properly Australian will be confronted by two dominant representational forms: Australian nature and Australian Aboriginal culture, art and/or motifs.33

This prominence is problematic because the latter often fail to convey the contemporaneity of Indigenous culture or to represent accurately the lived experience of the majority of Indigenous Australians. Albert simply asks that we consider how this reads from an Indigenous perspective.

Family is a recurring theme in Albert’s practice. He looks to family members for inspiration and frequently draws on their history and lived experience. As in the work of Vernon Ah Kee and Dianne Jones, family members also have a visual presence in his work. An early example of this is Albert’s 2007 photographic series Hey Ya! (Shake It Like a Polaroid Picture) (fig. 3.14). The series features his cousin Ethan Rist, whom Albert employs to channel the dynamism of Indigenous youth and to demonstrate the way they continue to reinterpret their culture through dance, language and music. The five images of Rist have been fashioned to look like large Polaroid pictures. The piece brings to mind the “postcard” format used by Daniel Boyd, which makes possible the inclusion of text. Albert quotes a line from the popular American hip-hop duo Outkast’s 2003 hit song Hey Ya!, which is also reflected in the series title (Albert is a fan of their music).34 The duo originally wanted to call themselves “The Misfits” but had to settle on “Outkast” because the name had already been taken.35 Links can be made with the outsider status that scores of Indigenous Australians, including Albert, experience as a result of their Indigeneity. Albert’s casting of Rist as the central figure hints the growing disquiet among Indigenous youth, many of whom feel alienated by the dominant culture and estranged from their Indigenous culture.

The series was shot in Cardwell, the small town in North Queensland where Albert grew up and where members of his family still live. Rist is seen dancing (“shaking it”) along the shoreline of a local beach. The depiction is humorous and entertaining, partly because it is not entirely clear whether he is re-enacting a traditional dance to hip-hop, playacting or both. Either way, he stays true to the song’s lyrics and does his best to

33 Franklin, “Aboriginalia,” 196.
34 The duo are André ‘André 3000’ Benjamin and Antwan ‘Big Boi’ Patton.
charm us with his youthful exuberance. Curator Jonathan Jones brings up an important point when he says that the vitality of Indigenous culture seen in the work is “in stark contrast to the stasis of Aboriginal culture characteristic of colonial photography.”

Notwithstanding Albert’s familial connection with Rist, a distinguishing factor is that Albert’s images are empowered by and captured through an Indigenous lens. This is important for a non-Indigenous audience, whose understanding of Indigenous people and culture is for the most part filtered through a Eurocentric lens. Of equal importance is the need of Indigenous Australians to see broader and more accurate representations of themselves in the public domain, which is exactly what Albert achieves through the series.

Rist reappears in Optimism (figs. 3.15–3.24), a composite of photographic images that offer a powerful visual statement about urban Indigenous identity. The series is an extension of Albert’s engagement with Indigenous youth and, as is typical of his work, it challenges the audience’s understanding of contemporary Indigenous Australian identity and lived experience. Common to all ten images in the series are Rist and the jawun he wears on his back. These traditional woven baskets used to carry goods are unique to the rainforest area of North Queensland where Albert and Rist are from. Albert’s Aunty Ninni Murray, a senior weaver, made the one that appears in each of the images. Albert says it has special significance because it was his aunty that introduced him to the jawun when he was a child. In the context of the series, Albert employs it as a marker of Rist’s cultural identity (we are told it is something he carries with him wherever he goes, and its recurrence makes this clear). The jawun also carries ideas of cultural inheritance. It may be that Albert is underlining the vital role he and Rist must play in the dissemination of their culture and traditions. Indeed, the sight of Rist wearing the jawun the traditional way suggests that Albert is not simply marking his respect for the customs of the Girramay people from whom he descends, but is passing them on to his younger cousin.

The series documents the life of a young Indigenous man, played by Rist, as he goes about his daily activities in the urban metropolis of Brisbane. In each image, the jawun on Rist’s back is filled with an assortment of items. Changing with each location, they

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tell us something about his interests, hobbies and dreams. The locations are the everyday places Albert says he visits, such as the supermarket, art gallery and train station.\textsuperscript{38} Albert’s revelation points to the series being both a self-portrait and a family portrait. The juxtaposition of the urban landscape and the contents of the jawun is a subtle reminder that Rist (and by extension, Albert) are more than just the Indigenous faces some people can only see. It would explain why Albert photographed Rist from the back so that we are unable to see his face. Beyond their role in broadening ideas about Indigenous people and culture, what defines these images is the way they disrupt and displace the narrative of remote Indigenous experience, which we know is contrary to the lived experience of the majority, who live in urban areas. The urban setting is the means through which Albert reminds us that culture is not a geographical construct, but is something that traverses time and place.

Aboriginalia comes in all shapes and sizes, and as we have seen from Albert’s work so far, it also comes in a multitude of forms. In addition to his collection of ashtrays, plates, plaques and figurines, he has also amassed an impressive collection of oil-on-velvet paintings. Like the other forms of Aboriginalia, they feature naïve and reductive representations of Indigenous people and were popular as household decorations during the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{39} The tradition of velvet painting, however, dates back farther and is said to have originated in Persia before spreading across the globe and becoming popularised in the United States in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{40} As arts writer Jennifer Heath has written, velvet paintings are despised for their often crude and sometimes laughable imagery, but they are also extremely popular with collectors.\textsuperscript{41} Bringing together a selection of velvet paintings is Hopeless Romantic (fig. 3.25), a large-scale installation Albert exhibited at Gallery Smith, Melbourne, in 2008 that was later acquired by the National Gallery of Australia. The paintings are notable for their romantic undertones, which Albert further highlights through the work’s title. The depictions of Indigenous women and children are particularly disturbing. Although Albert has been respectful in his choice of works, sexualised imagery is not uncommon.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Jennifer Heath, Black Velvet: The Art We Love to Hate (San Francisco, US: Pomegranate Artbooks, c.1994), 5.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
What is troubling about these seemingly innocuous representations is that they are the vehicles through which generations of Australian have, as Albert puts it, “forged an emotional albeit unrealistic connection to Indigenous people.” In other words, it is the kind of imagery that has given rise to stereotypes and fixed Indigenous Australians in the past and to certain landscapes. Albert attempts to counter this distortion by representing the images with overlaying text and iconography that play with their implied meaning. The texts come from a wide range of literary sources, such as songs, nursery rhymes, advertising slogans and even political speeches. He is strategic in his choices, deliberately targeting that which strikes a chord with his predominantly non-Indigenous Australian audience. The title of Peter Allen’s 1980s expat anthem *I Still Call Australia Home* is one example. Humour occasionally lightens the mood and offsets the collective sigh of disillusionment and despair that echoes throughout. Albert’s rewording of Justin Timberlake’s hit song *I’m Bringing Sexy Back* to read “I’m Bring’n Sexy Blak” comes to mind (although this wordplay could also be interpreted as a wry comment on the sexualised imagery of Indigenous women and children commonly found on velvet paintings).

The tone of the text is factual and to the point. When read together, the individual works form a dialogue that conveys an Indigenous perspective on Australia’s shared history and Indigenous past. To illustrate the point, *Sorry 13.02.2008* (fig. 3.26) recalls Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generation and *I Told You I Was Aboriginal...You Never Spoke to Me Again...* (fig. 3.27) offers a testimony regarding contemporary race relations. The iconography of the prison bars and the bullseye target have the same effect. They appear on several works (figs. 3.28–3.30), with the former denoting the institutionalisation of Indigenous Australians under colonial rule and the latter the war waged against them on the colonial frontier. The prison bars also have meaning as markers of the alarmingly high incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians in the prison system. According to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Indigenous Australians account for 27 percent of the national prison population, yet they constitute only 3 percent of the national population. What is disturbing about these figures is that they are increasing steadily, particularly among women and

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42 “Tony Albert,” Murdoch University Art Collection.
juveniles. The theme of institutionalisation also brings to mind the systems that have reduced Indigenous Australians to classificatory types and sought to define who and what is Indigenous. Albert underlines this in Coon (fig. 3.31) by overlaying text that reads “fullblood, halfcaste, quadroon, octoroon, coon.”

One of Albert’s most visually striking works is the 2009 photographic series No Place (figs. 3.32–3.36). Its five large-scale photographic works take us on a cross-cultural exchange to the thrilling world of lucha libre, a popular form of professional wrestling from Mexico. The wrestlers, or luchadores as they are more commonly known, are renowned for their high-flying manoeuvres and rapid sequences and are differentiated by their choice of brightly coloured costumes and patterned masks. While en route to the Havana Biennial in Cuba to exhibit Gangsta Supastar, Albert bought a selection of the masks, which are readily available and popular with tourists. On his return to Australia, he travelled up to Cardwell and coaxed family and friends into donning the masks for a new photographic series. The series was shot over four days in Girramay country, with the location being a departure from the urban setting of some of his earlier work. Of the two hundred photographs he took, only five made the final cut. The resulting images are tightly cropped portraits, which could also be taken for headshots. Contrary to the conventions of portraiture, however, the masks conceal the subjects’ identities.

Under different circumstances, the masks could have meaning as menacing symbols of conflict and war. Here they evoke a sense of fun and play, even if this was not Albert’s intention. His interest in them has little to do with their use in lucha libre or with what they might imply. He looks instead to the way they have become symbols of Mexican culture through their commercialisation, so that parallels can be drawn with his collection of Aboriginalia and, more broadly, with the rise of the Indigenous brand. Use of the masks in lucha libre dates back to the early 1940s; however, their origins date back to the Aztec Empire, where they were used as ornaments and worn for rituals and

44 In fact the Law Council of Australia reports that Indigenous juveniles (i.e., those aged 10–16 in Queensland and 10–17 in all other Australian jurisdictions) are thirty-one times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous juveniles. See Law Council of Australia, Indigenous Imprisonment Fact Sheet (Canberra, ACT: Law Council of Australia, 2014), http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/lawcouncil/images/LCA-PDF/Indigenous_Imprisonment_Fact_Sheet.pdf.
in death. The masks were traditionally made with wood, bone, cloth and wax and decorated with patterns representing animal beings that were often vestiges of pre-Hispanic gods. Those used in *lucha libre* and made for the tourist market are made of more contemporary materials. In keeping with tradition, however, the patterns continue to represent animal or spirit beings that the *luchadores* take on as part of their identity, so they continue to have meaning as a vestige of traditional Mexican culture.

Albert has stated that when he came across the masks he was immediately struck by how similar the patterns were to those found on North Queensland rainforest shields. He further notes that the designs on the shields also represent animal gods and spirit beings. Both are also forms of armature. In this context, the masks are an allegory for the warrior history and cultural legacy of the artist’s family. Indeed, Vernon Ah Kee has used these sorts of designs to similar effect. As curator Bruce McLean has written, “Girramay country is a place where warriors armed with an arsenal of giant wooden swords and shields protected their densely vegetated home from any external influences.” Albert’s reinstatement of the designs alludes to the ongoing battle of Girramay people to retain ownership of their land and maintain their language, cultural practices and traditions. The title of the series draws inspiration from the classic children’s book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by Lyman Frank Baum, which later became a popular Broadway musical and iconic film. Albert says it relates to the scene in the film where Dorothy wishes herself home from the frightening world of make believe by repeating the phrase “there’s no place like home.” Here it underlines Albert’s ongoing connection to Girramay country and the Cardwell community.

Albert’s 2009 to 2010 text-based wall installation *Pay Attention* (figs. 3.37–3.39) was one of his first artistic collaborations. It features contributions from twenty-five other Indigenous Australian artists. (Albert has also collaborated with the late Arthur Koo’ekka Pambegan Jnr, Alair Pambegan and internationally acclaimed photographer Mario Testino.) The twenty-five artists were brought together to form a collective voice

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48 Albert quoted in McLean, “There’s No Place Like Home,” 72.
49 McLean, “There’s No Place Like Home,” 71.
51 The contributing artists were: Judith Inakama, Archie Moore, Abe Muriata, Theresa Beeron, Jason Wing, Megan Cope, Joanne Currie, Ninney Murray, Laurie Nilsen, Arthur Pambegan Jr, Leah King-Smith, Daniel Boyd, Jennifer Herd, Judy Watson, Bianca Beetsen, Dale Harding, Rahel Ungwanaka, Gary Lee, Vernon Ah Kee, The Last Kinection, Gordon Hookey, Craig Koomeeta, Tonya Grant, Richard Bell and Maureen Beeron.
and to project a united front on something that could no longer be ignored. The work’s expletive-laden language sets the tone, which is deliberately confrontational and unapologetic. The text is both statement and instruction: the former commanding the presumably non-Indigenous audience to pay attention and the latter asking them to consider what the chorus of black voices are asking them to pay attention to. What they ask is that more consideration be given to the issues that affect Indigenous Australians, which the artists clearly believe are not being acknowledged. These issues include constitutional recognition and sovereignty, land rights and ownership, Indigenous incarceration and deaths in custody, institutional and intergenerational racism, unemployment and access to education and healthcare, particularly in remote communities where the need is acute.

The installation also reflects the changing environment in which Indigenous artists live and work, while drawing attention to the breadth and diversity of the art they produce. A good example is Gary Lee’s contribution, which is based on a self-portrait he entered into the Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2004. Lee’s work disrupts the narrative of Indigenous Australian art as being something produced in a remote setting, but it is not out of keeping with the type of art Indigenous Australians produce (in fact it is typical). Controversially, his portrait was rejected on the grounds that Lee did not take the photograph himself. Others, including Albert, believe it was because the portrait was not “Aboriginal enough.” (Or as Djon Mundine said of it: “well, it wasn’t a dot painting or bark painting.”) As we have seen, Indigenous artists also draw on a wide range of influences and sources, many of which have nothing to do with their cultural heritage. Actually, Albert drew inspiration for this particular work from renowned American artist Bruce Nauman’s 1973 lithograph Pay Attention (fig. 3.40), appropriating its text as well as its mirrored form. Nauman is known for his mirrored text works, and Albert’s recontextualisation of Sorry also shows the influence of Pay Attention.

54 “Tony Albert,” Colour Theory.
An installation of velvet paintings was also the focal point of *Family*, a 2012 solo exhibition of the artist’s work at Sullivan + Strumpf Gallery in Sydney. The exhibition was Albert’s first in three years, and it marked his return to Australia after a period spent abroad working on commissions. The installation *Rearranging Our History* (fig. 3.41) brought together ninety-seven velvet paintings that spanned eleven metres. Albert has stated that it forms part of an ongoing project based on reclaimed vintage velvet paintings.\(^{56}\) As with the previous installation of velvet paintings, *Hopeless Romantic*, the imagery is overlaid with text and iconography. The later work quotes a wider range of literary sources; for example, speeches by African-American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. and passages from former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s 2001 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. Their inclusion speaks to marginalised and disenfranchised people worldwide, including Indigenous Australians. Albert explains: “Aboriginal issues have long been echoed throughout the world by people in similar positions, and we have shared in each others struggles.”\(^{57}\) Albert’s work has the same qualities. Despite having a local context, its themes and subject matter resonate far beyond the Indigenous Australian experience.

A series of posters Albert made for the Cairns International Art Fair in 2011 (fig. 3.42) also formed part of the *Family* exhibition. Again, while they have a local context, the themes expressed resonate beyond the Australian experience. The posters were made as part of a community initiative to highlight the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in key areas such as life expectancy, mortality rates, numeracy, literacy, education, employment and health.\(^{58}\) These are areas in which Indigenous Australians have been identified as falling below the national average.\(^{59}\) The posters bear a striking resemblance to the brightly coloured political posters produced by Redback Graphix in the 1980s and ‘90s that gave a voice to a spectrum of social issues.\(^{60}\) To highlight the disparity, the posters were sold at different prices: $5 for Indigenous Australians and $10 for non-Indigenous Australians. The proceeds were

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\(^{57}\) “Tony Albert,” *Colour Theory*.


\(^{60}\) Redback Graphix was a print studio founded by Michael Callaghan that operated out of Wollongong and Sydney between 1979 and 1994. The studio was renowned for producing socially engaged posters, as well as posters to promote festivals, art exhibitions and music gigs.
then directed to the Cathy Freeman Foundation, which offers support for children in remote Indigenous communities across Queensland and the Northern Territory.

While their purpose at the point of sale was to cast a spotlight on Indigenous disadvantage, the posters had in fact been produced for distribution to Australian schools to convey an important social message to Indigenous youth. Albert has stated that the posters are key to redressing the sense of isolation some Indigenous youth experience because of their minority status or, as was the case for Albert, of not being able to see his people and culture accurately represented.61 He has stated that they are the kind of posters he and his sister looked for at school but could never see. (Artist Dianne Jones has made similar representations through her practice.) The free distribution of the posters was a way of remedying this invisibility and isolation. The posters, which feature three of Albert’s female cousins and bear the colours of the Aboriginal flag, inspire Indigenous youth to “be deadly” — a colloquialism used in this context to refer to something excellent or very good. Curator Liz Nowell’s description of the cousins as “poster girls for a new generation of educated, empowered and proud Aboriginal people” captures the spirit of what the posters epitomise.62 More than that, it underlines the role Indigenous youth must play in the maintenance and dissemination of their culture.

One of the most powerful works in the exhibition was Daddy’s Little Girl (After Gordon Bennett (figs. 3.43–3.45); a three-piece installation tackling the issue of intergenerational and institutional racism. It quotes Gordon Bennett’s 1989 watercolour Daddy’s Little Girl (fig. 3.46) and 1994’s Daddy’s Little Girl 2 (fig. 3.47). Albert says he was reminded of these pieces when he came across a newspaper article in 2010 outing prominent rugby league coach Andrew Johns for calling Indigenous rugby league star Greg Inglis a “black cunt.”63 The incident inspired Albert to resume the conversation Bennett had started more than a decade ago about racism in Australian sport. In Bennett’s works, parts of which Albert replicates, we see a fair-haired girl arranging a set of children’s lettered building blocks that spell out the many derogatory and disparaging names Indigenous Australians are often called, such as “abo,” “boong,” “cunt” and “darkie”. Overseeing her work is the girl’s father, who looks on from an

63 Albert quoted in Nowell, “Tony Albert,” 89.
armchair with a pipe casually resting in his hand. It is a disturbing scene that lays bare one of the many ways racism and bigotry is passed down from one generation to another.

Albert’s three-piece installation is composed of a framed watercolour, a framed letter and an arrangement of children’s building blocks. The watercolour mimics the style and composition of Bennett’s two works, but what distinguishes it from them is that Albert has updated it to reference the Inglis incident. The image on the television set of two football players wearing State of Origin colours and the football jersey worn by the girl’s father indicate this, along with the name “Johns,” which appears across the back of the man’s jersey. This simple but powerful act publicly shames Johns for the racist taunt, which is offensive not only to Inglis but to all Indigenous Australians and people of colour. Even though the slur is not exclusive to Johns or the sporting field, the Inglis incident epitomizes a prevalent attitude deeply embedded within Australian sport and elsewhere in the country’s institutions. In a recent public address, Australia’s Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane lamented the lack of racial diversity in the media and at the executive level in major Australian corporations, the root cause of which he suggests is an unwillingness to accept cultural diversity.

Despite concerted efforts to eradicate racism from sport, racism persists at all levels and through all codes of sport in Australia, as demonstrated by the Inglis incident and a more recent one involving former Sydney Swans Australian Football League (AFL) player Adam Goodes. Fans of Nicky Winmar, who is also a former AFL player, know that it also has a long history. In 1993, Winmar became the subject of one of the most significant photographs in Australian sporting history. In a match against Collingwood, team supporters racially abused St. Kilda’s two Indigenous players, Winmar and Gilbert McAdam. “Petrol sniffers, abos, coons, niggers and boongs” were just some of the names they were called. According to one report, one Collingwood supporter even

yelled: “Shoot him! He is only black.” At the conclusion of the game, Winmar lifted up his guernsey, faced the crowd and made a pointed reference to the colour of his skin: “I’m black and I’m proud to be black.” The following day a photograph of the gesture appeared on the front page of the Melbourne Sunday Age and has been reproduced countless times since. As Matthew Klugman said of the image: “no footy picture taken in the last 20 years has spoken to racism as powerfully as the image of Winmar pointing in pride and defiance to the colour of his skin.”

The letter is one of many that Albert sent to Bennett over the years. The last was received by Bennett just weeks before his death on June 3, 2014. Albert began writing to Bennett in 2010, inspired by a series of posthumous letters Bennett had written to Haitian-American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. Bennett was a great admirer of Basquiat’s work, and through the letters he pays tribute to Basquiat for helping him open up about his identity struggles (a recurring theme in Bennett’s work) and to understand the global context of his work. In fact, there are clear links between what Bennett saw in Basquiat’s work and what Albert found in Bennett’s. We see this in Albert’s letter, which not only thanks the elder artist for being a positive influence on his practice, but also underscores the importance of Indigenous role models who, like Winmar, Inglis and Goodes, motivate and inspire others to follow their lead. But this is not the only letter to Bennett that Albert incorporated into a work. A further one appeared in Once Upon A Time...(fig. 3.48), the large-scale mixed media work for which Albert won the highly coveted, sports-themed Basil Sellers Art Prize in 2014.

The work continues the conversation about racism in sport; in particular, the racial vilification of two-time Brownlow Medallist Adam Goodes that began during the AFL Indigenous Round in 2013 and continued until his retirement from the sport in 2015. An incident involving a Collingwood supporter, a young girl who had just celebrated her thirteenth birthday, sparked the abuse. In the dying minutes of the game, Goodes allegedly overheard the young girl call him an “ape,” for which she was then escorted from the grounds by security. Media coverage of the incident was widespread and

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67 Ibid., 3.
68 Ibid., 5.
public opinion divided.\textsuperscript{71} The continued booing of Goodes and the failure of the AFL to intervene did little to reassure Indigenous Australians that there was no place for racism in Australian sport. In the wake of the Goodes incident, Bennett’s \textit{Daddy’s Little Girl} takes on new meaning and is remarkably prophetic. When read alongside \textit{Once Upon a Time}..., which also includes a portrait of Winmar based on the aforementioned iconic image, a pattern emerges that echoes “the seemingly endless cycle of cruelty begetting cruelty” that underlines Ah Kee’s work.\textsuperscript{72} Through the letter, Albert signals his intention to break the cycle by continuing Bennett’s fight against racism and his sustained championing of Indigenous rights.\textsuperscript{73}

In 2011, Albert was approached by the Australian War Memorial to undertake a commission to honour the unique contribution of the North-West Mobile Force. NORFORCE, as it is more commonly known, is an army unit attached to the Australian Defence Force in the Northern Territory that oversees border security and sea patrols in the area. The unit has a high proportion of Indigenous Australian soldiers, many of whom are recruited from communities in the areas where the patrols take place, meaning they can draw on their local knowledge.\textsuperscript{74} The unit was officially formed in 1981; however, its history dates back to 1942 with the 21st North Australian Observer Unit (NAOU) commanded by W. E. H. Stanner, whose contribution to Indigenous affairs is well documented.\textsuperscript{75} Albert’s commission derived from a new initiative at the War Memorial to engage conceptual artists to produce a body of work based on time with soldiers in the field. His time was spent with a group of new recruits on an intensive, two-week training course at an army camp located an hour out of Darwin.\textsuperscript{76}

The commission was significant for two reasons: the first being that it saw Albert become the first official war artist since the Second World War to be tapped for work on Australian soil, and the second that he was the first Indigenous artist to have been

\textsuperscript{71} For a selection of these see “Adam Goodes and the Race Debate,” \textit{Media Watch}, presented by Paul Barry, aired August 3, 2015, on ABC Television, 7.10 mins, television broadcast, http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s4286254.htm.


\textsuperscript{73} Albert, “Tony Albert on Gordon Bennett,” 25.


commissioned by the institution. Like thousands of other Indigenous Australians, Albert also has familial connections to the Australian military through service by his father and grandfather. Even so, he admits he was surprised to learn that 60 percent of the NORFORCE unit were Indigenous men and women. A series of A4 size acrylic-on-paper works brought together under the title Gangurru Camouflage (figs. 3.49–3.52) forms part of the commission. In Girramay language, “Gangurru” means “grey kangaroo,” a representation of which recurs through the camouflage that forms the backdrop for the individual works. (A similar pattern appears on the soldier’s uniform.) Albert plays with its meaning and employs it as a visual metaphor to address the invisibility of Indigenous military service in Australian museums and cultural institutions, as well as in the dominant Anzac narrative. The overlaid text offers a broader historical context for the artist’s engagement with the NORFORCE unit. Some texts are philosophical comments about war; others are terse statements about Australia’s Indigenous war history.

As part of the creative process, Albert worked with the Indigenous Australian collection at the War Memorial in Canberra, which includes many “unmarked” portraits of Indigenous servicemen and women for which basic information such as the soldier’s name, title and rank was not recorded and remains unknown. Among the contributing factors to this lack of information are the difficulties encountered by Indigenous Australians wanting to enlist for Australian war efforts. For example, The Defence Act 1909 (Cth) prohibited people who were “not substantially of European origin or descent” from enlisting in any of the armed services. There were ways of getting around the official channels, and restrictions were relaxed when recruits were hard to find. Officially, however, it was not until the Second World War that Indigenous Australians were permitted to enlist. Even so, many lied about their heritage or changed their name to serve their country, and this legacy plays out in the unmarked

80 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
images. A project is now underway to help identify and document the service history of as many Indigenous Australians as possible.)

While it is difficult to determine exactly how many Indigenous men and women have served in Australian war efforts, War Memorial Indigenous liaison officer Gary Oakley estimates that since 1860 thousands have served and hundreds have died. He adds that the figure continues to rise with increased research efforts. The War Memorial’s collection of unmarked photographs of Indigenous soldiers was at the forefront of Albert’s mind when he was working on Green Skins, a series of portraits that celebrate the unique history of the NORFORCE unit and pay tribute to the recruits Albert worked alongside as part of the commission. To ensure they do not become a causality of history like previous generations of Indigenous soldiers, Albert identifies them by name. Nonetheless, the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in the Anzac narrative extends far beyond the unmarked portraits in the War Memorial’s collection. Australia has been slow to acknowledge the significant contribution of Indigenous soldiers, particularly in war efforts overseas but on Australian soil as well. In fact documentation of their stories and experiences is in its infancy, through projects such as the Serving Our Country: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Defence of Australia.

The issue is close to Albert’s heart. His grandfather, Eddie Albert, enlisted for the Australian armed services after the outbreak of the Second World War. His story is remarkable. He served with the 51st Militia Battalion and spent two years as a prisoner of war in various camps in Italy before escaping in early September 1943. According to his military record, Albert and six other Australian soldiers (including another Indigenous man from Western Australia) spent seven months on the run before taking refuge with an Italian family and eventually being recaptured in the foothills of the

86 Ibid.
87 Serving Our Country: A History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Defence of Australia is a four-year ARC funded project run by the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University.
Italian Alps. Three of them were killed instantly. When the captors learned the soldiers were British Allies and should be returned to Germany, the others were spared. Eddie Albert survived the ordeal and left a remarkable legacy. Five of his eight children, one of whom is the artist’s father, have gone on to serve in the Australian Defence Force. Of course his legacy continues with his grandson’s engagement with the Australian War Memorial and NORFORCE unit in the Northern Territory, and his service remains an ongoing source of inspiration to the Albert family.

The engagement with the War Memorial inspired Albert to submit a proposal for a public artwork in Sydney’s Hyde Park to commemorate the sacrifices and bravery of Indigenous servicemen and women. His proposal won, and the resulting work *YININMADYEMI — Thou Didst Let Fall* (fig. 3.54) was unveiled in 2015. The work is composed of seven large bullets: four upright and three fallen. The bullet is a universal symbol of war and conflict; here it represents those who survived and those who were sacrificed. The work draws on Albert’s grandfather’s legacy and makes public his service to the nation. At the same time, Albert says, it pays tribute to all of the Indigenous Australians who have served Australia in war efforts.

There is this invisibility, and when you look at something like war which is so relevant and takes so much pride in the Australian psyche, I think it would be amazing if Aboriginal people are part of that and people know that in every single war that’s happened, there have been Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women involved.

Albert hopes the memorial will act as a catalyst for more stories to emerge and be written down for future generations. Some of them are manifest in the work of Dianne Jones, who through the narrative of her grandfather’s military service draws our attention to the discriminatory way Indigenous war veterans were treated on their return home to Australia.

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88 Ibid.
Dianne Jones was born in Perth in 1966 and spent her childhood in Northam, a small town to the northeast of Perth in Western Australia. She is a descendant of the Balardung people of the Nyungar\(^1\) nation, who occupied the Southwest corner of Western Australia prior to European colonisation. Of her childhood in Northam, Jones says she often felt isolated and alone.\(^2\) During an artist talk she gave at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2008, Jones explained that this was due to the undercurrent of racism in town and was exacerbated at school by not being seeing herself represented in history books and in the version of Australian history she was taught.\(^3\) Jones left Northam for Perth when she was seventeen. Although she says she could not wait to leave Northam, it is evident from the reading of her work that the years spent there had a profound and significant impact on her life. This is reflected not only in terms of her trajectory as an artist, but also in the context of her cultural identity and how she has come to see herself as an Indigenous Australian.

After moving to Perth, Jones completed an Art Foundation Course at Perth Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College. She then attended Edith Cowan University, graduating with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2001. Jones says that despite the fact that she grew up painting, and her mother Della is an artist, the idea of becoming an artist did not occur to her until she was in her early twenties.\(^4\) The catalyst was a visit to the

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\(^{1}\) *Nyungar* is a broad term used to refer to the Indigenous people of the Southwest of Western Australia. The Nyungar nation comprises fourteen language groups, all of which relate to specific geographical areas. Alternate spellings include *Nyoongar, Nyoonar, Noongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Nyungar, Noonga* and *Yunga*. For consistency, *Nyungar* is used throughout this thesis.


\(^{3}\) Ibid.

Art Gallery of Western Australia, where she came across Gordon Bennett’s 1989 work _Valley of the Ghost Gums_. Jones says that the issues Bennett conveyed through this work resonated with her and were unlike anything she had seen before. She credits him with giving her a different view of art, one driven by thoughts and ideas rather than an aesthetic outcome. Bennett’s work led her to the discovery of Tracey Moffatt and Brenda L. Croft, who practices have also been influential on the conceptual development of her practice. Outside of Australia, Jones has looked to the work of French-American conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp and American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger.

Jones was introduced to photography and digital media while studying painting at university. She was immediately drawn to the immediacy and storytelling properties of the photographic medium. While she is best described as a photo-media artist, Jones still thinks of herself as a painter. Since 2000, her work has revolved around the photographic medium and the use of digital software to appropriate existing imagery. Jones is strategic with selecting images from art and history books, choosing artworks that are iconic, well loved and familiar to audiences. She exhibits a preference for imagery that has played an influential role in the formation of Australia’s national identity, or that acts as a marker of Australian life and culture. Imagery that fixes Indigenous Australians to the past and to certain landscapes also forms part of her visual manifesto.

Appropriation dominates Jones’ practice. She uses it as a narrative tool to aid the reading of her work and to highlight an Indigenous perspective. It also allows her to point to something amiss, which in the context of her practice relates to the invisibility of Indigenous faces in popular culture and in visual representations of Australian life and endeavours. An extension of this eclipsing of Indigenous Australians is their invisibility in the dominant discourse of Australia’s written history. The performative act of mimicry also dominates Jones’ practice and is used to redress the invisibility of Indigenous people and to contemporise Indigenous identity. For this reason, Jones’ work can be seen as both the “Indigenisation” of Australian art history and the re-imagining of the Indigenous Australian as a subject. Moreover, as the following

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5 Jones, “Half Light.”
6 Jones in conversation with Perkins, _Half Light_, 83.
7 Ibid.
9 Jones in conversation with Perkins, _Half Light_, 84.

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reading of Jones’ work seeks to demonstrate, her use of appropriation and engagement with Australia’s visual history is the means through which she exposes the potential of iconic imagery to give rise to a mythology that Sarah Norris believes fails to “accurately reflect the culture it informs.”

Jones’ 2001 work Brenda’s Wedding (fig. 4.1) is an appropriation of Eugene Von Guerard’s 1854 Australian colonial landscape Barwon River Geelong (also known as The Barter) (fig. 4.2). The Austrian-born artist arrived in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century and came to be recognised as the foremost landscape artist in the country. At the centre of Von Guerard’s painting is an Indigenous family offering animal skins to several Europeans, presumably for sale. In Jones’ appropriation, the family is replaced with a picture of her own. The image is from her sister Brenda’s wedding and is a typical family wedding portrait: huddled together in their finest attire, they smile broadly at the camera. The appropriation is intended to convey a contemporary idea about Indigenous Australians that represents a departure from the past and relocates Indigenous experience from the pastoral landscape of Von Guerard’s painting to the towns and cites of Australia where her family, and the majority of Indigenous people, now live and work.

Scale is used to bring the Jones’ family to the forefront of the work. Here she plays with the depiction of Indigenous Australians as subordinate or background figures in colonial Australian art. As Clegg and Gilchrist have written: “many colonial artists were reluctant to insinuate the original owners into the landscape, thereby avoiding complicated issues of dispossession, resistance and guilt.” There is also the implication that Indigenous Australians were “lesser” and not of equal status to their European counterparts, the idea of which Jones subverts by making her family the focal point of the work and by identifying them through its title. Jones has said her use of an image from her sister’s wedding plays with a type of ceremony people do not traditionally associate with Indigenous people. It can also be interpreted as a critique

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12 Ibid.
13 Jones in conversation with Perkins, Half Light, 83.
of the reductive representations of Indigenous Australians in colonial art, and more specifically, the false characterisations and stereotypes she seeks to counter and redress.

The conversation is continued in *Jones's Picnic* (fig. 4.3), a work that quotes John Glover’s 1835 painting *Natives at a Corrobory, under the Wild Woods of the Country (River Jordan below Brighton, Tasmania)* (fig. 4.4). The English-born artist is best known for his paintings of the Tasmanian landscape, some of which are ethnographic due to the inclusion of Indigenous people. The appropriation sees the anonymous Indigenous figures in Glover’s work displaced by a contemporary portrait of the artist’s family at a family picnic. Jones is clearly playing with the idea of tradition, the bush picnic being a favourite for many Australians. Like *Brenda’s Wedding*, the intervention challenges stereotypical representations of Indigenous Australians and brings new understanding to contemporary Indigenous experience. The appropriation might also be a pointed reference to the Romantic symbolism prevalent in Australian colonial art, which is evident in Glover’s treatment of Indigenous Australians. Indeed, art curator Ron Radford’s characterisation of same as a “melancholy testimony to the passing of a lively Aboriginal civilisation” certainly gives this impression.

Jones’ engagement with the icons of Australian art also reveals the invisibility of Indigenous people in significant periods of Australian art history. Despite the Indigenous presence in the landscape in the nineteenth century, by the twentieth century it had all but disappeared. “When the Tom Roberts era came about” says Jones, “they [the artists] didn’t acknowledge or include them.” Here she refers to the Heidelberg school of artists active in the late nineteenth century. These artists, including Roberts and others such as Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin, Charles Conder and Walter Withers, worked in the tradition of the Impressionists and painted “plein air,” which is a French expression describing the act of painting outdoors. Their work is lauded for its realistic portrayal of settler life, lively narratives of bush life and tales of pastoral toil. As Bernard Smith wrote, the “idealisation of the rural pioneer” is a

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recurring theme.\textsuperscript{18} The imagery is intensely nationalistic and channels the aspirations of the new nation on the eve of Federation.

The displacement and invisibility of Indigenous Australians in this and other periods of Australian art history is demonstrated through Jones’ appropriation of Tom Roberts’ \textit{Shearing the Rams} (figs. 4.5 and 4.6), described fittingly by Leigh Astbury as “an archetypal vision of Australian pastoral life.”\textsuperscript{19} It is also the means through which she questions the revered status and underlying narrative of Roberts’ work. The image takes us inside the shearing sheds of country New South Wales and offers a glimpse of the shearers’ life and growing agricultural trade. A photograph of Jones’ father inspired the appropriation.\textsuperscript{20} He was a “gun shearer” who spent years plying his trade.\textsuperscript{21} The photograph prompted her to revisit Roberts’ work, and she was immediately struck by the similarity of her father’s pose and the absence of Indigenous shearers.\textsuperscript{22} The scene in Roberts’ painting would be equally familiar to Indigenous Australians, including her father, uncle, brother and nephew, who worked the land either shearing, stooking or taking up seasonal work. As stated by Jones in a 2008 interview, their absence is not something that is often acknowledged or “gets talked about.”\textsuperscript{23}

Frustrated by these historical implications, Jones intervened and replaced the non-Indigenous shearers with images of her father, uncle, brother and nephew. This simple act challenges the cultural homogeneity of Australia’s visual history by reinstating her family’s previously unrecognised presence in depictions of Australian life. By the same token, it also affords Jones the opportunity to pay homage to her father’s work ethic: “there’s that pride in our family that we work and work hard.”\textsuperscript{24} As Brenda L. Croft has written, Jones’ intervention is also “a sharp retort to the continual denial of pastoral and agricultural wealth being gained not only from riding the sheep’s back, but on the back of blacks.”\textsuperscript{25} Croft is referring to the significant contribution Indigenous Australians

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\item \textsuperscript{18} Bernard Smith, \textit{Australian Painting: 1788–2000}, 4th ed. (South Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press, 2001), 84.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Jones in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
have made to the wool trade and agricultural industry, which is contrary to their invisibility in Roberts’ iconic painting and in nationalistic representations of Australian life during this significant period in Australia’s cultural history. Jones simply asks us to consider the perspective of those it excludes.

In the decades following Federation, the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in visual depictions of Australian life was more pronounced. By the late 1920s and ‘30s, they had all but disappeared. For evidence, one needs to look no further than seminal books on Australian art such as Sasha Grishin’s *Australian Art: A History* and Andrew Sayer’s *Australian Art*. With urban life replacing the bush as the new frontier, life in Australia had changed and a new Australian identity had begun to emerge. The change is reflected in the work of photographers such as Max Dupain and Harold Cazneaux, whose images depict life in the sprawling towns and cities. Dupain’s black-and-white city beachscapes document the great Australian pastime of spending time at the beach with family and friends. His subjects are at home in their new surrounds and are seen enjoying the spoils of coastal city life — swimming, surfing and sunbaking. To quote Matthew Cawood, the images were taken at a time when “money was tight and the beach was free.”

The images trigger nostalgic moments of familiar experience and reflect Australia’s unique way of life and obsession with the outdoors.

Dupain’s city beachscapes are celebrated as iconic Australian images. Through the cliché of the “bronzed Aussie” they have become markers of Australia’s cultural identity and images many Australians see themselves in. Jones is not one of them. For her, Dupain’s images are emblematic of her exclusion and invisibility as an Indigenous Australian. Jones does not see herself in works such as *Form at Bondi* (fig. 4.7) and *At Newport* (fig. 4.8); nor does she see others who look like her: “this is what I think Australia is — I actually think it’s not with me in it.”

Dupain’s images conjure up the same feelings of cultural alienation and displacement as Ah Kee’s *Cant Chant*. Jones goes further to say that when she looks at these types of images, she is not only reminded of the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in visual recordings of Australian life, but also of the fact that members of her family were not Australian citizens when

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these photographs were taken.28 Ah Kee also made this point, albeit via text rather than appropriated imagery.

Jones responds to Dupain’s images by hijacking his most iconic works (figs. 4.9-4.10). In this audacious and arguably cheeky move she strikes back at those who have excluded Indigenous Australians, whether intentionally or not, from mainstream representations of Australian life. The intervention is made possible by a simple cut-and-paste technique in which she replaces the “white” faces with her own. The outcome is that Jones, and by extension all Indigenous Australians, can overcome exclusion and become part of the works’ narratives and, by extension, the Australian story. Jones might not be where others expect her to be, but far from looking uneasy or out of place, she is carefree and relaxed as she mingles with the crowd and beckons us to meet her gaze, with her smile indicating what it feels like to be one of the gang. The appropriation is underlined by Jones’ sense of humour and mischievous grin, which is a subversive element that lightens the mood. A tactical device employed by many contemporary arts, satire is also a powerful tool for communicating complex ideas.

There is also the implication that Jones’ intervention plays with the perception of Indigenous people as belonging to the remote interior of Australia, which is contrary to the experience of the majority of Indigenous Australians. Her appropriation of Harold Cazneaux’s 1929 photograph Beach Scene (figs. 4.11 and 4.12), along with its title, gives this impression. In contrast to the previous two works, she has the company of a larger group of people, which offers an alternative reading of her place in this landscape. Either way, in this work Jones takes the intervention a step further by waving enthusiastically to the photographer. In doing so, she disrupts the anonymity of the scene and sets herself apart from the others, who are unresponsive to the photographer’s presence. More than that, she also disrupts Cazneaux’s attempt to capture an unmediated moment in time.

What is also interesting about the appropriation is that contrary to the previous two works where Jones takes on the identity of Dupain’s subjects, in this image she is herself and has colonised a space of her own. It is a powerful gesture suffused with symbolism. Jones is clearly colonising a space that has been denied her as an Indigenous Australian. Few would disagree with this interpretation; however, it is also

28 Ibid.
possible that she is marking her resistance to the history of assimilation, which was adopted as official government policy in the first half of the twentieth century. It was intended to create a “uniform” Australia and to bridge the divide between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. The policy had a devastating impact on Indigenous communities, who were discouraged or even forbidden to speak their traditional languages and to practice their cultural traditions. With this in mind, one would imagine the space Jones has colonised to be one where she exists on her own terms and no longer feels the need or pressure to assimilate. It is also more than likely that Jones is simply having a joke at Cazneaux’s expense.

As well as reminding audiences of the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in visual depictions of Australian life, Jones’ appropriation of Dupain’s city beachscapes highlight the mythology that nationalistic imagery takes on over time. Dupain’s celebrated 1937 photographic image Sunbaker (fig. 4.13), which Jones has appropriated (fig. 4.14), is an exemplary example. The simple image of a man with his head down lying on a beach is, as curator Gael Newton has written, “one of the most widely recognised Australian photographs.” Since entering public consciousness after it was used on the poster for Dupain’s retrospective exhibition at the Australian Centre of Photography in 1975, the image has become emblematic of Australian life and a marker of Australian identity. Yet a closer reading reveals the mythology built around the picture to be fundamentally flawed and the image not a true reflection of what it has come to represent in the national psyche.

Following Dupain’s death, questions were raised about the identity of the man at the centre of the photograph. Until then it had not been considered relevant and was thus never publically revealed. In 1992, Sydney Morning Herald writer Geraldine O’Brien revealed it in a front-page article with the scurrilous headline: “Exposed: Max’s bronzed Aussie Sunbaker was a lilywhite Pom.” The unmasking of Harold Savage as an immigrant and not a “born and bred Aussie” was, as Newton put it, “a public

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disappointment.”32 For this Dupain cannot be blamed. The artist himself had professed that the image had “taken on too much meaning.”33 Jones’ appropriation of this iconic work further highlights the influential role imagery plays in the formation of national identity and its potential to give rise to a mythology that fails to accurately reflect the culture it informs. It is also a salient reminder to look beyond the surface and outside of what we have been taught, or think we know to be true.

Jones is not alone in her critique of Dupain’s *Sunbaker*. The work has been the subject of numerous interventions: a well-known example is Anne Zahalka’s *The Sunbather #2* (fig. 4.15). In Zahalka’s appropriation, which she produced in 1989, Dupain’s “bronzed Aussie” has been replaced with a fair-skinned man with flaming red hair awkwardly mimicking his pose. For the simple reason that Zahalka’s appropriation calls into question the status of the beach as a culturally significant site and what she describes as the “dominant representations that mythologise and embody it,” links can be made with Jones’ work.34 For example, parallels can be drawn with the redhead’s outsider status and perhaps even the artist’s own status as the child of immigrant parents.35 Incidentally, Zahalka’s appropriation is part of a series of images that reflect the changing face of contemporary Australia and, by extension, its national identity. For this reason the appropriated images are more than just a critique of Australia’s much-admired national stereotype and the mythmaking that upholds it. They rewrite history and offer pathways to a new cultural identity.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Dupain began to document the hardships of life in post-war Australia. One of the most recognisable photographs of this period is *Meat Queue* (fig. 4.16). Taken for a story on post-war food rationing, the image shows five middle-aged women lined up at a butcher shop in Pitt Street, Sydney.36 The mood is sombre and contrasts starkly to the carefree ambience of his city beachscapes. The women are emblematic of tough economic times (we see their coupons firmly clutched

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32 Newton, “It Was a Simple Affair,” 145.
36 Ibid.
in their hands). Dupain captures their frustration and boredom at having to wait and hold their position in the queue. In her appropriation of the image, Jones takes the place of one of the women (fig. 4.17). She does this to remind us that contrary to their invisibility in visual representations of post-war life, Indigenous Australians also bore the brunt of tough economic times. The appropriation is typically subtle and does not compromise the integrity of the original image. Jones makes her presence felt by looking directly at the camera and adopting an authoritarian pose. The decidedly gruff expression on her face gives the impression she is growing tired of the façade.

The theme of exclusion and invisibility also dominates her appropriation of David Moore’s iconic image *Redfern Interior* of 1947 (fig. 4.18), a portrait of a family on the brink of poverty taken when Moore was working as Dupain’s assistant. On weekends Moore frequented the slum areas of inner Sydney, where he gained an understanding of the oppressive conditions in which the people lived.37

The scene in that room contained all the elements of poverty that epitomised the plight of slum dwellers in Sydney: cracked and stained walls, floor boards with token rectangle of carpet or linoleum, a rudimentary baby’s cradle with ragged canvas base, a double bed which was perhaps the most important piece of furniture in the house, an older woman at the foot of the bed drawn with concern, and a child on the floor clutching a doll next to a pair of cheap gym shoes.38

In her appropriation of Moore’s image (fig. 4.19), Jones takes the place of the mother cradling the newborn child. As previously mentioned, she does this to reinstate an Indigenous presence in visual representations of post-war life, but this might be too simple an interpretation. The locale of Moore’s image is significant. Redfern has a long-held Indigenous history and is the site of the first urban Indigenous community housing. It also has a migrant history, which hints at Jones’ interest in Moore’s work.

One of Moore’s most widely recognised photographs is *Migrants Arriving in Sydney* (fig. 4.20). The atmospheric black-and-white picture was taken in 1966 for *National Geographic*. The image denotes the period in which aspects of migrant Australia began to appear in visual references of Australia life, and it draws on the call for migration to address labour shortages due to Australia’s rapidly developing industrialised economy. It epitomises Australia’s changing identity and the beginning of multiculturalism. Jones does not appropriate the work, which is unfortunate because there is great deal in it for

38 Ibid.
her to play with. To start with, it underlines the displacement of Indigenous Australians and subjugates their history in favour of more recent ones. Second, the image was taken a year before the 1967 Referendum that marked a turning point in Indigenous affairs and improved the services available for Indigenous Australians but, as history tells us, failed to end their disadvantage. Third, it was a missed opportunity for her to articulate an Indigenous perspective on the arrival of these “new Australians” and, more broadly, this aspect of Australian history.

However, as was the case with Dupain’s *Sunbaker*, Moore’s image is also not what it seems. Contrary to what it has come to represent as a marker of Australia’s evolving cultural identity, what Moore did not know when he took the image was that four of the passengers were not migrants arriving in Australia, but in fact a family of Sydneysiders returning from a holiday abroad. Although they were of Italian heritage, they were not the newly arrived European migrants that the mythology of the image suggests. Likewise, the man and woman on the right-hand side of the image were not from Europe, but from Egypt and Lebanon. The revelation led Moore to change the work’s original title *European Migrants* to *Migrants Arriving in Sydney*, which still leaves the impression they were all newly arrived migrants. While the image certainly captures the spirit of migration and the changing face of Australia, it is also a historical fiction, albeit an unintentional one. It is this type of misrepresentation and mythology that Jones underlines and exposes through her appropriations.

*Dianne Jones* (fig. 4.21), Jones’ appropriation of Harold Cazneaux’s 1929 portrait of artist and theatre designer Doris Zinkeisen (fig. 4.22), and *Fashion Queue* (fig. 4.23), her take on Laurence Le Guay’s 1960 image *Untitled (Fashion Queue with Masked Child)* (fig. 4.24) take us to the world of high fashion, where Jones has reinvented herself as a model and muse. We see her “dressed to the nines” in the latest fashion. It is not a typical representation of an Indigenous woman, although parallels can be drawn with the high-fashion photographs Michael Riley took of Indigenous women in the 1980s. However, while Riley was driven by the desire to convey their sophistication, beauty and intelligence, Jones seeks to redress their invisibility in popular culture. At the root of these works is the isolation Jones felt not being able to see herself represented in fashion magazines, clothing catalogues and on television while growing

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40 The passengers were a mix of migrants and holidaymakers returning home to Australia.
up (“there’s a certain feeling that you get if you never see yourself, and you constantly have this feeling where you’re not there”\textsuperscript{41}).

Jones is not the only one to call into question the perpetuation of “whiteness” in Australian popular culture. On a recent trip to Australia, American academic Roxane Gay lamented the “glaring difference” between advertising in the United States and Australia.\textsuperscript{42} She had noticed the “whiteness” in Australian commercials, which she said was far more pronounced than in in her home country.\textsuperscript{43} This imbalance is problematic because it has become the accepted norm and assumes that people of colour are not part of the consumer public. Jones’ appropriation gives rise to the type of imagery she longed for as a child but never saw, and it realises a long-held dream of being able to see herself presented as an equal part of society. What is more, the fact that she stays true to the model’s pose and does not prompt the viewer to meet her gaze leaves the impression that her need to be seen has been surpassed by her desire to simply fit in, the caveat being that she is able to do it on her own terms.

Jones’ work is often informed by personal and familial experience. An example is the series of portraits she made for \textit{Black and White}, an exhibition held at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in 2005. The curatorial premise was to explore “black” perspectives on “white” Australia in relation to issues of representation and identity.\textsuperscript{44} This directive implied what Jones describes as a “binary opposition of black versus white and black as different from white.”\textsuperscript{45} It prompted her to think about what happens when this opposition occupies the same space, or manifests in one body.\textsuperscript{46} She immediately thought of her nieces and nephews, who each have an Indigenous and non-Indigenous parent. An unexpected outcome was that it forced her to examine her inner narrative about “white” people, which she says gave her a greater understanding about

\textsuperscript{41} Jones in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 84.
\textsuperscript{42} “I’m a Feminist But…,” \textit{The Drawing Room}, presented by Patricia Karvelas, aired March 5, 2015, on ABC Radio National, 15.50 mins, radio broadcast, http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2015/03/drm_20150305_1915.mp3.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} The exhibition was curated by Maree Clarke and Megan Evans and included the work of Dianne Jones, Mervyn Bishop, Gayle Maddigan, Brook Andrew, Lisa Bellear and Christian Thompson.
\textsuperscript{45} Dianne Jones, artist statement in \textit{Black on White: An Exhibition of Photographs by Aboriginal Artists Representing Non-Aboriginality}, curated by Maree Clarke and Megan Evans, exhibition catalogue (Fitzroy, VIC: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2005), n.p.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
bi-culturalism and the prejudice many Indigenous Australians, including members of her own family, deal with on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{47}

The concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse and, as sociologist Haj Yazhida has written, refers to the “integration of cultural bodies, signs, and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures.”\textsuperscript{48} In colonial discourse, it was, to quote Paul Meredith, “a term of abuse, particularly for those who were products of miscegenation.”\textsuperscript{49} Hybridity is now thought of in much broader terms, particularly in relation to race, yet as Jones discovered and Meredith also notes, the dichotomous categories of “us/them” and “either/or” still prevail.\textsuperscript{50} Prior to the exhibition, Jones had not spoken to her nieces and nephews about their cultural identity.\textsuperscript{51} She was surprised to learn that some of them identified more with their non-Indigenous parent and others with their Indigenous parent.\textsuperscript{52} While she says that it was not the case for her nieces and nephews, she believes that many are often forced to choose sides.\textsuperscript{53} This pressure, it should be noted, comes from both sides. Of this situation she says:

> They have to grow up in this world, which has already been made hard for them because one of their parents is black and one white. They have a foot in both camps and need to be supported and need more than anything to see themselves positively represented.\textsuperscript{54}

Jones invites us to consider the flux that surrounds their identity by casting her nieces and nephews as one of the most enigmatic figures in art history — Leonardo da Vinci’s \textit{Mona Lisa}.

Also known as \textit{La Gioconda} (fig. 4.25), the sixteenth-century painting is arguably one of the most recognisable in the Western world. The appropriation is in keeping with Jones’ critique of iconic imagery. The painting’s popularity is built around the central figure’s ambiguity, of which Jones says: “the enigma of Mona Lisa’s gaze and persona has outwitted critics, historians, artists — anyone who has attempted to deconstruct her.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Jones, “On Representation, Inclusion and Race.”
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Jones, artist statement in \textit{Black on White}, n.p.
Who is she? What is it she knows that we don’t? Is she male or female? Is it Leonardo da Vinci himself? In particular, Jones says, “she can be seen to override the many binary oppositions that dictate the dominant structure of Western phallocentric society.” What she means by this is that the work opens up a “third space” (a term used by influential cultural and post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha) between the binary oppositions that, in the context of her work, create a space for cultural hybridity, which she clearly hopes will become an accepted norm. The appropriation also plays with our attempts to unmask Mona Lisa or to assign her a fixed identity. The revelation of her true identity would put an end to one of the greatest art world mysteries.

In recreating da Vinci’s painting with her nieces and nephews as the central figure (figs. 4.26–4.29) Jones drew on Mona Lisa’s stoicism and the beauty, strength and power she embodies. These are traits she clearly recognises in Jeulisa, John, Kristy and Murray. As Jones puts it, their portraits are “a statement about their individual power to surmount the pressure to fit into unnatural binaries.” More than that, they are a public declaration and positive representation of their cultural identity. Parallels can be drawn with Tony Albert’s 50perCENT. Both Albert and Jones reject what Marianne Riphagen describes as “straightforward notions of identity.” The underlying message is that it is not always about being black or white, or Indigenous or non-Indigenous, but that sometimes it is a case of being in-between. Similarly, it is the right of the individual to reconcile the two without pressure from others to conform to one or the other. Common to Albert and Jones’s work is also the creation of a “third space” that celebrates rather than subjugates their cultural identity. The creation of this space represents a significant shift in discourse and a new framework for the scores of Indigenous Australians who, like 50perCENT and Jones’ nieces and nephews, are neither black nor white.

The theme of race is explored further through a series of portraits Jones made in 2008 (figs. 4.30–4.34). These are of Jones dressed as her childhood idols: Elvis Presley, Cary

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
58 Third spaces are the in-between (or hybrid) spaces created when two different, and often conflicting, spaces work together to generate a new (third) space.
59 Jones, artist statement in Black on White, n.p.
60 Ibid.
Grant, Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly and James Dean. For authenticity she replicates their poses from movie publicity shots (figs. 4.35–4.39). The performative act is a departure from the cut-and-paste technique of previous work. The portrait also marks the return of humour to Jones’ work, which remains a powerful tool for communicating that also helps lift the mood. Indeed, Odette Kelada’s description of the series as “a critique of the impact of pervasive imagery on identity formation” suggests the latter might be needed.\textsuperscript{62} What Kelada is referring to is the role imagery plays in determining who we are and where we fit into the world. The series is another example of the artist’s use of a personal narrative: one that takes us back to her childhood and to the isolation she felt at not being able to see herself or her family represented in popular culture. Links can also be made with her earlier works \textit{Dianne Jones} and \textit{Fashion Queue}.

The titles draw inspiration from \textit{A Little Less Conversation}, a song written by Mac Davis and Billy Strange and made famous by Elvis Presley in the 1968 musical comedy \textit{Live a Little, Love a Little}. Jones’ idolisation of Presley is not through this song, however, but instead derives from Pacer Burton, the character he played in the 1960 Western \textit{Flaming Star}. It is Presley dressed as Burton that Jones emulates in \textit{A Little Less Conversation} (fig. 4.30). Those who are familiar with the film will understand why, as Burton is a cowboy with a Texan father and a Native American mother. The film’s narrative revolves around his struggle to decide where he belongs and with whom he identifies. His dilemma, which recalls the predicament of Jones’ nieces and nephews, comes to a head when a group of Kiowa Native Americans begin raiding neighbouring ranches. A little-known fact about Presley is that his great-great-great grandmother, Mourning Dove White, was Cherokee. The film is one of the few in which Presley played a character authentic to his own American Indian lineage.\textsuperscript{63} These roles presumably gave Presley the means to explore this aspect of his heritage.

Pacer certainly embodies the clichéd phrase “torn between two worlds.” This message was made clear through the film’s publicity material, which carried the stirring taglines “suddenly they were a family divided … by its colour,” “the white man’s song was on his lips … but an Indian war cry was in his heart” and “half breed: torn between two

\textsuperscript{63} The other two films were \textit{G.I. Blues} (1960) and \textit{Stay Away} (1968).
loyalties … two loves and fighting to save them both.”64 One distinctive quality of the film is its treatment of miscegenation at a time when anti-miscegenation laws were still enforced in parts of the United States.65 While this would surely be of interest to Jones, there are several other reasons why she worked with this depiction of Presley. The first relates to the film’s narrative, which is set in Texas in 1878. As Michael Snyder has written, it “depicts the agitation and encroachment of the Euro-American settlers and cavalry upon the Kiowa and how the tribe’s attempts to regain their land takes a toll on Pacer’s family.”66 The Australian colonial frontier and violent clashes between Indigenous Australians and European settlers, which Ah Kee has also drawn on, immediately comes to mind. Thus, Jones’ appropriation underlines the cost of racial prejudice but also hints at the dispossession of Indigenous people from their traditional land.

The second reason relates to Presley’s music, in particular his links to African American culture, which, as Snyder notes, tend to overshadow the connection to his Cherokee heritage.67 Presley’s music, which “blends white country music and pop with African American blues, R&B, and gospel” (to quote Snyder), was considered a threat to mainstream, white-dominated culture.68 In fact, Snyder’s characterisation of the singer as “the target of projected fears about miscegenation and integration, particularly in the American South” is not unfounded.69 Presley was not the only proponent of musical miscegenation, yet he played an instrumental role in bridging the divide between races, breaking down barriers and making Black music part of mainstream white culture.70 Moreover, while he was not a political figure or active participant in the civil rights movement, he was unquestionably “one of the pillars of the movement” in the estimation of Presley biographer Peter Guralnick.71 For this reason, Presley is more

65 In 1967 the Supreme Court of the United States deemed the remaining anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional.
67 Ibid., 55.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Glen Jeansonne, David Luhrssen, and Dan Sokolovic, Elvis Presley, Reluctant Rebel: His Life and Our Times (Santa Barbara, US: Praeger, c.2011), 93.
than just an idol or pop icon to Jones; he is a role model and symbol of unity.

Australia’s Indigenous war history is a common concern for Indigenous artists, in particular those who have a familial connection to it or have a family member in active service. Jones is one of these artists; others include Tony Albert and Christian Thompson. As we know from Albert’s work, Indigenous Australians have more or less served in every conflict and peacekeeping mission over the last century, yet their significant contribution is only just being realised. The complex reasons for this relate not only to the paucity of documents relating to their service, but also to their tenuous place in Australia following European colonisation. A further factor is the denial of Australia’s frontier wars and exclusion of them from the Australian war narrative. Jones is typical of the growing number of Indigenous artists engaged in an extraordinary salvage operation to piece together the fragments of Australia’s Indigenous war history and to valorise the nation’s Indigenous servicemen and women for their contribution and service to the nation.

Jones offers a personal response to this history by way of a tribute to her grandfather Private Jones in a mixed-media piece appropriately titled *Lest We Forget* (fig. 4.40). The work is monumental, with the large format denoting its importance. The centrepiece is a black-and-white photograph of her grandfather dressed in military attire that challenges ideas about Indigenous masculinity. Jones describes it as being “in stark contrast to the media construction of Indigenous masculinity fuelled by grog and abuse.”

By the same token, it is also a form of memorialisation that preserves the memory of him as a returned soldier and pays homage to his bravery, sacrifice and good character. Again, it is exactly the kind of imagery Jones looked for as a child and could not see. On the left side of the work, Jones identifies her grandfather and tells us he is an “Australian hero,” while on the right side she offers this terse and troubling statement about his service:

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he was not a citizen
did not have the right to vote
refused entry into hotels
6.00pm street curfew.
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The text draws our attention to the hypocrisy of a soldier fighting for the only country he had ever known, but to which he had no legal right or entitlement. When Jones was researching her grandfather’s military service she came across a set of documents that outlined the government’s fear that Indigenous soldiers would turn on their non-Indigenous comrades and cause them harm. To prevent this from happening, she says they were promised full Australian citizenship on their return to Australia, a promise that was never fulfilled. *Lest We Forget* is a fitting tribute to the artist’s grandfather that extends to the thousands of Indigenous Australians who have served Australia at war. It also critiques the systems and ideology that for many years denied them their rightful place in the Anzac narrative, which, as suggested above, should be extended to public memorisation of their service. It should not be left to the families of Indigenous soldiers to perform these acts of memorisation, but instead it should be the duty of an entire nation.

A recurring narrative in Jones’ work is the demonisation and false characterisation of Indigenous men, whom she defends and valorises through positive imagery. Her appropriation of Roberts’ *Shearing the Rams* is an early example and *Lest We Forget* a more recent one. She continues the conversation with *Men’s Business* (figs. 4.41–4.48), a photographic series from 2008 that responds to the negative portrayal of Indigenous men in the lead up to the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* or “Northern Territory Intervention” as it is commonly known. Jones has stepped behind the lens, marking a new direction in her practice. The series is about men as fathers and is said to counter the media’s demonisation of Indigenous men as “drunk and predatory.” The characterisation demonstrates the undercurrent of racism she believes exists in the media, and the reference to it constitutes a reminder that there are predators in every community, not just Indigenous ones. The root cause is, as Kelada writes, “the way the Australian public rarely have an opportunity to access Indigenous voices unmediated by white culture.”

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74 Jones, “On Representation, Inclusion and Race.”
75 Ibid.
76 The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* is a legislative response from the Federal Government to the Northern Territory Government’s Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, or *Little Children Are Sacred* report.
77 Jones, “On Representation, Inclusion and Race.”
78 Ibid.
The series is built around images of her father, Allen, and brothers, Peter and Tony, and the mundane images document the everyday interactions between the men and their families. Jones does not name them, but instead marks their identity through the works’ titles, which denote their place of residence: Perth, Kojunup and Northam. She clearly does this to create a sense of place and belonging — a connection to country. Yet their anonymity sits uncomfortably and calls to mind the type of reductive imagery that underpins Ah Kee and Andrew’s work. The significance of the locations is that each has a history of colonial violence and dispossession. The exclusion of Nyungar from the city of Perth in the first half of the twentieth century is one example. Artist Christopher Pease, whose work deal extensively with the post-contact history and lived experience of the Nyungar, provides a more in-depth reading of this history and offers further evidence of Jones’ claim.

There is an interesting backstory to Northam #1, the image of her brother Peter holding a poem and certificate his son PJ had been awarded at school. Peter had urged Jones to take the photo quickly because the police regularly patrol the area and he did not want to attract their attention. Northam has a high-density Nyungar population and police presence, of which Peter says: “they get whip lash, they twist so much when they see a Nyungar walking down the street.” Whether consciously or not, Jones has captured him on the lookout for their car. Minutes after the image was taken, the police came by and stopped to question Peter. They recorded his name, along with her father’s, as he was also present. The men were not breaking the law, nor were they charged with any criminal office. Their “crime” was evidently being Indigenous Australian. Jones described how this makes her feel:

Growing up Aboriginal means that if you stay quiet, work hard and answer questions then life shouldn’t have too many downers. But there are glass walls that keep you on one side whilst being observed. You are told about every cultural and visual aspect of who you are with reasons why that is not civilized or normal or clean.

81 In order to do so, they were required to hold a Native Pass.
82 Jones, “On Representation, Inclusion and Race.”
84 Jones, “On Representation, Inclusion and Race.”
Since Jones was taking photos for a series that offered a critique on the demonisation of Indigenous men, the irony could not have been greater, and it was certainly not lost on Jones and her family.

In 2013, Jones curated an exhibition that brought together the work of her mother (Della Jones), artist Genevieve Grieves and her own. Jones’ contribution, an installation of found objects and photographic images, hints at a new direction, since she had worked exclusively with the photographic medium until this point. The exhibition offers a visual response to the brutal historic murder of a young English woman named Sarah Cook and her infant child Mary in the peaceful setting of pastoral York in 1839. York is the oldest inland town in Western Australia and is situated approximately one hundred kilometres east of Perth. The murder of Cook and her child, for which two local Nyungar men were charged, was the first of its kind in Western Australia. Jones says she was captivated by the tale because it is part of Nyungar history. She also has an ancestral connection through her mother’s family to the land where the crime took place. As part of the creative process, Jones spent a period researching the case, using court transcripts, old newspaper articles and police records held at the J. S. Battye Library (Perth) to help piece together the facts. Notably, she discovered that some of the records were missing.

Sarah Cook had arrived in Australia in 1830 to work as a servant. Records indicate that in 1837 she married Elijah Cook, an Englishman who worked as a shepherd. Their only child, Mary, was born soon after. The murders took place at their remote farmhouse in Norrilong, a small town near York where Jones’ mother Della was born. As the story goes, Elijah returned home one day to find the charred remains of his wife and child in the farmhouse, which had been set on fire. It is alleged that Sarah had been stabbed and raped, and a glass-tipped spear found at the site led to speculation that the culprit/s had to be Indigenous. A year after the murders, two Nyungar men, Barrabong and Doodjeep, were charged with the crime and sent to Perth to be tried. Perth-based historian Ann Hunter notes that the two men were not given legal assistance to aid in

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 A third Indigenous man (Yambuk) was also implicated in the murders. He was sent to Rottnest prison for life but was pardoned and released a year after his conviction.
their defence. She further notes that their conviction hinged on confessions offered to a government-appointed interpreter, which raises questions about impartiality.

Jones’ investigation raised more questions than answers. Elijah and Sarah were said to have been sympathetic to the Nyungar people, and no motive for the murders was ever established, although it was said to be an act of retribution for the murder of a Nyungar woman. There were also conflicting accounts of the crime. According to a member of Jones’ family who learned about it from her father (who had been told about it from his grandfather), it was not Barrabong and Doodjeep who committed the crime, but a white man working in the area as a shepherd. The only known shepherds there were Elijah and his brother. Jones also found evidence of white men burning the bodies of Nyungar people to cover their crime, but says she has no knowledge of Nyungar doing the same. Notwithstanding the circumstances in which Sarah and Mary tragically lost their lives, the sentences handed down to Barrabong and Doodjeep for the crime they were alleged to have committed were deeply disturbing. The men were returned to the scene of the crime and hung in chains from a gumtree, where they remained until their lifeless bodies decomposed, a practice known as gibbeting.

Gibbetting was a common punishment for murder in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England that denied the criminal the right to a proper burial. These Indigenous people were denied a mourning ritual, which is customary practice for Nyungar. Through the installation of found objects, Jones takes us back to the scene of the crime — or, as she would have it, crimes (fig. 4.49). She indicates this through the work’s title. The objects, which include bones, coins, chains, rocks and shards of broken glass, were collected from the site where the Cook farmhouse once stood and are evidence of lives left behind. Jones visited the sight with Grieves and her mother, who still lives nearby. Of the visit, Jones writes: “It was a chance for me to connect this story that comes from the town where I was born to the many narratives of violence and colonisation that

91 Ibid., 141.
92 R v. Barrabong (or Mulgan), examination of Barrabong, Case 224, Criminal Indictment File, and R v. Doodjeep, Case 225, WAS 122, CONS 3472/42.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
riddle the Australian frontier and our memories as Aboriginal women.” In this way, the installation was a visual metaphor for the frontier violence that underlies Australia’s colonial past and shared history.

The murders of Sarah and Mary Cook sparked a number of retaliatory attacks on the Nyungar, and through the course of her research Jones came across countless stories of the violence that ensued. The most haunting was a story told by a white man about a massacre of Nyungar that he and several other white men had carried out. He wrote that in the aftermath he had spotted a young Indigenous girl with tears in her eyes who was visibly traumatised by what she had just seen. Rather than showing a sense of remorse that such a young child had bore witness to their extreme act, he labels her a “pathetic creature.” The girl’s trauma is recalled in the Things She Saw (fig. 4.50), a photographic image of a young Indigenous girl, played by Jones’ niece Wenonah, peering out from behind a tree. The representation is a poignant reminder of a history in which scores of Indigenous men, women and children lost their lives in the name of Sarah Cook and her child. Jones simply asks that we come together and remember their loss as well. The violence and massacres that cast a shadow over Western Australia’s colonial history were not tied solely to this heinous crime. We learn from Christopher Pease that they were rife throughout the colony.

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98 Ibid.
Christopher Pease was born in 1969 in Perth, where he currently lives. He is a descendant of the Minang,1 Wardandi and Balardong people of the Nyungar nation from the south coast of Western Australia. Pease’s background is in graphic design. Prior to embarking on a career in the arts, Pease worked as a graphic designer for The Aboriginal Independent Newspaper. Through his work he came into regular contact with Perth’s Nyungar community, which he had been was unfamiliar with outside of his own family.2 The experience had a profound effect on him and sparked an interest in learning more about Nyungar culture and history. Pease says he was surprised that Nyungar culture still existed and was taken aback at how strong the ties were in the Perth community.3 As a child Pease was aware of the stigma attached to his Indigeneity, but says that his childhood nevertheless was a happy one.4 His experience differs from the previous generations in his family, who bore the brunt of colonisation and of government policies that removed them from their families and left them estranged from their Indigenous culture.

There is a direct relationship between Pease’s fractured family history and his practice. The latter is entry into the former, of which he knew little. Under the Australian government’s assimilation policy, Pease’s mother, Sandra Hill, and her three siblings were removed from their family and placed in an orphanage, where they remained until being moved into foster care with non-Indigenous families.5 Sadly, this was not the first time this deplorable act was perpetrated on Pease’s maternal family. Authorities

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1 The Minang, who are one of the fourteen language groups that make up the Nyungar nation, occupied the territory around Albany on the south coast of Western Australia and were among the first Indigenous groups to encounter Europeans.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
also sanctioned the removal of his grandmother and great-grandmother from their families. This legacy explains why Pease’s practice is underlined by a personal investigation into his cultural heritage and is firmly entrenched in the history and lives of the Nyungar. Through his research-driven practice, the artist pieces together the lost fragments of his family history and re-establishes the cultural links severed by the processes of colonisation.

As part of the creative process, Pease undertakes a period of research using a wide range of source material, including family stories, historical documents, colonial artworks and archival photographs. Artworks that document the first encounters between the Europeans and the Nyungar and treat colonial expansion are frequently quoted. Archival photographs such as those taken by Irish-born anthropologist Daisy Bates also have a presence in his work. What is noteworthy about Pease’s work, however, is that it delves deeper than his family history and documents a much broader history. Pease has stated that although he comes from an artistic family and had been drawing for a number of years, a period spent tutoring Indigenous students at Curtin University inspired him to follow a similar path. Success came with relative ease. *Nyoongar Dreaming*, Pease’s first attempt at an oil painting, caught the attention of Brenda L. Croft, who subsequently acquired it for the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Pease’s preferred medium of painting sets him apart from his contemporaries, who typically work across multiple mediums. In his work, appropriation is ever-present and is employed as a means of critique.

*Nyoongar Dreaming* (fig. 5.1) is both a portrait and landscape. The painting is of Peter Farmer, a young Indigenous man and a former student of Pease, standing at an intersection of the then-incomplete Farmer Freeway. The freeway provides an east-west bypass of Perth’s central business district and is named after Australian sporting hero and AFL legend Graham “Polly” Farmer, who is Peter’s uncle. Common to all three men is their Nyungar heritage. The influence of expatriate Australian painter Jeffery Smart, whom Pease admires, is evident in the composition of the work. Admiring of Smart’s precisionist urban landscapes will note the resemblance between *Nyoongar Dreaming* and Smart’s 1962 painting *Cahill Expressway* (fig. 5.2), one of his most famous paintings. (Precisionism is a geometric, highly controlled style of painting

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6 Pease’s mother, Sandra Hill, and brother, Ben Pushman, are also artists.
7 Laurie, “Black and White.”
8 Christopher Pease quoted in Laurie, “Black and White.”
made popular in the 1920s by a group of American artists who favoured urban settings and landscapes with an industrial edge.) Common to both works is the lone man standing at a junction on the empty freeway, which in the case of Smart’s work is said to express the alienation of the modern urban man.9

The same can be said of Pease’s work, but a key difference is that Pease pushes the narrative a step further and looks beyond the man’s alienation to his dispossession from the land.10 The positioning of an Indigenous man in a stark landscape with no traces of the natural world gives this impression. The idea of naming a freeway that “cuts through the heart of Nyoongar land” after a prominent Nyungar figure is, as art curator Chad Creighton suggests, not without irony.11 Creighton is right to question whether it is a symbolic gesture or form of compensation.12 Farmer’s presence is a reminder that this has always been Nyungar land. On reflection, it can also be seen to reaffirm the place of Indigenous Australians in the urban landscape. In her critique of the work, Clotilde Bullen draws on the symbolism of Farmer’s positioning on a line that “keeps going and going,” which she argues is a metaphor for the continuance of Nyungar culture and traditions.13 Another way of looking at it is that his positioning at a junction or “fork in the road” suggests that Nyungar culture is similarly at a juncture. There is uncertainty about what lies ahead, and about what path Nyungar people must take to safeguard their culture for future generations. Either way, Bullen’s description of the incomplete freeway as “a metaphor for unfinished business,” is succinct.14

Contemporary art is rarely straightforward. It often has meaning that goes beyond the literal and contains symbols not always immediately recognised by the viewer (or are so abstract they need explanation to be understood). This is true of Nyoongar Dreaming. A little-known aspect about the painting is that the gaudy green skyline connects the work to a remarkable story about a collection of artworks produced by Nyungar children in the 1940s and 1950s. They had been removed from their families under the

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
government’s policy of assimilation and resettled at the Carrolup Native School and Settlement near Katanning, a small town to the southeast of Perth run by the Native Welfare Department. As part of their schooling, the boys were trained as farm hands for menial labour and the girls as domestic servants. In May 1946, an empathetic headmaster named Noel White arrived at the school and introduced an art program. He and his wife, Lily, supplied the children with art materials and encouraged them to draw. The children responded with colourful landscapes and scenes of Nyungar people and native wildlife. Pease replicates the children’s distinct use of colour. The gesture is not unexpected; the Carrolup Native School was built on Nyungar land and Pease is well known for his portrayal of the dispossession of Nyungar people.

Word of the children’s artworks travelled afar and caught the attention of Florence Rutter, an English philanthropist who had come to Australia to set up soroptimist clubs. Rutter travelled to Carrolup in July 1949 to see them for herself. She purchased a number of the drawings, and made arrangements for additional works to be sent to her. The shipments often included letters from the children thanking Rutter for her patronage. A further visit was made in January 1950, and Rutter subsequently negotiated with the authorities to have the works exhibited. After a number of successful exhibitions in Australia, they were sent to New Zealand and then eventually to Europe, where they received critical acclaim. She also facilitated the sale of many works, using the proceeds to buy the children more art materials. Towards the end of her life, Rutter fell on hard times and sold the collection of Carrolup paintings to

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15 The Indigenous settlement at Carrolup was established in 1915 as an alternative to the town camps (such as those on the outskirts of Katanning) opposed by many non-Indigenous town-dwellers. Because few Nyungar families were willing to leave their traditional lands and move to the settlement, the government issued ministerial warrants that enabled police to forcibly relocate them. This was detrimental to the Nyungar people because it forced them to live on land that was not their own and contravened customary laws that require them to seek permission before crossing onto land that is not their own. For further reading see John E. Stanton, Nyungar Landscapes: Aboriginal Artists of the South-West: The Heritage of Carrolup, Western Australia (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, Berndt Museum of Anthropology, 1992): 5–7; and Creighton, Noongar Native Title, 6.
17 Several of the artists, including Revel Cooper, Parnell Dempster and Reynold Hart, continued to produce art in adulthood.
18 Watson, “Public Works.”
21 Ibid.
22 “Carrolup Found,” Message Stick.
New York art collector Herbert Mayer, who subsequently bequeathed them to Colgate University in New York. 23

Contrary to the excitement that had previously surrounded the paintings, the collection sat unnoticed until a chance encounter with anthropologist Howard Morphy in 2004 led to their rediscovery and their eventual return to Australia.

I’d been asked to give something called the “Ryan Memorial Lecture” at Colgate University and afterwards as a courtesy they said, “Well, have a look in the Picker Art Gallery,” which is Colgate University’s art gallery. And they said, “We’ve got a few things from Australia.” And then they said, “We’ve got this old cardboard box here which has Australian drawings in it.” It was obvious even then that it was a Carrolup. I sort of put my finger down towards the bottom and I realised there were, sort of, 50 or 60 or 70 of those there and I just leapt for joy. I said, “You know, this quite extraordinary. You don’t know what you’ve got here.” 24

The discovery ended a decades-long search by Australian researchers to locate the missing artworks. More importantly, it sparked a fruitful relationship between Colgate University and the Nyungar community, which led to the repatriation of the collection in May 2013. 25 The collection of 122 paintings, known as The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artworks, can now be enjoyed by Australian audiences at the John Curtin Gallery at Curtin University of Technology in Perth. For the artists (some who are still alive) and their descendants, this turn of events represents a unique opportunity to reconnect with their culture and revisit the past.

Relations between the Nyungar and Europeans are also at the fore of Wadatji Country, Belief and Disbelief (fig. 5.3), the work for which Pease was awarded the painting prize at the 19th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award in 2002. The work extends from research Pease undertook on “Wadatji” and other spirit beings of the southwest of Western Australia. 26 In this painting, which depicts a forest in the deep of night, Pease draws on the conflict between science and mathematics — more specifically, between the belief systems of the Nyungar and Europeans. He conveys this conflict through the work’s title: “for an Indigenous person raised in an urban

23 Ibid.
24 Howard Morphy quoted in “Carrolup Found,” Message Stick.
environment there are many instances such as this where there is a conflict of beliefs."

An example would be the belief in the Kimberley that the Wandjina, a spirit being, is responsible for storms and cyclones. This way of thinking conflicts directly with what Pease was taught at school and was brought up to believe. In the context of the work, the leafless trees and interwoven branches denote the coming together of two different cultures and belief systems. The work’s underlying narrative also marks the beginning of Pease’s ongoing quest to reconcile these opposing ideologies and ways of thinking.

Shortly after he won the Telstra art prize, Pease began appropriating European pre-colonial images of the southwest of Australia. He is drawn to these works because of the important historical references they contain. Of particular interest are the first encounters between the Nyungar and Europeans, and the reinterpretation of the landscape as a hospitable and familiar place. Because many of these works are not widely known, the act of appropriation is an inventive way of reintroducing them to contemporary audiences, albeit from an Indigenous perspective. Particular favourites are illustrations and drawings of Indigenous Australians by French draftsman Louis Auguste de Sainson. De Sainson visited King Georges Sound on the south coast of Western Australia as part of famed French explorer Jules Dumont d’Urville’s expedition of Australia in 1826. (There is a personal connection to de Sainson’s work through Pease’s French ancestry.) While they were ashore, De Sainson produced a large folio of works depicting the native flora and fauna. He also recorded the Nyungar people and their material culture, as well as some of the encounters between them and the expedition party.

Typical of these works and Pease’s meticulous attention to detail is the 2003 painting *Hunting Party* (fig. 5.4). The painting quotes de Sainson’s 1833 lithograph *Vue D’un Etang Près La Baie Du Roi Georges Nelle Holland* (*View of Lake near King George Sound*) (fig. 5.5). To quote curator Anne Gray, the appropriation expresses Pease’s concern about the “environmental devastation of the Nyoongar homelands in the years

27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 The expedition spent ten days at King Georges Sound before sailing along the southern coast of Australia to New South Wales.
since d’Urville’s expedition.”

Also at play are the opposing views held of the marsh and swampland. According to Pease, while the Europeans disregarded its use and value, the Nyungar held it to be a “rich and delicately balanced ecosystem.” The waterways also have significance through their connection with the Wagyl, a major spirit in Nyungar culture that manifests as a large serpent. It is recognised as the giver of life and is responsible for the freshwater sources. Importantly, Nyungar people believe that the Wagyl made them custodians of the land. While its inclusion can be interpreted as an affirmation of land ownership, its positioning in the explorer’s line of fire is an artful way of demonstrating the Europeans’ disregard for it. It also marks their ignorance of the environmental importance of the river systems and waterways.

The conflict of ideas and beliefs is also apparent in New Water Dreaming (fig. 5.6), which draws on de Sainson’s hand-coloured lithograph Aiguade De L’Astrolabe Au Port Du Roi Georges (Nelle Hollande) Western Australia of 1833 (fig. 5.7). The image captures members of the expedition party funnelling water onto one of the Astrolabe’s longboats. A group of Nyungar watch, presumably enthralled, if not confused, by the scene in front of them. Pease’s appropriation examines the changing social order and the introduction of science and technology, which radically transformed the lives of the Nyungar people. The indicator is the scientific diagram Pease adds to the work. Symbolically, it takes the place of a flock of birds, which represents in this context the natural order the Nyungar had until that time abided with and lived by. Contrary to the tension between the scientific and traditional beliefs Pease exposes through his appropriation, what is interesting about the scene is that the relationship between the groups appears friendly and cooperative as the Minang assist the Europeans with their task. There is no telling how long the cordiality lasted, yet the scene captures a delightful moment that prompts us to consider how different things could have been.

The Australian landscape was alien and unfamiliar to the European eye. Undeterred by its harsh and unforgiving character, artists such as de Sainson often fashioned it to look more familiar and hospitable (i.e., more European). There is little evidence of the harsh terrain, the unpredictability of nature, or the Europeans’ struggle to adapt to their new

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33 Elsewhere it appears as Wagul, Waugal, Waakal, Wawgal, Waugal, Woggal and Waagal.
surroundings. This pictorial strategy was designed intentionally to present an idea of Australia as a desirable place to settle. Here it could be argued that Pease’s use of colour, which is significantly more pronounced than in the original works, brings into focus the re-visioning of the land as a fanciful utopian paradise. Encounters between Europeans and Indigenous Australians, as depicted in colonial Australian art, also contain elements of fantasy. This is not to say that relations between the two were not congenial and cooperative (the aforementioned work suggests otherwise); however, in viewing these works the reality of their situation is easily overlooked. The language barrier alone would have made their relationship precarious and uncertain, even if the images suggest otherwise.

Pease’s 2005 Target (fig. 5.8) also draws on de Sainson: his 1833 lithograph Vue Du Port Due Roi Georges (fig. 5.9). The work’s narrative depicts a scene in which a group of Minang are keeping company with the crew of the d’Urville expedition at a camp overlooking Princess Royal Harbour in King George Sound. The Astrolabe is visible in the background. Pease leaves his mark via a large, concentric circle or bullseye in red that dominates the painted surface and catches the viewer’s eye. It brings to mind the work of American artist Jasper Jones, who in the mid-1950s produced a series of paintings based around the bullseye target. Pease has stated that the circle’s meaning is intended to be broad and will inevitably vary according to the viewer’s history, culture and education.35 Some will look to John’s work, while others might associate it with the concentric circles common to Indigenous visual language.36 Others might simply see a retail store logo or shooting target. Viewers familiar with Pease’s work would surely agree with Bullen, who suggests its use is more sinister and relates to the way Indigenous land, and by association Indigenous Australians, became targets of “greed and ignorance.”37 Through its association with weaponry, the target is also a forewarning of looming frontier violence and massacres.

Pease’s warning comes to fruition in Wrong Side of the Hay (fig. 5.10), a painting based on John Sykes’ 1798 engraving A Deserted Indian Village in King George III Sound, New Holland (fig. 5.11). Sykes was an English draftsman and landscape painter who

36 For example, those used to mark a waterhole, meeting place or campfire.
served as a master’s mate on the Discovery between 1790 and 1795. When the ship anchored at King George Sound in 1791, Sykes made a series of sketches of Nyungar huts, including the one on which Wrong Side of the Hay is based.\textsuperscript{38} The sketch was later redrawn and reproduced as an engraving. The scene shows a deserted Nyungar camp where the only sign of life is the two European figures in the centre. As Bullen has written, “the men are unaware of the framework of spiritual inheritance embodied within the land, which is the birthright of every Indigenous person.”\textsuperscript{39} A topographical map has been added to Pease’s work. Pease explains that it is a map of the Hay River, which Europeans first came across in 1829 when the brig Governor Phillip was being repaired at King George Sound.\textsuperscript{40} Its inclusion denotes the Europeans’ scientific way of looking at the land. Symbolism can be found in the way Pease literally imposes it over Nyungar country.

Several museum artefact codes also appear on the work. They relate to artefacts found in the area and relay the contemporary importance of museum collections from the southwest for successive generations of Nyungar.\textsuperscript{41} What is more, they are evidence of the Nyungar’s pre-colonial history and relationship with the land. The work’s title is a pun on the idiom “wrong side of the law.” In the context of Pease’s work, it relates to the fact that shortly after the Europeans settled on the south coast of Western Australia, the area between the Hay and Kent River became out of bounds to the Nyungar, and those caught trespassing faced the possibility of being shot. When Pease learned this, he was immediately reminded of an image he had come across in a book by comedian Spike Milligan when he was in high school.\textsuperscript{42} The image was of Milligan pointing a gun at a group of Indians, with an underlying caption that read: “Shooting a few coons before breakfast.”\textsuperscript{43} Since Coon is a disparaging and offensive term for a black person or someone of mixed race, Pease took offence. It is possible he misread the context; Milligan was after all a comic. Even so, when read from an Indigenous perspective, it not only reads differently, but also carries different connotations.

\textsuperscript{39} Bullen, “Christopher Pease,” 144.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
The exploitation of Nyungar land continues in Pease’s *Swan River 50 Miles Up* (fig. 5.12), which draws on William John Huggins’ 1827 print of the same name (fig. 5.13). Huggins was an eminent British marine painter who had visited Australia while serving at sea for the British East India Company. In this picturesque image several Wajuk men are observing Captain Stirling’s exploration party come ashore along the banks of the Swan. Stirling was a British naval officer and colonial administrator who subsequently became the first Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Western Australia. Early in his administration, he explored the coastal districts near the Swan, Murray, Collie, Preston, Blackwood and Vasse Rivers. The scene poses questions to which there are no real answers. Were the Wajuk men curious or scared? Or both? Did the parties meet, and if so, what was the outcome? Pease invites us to consider such questions through his appropriation of Huggins’ work. He also wants to underline the way the Europeans viewed the Nyungar, which Bullen argues was akin to the way they “scientifically categorised and decontextualized” the flora and fauna. The faint white geometric boxes that surround the Wajuk men and one of the black swans indicate this. Conversely, the boxes point to their exclusion from the new regime and the way they were “fenced off” and denied access to traditional lands, waterways and important cultural sites.

The geometric diagram of land allotments that extends from the coloniser’s arm and appears on the right-hand side of the work suggests this might be true. Its inclusion references the introduction of Ribbon Grants in 1839, under which the land across the river was divided into thin ribbon-like parcels. At Swan River, grants were issued in proportion to the value of the assets and labour the settlers bought with them to the colony. Each parcel had a small river frontage that provided grantees access to the river and fertile soil. Grants were conditional on the grantees improving the land, and those who failed to improve it by at least one quarter within the first three years were

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45 Bullen, “Christopher Pease,” 114.
fined. Moreover, if the authorities were not satisfied that the land had been adequately improved within ten years, they could remove the grantees from it. The concept of land division and individual ownership was of course foreign to the Nyungar, which is evidently the point Pease makes through the reference to the Ribbon Grants. Another relates to the land degradation that occurred as grantees cleared the bushland and introduced crops and grazing animals, which was an unforeseen consequence of the Wadjuk’s displacement from their traditional land.

Pease is one of a growing number of artists who use their practice as a form of environmental advocacy to promote ecological awareness, environmental sustainability and issues related to climate change, population density and urbanisation. British artist Andy Goldsworthy is another prominent example. It is not uncommon for such artists to draw on the landscape or to incorporate elements of the natural environment in their work. Pease’s 2006 piece *Seasons* (fig. 5.14) offers an example of the latter, and it also marks a shift away from his appropriation of the colonial landscape to a more conceptual space. Here the landscape gives way to abstract form. The work, which takes the shape of a black-like canvas with a matrix of orange dots, is made out of natural resources: grass tree resin, ochre and hessian. The grass tree resin was collected from the Darling Ranges and the ochre from a pit at Wilson’s Inlet in Denmark, Western Australia. Formed by tidal and meteorological influences, the pit has been used by Pease’s family for generations. The resin, which is a thermoplastic, “glue-like” substance, is a traditional material used by the Nyungar for ceremonies and to make tools.

As the title suggests, the work is about weather patterns and ecological systems. The matrix of dots represents the seasonal calendars used by the Europeans and the Nyungar, with the vertical dots corresponding to the European or Western seasons and the horizontal dots to those of the Nyungar. In contrast to the European calendar of four seasons, the Nyungar calendar has six: Birak (December–January), Bunuru (February–March), Djeran (April–May), Makuru (June–July), Djilba (August–September) and

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
Kambarang (October–November). According to Pease, the dots represent the twenty-four hours it takes for the planet to orbit around the sun. This is important because all things material and organic revolve around this cycle. Pease’s use of natural resources conveys the importance of the seasons and weather patterns on the Nyungar culture and traditional way of life. As well as influencing where they lived (by the coast or inland), the seasons also determined what, where and when they hunted and collected food.

This cycle changed when land grants were issued in the southwest of Western Australia and the Nyungar were denied access to the ecosystem they had maintained, and that had been the lifeblood of their culture, for tens of thousands of years.

Pease keeps the conversation going with Cow with Body Paint (fig. 5.15), which offers a critique of the environmental destruction of his ancestral land. Like Seasons, it is made with materials Pease sourced from the land. Its subject is a large cow painted with a traditional Nyungar body design, and an untrained eye might simply see a barcode-like pattern. This is intentional, as curator Tina Baum explains, because the imagery refers specifically to land degradation in the area around Narrogin in Western Australia, a regional centre with a thriving agricultural industry. Through its association with mass-produced goods, the barcode points to the significant commercial value of the industry. Likewise, the arid landscape that forms the backdrop of the work hints at the environmental implications of the industry. Through this work Pease asks us to consider the distinction between the intensified agricultural practices brought by the Europeans and the holistic approach of the Nyungar in their use and management of the land. The question that remains unanswered, and that underlines his work, is how in the age of globalisation and climate change concern for the environment can be reconciled with the demands of industry. In this context, it is one of the few works Pease has created with a contemporary narrative in mind.

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52 Ibid.
53 Tina Baum, “Cow with Body Paint,” in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights, eds. Francesca Cubillo and Wally Caruana (Canberra, ACT: National Gallery of Australia, 2010), 236.
While the narrative of his work might occasionally flicker between past and present, it is firmly entrenched in the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians in the state of Western Australia, regarding which he offers a rich depository of cultural and historical information. This is a unique aspect of his practice and is one of the qualities that stands out. His technical virtuosity, demonstrated through his appropriation of the colonial landscape, is another. Pease’s 2007 work *The Round House* (fig. 5.16) is a prime example, showcasing his dexterity as a storyteller and visual artist. Taking us back to the colonial landscape of nineteenth-century Perth, the painting revisits Wallace Bickley’s 1832 lithograph *View of Fremantle, Western Australia, from the Canning Road* (fig. 5.17). Bickley was an early settler in the Swan River Colony, the area now known as Fremantle in Perth. He arrived from England in 1829 and was granted large parcels of land in the Avon and Rottnest districts. His view of Fremantle is the only known artwork he produced, and although the topography is said to be inaccurate, it nevertheless captures the spirit of the growing colony.55

More specifically, Bickley’s work offers a panoramic view of the Swan River Colony and takes in the Round House, which was the first permanent building in the colony and was used as a prison from 1831 to 1886. Pease’s appropriation is complex, containing multiple readings and points of reference. First is the Wagyl, a major spirit being for Nyungar people that manifests as a snake or rainbow. The Wagyl’s inclusion is a reminder and affirmation of the Nyungar people’s presence and spiritual connection with the land and waterways. States Pease: “I have taken this image and placed the Wagyl — a mythical serpent that created the Beela (rivers) as it moved across the land. The Wagyl rises from the water like a giant sea monster ready to engulf passing ships.”56 Here Pease hints at the unrealised dream of the Wagyl thwarting the Europeans’ plan to colonise Nyungar land. One again Pease entertains us with the idea of what could have been.

Also symbolic is the colony of white rabbits in the foreground, which reference the immeasurable environmental damage the rabbit and other introduced species have caused since their introduction to Australia by European settlers. Elsewhere in Pease’s work, the white rabbit appears as a manifestation of the fictional character in

Lewis Carroll’s 1865 classic children’s novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.* Alice follows the white rabbit down a rabbit hole, leading her to a world of magic and make believe that was unlike anything she had seen or experienced before.\(^{57}\) Pease draws parallels with the way the Nyungar were suddenly exposed to scientific ways of thinking that conflicted with and were radically different from their own:

> I see a parallel between that story and the time when Indigenous people were suddenly exposed to new scientific ways of thinking. For example, hydrology — the science of water — is completely opposite to Indigenous beliefs about the Water Dreaming and Wagyl.\(^{58}\)

While parallels can be drawn with Alice’s adventures, for the Nyungar the advent of Europeans was not a dream, but a nightmare from which they could not awake.

Pease’s appropriation also offers a gateway to an aspect of Australia’s past that has been hidden and obscured from public consciousness: the incarceration of approximately 3,700 Indigenous men and boys on Rottnest Island between 1839 and 1903.\(^{59}\) As the Swan River Colony prospered, the Round House became overcrowded. Thus, a decision was made to relocate the Indigenous prisoners to Rottnest Island, eighteen kilometres west of Fremantle, where a new prison was to be built. The Indigenous prisoners came from as far away as Gascoyne, Fitzroy River and the Kimberley, and they were from different language groups. The Round House became the “drop-off” point where they were held until their transfer to the island, and it is the likely reason for Pease’s appropriation of Bickley’s work. After their arrival on the island the prisoners — the youngest of whom was said to be eight years old and the oldest seventy — were sent to work building the prison, farming and labouring at the salt works.\(^{60}\) They also built the roads, lighthouse, seawall and most of the island’s heritage buildings, many of which still stand today.

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\(^{57}\) Charles Lutwidge wrote the novel under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll.

\(^{58}\) Christopher Pease, artist talk at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, on May 15, 2010 in association with the 17th Biennale of Sydney.

\(^{59}\) The prison closed in 1904; however, a number of prisoners remained on the island to build roads and other works until 1931.

The prison records reveal that most of the prisoners were convicted of minor offences such as stealing food or livestock, often from their own traditional lands. Others had committed more serious crimes, such as murder. The removal of the men, many of whom were Elders or Custodians, had a devastating impact on the communities they left behind. Neville Green, a historian who has undertaken extensive research on the incarceration of Indigenous prisoners on Rottnest Island, estimates that between 1839 and 1918 there were 373 Indigenous deaths in custody. The figure is not surprising, given the vulnerability of the prisoners to introduced diseases such as influenza, measles, mumps and whooping cough. The deplorable living conditions and lack of sanitation, proper food and dry clothing were also contributing factors. As Michael Sinclair-Jones writes, “many suffered pneumonia, scurvy and dysentery as they lay wet and shivering in threadbare blankets on cold stone floors, constantly damp in winter from being flushed out daily with buckets of cold water to remove overnight faeces and urine.”

The prisoners were also subject to undue trauma by being made to watch the public hanging of inmates who had stepped out of line. There are five such deaths on record. Research into the prison’s history also confirms that the remains of at least 371 Indigenous prisoners are buried in one of the two cemeteries on the island, making it the largest deaths in custody burial ground in Australia. There is disagreement over when the grave was first discovered: accounts range from 1962 to 1971. The site was formally recognised in 1985, although it was not until 1992 that it was fenced off and a sign erected to notify the public of its significance. Disturbingly, the site had previously formed part of the island’s camping ground. In recent years, the burial ground has been a source of ongoing tension between authorities and Indigenous groups.

61 In their book Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838–1931, historians Neville Green and Susan Moon document the criminal convictions of the 3,676 Indigenous men imprisoned on Rottnest Island by way of a biographical dictionary. The names were drawn from multiple sources such as the Colonial Secretary’s Records, Fremantle Prison Records, Rottnest Island Records, Rottnest Island Committal Books and Police Department files held in the Public Records Office and J. S. Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia. See Neville Green and Susan Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838–1931 (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), 100–332.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 59. The official records of these deaths are held at the J. S. Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.
65 Green and Moon, Far From Home, 64.
66 Ibid., 67.
67 Ibid., 70.
68 Ibid., 71–72.
who are calling for it to be reinstated as a parkland for reflection. Of upmost importance is the conservation and preservation of the site, which in its current state is an unresolved reminder of the past. The plan is slowly coming to fruition, although funding for the project remains an ongoing issue.

The rebirth of Rottnest Island as a holiday destination continues to overshadow its Indigenous past and shared history. Green’s research reveals that few tourists are even aware of this history, or of the fact that the Rottnest Lodge, touted as the island’s premier place to stay, was once a prison where hundreds of Indigenous males of all ages lived and died in abject misery.\(^69\) The realisation of this tragic history has led to calls for the lodge to be converted into a museum and memorial to those who were incarcerated and died there. As Green has argued:

> Very few societies in the world would convert to tourist accommodation prison cells in which an estimated 287 people died in miserable conditions thousands of kilometres from their homelands and families. It is comparable to transforming Auschwitz concentration camp into holiday cottages. Tourists as well as the general public should be made aware of the fact that many men died in the holiday units of the Quod.\(^70\)

Artist Brook Andrew makes a similar point in relation to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls and Kinchella Aboriginal Boys’ Training Home. In fact, his practice has been instrumental in underlining the importance of memorials in the healing process and the role they play in fostering reconciliation through public acknowledgement of the past. The museum established on Robben Island in South Africa offers an example of what can be achieved.

The Rottnest Lodge website makes little reference to its prison past. The property boasts six types of accommodation and room for up to 246 guests. Facilities include an “exciting” Italian eatery serving authentic wood-fired pizza and an expansive pool that provides the “perfect backdrop for a host of fun activities.”\(^71\) The Quod rooms, which were once prison cells, are described as “rich in history”; we are told that they accommodate two to six people and are “great for friends.”\(^72\) There is no mention of the seven men who slept “clad only in filthy rags on the bare floor with no toilet, water,

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\(^69\) Ibid., 82.
\(^70\) Ibid., 83.
\(^72\) Ibid.
clear air or room to move.” Nor is there mention of the fact that an average of twenty-one Indigenous men died in each $240 a night Quod twin-share holiday unit, each being three former cells with “just a narrow slit for air and light.” It begs the question: how many people would choose to stay at Rottnest Lodge if they knew the truth about its Indigenous past? The prison’s conversion into tourist accommodation is an example of the way aspects of the past are hidden to meet contemporary needs and desires. By bringing its past and present use to our attention, Pease simply asks us to consider how it might seem from an Indigenous perspective.

In 2010, Pease was invited to present work at the 17th Biennale of Sydney. He responded to this major milestone in his career with two works, one of which was *Law of Refraction* (fig. 5.18), an oil painting based on another of de Sainson’s works from the expedition to the King George Sound in 1826 (fig. 5.19). De Sainson’s lithograph entertains with a story of a Minang man who spent several nights aboard the *L’Astrolabe* as a guest of Captain Dumont D’Urville. The image captures the man’s return to land, where he shares his experience with his friends and family. He has returned wearing European clothes, and he greets his companions with several gifts: a pair of European shoes, a necklace and mirror. As the man holds up the mirror, the Minang recoil in shock at the wonder of this new technology. It is an enthralling image, and Pease has speculated whether it was the first time the Minang had seen a clear reflection of themselves. He adds that it is more than likely they had seen a reflection of themselves in the water, but certainly not a mirror.

Typical of Pease’s work, a scientific diagram forms part of the appropriation. Sourced from a publication on the physics of light, it relays the scientific explanation of reflection known as the law of refraction. It appears in the centre of the work and is also reflected in the work’s title, presumably to those unfamiliar with its symbolism. The diagram represents the Western way of thinking. The wallpaper of concentric circles seen in background represents the spiritual beliefs of the Minang. As with previous works, the juxtaposition exposes the tension between the scientific approach of the Europeans and the spiritual beliefs of the Minang (or as curator Keith Munro puts it,
“the collision, meeting and dealing of two cultures with polar opposite ways of thinking.”78). With this in mind, it is interesting to consider the presence of D’Urville and de Sainson, the former wearing a blue tailcoat and the latter a belted pink cloak, in the work. Their presence reflects an intimacy with the Minang that cannot be ignored. This is because de Sainson’s image captures both the Minangs’ fascination with Europeans and their wares and the Europeans’ fascination with the Minang. It is this mutual interest that de Sainson and D’Urville’s presence in the work underlines.

Ideas of land ownership and use recur throughout Pease’s practice. In early work they are explored through narratives related to the colonial landscape. The same can be said of a series of paintings Pease produced between 2011 and 2012 based on de Sainson’s Habitans De Port Du Roi Georges (Nelle Hollande) (fig. 5.20), the homey image of a Minang family sitting around a campfire on a hill overlooking King George Sound. In contrast to earlier interventions, here Pease pushes the narrative in a new direction by bringing the urban landscape to the forefront. By an act of appropriation he continues to highlight the contrasting views of land ownership and proprietary rights, but he does so with a contemporary twist. We learn this through the architectural drawings Pease has superimposed over images of the Minang, and through the titles of the work, which are catchphrases from real estate advertising copy. Pease mocks their implied meaning by re-presenting them from the perspective of the Minang.

Take for instance Luxury Apartment (fig. 5.21), which draws on aspirations of the predominantly white Australian middle class. The family unit is reduced from seven to two, which Pease achieves by zooming in on the original image. This reduction points to both the decline in size of the average Australian household to 2.6 persons and the rise of the one-person household.79 The figures point to changes in social structure and living that differ from the Nyungar’s traditional way of life and ideas of the family unit. The work also reflects the contemporary disdain for multigenerational living, although it is fast becoming a reality for thousands of Australians as the cost of housing continues to rise.80 Land Release 3 (fig. 5.22) and Open Plan Living (fig. 5.23) also embody

78 Ibid.
middle-class aspirations: the quarter-acre block and the modern architectural marvel of open plan living. The quarter-acre block is the “great Australian dream” that is no longer attainable for the average Australian yet remains ingrained in the national psyche. *Open Plan Living* plays with the way the Nyungar lived for thousands of years vis à vis the popularisation of open plan living in recent years.

Common to all of the works is a patterned wallpaper backdrop. The design is based on the native banksia, a wildflower named after celebrated British botanist Joseph Banks that is found along the southwest coastline of Western Australia. The pattern is a symbolic reminder of the classification of Indigenous Australians as part of the nation’s flora and fauna (as Ah Kee refers to it), and it links the work to the Indigenous settlement at Moore River and Sister Kate’s Children’s Cottage, where Pease’s mother lived for a period as a child. Moore River was established as an Indigenous settlement in the early twentieth century and entered public consciousness through Doris Pilkington Garimara’s 1996 novel *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, which was later made into an award-willing film directed by Phillip Noyce. Garimara’s novel recounts the true story of three Indigenous girls forcibly removed from their family and resettled at Moore River in 1931. We know from Pease’s own family history that they were not the only Indigenous children removed from their family. In fact, Haebich and Delroy note that Nyungar children were being taken from their families in the Swan River colony as early as 1833.

Sister Kate’s Children’s Cottage was established in Queen’s Park, Perth, in mid-1934 by Sister Kate Clutterbuck as a home for “quarter cast” and “fair skinned” Indigenous children who had been orphaned or removed from their families under the assimilation policy. A number of them had been sent there from the Moore River Settlement. The idea was to bring the children up in accordance with white standards so they would live a better life. As the following testimony taken from a woman who lived at the home for fourteen years demonstrates, many of them paid a high price for being there.

> At the age of four, I was taken away from my family and placed in Sister Kate's Home in Western Australia where I was kept as a ward of the state until I was eighteen years old. I was forbidden to see any of my family or know of their

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whereabouts. Five of us D. children were all taken and placed in different institutions in WA. The Protector of Aborigines and the Child Welfare Department in their ‘Almighty Wisdom’ said we would have a better life and future brought up as whitefellas away from our parents in a good religious environment. All they contributed to our upbringing and future was an unrepairable scar of loneliness, mistrust, hatred and bitterness. Fears that have been with me all my life. The empty dark and lonely existence was so full of many hurtful and unforgivable events that I cannot escape from no matter how hard I try. Being deprived of the most cherished and valuable thing in life as an Aboriginal child — love and family bonds.83

Some of the children who resided at the home, however, went on to live happy and productive lives. One example is Graham “Polly” Farmer, whom Pease referenced in Nyoongar Dreaming; as mentioned earlier, he become one of Australian Rules Football’s greatest players. Be that as it may, the point being made is that nothing can compensate for the bonds that were broken between these children and their families.

The wallpaper pattern reappears in Pease’s 2014 Fauna and Fauna series (figs. 5.24-5.27). As with the previous series, the prints are derived from flora found in Western Australia. A key difference is that here Pease uses an assortment of native and introduced species: *fumaria capreolata*, *olearia axillaris* and *clematis linearifolia*. As mentioned previously, the use of native flora relates to the less-than-human status of Indigenous Australians prior to the 1967 Referendum. The introduced species underlines Pease’s concern for the environment and highlights the ecological damage plants such as *echium plantagineum*, or Patterson’s curse, have caused. However, it is the juxtaposition of the two that is most interesting. The combination of Indigenous and European elements denotes the changing landscape, in terms of both the physical environment as well as the establishment of a new social structure and order. Similarly, and in keeping with earlier work, it also symbolises the tension between the two cultures and the differences in their belief systems.

Another common element is the Nyungar man, who appears in each of the works flanked by an assortment of native and introduced animals. The native animals replace the Wagyl as the symbol of Indigeneity, while the introduced species carry the

symbolism of the introduced flora. The black swan has significance as the Western Australia State emblem; the other animals (kangaroo, spotted quoll, numbat, sheep, fox, rooster and rabbit) are common to the area. On the subject of the kangaroo, it is disconcerting that Pease, whose attention to detail is acute, would get it so wrong. The representation is imperfect, as the animal is too lithe and not to scale. Close examination of the work reveals it not to be by Pease, but by British painter George Stubbs, who in 1772 produced the first known colonial painting of a kangaroo, albeit having never seen the animal with his own eyes. The painting, Kongouro from New Holland (fig. 5.28), was commissioned by Joseph Banks, who supplied Stubbs with eyewitness accounts, several basic sketches and a piece of preserved kangaroo skin to assist with the task. Even though Stubbs’ depiction is not a precise rendering of what was later identified as a male eastern grey kangaroo, it nevertheless bears a genuine likeness to the real thing.

In 2013, Kongouro from New Holland and Stubbs’ painting of a dingo titled Portrait of a Large Dog were the subject of a bitter row between the National Gallery of Australia and the British Government. Owing to their significance as the first known European representations of Australian animals, the gallery had for many years tried to acquire the works from the former owners, the descendants of Joseph Banks’ wife’s family. Negotiations soured when a temporary export ban was placed on the works so that funds could be raised to keep them in the United Kingdom. Debates ensued over who was the more deserving guardian, Australia or Britain. The British argued that the works were important visual records of Cook’s first voyage to Australia and should remain where they were commissioned and painted. Stubbs was also one of their finest animal painters. Ron Radford, the former Director of the National Gallery of Australia, argued that Australia had a stronger case for the acquisition due to the symbolism of the kangaroo and the significance of the works to Australia’s visual history. Their fate was sealed by a sizable donation from an Israeli shipping magnate

85 Portrait of a Large Dog was also commissioned by Joseph Banks.
86 The paintings were listed on the National Gallery of Australia’s acquisitions list from 1972.
that made it possible for the National Maritime Museum in London to acquire the works. As we shall see, this is not the only time the two countries have been at loggerheads over cultural heritage issues, which are extremely complex and sensitive.

A photograph taken by Irish anthropologist Daisy Bates in the late nineteenth century inspired the Nyungar figure that appears in each work (fig. 5.29). Bates migrated to Australia from Ireland in 1883. She spent thirty-five years studying Indigenous Australians, for the most part in Western Australia and South Australia. She died in 1951, leaving behind a large and significant body of work, including manuscripts, photographs and notebooks filled with ethnographic information, short stories, oral histories and folklore related to the people she studied. This particular photograph forms part of the Daisy Bates collection. The man, whom Bates identifies as “Ngandil,” stands in a neo-classical pose and is decorated with traditional body paint, which Pease replicates in his work. The date of the image is unknown; however, Bates’ spirited description of the man on the back of the photograph offers a glimpse into his life. It reads:

Ngandil
A Bunbury-Busselton man
One of the finest Bibbulmun hunters and runners
A perfect physical type
He was a Tondarup and manitchmat (white cockatoo stock) and was a brother to John Forrest and myself.
The last of his group.

The final line, which appears to have been added at a later date, is a poignant reminder of the declining Indigenous population in the aftermath of colonisation. This was clearly a concern of Bates: her archive is interspersed with references to their waning numbers and rapid decline.

In Bates’ photograph the man’s cotton loincloth is fastened with a Western style belt. Traditionally a belt, or girdle was it was known, would have been made of possum

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hair. The belt reappears in Pease’s appropriation; however, he reverts to tradition and replaces the cotton loincloth with animal skin. In keeping with previous work, Pease plays with the tension between the coloniser and colonised and the loss of Nyungar traditions, which he responds to by reinstating the skin. The series title *Flora and Fauna* makes specific reference to the legal classification and rights of Nyungar people in Western Australia. They were unable to apply for Australian citizenship until 1944, which, as previously mentioned, implied that they were less human than their European counterparts. A lesser-known fact is that under the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944*, which operated in Western Australia until 1971, Indigenous Australians were forced to apply to become Australian citizens. For them it was not an automatic right, nor was it unconditional.

The application process was complex, making citizenship difficult for Indigenous Australians to obtain. To meet the requirements, applicants had to supply two written references certifying their “good character and industrious habits.” What is more, they had to satisfy the authorities that they had adopted the “manner and habits of civilised life,” were well behaved, able to speak English and capable of managing their own affairs. They also had to prove that they were free of diseases such as leprosy, syphilis, granuloma and yaws. A sticking point for many Indigenous Australians was the added requirement that they sign a statutory declaration stating that in the two years prior to lodgement of the application they had “dissolved tribal and native association except with respect of lineal descendants or native relations of the first degree.”

Between 1927 and 1954 Indigenous Australians were prohibited from entering the City of Perth unless they had what was called a “Native Pass” signed by the Commissioner of Native Affairs. A legitimate reason such as employment was required to obtain the pass. Pass holders were, however, not given free reign of the city and were subjected to a curfew. The scheme responded to rising unemployment in rural areas, which led

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93 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
many Indigenous people to move to Perth, and it attempted to control their movements.\textsuperscript{98}

*Martinis After Lunch* (fig. 5.30) and *Cocktail’s by the Pool* (fig. 5.31) are an extension of *Flora and Fauna* series. The Nyungar man reappears as the central figure in the work, and other common elements include the patterned wallpaper and assortment of native and introduced animals. There are, however, subtle differences. The narrative has been broadened to reference the idealised portrayal of Indigenous Australians as the “noble savage” and “exotic other.” Likewise, elements of sarcasm and humour atypical of Pease’s work manifest in titles of the paintings and are indicated, albeit symbolically, through the juxtaposition of the cocktail glass and kylie\textsuperscript{99} held by the man. As explained by Pease, the representation is influenced by mid-twentieth century kitsch paintings and imagery.\textsuperscript{100} The cocktail glass alludes to the man’s attempt to be civilised and comply with what was asked of him under Western Australian colonial law. Of course, it has contemporary relevance as a marker of Pease’s urban roots. Its juxtaposition with the kylie, which is an obvious marker of his ancestral roots, hints at the underlying tension between the two. Perhaps the man, like Pease, is trying to reconcile them. As we shall see, Daniel Boyd is another artist whose work is in dialogue with the narrative of Australia’s colonisation and who, like Pease, subverts the colonisers’ account by re-presenting it from an Indigenous perspective.


\textsuperscript{99} A non-returning boomerang.

\textsuperscript{100} Pease quoted in Michael Reid Gallery, *Chris Pease*, n.p.
CHAPTER SIX
DANIEL BOYD

Daniel Boyd was born in Cairns, a regional city in the Far North of Queensland in 1982. He is a descendant of the Kudjla and Gangalu peoples from the northeast region of Queensland, and has roots in Pentecost Island, Vanuatu. In a short period of time Boyd has risen to the forefront of contemporary art practice in Australia. Today he is recognised as one of Australia’s most collectable artists, and in 2014 was awarded the highly coveted Bvlgari Art Award. Boyd took to drawing as a child, copying drawings he found in old books and comics. He also made small tourist paintings of the reef to sell locally. His artistic talent caught the attention of family members and teachers at his school, who encouraged him to apply for art school. Boyd relocated to Canberra in 2001, where he took up a scholarship at the Australian National University’s School of Art. He graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2005, after which he moved to Sydney, where he continues to build his practice. Although he focuses on painting, over the past decade he has also experimented with video and installation.

At art school Boyd experimented with printmaking, sculpture and installation. At this time he also developed an interest in Indigenous Australian history. This was something he had not learned at school, leading him to question the version of Australian history that he and generations of Australian children had been taught. It also led to the realisation that there were not only discrepancies in written accounts of Australia’s settler history, but also in visual reckonings of the past. Boyd cites the work of Destiny Deacon, Vernon Ah Kee, Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley and Brenda L. Croft

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4 Zinovieff, “Daniel Boyd.”
as being influential on his practice. On account of his interest in the subjugation of Australia’s Indigenous history and visual critique of the dominant discourse of Australian history, this is not entirely unexpected.

In his final year at art school, Boyd began to interrogate visual representations of Australia’s settler history. The starting point were figures and heroes at the centre of the Imperial regime, whom Boyd recognised as having played a role in the dispossession of Indigenous Australians from their land. They are also figures valorised through portraiture and celebrated through the mythology of the so-called “discovery” of Australia in 1770 by Captain James Cook. The resulting work was a series of reworked oil-on-canvas paintings of several emblematic personages of the British Empire — Captain James Cook, King George III, Governor Arthur Phillip and Sir Joseph Banks. The series launched Boyd’s career, and by 2006, a year after he had graduated from art school, the National Gallery of Australia acquired four of the works. This was a major coup for an artist in his early twenties who had not yet established a place for himself in the Australian art world.

Boyd’s assault on the figures at the centre of Australia’s colonisation began with Captain No Beard (fig. 6.1), an appropriation of John Webber’s 1782 posthumous portrait of Captain James Cook (fig. 6.2). Painted three years after Cook’s death and acquired by the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, in 2000 for $5.3 million, it is one of three surviving portraits of Cook by Webber. Lauded as one of the most iconic figures in Australian history, Cook is also Boyd’s unofficial muse. Rather than validating his place in Australian history, however, Boyd subverts his totemic status by representing him through the eyes of those who were colonised. He does this by exploring the colonisation of Australia through the theme of piracy, recasting Cook as a thieving buccaneer guilty of an illegal act of banditry. The indicators of this are the eye patch and macaw parrot, pirate paraphernalia Boyd has added to his portrait of Cook. Boyd has nevertheless stayed true to the original format of Webber’s portrait, drawing it from a postcard to preserve its original integrity.

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6 Captain James Cook was born in England in 1728. He was an explorer, navigator, surveyor and captain in the Royal Navy. In 1770, Cook claimed the entire east coast of Australia for Great Britain and named it New South Wales.
7 The other two portraits are held at the National Portrait Gallery (London, United Kingdom) and Te Papa (Wellington, New Zealand).
The recasting of Cook as a thieving buccaneer turns Australian history on its head. It also gives rise to a different perspective on the colonisation of Australia, one that prompts audiences to reconsider what they think or know to be true about the subject. In a statement he wrote to accompany the work, Boyd says that prior to seeing Webber’s portrait he had come across the secret instructions Cook had in his possession on each of the three voyages to the South Pacific between 1768 and 1779. An excerpt of them appears below, implicitly stating that Cook was to take possession “with” the consent of the relevant Indigenous people.

You (Cook) are also with the Consent of the Natives to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain: Or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors.  

In the case of Australia, consent was neither obtained nor sought. For this reason Boyd draws parallels between the colonisation of Australia and the act of piracy. As well as exposing what is arguably an inconvenient truth, Boyd’s portrait prompts us to consider Cook’s ambivalent stature as hero to the coloniser and villain to the colonised.

The title, which Boyd has incorporated into the work using the postcard-like format, refers to an account of Cook’s landing at Kurnell on the southern headland of Botany Bay, New South Wales. It has been said that the local Indigenous people thought Cook and his men were women because they had no facial hair. While Boyd tells us that it was a way of introducing satire into his work, the title also plays with the legend of the infamous pirate Blackbeard. Blackbeard, or Edward Thatch, was a notorious English pirate who operated around the West Indies and American colonies in the early eighteenth century. Like Cook, he is a legendary figure whose life and endeavours has been obfuscated by myth and propaganda. Contrary to the portrayal of Thatch as savage and barbaric, some researchers have made the case that there is little evidence

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11 Ibid., 72.
13 In some historical accounts his surname appears as Teach.
that suggests he was a violent man.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed Thatch is seen by many as a heroic figure who menaced the colonies by disrupting their trade routes and, like Robin Hood, “plundered from the rich as part of a social revolt.”\textsuperscript{15}

The theme of piracy also dominates Boyd’s 2005 work \textit{Treasure Island} (fig. 6.3). Here Boyd appropriates the 1994 AIATSIS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language map created by David Horton for the \textit{Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia}. The map documents the three hundred plus Indigenous language groups in Australia prior to European colonisation. Boyd’s appropriation of the map can be read in a number of ways. One points to cultural loss, with the map being a salient reminder of the devastating impact of colonisation on the Indigenous population, and the loss of traditional language being one example. Another is that it celebrates the rich cultural life of Indigenous Australians and, by extension, illuminates its breadth and diversity. The work’s title, from Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1883 classic tale of pirates and buried gold, also has meaning. In the context of Boyd’s work, it alludes to the race for the “Great Southern Land.” To quote Boyd, this was a race driven by colonial expansion in which “nothing was to stand in the way of obtaining it, not even a complex culture tens of thousands of years old.”\textsuperscript{16}

Contemporary relevance can be found in the ongoing battle for land rights and mineral resources under the current mining boom. Indigenous Australians, who derive little from the nation’s natural resources, would be justified in questioning whether this is simply the re-colonisation of their traditional lands, albeit by mining companies. Arts writer Jo Higgins makes a similar observation, adding that the title also points to contemporary political developments such as the “reprobation of Indigenous land” in the Northern Territory by the Federal Government.\textsuperscript{17} Here Higgins refers to the terms of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), which included but was not limited to the compulsory acquisition of Indigenous land, the suspension of Native Title rights and interests and removal of the permit system that gave Indigenous communities

\textsuperscript{15} Woodward, “The Last Days of Blackbeard.”
\textsuperscript{17} Higgins, “Daniel Boyd,” 116.
the right to restrict public access to their land. Either way, the underlying message is still the same: Indigenous land is and has always been a target for those seeking to exploit the wealth and prosperity it provides.

Like artist Christopher Pease, Boyd reappraises eighteenth and early nineteenth century artworks that relate to Australia’s colonial history and record some of the first encounters between Indigenous Australians and Europeans. He does this to expose the subjective nature of history and to offer an Indigenous perspective. Boyd’s appropriation of Emmanuel Phillips Fox’s triumphant scene *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770* (fig. 6.4) is an excellent example. Fox’s 1902 painting (fig. 6.5) was made on the eve of Federation and is a re-enactment of Cook’s infamous landing at Botany Bay. The work was commissioned under the terms of the Gilbee bequest for the National Gallery of Victoria. Boyd has stated that in addition to marking a historic occasion, the work was commissioned to “solidify colonial rule in Australia.” The scene depicts Cook and his party in the midst of staking their claim on the new land, with the Red Ensign flag, a symbol of Empire, flying in the background. Their plan is momentarily thwarted by the appearance of two Indigenous men who are outnumbered but nevertheless determined to ward off the British and defend their territory.

Through his appropriation of Fox’s iconic work, Boyd exposes the subjective nature of history by juxtaposing the settlers’ version of Cook’s landing at Botany Bay with how he reads it from an Indigenous perspective. He does this by reinstating the theme of piracy symbolically, with the Jolly Roger flag, the patch over Cook’s eye and the macaw parrot perched on his left shoulder. His perspective is also implicit in the work’s title. Boyd has stated that he was listening to “We Call Them Pirates,” a song produced by Mark Mothersbaugh for the soundtrack to Wes Anderson’s 2004 film *The Life Aquatic* when he painted the work. Mothersbaugh is best known as the lead singer of the American new wave band Devo. This may have been serendipitous, yet it encapsulates the underlying narrative of Boyd’s work. In keeping with the postcard format, and his appropriation of Webber’s portrait of Cook, the title also forms part of

19 “Artist Daniel Boyd Discusses His Work ‘We Call Them Pirates Out Here,’” video.
the work. As well underlining Boyd’s subversion and aiding viewers’ understanding, it is an astute way of injecting a sense of drama and humour into the work.

Having drawn our attention to the subjective nature of history, Boyd asks us to consider whether the scene is one of conquest or invasion. The answer will of course will differ from the perspective of the coloniser and colonised, but we know from Boyd’s use of pirate iconography that he considers it the latter. The thunderous clouds, which are notably darker than in Boyd’s appropriation, are a further clue. In their thunderous state they are a visual metaphor for the cataclysm that looms ahead for Indigenous Australians under colonial rule. The work is also littered with personal references. The faces of two of Cook’s men have been replaced with Boyd’s contemporaries. One is the artist’s housemate and the other a friend who migrated to Australia from England via Scotland. This symbolic gesture “traces the trajectory of British colonisation” and lifts the veil on the complexity of contemporary relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Be that as it may, it is interesting Boyd chose not to replace the faces with Indigenous ones, as artist Dianne Jones often does, as a pointed reference to the continued lack of Indigenous faces in representations of contemporary Australian life.

Granted, Boyd compensates for such erasures by underlining the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in historical depictions of Australian life and the colonisers’ dismissive attitude towards them. Boyd makes this known by replacing the two Indigenous figures in Fox’s painting with two “blackboy” trees. Blackboys, or Xanthorrhoea as they are more formally known, are a type of native grass tree. The name refers to the apparent likeness of the trunked species to a young Indigenous person holding an upright spear. An alternative interpretation relates to the exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the census, which gave them a less than human status (i.e., one equivalent to the flora and fauna). By the same token, the substitution plays with the myth of Australia as terra nullius, the Latin term used to describe land that “belongs to no one.” This subtle reference is evidenced by an Indigenous smoke signal Boyd added to the far left side of the work. Smoke signals are a visual form of communication typically used by Indigenous people to make others aware of their presence. Boyd uses one here to make the point that although we cannot see them, contrary to the idea of terra nullius they always were.

21 Ibid.
Boyd’s 2006 painting *Fall and Expulsion* (fig. 6.6) marks Cook’s demise from icon to anti-hero. The work quotes Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg and John Webber’s widely known engraving *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* of 1794 (fig. 6.7). Flanked by the allegorical figures Fame and Britannia, Cook is seen wafting heavenward following his death at Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii, during his third voyage to the Pacific. De Loutherbourh produced the print for *Omai: or A Trip Around the World*, a popular pantomime performed at the Theatre Royal in London’s Covent Garden on December 20, 1985. Loosely based on Cook’s voyages to the Pacific, it featured Omai, the young Raiatean man who travelled to England on the *HMS Adventure* and who charmed the upper echelons of British society during his two-year stay.\(^{22}\) For curator Michelle Hetherington, the work captures the “popular contemporary view that Cook had become a martyr to Britain’s scientific and territorial advancement.”\(^{23}\) She adds that it also “completes the translation of Cook from naval captain to Enlightenment hero,” which Boyd critiques through his appropriation of the historic work.\(^{24}\)

Boyd’s appropriation also calls to mind the circumstances of Cook’s death at Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii on February 14, 1779. After an unsuccessful trip along the coast of Alaska to the Artic Circle, Cook had decided to spend the northern winter in Hawaii. It was a fateful decision, paid for with his life.\(^ {25}\) As noted by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, Cook’s arrival at Kealakekua Bay at the time of the Hawaiian annual mythical cycle led the Hawaiians to believe he was the manifestation of their local god Lono.\(^ {26}\) Accordingly, the Hawaiians welcomed Cook ashore, and the Europeans took


\(^{26}\) Marshall Sahlins’ *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 33. It is worth noting that anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere rejects Sahlins’ claim that Cook’s death was attributed to the mythical worldview the Hawaiians subscribed to. Obeyesekere argues that the Hawaiians were too pragmatic and rational to mistake Cook (a human) for a Lono (a god). Sahlins’ counter-claim is that Obeyesekere’s thesis lacks important contextual knowledge about the region and the historical period. Moreover, it eliminates the Hawaiian voice from its own history because both British and Hawaiian texts confirm that the Hawaiians believed Cook was a manifestation of their god Lono. See also Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, c.1997).
advantage of the their hospitality for several weeks before resuming their exploration of the Northern Pacific. What was unexpected, however, was Cook’s return to Kealakekua Bay after storms forced the ships back for repairs. Cook’s “inexplicable return” (as Sahlin puts it) was out of phase with the Hawaiian ritual cycle and met with confusion.27 Thereupon, relations between the parties soured with tensions boiling over when the Discovery’s cutter boat was stolen. To force its return, the Europeans devised a plan to take the Hawaiian King Terreeoboo hostage. Their plan was thwarted when shots were fired and Kalimu, a high-ranking Hawaiian chief, was killed. The Hawaiians responded angrily and turned on the Europeans as they made a hasty retreat to the safety of their boat. Cook was killed in the confrontation that ensued.

As previously stated, Boyd’s appropriation calls into question the myths and narratives that deify Cook. Much has been written about them, however paramount to Boyd is the deification of Cook in narratives of Australian history and his revered place in the national psyche, which he subverts by refusing to preserve Cook’s elevation to divine status, choosing instead to mark his fall from grace. Boyd conveys this perspective by turning the original image on its side so that Cook faces downwards, and by rendering Fame flightless by removing her wings. He further alludes to this reversal through the work’s title, which is derived from Michelangelo’s The Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, a biblical painting that recalls the story of Adam and Eve and represents ideas of good and evil.28 For those unfamiliar with Boyd’s earlier works, the notion of Cook as a thieving buccaneer is also reinforced. In typical fashion he does this symbolically, by replacing Cook’s sextant29 and by fitting a patch over his eye. The Jolly Roger flag and the macaw are further clues. Boyd has stated that the parrot is “symbolic of freedom through flight.”30 What he presumably means is that the bird is no longer at Cook’s mercy and is now free to take flight (in contrast to Fame, who has lost her wings).

Boyd is not alone in his critique of the people, places and events at the centre of Australia’s colonial history, and he is not the only artist to have questioned Cook’s mythical and heroic status. In 2008 Boyd participated in an important exhibition at

27 Sahlin, How “Natives” Think, 79.
28 The work forms part of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City, Italy.
29 A navigational tool used to determine latitude and longitude at sea by measuring angular distances.
Hazelhurst Regional Gallery in Sydney that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic responses to the colonisation of Australia. Anthony “Ace” Bourke curated the exhibition under the title *Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770*. The exhibition featured contemporary artworks hung alongside artefacts and documents relating to the colonisation of Australia. As well as offering audiences alternative perspectives on Australia’s shared history, a number of the artists addressed Cook’s iconic status and the nation’s ongoing fascination with him. In point of fact, the exhibition included two further appropriations of John Webber’s posthumous portrait of Cook, one by Dianne Jones and the other by Gordon Bennett. Boyd exhibited four works in the exhibition: three paintings and an installation composed of a miniature tall ship marooned in a sea of sand (fig. 6.8). At the time, the latter represented a shift in Boyd’s practice into a more conceptual space.

The installation was an extension of Boyd’s ongoing investigation into Australia’s colonial history and marks his unwavering desire to bring an Indigenous perspective on it to the forefront. Yet separating this work from earlier investigations is the demotion of Cook as the emblem of Empire. Standing in his place is a tall ship — a fitting substitution given its familiarity to Australian audiences due to the prevalent narratives of Cook’s “discovery” of Australia and the arrival of the First Fleet. Tall ships continue to have relevance through re-enactments on Australia’s national day, which marks the anniversary of the First Fleet’s arrival and the raising of the British flag. Few would disagree with Lawrenson’s interpretation of the ship’s “beached” state as being a metaphor for the continued legacy of colonisation, with its upright and buoyant position clearly denoting the Empire’s continued hold on Australia. As Lawrenson further notes, what Boyd has fashioned to look like ripples in the water brings to mind the tradition of sand drawing prevalent in the Central and Western Deserts, which has had a resurgence in contemporary art. Intentional or not, it is an effective way of reinstating an Indigenous presence in the landscape.

While Cook is arguably Boyd’s unofficial muse, he is not the only figure in Australia’s settler history to incur the artist’s wrath. Further examples include George III, the reigning King of England at the time of Australia’s colonisation; English naturalist Joseph Banks, who had accompanied Cook on the *HMS Endeavour*; and Governor

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32 Ibid., 17.
Arthur Phillip, the first governor of New South Wales. Instead of presenting them as heroes of the nation, Boyd continues to recast them as pirates to expose the hand they played in the dispossession of Indigenous Australians, and by extension, the decimation of their traditional practices and cultural life. In each of the three portraits the term “no beard” reappears in the title and as an element in the work. As was explained earlier, here Boyd plays with an account of Cook’s landing at Botany Bay in which it is said that the local Indigenous people mistook Cook and his men for women. Boyd’s continued use of the phrase “no beard” further subverts their masculinity — a trait for which men such as these are celebrated, contrary to their divisive deeds.

King No Beard (fig. 6.9) is a contemporary take on Nathaniel Dance’s 1773 portrait King George III (fig. 6.10). Dance was a talented portrait painter and a founding member of the Royal Academy who in 1790 retired from his practice to become a politician. In keeping with the theme of piracy, Boyd has furnished the King with an eye patch and a macaw parrot. The artist thereby makes the point that although Cook may have been the figurehead in the expropriation of Australia, he did not act alone. On close inspection, it is revealed that the golden orbs in his stately necklace have been replaced with miniature skulls. As gruesome as this sounds, there is worse to come. Where the King’s jewelled crown once stood is a specimen jar containing the remains of Boyd’s decapitated head. As Tina Baum writes, the self-portrait sees Boyd “gazing mournfully heavenward like a latter day Saint Sebastian.” Saint Sebastian was martyred during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Diocletian. Parallels can be drawn with the fate of Indigenous resistance fighters such as Pemulwuy, who opposed European colonisation of Australia.

The vision of Boyd’s decapitated head in a specimen jar also brings to mind the plundering of Indigenous material culture and the collection of human remains. Despite ongoing calls for their repatriation, a sizable number of these items continue to be held in overseas museums and collecting institutions. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the repatriation of Pemulwuy’s head has been one of the most publically discussed cases in recent years. After Pemulwuy was hunted down and shot dead by the British, his head was severed and sent to Joseph Banks (who had returned to England) as a reward for his

scientific endeavours. This explains why the decapitated head (Boyd’s) reappears in the portrait of Banks titled *Sir No Beard* (fig. 6.11), which is based on Benjamin West’s 1773 portrait of Banks (fig. 6.12). In addition to his role as the scientific advisor on Cook’s first expedition to the Antipodes, Banks was an influential figure with a formidable presence in colony.\(^{35}\) He was present when the *HMS Endeavour* landed at Botany Bay, which in the context of the appropriation places him at the scene of the crime and makes clear Boyd’s recontextualisation of him as one of Cook’s thieving buccaneers.

Bergit Arends, a curator at the Natural History Museum in London, argues that Banks being sent Pemulwuy’s head leaves the impression that he was “more than just a Linnaean plant collector.”\(^{36}\) The arrangement of artefacts in the background of Banks’ portrait gives this impression, and their inclusion suggests he was a keen collector of material culture and possibly even human remains. In fact, when he was aboard the *Endeavour* in New Zealand’s Queen Charlotte Sound in 1770, Banks traded a pair of white linen underpants for the preserved head of a Maori adolescent (a common practice at the time, such an exchange was typically carried out in the name of science).\(^{37}\) To Europeans, the exotic and extremely rare head of a “New Hollander”\(^{38}\) would have been a prized catch for any collector. This was the case with Pemulwuy, whose reputation in the colony was such that a bounty had been placed on his head prior to his death in 1802. With this in mind, the gift bestowed on Banks was well-nigh priceless.

Boyd completes his interrogation of colonial malfeasance with a portrait of Governor Arthur Phillip, who arrived with the First Fleet as the first Governor-designate of New South Wales. The portrait, which bears the subversive title *Governor No Beard* (fig. 6.13), draws on Francis Wheatley’s 1786 portrait of Phillip (fig. 6.14), who is shown in his captain’s undress uniform standing on a coastal shore (the ship on which he arrived can be seen in the distant background). The portrait was presumably

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38 New Holland is a historical name for mainland Australia, but in this context it refers to the head of an Indigenous Australian.
commissioned after Phillip’s governorship appointment was announced on October 12, 1786. It marks his arrival in Australia, even though this occurred at a later date. As with the previous portraits, Boyd’s appropriation exposes Phillip’s role in the dispossession of Indigenous Australians. Although not immediately obvious, it also offers a more in-depth reading of Pemulwuy’s life and fate for those interested. There are no visual clues as to the relationship between Phillip and Pemulwuy, as the decapitated head is not present. What the portrait alludes to but does not visually convey, however, is that in December 1790 Pemulwuy had fatally speared Governor Phillip’s gamekeeper, John McIntyre. McIntyre was a convict who reportedly brutalised Indigenous people, and his death is said to have been payback for his contempt of them.

In the years after McIntyre’s death, Pemulwuy led a series of raids on settlers at Prospect, Toongabbie, Georges River, Parramatta, Brickfield Hill and the Hawkesbury River for food and as retribution for the kidnapping of Indigenous children. The raids prompted Philip Gidley King, the third Governor of New South Wales, to issue an order stating that any Indigenous Australians caught near Parramatta, Georges River and Prospect could be shot on sight. Later that year, a proclamation outlawed Pemulwuy and offered a reward for his capture, dead or alive. Pemulwuy’s life reportedly came to an end at the hands of Henry Hacking, an early settler with a criminal past who had arrived on the *HMS Sirius* under the stewardship of Governor Arthur Phillip. (The Sydney suburb Port Hacking bears his name.) Boyd clearly believes that Pemulwuy should hold the same place in Australian history as Cook, Banks and Phillip, and this is arguably why he brings him to our attention, albeit symbolically. Another reason is that Pemulwuy remains “unfinished business.” According to a letter Joseph Banks wrote to Governor Philip Gidley King on April 8, 1803, a head that was possibly Pemulwuy’s was received in London and sent to the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Since 2003 it has been widely accepted that Pemulwuy’s death was at the hands of Henry Hacking. The claim is disputed by Doug Kohlhoff, whose research absolves Hacking from the crime. See Doug Kohlhoff, “Did Henry Hacking Shoot Pemulwuy? A Reappraisal,” *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 99, no. 1 (June 2013): 89.
Surgeons. Its current whereabouts is unknown, remaining a source of contention between interested parties in Australia and Britain.

According to the Museum’s records, the heads of two Indigenous Australians arrived at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1802. No names were recorded, and there is no record of what happened to them after 1818. One theory is that Pemulwuy’s presumed skull was destroyed when the college was bombed during the Second World War, which resulted in two-thirds of the collection being either destroyed or lost. Another is that the skull was moved to the Natural History Museum in London, along with thousands of other skulls. Claims that it was repatriated to Australia in the 1950s have proved inconclusive. Exploring the theory that Pemulwuy’s skull is in storage at Britain’s Natural History Museum, Australian Government representatives have made approaches regarding its repatriation. As they have yet to receive confirmation that the skull is there, the issue remains unresolved.

Boyd’s critique of Australia’s colonisation continues with Shame (figs. 6.15–6.17), a series of paintings made in 2008 that draw on the symbolism of the red rose as England’s national flower. The rose was adopted by England in the fifteenth century as a symbol of unity following the Wars of the Roses, a series of battles between two rival branches of the Royal family for the throne. Boyd uses it as a symbol of imperialism and says that it plays with “different perspectives on the iconography of the red rose,” also recalling the biblical story Adam and Eve. (It is said that the white rose blushed crimson with shame when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Parallels can be inferred to Cook’s defiance of the King’s instructions in order to claim Australia for the growing Empire.) The series title appears as an element in each of the works. Again, this is

48 Ibid.
51 “Secret Instructions to Lieutenant Cook 30 July 1768 (UK),” Documenting a Democracy: Australia’s Story, Museum of Australian Democracy.
made possible by the postcard format, which recurs throughout his practice. Boyd is clearly playing with the duality of the rose as symbol of nation and marker of shame, the latter usage plainly underlining the devastating impact of colonisation’s legacy on generations of Indigenous Australians.

Imperialism is also at the root of *Freetown* (figs. 6.18–6.21), a 2009 series of paintings depicting African wildlife. What sets it apart from others in Boyd’s oeuvre, however, is that it looks beyond the narrative of Australia’s settler history to experiences of colonisation elsewhere. Boyd has stated that by taking a global perspective he had hoped to “gain a better understanding of the processes and outcomes” of colonisation. As he makes clear through the series title, the subject of his inquiry is Freetown, the capital of the West African nation Sierra Leone. Freetown, or the “Province of Freedom” as it was known, was one of the first British colonies in West Africa. The colony was established in the late eighteenth century for emancipated slaves following the abolition of slavery, a fact poignantly reflected in its name. Boyd argues that the well-intended process of British liberation “resulted in the relocation of Africans to an idealised and constructed freedom,” which he likens to a lion returned to its natural environment after a period of captivity. In other words, Boyd sees it as a freedom that was imposed rather than chosen. Historians have argued that the scheme was more a social convenience to emancipate British society from black people than an act of “utopian idealism.”

The titles of individual works are songs that play with romantic ideas of freedom. They reappear in the work via the postcard format common to Boyd’s practice. In keeping with the African theme, the recording artists attached to the songs are unified by their African heritage. As suggested earlier, the lion in each of the paintings symbolises displacement, for despite being freed from captivity and returned to a natural environment, it faces an uncertain future in unfamiliar surroundings. The lion’s state of uncertainty brings to mind the resettlement of Indigenous Australians on government-run missions and reserves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Boyd

52 Ibid.
55 The recording artists are Al Green, Milli Vanilli, Sade and Nina Simone.
has a personal connection to this history, as generations of his family grew up on the Yarrabah mission near Cairns in Far North Queensland. Yarrabah (a.k.a. the Bellenden Ker Mission) was established in 1872 at the bequest of English missionary John Gribble. It became a virtual dumping ground for Indigenous people from the surrounding areas, and from as far away as Fraser Island and Cape York. 57

The Yarrabah mission was beset by food shortages, disease and deplorable living conditions. 58 Adults and children were trained as domestic servants for white families, and often forced to work for little or no pay. 59 Boyd’s grandmother, who lived there, told him that Indigenous people were also forbidden to speak their own language and were punished if caught doing so. 60 A strike by the residents over the poor conditions led to the mission being taken over by the Queensland Government in the 1960s, and in 1986 it became a self-governing Indigenous community. The settlement survived because many of the Indigenous Australians who lived there were displaced from their traditional land and had nowhere else to go. As a measure of the devastating impact and legacy of colonisation, it is estimated that of the 2,500 Indigenous Australians now living in the community, 80 percent are the descendants of men and women who were forcibly removed from their families. 61 Although the circumstances differ, what the Yarrabah mission and Freetown have in common are the paternalistic practices that enslaved residents to an idea of freedom, or as Boyd puts it, “romantic.” 62

In 2011, Boyd travelled to the United Kingdom for a three-month residency at the Natural History Museum in London. This transformative experience gave rise to new creative processes and broadened the scope of his previous investigations. Boyd’s starting point was the museum’s First Fleet Collection, comprising 629 drawings and

59 Thompson, ed., Reaching Back, 66.
62 Boyd, artist statement, “Freetown, 2009.”
watercolours of Australia’s flora, fauna and topography. The collection offers a rare, unparalleled snapshot of life in the colony in the aftermath of the fleet’s arrival in 1788. Of particular interest to Boyd were the visual recordings of Indigenous Australians and their material culture, and those depicting early encounters between the British and Eora people. 63 Like artist Christopher Pease, who has extensively researched the post-contact history of the Nyungar in Western Australia, Boyd has a familial connection to the landscape on which the works in the collection are based: “I had a few points of entry into the National History Museum archive, personal connection to landscape was one of them, in particular Cooktown on the far north-eastern coast of Australia.” 64

Boyd explains that his great-great grandmother was born in the Daintree Rainforest, approximately fifty kilometres from Cooktown in Far North Queensland. 65 The significance is that during Captain Cook’s first expedition to Australia, the HMS Endeavour struck a reef and had to make an unexpected stop in the area known as Cooktown. While the ship was being repaired, Joseph Banks went ashore and collected a large number of specimens, a number of which are in the Natural History Museum’s collection. What is more, Sydney Parkinson, a Scottish botanical draughtsman Banks employed for the expedition, simultaneously produced some of the first European pictures of Indigenous Australians from direct observation. 66 Boyd says that his work with the First Fleet Collection sparked his curiosity about the kind of relationship the British had with the Indigenous people they encountered along the way. 67 He adds while he was buoyed by how much information could be read from a single image, he became acutely aware of how much had been lost over time. 68 What Boyd mourns are the stories behind the images, the loss of which he seeks to acknowledge through his work. 69

63 The “Eora people” was the name given to the Indigenous Australians around Sydney. There are approximately 29 groups in the Sydney metropolitan area, referred to collectively as the Eora Nation.
65 Milliard, “Daniel Boyd’s Hamlet Moment.”
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
Boyd’s curiosity as to possible connections to his ancestry prompted a visit to the museum’s Human Remains Unit, which coincided with a museum project to re-box the collection. Curator Margaret Clegg estimates that there are twenty thousand sets of remains, ranging from individual bones and teeth to full skeletons. In an interview about Boyd’s engagement with the collection, Clegg acknowledged that although Indigenous communities did sell some human remains to Europeans, in many cases they were simply taken. The revelation prompted Boyd to broaden the scope of the original project to include a response to the museum’s human remains collection (“I want the wider public to question how these remains came to be in the Natural History Museum”). Conversely, creating programs to identify and facilitate the repatriation of human remains in collections is an increasingly topical issue in museum practice.

Clegg says that the issue prompted the museum to establish a program to administer repatriation requests by interested parties, a number of which have come from Australia. An unexpected outcome of Boyd’s engagement with the human remains collection was the discovery of a skull from a burial ground west of Brisbane, which Boyd says is a territory once occupied by his ancestors. He describes the discovery as one of the most challenging moments of the residency. Having been in presence of the remains, he felt obliged to do what he could to facilitate their return. This repatriation is important because, although Indigenous ceremonial funeral rites differ across Australia, Indigenous Australians share the common belief that “we don’t own the land, the land owns us, and we come from the earth only to return to the earth.” Accordingly Boyd applied to the museum to have the skull repatriated to Australia, but the museum must first confirm the skull’s provenance and accept his claim for its repatriation, with no guarantees.

Boyd’s response to this collection reflects the process of change occurring within the museum in their dealings with this highly complex and sensitive issue. To Boyd’s

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Boyd quoted in Milliard, “Daniel Boyd’s Hamlet Moment.”
74 “Tracing the Past,” video.
75 Milliard, “Daniel Boyd’s Hamlet Moment.”
76 “Tracing the Past,” video.
77 Ibid.
relief, it is a process he describes as being more respectful to the individuals in the collection. The new dialogue the museum is having concerning the repatriation of human remains is reflected in the installation of twenty-four decommissioned human remains boxes Boyd completed during his residency, which were installed in a display case in the museum’s Nature Gallery (figs. 6.22–6.23). It was a fitting location that offered the museum a unique opportunity to engage with the public on the issue. The juxtaposition of old and new boxes, many of which still had their labels attached, reflects the museum’s changing ideology and practices with regards to the collection. The labels, which are from different eras, describe the contents of the boxes and bring into focus the dehumanising anthropological practice of identifying individuals by number rather than name.

The work Boyd created in response to the First Fleet Collection was hung alongside the installation (figs. 6.24–6.25). This assemblage of appropriated images relating to Cook’s first voyage to Australia draws on a large number of Indigenous Australian portraits within the collection. Even so, the appropriation is unlike Boyd’s previous displays. Here the surface is obscured by an overlay of dots that allude to the erasure of history and memory over time and, on a more personal level, to the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices within Boyd’s family since colonisation. The pattern also recalls the tradition of Western Desert painting, to which he made similar reference years earlier through his installation of the tall ship marooned in a sea of sand. To create a dialogue between the two bodies of work, the lids and trays of the human remains boxes were used as a framing device. It is an artful way of mapping the trajectory of Australia’s colonial past. The exhibition title, The Up in Smoke Tour, takes its cue from the commercially successful hip-hop tour headlined by Dr. Dre and Snoop Dog in 2000. As explained by Duncan Grewcock, it also makes reference to the Grand Tour of Europe, a tradition that emerged in the seventeenth century designed to enlighten the young elite and give them an education in classical knowledge. Their juxtaposition is a clear indication that Boyd sees his residency as a contemporary manifestation of the tradition.

The period spent at the museum inspired Boyd to learn more about his family history. He turned his attention to the history of his paternal great-great grandfather.

78 Ibid.
Samuel Pentecost. Pentecost arrived in Australia from Pentecost Island in the late nineteenth century to work in the Queensland sugarcane fields. Pentecost Island is one of the islands that make up the nation of Vanuatu, which prior to independence was known by its colonial name, the New Hebrides. Boyd’s investigation saw him reconnect with Cook, who named the archipelago of islands on his second voyage to the Pacific in 1774. The New Hebrides series (figs. 6.26–6.31) marks Boyd’s response to this investigation. As part of the creative process, Boyd worked with archival photographs and drawings. As with his works in response to the Natural History Museum’s First Fleet Collection, the painted surface is overlaid with a “sea of pointillist glue dots” that form an image based on the archival material. Boyd has stated that the dots act as lenses that represent different perspectives and points of view on Australia’s history with Vanuatu. The dots give rise to a contradictory visual effect, one that reduces the surface quality while bringing into focus aspects and elements of the image. The reduction of the surface is clearly a visual metaphor for the erasure of history and loss of culture over time.

As well as marking his Vanuatuan heritage and paying respect to his great-great grandfather’s sacrifice, New Hebrides provides a gateway into what is arguably one of Australia’s greatest hidden histories. Between 1863 and 1904 it is estimated that 62,000 men, women and children from Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea were transported to Queensland to work in the sugarcane fields in the north of the colony, and Samuel Pentecost was one of them. The South Seas Islanders, or “Kanakas” as they are also known, were sought after by Europeans because of their perceived ability to withstand the heat and harsh conditions of north Queensland. The close proximity of the islands to Queensland made their transport possible. For many years the islanders were the backbone of the Queensland sugarcane industry. A little-known fact is that many of them were brought to Australia under false pretences and against their will, in a practice known as “blackbirding.” Some were kidnapped; others were tricked. Joyce Lea, one of the remaining first-generation South Sea Islanders, has spoken publically about her father’s ordeal after being lured onto a boat with fake jewellery. It was one of the many tricks employed to entice the islanders.

to board the boats. As soon as there were enough people on board, Lea says, their captors simply pulled up the anchor and set sail.\textsuperscript{83}

According to historian Clive Moore, an expert on the history of the South Sea Islanders, they are the only migrant group to have been removed from the country under an act of Parliament.\textsuperscript{84} The indentured labour program was brought to an end by the \textit{Immigration Restriction Act 1901}, which restricted non-European immigration to Australia. Under the powers of the \textit{Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901 (Cth)}, all but 2,500 South Sea Islanders were deported back to their country of origin.\textsuperscript{85} Many were returned home without payment of their wages, which was reportedly £6 per year and significantly lower than the wages earned by Europeans performing the same tasks.\textsuperscript{86} Moore estimates that only 15 percent of the wages were returned to workers. The remainder was kept by the Queensland government, which in 1901 passed it over to the Commonwealth Government to pay for the deportation, meaning that those brought to Australia illegally also paid for their own deportation.\textsuperscript{87} Even more dismal are figures suggesting that 30 percent of the labourers never made it home. They represent the fifteen thousand workers who died on Australian soil from lack of immunity to disease between 1863 and 1904.\textsuperscript{88} The large-scale execution of the \textit{New Hebrides} series is Boyd’s way of commanding our attention to this aspect of Australia’s past.

Despite these figures, a veil of silence remains over the history of the South Sea Islanders. It is not taught in schools, nor has it been shared with the wider community. Boyd compensates for this neglect by bringing Samuel Pentecost’s story to our attention and by underlining the significant contribution of the islanders to the Australian economy. Artist Dianne Jones makes a similar point through her work with regard to the contribution of Indigenous Australians to the Australian pastoral industry. Under the “white Australia” policy, the minority of South Sea Islanders who were given permission to remain in Australia were subject to many of the

\textsuperscript{84} Clive Moore quoted in Armbruster, “South Sea Islanders Mark Sugar ‘Slave’ Days.”
\textsuperscript{86} “South Sea Islanders Call for an Apology,” \textit{Lateline}, presented by Emma Alberici, reported by Charmaine Ingram, aired September 2, 2013, on ABC Television, transcript of television broadcast, http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2013/s3839465.htm.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
discriminatory laws that applied to Indigenous Australians living in Queensland. In other words, their “freedom” was subject to a new set of rules and regulations. That said, while Boyd’s series offers a reading of the South Sea Islanders’ history in Australia, the paintings also convey Boyd’s interests in primitivism and cultural appropriation. Visual clues reference the portrait of Pablo Picasso wearing a Native American headdress (fig. 6.30) and an abstract reference to a Vanuatuan object Matisse bequeathed to Picasso (fig. 6.31). Notwithstanding, the history of the South Sea Islanders is representative of the power structures that operate in society and maintain the divide between the coloniser and colonised, ideas of which recur in the work of Brook Andrew.

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89 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Brook Andrew was born in Sydney in 1970, and he currently resides in Melbourne. Andrew is a descendant of the Wiradjuri people of central New South Wales. References to his cultural heritage recur throughout his practice, although his work is notable for its global context and dialogue with indigenous people and minority groups elsewhere in the world. Contrary to the experience of artists in remote areas, who typically receive instruction from Elders and family members, Andrew is one of the many artists of Indigenous heritage working outside remote Australia who received formal art training at university. In 1993, he graduated from the University of Western Sydney with a Bachelor of Visual Arts. A master’s degree from the College of Fine Arts (now UNSW Art & Design), University of New South Wales, followed in 1999. Since completing his formal art training, Andrew has received numerous awards, residencies, grants and fellowships. He has an extensive exhibition history, both in Australia and abroad. Outside of his art practice, Andrew works as a curator and lecturer, and he has also been an active voice in the discourse and debate on Indigenous Australian art.

Andrew describes himself as an interdisciplinary artist. His work is conceptually driven, spanning photomedia, installation, mixed media, printmaking, video and neon. Australian artists Fred Williams and Tracey Moffatt and French-American artist Louise Bourgeois were influential on the development of his practice. Later influences include the work of internationally renowned artists Gerhard Richter, Oscar Munoz, Christian Boltanski and Marcelo Brodsky. The influence of Richter is evident in Andrew’s frequent use of archival imagery, while that of Munoz is reflected in his use

of unorthodox photographic and printing techniques. Boltanski’s portraits of Second World War Holocaust victims and Brodsky’s photographic essays of the disappeared people of Argentina echo his concern for hidden histories and invisibility. Andrew follows their lead by making visible the lives and histories of those who have been forgotten, often with an Indigenous Australian context in mind. With the connections between cultures becoming ever stronger, however, he frequently looks beyond the Australian experience, situating his work in a global context.

As with Ah Kee, Russian Constructivism is a notable influence on Andrew’s work. He draws on its ideology as well as its aesthetic. As we have seen, the constructivists rejected the notion of “art for art’s sake” and insisted that art practice be directed towards social change. The constructivists’ use of symbolic colours and geometric elements are also reflected in Andrew’s work. Op art, a form of abstract art that creates the impression of movement on a surface by means of an optical illusion, also influences his practice. For evidence we need look no further than the black-and-white Wiradjuri design that recurs throughout Andrew’s practice. The design originates from dendroglyphs, or tree carvings that Wiradjuri people used to mark the burial site of an important person from their community. Andrew also uses the design practically, as a marker of his cultural heritage and as the filter through which he says he views the world. His adoption of the colour palette of the Union Jack’s red, white and blue is in line with the constructivists’ use of symbolic colours. It situates his work within a postcolonial framework and represents the power structures operating within society.

Andrew came to the art world’s attention in 1998 when he won the prestigious Kate Challis RAKA Award for Sexy and Dangerous (fig. 7.1). The 1996 work is a digitally altered portrait of an Indigenous Australian Chief from Barron River in Queensland. Well-known Australian photographer Charles Kerry took the photograph on which the work is based in the late nineteenth century (fig. 7.2). Kerry was the proprietor of the commercially successful studio Kerry & Co., based in Sydney. The portraits they took of Indigenous Australians, particularly those taken in the studio, are notable for their romantic and often fanciful undertones. Hence, Andrew’s

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4 Op art is also referred to as “optical art” and “perceptual abstraction.”
appropriation of Kerry’s image plays with the idea of the “noble savage.” Andrew has stated that it also subverts the “setters’ idea” of what an Indigenous Australian is meant to look like, which he suggests corresponds with “the guy on the back of the $2 coin.”

Despite launching his career, including acquisition by the National Gallery of Victoria, the prize-winning work was controversial. The debate centred over Andrew’s alleged ignorance of the protocols involved with working with ethnographic material. His contention that he was “just a young artist looking into his history and Australia’s engagement with the Asia-Pacific region” did little to silence the critics.

Andrew later conceded that he got the cultural protocol wrong by failing to obtain permission from the relevant Indigenous community to use the image in his work. Although this can be easier said than done, the issue cannot be ignored because of the cultural sensitivity assigned to images of deceased persons and to others unsuitable for general viewing for cultural reasons. Andrew’s admission nevertheless echoes current art world debate about the cultural ethics of using ethnographic imagery in contemporary art practice. Of course, cultural sensitivity is not the only issue at hand; as art historian Kate Mac Neill writes, “the archive is dangerous territory as the images therein form an integral component of the project of colonialism itself.”

One of the key arguments in the debate is that the use of ethnographic imagery in contemporary art practice simply reinforces stereotypes and notions of primitivism. This view is not held by Andrew or by the many other artists (such as Vernon Ah Kee and Christian Thompson) who also work with such archives.

In defence of his use of such images, Andrew has stated:

In the mid-1990s many Aboriginal people, like myself, were looking to subvert these past representations and create positive outcomes even though we were still working out protocols in relation to different kinds of representation and different circumstances. It’s a disputed area ... there has been community debate and support surrounding these issues since artists like Tracey Moffatt, Rea,

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10 “Brook Andrew,” Message Stick.
Leah King-Smith and Gordon Bennett began representing the archive … and some have changed their positions on this matter. It may never be truly resolved because of people having quite different and changing opinions.12

The potential of the archive to offer positive outcomes should not be overlooked in the debate, nor should the entry points it offers into readings of Australia’s shared history and Indigenous past. This matter is of particular importance to Indigenous Australians and to Indigenous artists, because their history is incomplete and is still being discovered, told and represented. By tapping into this resource, Andrew and his contemporaries can play an active role in the dissemination of this history. Likewise, as Martin Jolly has observed, the archive has agency as a “two-way corridor through time” in which its reuse in contemporary art creates an active dialogue with the past, as well as with the subject(s) therein.13

Jolly cites Tracey Moffatt’s 1986 photographic series *Some Lads*, which is in dialogue with J. W. Lindt’s photographs, as an early example of the reuse of Indigenous archival imagery in contemporary Australian art.14 But in contrast to *Sexy and Dangerous*, in which the archive is re-presented in the work, Moffatt implies its use but does not incorporate it as a visual element. Moffatt’s approach is not uncommon, in that many artists engage with the archive but also choose not to re-present it in their work (e.g., Christian Thompson). While it is true that archival imagery dominates Andrew’s practice, his engagement with it has various outcomes. A suite of large-scale portraits he produced between 2002 and 2003 under the title *Kalar Midday* comes to mind (figs. 7.3–7.6 and 7.9–7.10). The series constitutes a dialogue with stereotypical representations of Indigenous Australians in the archive. In this body of work, however, its subjects are contemporary. Andrew has stated that the images are an attempt to re-imagine “blackness” and to redress the perception of Aboriginal people as an “ugly race.”15 A broader aim was to tell a different story about Indigenous Australians, one Andrew believes non-Indigenous Australians do not know or understand.16

12 Andrew quoted in Murray Cree, “Brook Andrew,” 55.
14 Ibid., 75.
The photographs are a celebration of beauty and human form (or, as Marcia Langton puts it: “an expression of love, sexual longing and superb physical beauty”\textsuperscript{17}). They bring to mind Bill Henson’s heady portraits of adolescence. The landscape, the moonlit night sky and the subject’s state of undress are common elements. Links can also be made with Michael Riley’s sultry black-and-white portraits of Maria (Polly) Cutmore, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Cutmore and Kristina Nehm taken in the mid-1980s. Riley’s objective, which is shared by Andrew, was to recast the Indigenous subject in a different light,\textsuperscript{18} and his photographic work also contains subtle references to the archive. In the \textit{Kalar Midday} series, the first four images are of Andrew’s subjects lurking in the shadows of the night (Tina Corowa, Miriam Corowa and Gary Lang, all of whom are Indigenous Australian). Andrew has stated that he approached the series with a clear mandate and strived to convey a “heartfelt beauty” rather than one that was “sexy or pretty.”\textsuperscript{19} The resulting images are indeed elegant and refined, and they are in keeping with Andrew’s objective to present Indigeneity in a new light.

Andrew had fashion photographer Tim Richardson take the images of Tina, Miriam and Gary. They were shot in a studio and then digitally composited onto landscape photographs Andrew had taken at Sydney’s Centennial Park and Royal Botanic Gardens. Andrew has said that he wanted to “pull out the romantic sensualism” of the landscape but to approach it from an urban position.\textsuperscript{20} This purpose is presumably to reflect the lived experience of the majority of Indigenous Australians whose lives play out in the towns and cities of Australia. To return to an earlier point, the trio’s positioning in an ethereal dreamscape and their recontextualisation via an Indigenous lens displaces their depiction in the archive. Andrew literally and metaphorically moves them out of the shadows of Australia’s colonial past and away from the colonisers’ one-sided gaze to a space where their visibility empowers them. The series title, which in English means “land of three rivers,” recalls a place in Wiradjuri country that belongs to Andrew’s mother. It is a thoughtful way of reinstating an Indigenous presence in the landscape and of reaffirming his ongoing connection to country.

\textit{Narcissus} (fig. 7.6), the mirrored image of Gary, draws inspiration from a sixteenth-century oil painting of the same name by Italian Baroque artist Michelangelo Merisi da

\textsuperscript{17} Langton, “The Space of Dreams,” n.p.
\textsuperscript{19} Andrew in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 36.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Caravaggio (fig. 7.7). The painting has its roots in a Greco-Roman myth that tells of a handsome young man who fell in love with his own reflection and died tragically as a result. Andrew has stated that he was influenced by Caravaggio’s work at the time, and he replicated his dramatic use of light and Narcissus’ mirrored form.\(^{21}\) Andrew’s own use of mirroring dates back to 1997 with I Split Your Gaze (fig. 7.8). Links can also be made between Gary’s nudity and Caravaggio’s frequent and often full-frontal representations of the male nude. Although subtler, Andrew’s representation of Gary nevertheless celebrates an ideal human physique as represented by an Indigenous man. Not surprisingly, one of Caravaggio’s greatest strengths (a talent clearly shared by Andrew) was his ability to “bring beauty to subjects that were commonly dismissed.”\(^{22}\) That aside, the images of Gary, Tina and Miriam undoubtedly disrupt and challenge the stereotypical representations of Indigenous Australians in the archive. The work’s urban setting also creates a new forum for representation that broadens the narrative of contemporary Indigenous experience.

*Ignoratia* (fig. 7.9) and *Tensio (Currawongs and Snake)* (fig. 7.10), the two other works in the series, are also presented in mirrored form. *Tensio* won Andrew the “Works on Paper” prize at the 2004 National Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award. In these two images, the human form is replaced with taxidermy specimens of native Australian fauna: a kookaburra, currawong and coiled snake. The specimens are from the Australian Museum’s Education Collection, and in keeping with the other works in the series, they have been restaged in black space and illuminated with light. Andrew describes the museum exhibits as “soft” reference to the Indigenous bodies in museums in Australia and abroad.\(^{23}\) Another interpretation is that they comment on collecting cultures, more specifically, on the pillaging of Indigenous material culture and human remains. By removing the animals from the museum diorama, Andrew restores their totemic status and liberates them from the world of ethnography and scientific curiosity.\(^{24}\) The kookaburras’ “back to back” positioning creates a metaphor for the ignorance Andrew says Australians tend to have of each other’s perspectives.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{21}\) Ibid.


\(^{24}\) All three animals are represented in Indigenous Australian mythology.

The sentiment is reflected in the title *Ignoratia* or “ignorance.” *Tensio*, which also has a Latin root, hints at the ongoing tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The male form is again central in Andrew’s *Peace, the Man and Hope* (fig. 7.11), which celebrates Indigenous achievement in sport through the prowess of Wiradjuri/Bundjalung sports star Anthony Mundine. From Albert’s work we know that Mundine’s achievement is not unique, and that he is one of a growing number of Indigenous Australians who have risen to the top of their chosen sports. (Cathy Freeman and Nova Peris are two other examples.) Mundine is a former Australian rugby league player turned world champion boxer. He was the Indigenous Australian of the Year in 2000, and he won the Deadly Award for Male Sportsperson of the Year in 2003, 2006 and 2007. Contrary to his characterisation as a polarising and controversial figure, Mundine is a cultural hero and aspirational figure for many Indigenous Australians, in particular the youth. Like Winmar, Inglis and Goodes, he has also been racially vilified on the Australian sporting field. In 1998, former league player Barry Ward was fined $10,000 for calling Mundine a “black cunt,” the same term Andrew Johns used to describe Greg Inglis.

Andrew’s aspirational image of the athlete was made with the assistance of master printer Larry Rawlings. Andrew heralds Mundine as the “posterboy” for Indigenous achievement, a depiction at the other extreme of his characterisation in the media as one of “the most polarizing athletes in Australia.” The aesthetic is vastly different from *Kalar Midday*, as the fluid lines give way to geometric forms and the sombre tones to a colourful palette. This palette represents both Mundine’s Wiradjuri heritage, which he shares with Andrew, and Australia’s shared history and colonial past. The contemporary use of the black-and-white Wiradjuri design, which recurs throughout Andrew’s practice, reminds us that Indigenous culture is not static, but continues to manifest in new and interesting ways. Andrew says that it is also a metaphor for what

26 The Deadlys are an annual award that celebrates Indigenous achievement in music, sport, entertainment and community related activity.
we “may not see.” 29 By this he refers to a different history or perspective on the past in relation to Australia’s shared history. 30 This double perspective is also reflected in the Wiradjuri text on the banners cascading from Mundine’s outstretched arms, which read ngajuu ngaay nginduugirr (“I see you”) and nginduugirr ngaay ngajuu (“you see me”) and are executed in the colours of the Aboriginal flag (i.e., the colonised) and the Union Jack (the coloniser). Andrew’s deployment of the Wiradjuri language is, however, more than just a symbolic gesture. As noted by Wendy Garden, language has been a significant instrument of Empire and there were many attempts to exterminate Indigenous languages. 31 Its presence in Andrew’s work is thus a powerful assertion of the survival of the Wiradjuri language and culture in the colonial encounter.

Mundine’s pose and the banners offer further evidence of the influence of Constructivism on Andrew’s practice. That being said, he has stated that rather than being overtly political or “sloganistic,” he prefers a more subtle approach towards the expression of his thoughts and ideas. 32 The cigarette packets overlaid on the banners direct viewers’ attention away from Mundine. Hope and Pease are popular cigarette brands in Japan, and arts writer Ashley Rawlings says they represent a loose reference to Australia and Japan’s support of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. 33 Australia sent troops to Iraq and Japan provided non-combative logistical support to the U.S. military there (contrary to its post-Second World War pacifist constitution, in which it renounced war as a means to settle international disputes). 34 The issue was topical when Andrew was making the work. According to Penny Creswell, the cigarettes also have meaning as one of the “clichés that forms part of the iconography of the American solider in television and film.” 35 Creswell adds that “hope” and “peace” are war-related terms, and are therefore consistent with the underlying theme of warfare. 36

Often overlooked in readings of Peace, the Man and Hope is the proud history and tradition of Indigenous boxing from which Mundine comes. The careers of Lionel Rose, Francis Roberts, George Bracken, Jack Hassen and Wally Carr come to

30 Ibid.
32 Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 114.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
mind. Mundine’s father, Tony, is also a former champion boxer. Many of these boxers got their start in travelling circuses that toured agricultural shows, carnivals and rodeos around Australia, a tradition that emerged in 1900 as boxing became a legal sport. As Richard Broome notes, the troupes were “an important nursery for both boxers and fans.” The Sharman troupe, run by showman Jimmy Sharman and his namesake son, is one of the most well known. During the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Protection era, sport offered Indigenous men a way out of the reserves and the country towns where they faced discrimination. Some, like Bracken, won titles and forged a career in boxing; for others it was simply a much-needed source of income. While it was certainly one of the few avenues for Indigenous men to earn money, boxing was arguably one of the few platforms through which they were able to gain the respect of non-Indigenous Australians and to become role models to their own people. Indeed, Rose looked up to Bracken, and Bracken to Hassen. It is clear that a new generation now looks to Mundine.

By the mid-2000s, Andrew’s practice had begun to move into a more global space, and parallels between and references to the experiences of indigenous people and minorities elsewhere in the world became an increasingly visible aspect of his practice. An early example is Interviews (figs. 7.12–7.14), a thirty-eight minute video installation from 2006. This experimental work is based on a series of interviews Andrew conducted in Australia, China, Europe and South America, and the interviewees were from myriad socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One was an Argentinian woman called Rosa, whose child “disappeared” under the country’s military dictatorship in the mid-1970s, bringing to mind the fate of the Stolen Generation. Andrew asked the interviewees a series of uniform questions about race and colour, such as “have you ever wanted to be black or white?”; “do you see the world as a black and white experience?”; “what is your cultural identity?” and “have you ever fantasised about

having a different cultural or physical identity?”. He says the idea was to see how people from different cultural backgrounds translate these terms. The answers were unpredictable and diverse. What Andrew found interesting was the way that terms such as “black” or “white,” which he says are racially charged in Australia, had different connotations elsewhere in the world.

When a Chinese woman was asked if she had ever wanted to be black, she playfully announced that she did, because she wanted to be “dangerous”. What struck Andrew about the woman’s answer was that she did not see the question as being about skin colour. Similarly, while some interviewees said that they saw the world as predominantly white, others said they saw it as varying shades of grey. As art historian Anthony Gardner comments, while the work demonstrates connections between their stories, experiences and histories, the interviewee’s responses hint at the way human experience is “multi-coloured and perpetually re-framed through personal and collective memories.”

Contrary to the homogenising effect of globalisation and the ensuing standardisation of human experience, the perspectives and concerns of the individual remain unmediated and diverse. The task for the viewer, of course, is to make the connections between the interviewee’s experiences, perspectives and concerns.

The archive reappears in Gun Metal Grey (figs. 7.15–7.22), a series of large-scale prints based on archival photographs of Indigenous Australians held in the collections of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London and Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. Andrew is no stranger to these institutions: he has been studying their photographic collections since 1995. The images, which are closely cropped headshots, were taken in the late nineteenth century, and they reveal the shock and trauma of a people on the precipice of violent, unbelievable change. Andrew refers to them as images of “disappeared Aboriginal people” and has stated that they reminded him of the countless portraits he has seen in Jewish museums and in footage

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45 Andrew quoted in Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 114.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
50 Andrew quoted in Murray Cree, “Brook Andrew,” 56.
of the rallies for the disappeared in South America. Rawlings’ description of them as “ghostly encounters with people who were documented for the construction of history and yet remained completely anonymous” is fitting. Their anonymity is largely due to the lack of information on the original images, which makes it difficult or impossible for museums to identify the subjects (one of the unfortunate legacies of ethnographic documentation). Indeed, the issue is compounded by the fact that archival imagery can disrupt the narratives a nation tells its people about the past.

The “ghostly encounters” Rawlings speaks of relate to the printing technique Andrew developed alongside Scottish, Melbourne-based master printer Stewart Russell. As we have seen, Andrew frequently summons the expertise of other artists. The technique was inspired by Latin American artist Oscar Munoz’s artistic investigations of the hidden histories of the disappeared peoples of Columbia, which parallels for Andrew the experience of Indigenous Australians. Andrew and Russell tasked themselves with creating a light-sensitive surface that gave the illusion of the image appearing and then disappearing as the viewer moved passed the work. After months of experimentation with different mediums and materials, they settled on a process that involved heat setting metallic paper (foil) onto cotton. As with the charcoal portraits Ah Kee produced from archival images in the Tindale Collection, the source images have been enlarged. Nicholas Thomas, who has written about Andrew’s engagement with the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology’s Indigenous collection, outlines the resulting advantages of scale:

Scale says that an image is not just an image, but something seen and felt by a person, who is affected in a different way by a snapshot the size of a postcard, and a work that is not flat but palpable, perhaps close to your or my own height, confronting us on a wall.

Andrew’s use of scale is also a means of amplifying and making visible the history that the images represent, which explains why Andrew describes the works as memorials.

52 Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 115.
Contrary to their place in the archive, where they are shielded from public consciousness, as memorials they are a public and personal reminder of this history.

One of Andrew’s most recognised series, *The Island* (figs. 7.23–7.28) takes us deeper into the archive, with a set of drawings produced by German-born zoologist Gerard Krefft in the mid-nineteenth century capturing his imagination. In 1856, Krefft had accompanied Prussian naturalist William Blandowski\(^{56}\) on an expedition to the Lower Murray and Darling Rivers in southeast Australia with the purpose of collecting indigenous flora and fauna. With the assistance of the Nyeri Nyeri, the Indigenous people from the area now known as Mildura, they collected twenty-eight boxes containing more than 17,400 specimens.\(^{57}\) In addition to his assigned scientific role, Krefft documented the activities and ceremonies of the Indigenous Australians they encountered along the way. On completion of the expedition, Blandowski returned to Germany with Krefft’s photographs and drawings and began working on a visual encyclopaedia of Australia. To assist with the project he engaged German illustrator Gustav Mützel, whose resplendent illustrations of mammals and birds made him an ideal colleague. Mützel’s task was to rework Krefft’s material into a set of engravings for inclusion in the encyclopaedia.

Blandowski’s failure to secure financial backing for publication was a major setback. Determined to see the project come to fruition, he scaled it down and financed an album of fifty-two pages titled *Australien in 142 Photographischen Abbildungen*. It is not known how many copies Blandowski was able to produce: the only known ones are held at the Staatsbibliothek (Berlin State Library) in Germany and Haddon Library at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom.\(^{58}\) Andrew discovered a photographic copy of the album while researching portraits of Indigenous Australians at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in 2007. He says he was struck immediately by the spectacle and absurdity of Mützel’s illustrations.\(^{59}\) Here Andrew refers to the way the images reflect the fantasies through which many nineteenth-century imagists viewed Australian landscape and its inhabitants. After viewing the selection of images Andrew

\(^{56}\) He is also known by his birth name Johann Wilhelm Theodor Ludwig von Blandowski.


\(^{59}\) Andrew quoted in Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 115.
reproduced for the series, it is hard to find fault with his description of them as “a collection of science fiction renditions of an imagined place.”60 By his own admission, the selection represents those that appealed most to Andrew’s imagination.61

The historical importance of Blandowski’s album as a visual record of the Nyeri Nyeri’s material culture and cultural practices, and of some of their first encounters with Europeans, is clouded by uncertainty over the extent to which Mützel’s illustrations are real or imagined. The sentiment is echoed by Thomas, who writes: “many of the images may well be accurate visual records, but others are twice or three times removed from field sketches that were perhaps themselves imaginative, even falsified or fantastic.”62 The use of scale highlights the absurdity of Mützel’s illustrations. Through showing them publicly, Andrew invites us to consider their reliability as a visual record and as a sincere representation of the Nyeri Nyeri people and their cultural life. The printing technique Andrew used for the Gun Metal Grey series was re-employed. A key difference, however, is that the new works were made in red, white and blue — the colours of Empire. This choice is indeed puzzling, because Blandowski, Krefft and Mützel had ties to Germany rather than Britain. Perhaps Andrew is drawing on Blandowski’s association with the Natural History Museum in Melbourne (now known as Museum Victoria) and his role in advancing the Empire through his scientific endeavours and contributions to the institution. That being the case, the colours hint at the colonial lens inherent in Blandowski’s album.

The “science fiction” Andrew speaks of is plain to see in The Island I (fig. 7.23) and The Island II (fig. 7.24). The dendroglyphs, concentric circles and perfectly domed burial mounds conjure up a surreal and paranormal world. Alien-like creatures with white bulbous heads huddle together in a makeshift shelter in The Island III (fig. 7.25). Close examination of Blandowski’s album reveals that Mützel’s illustrations were not the only thing riddled with science fiction and fantasy. Blandowski’s accompanying text makes all sorts of wild and exaggerated claims. One of the most extraordinary notates Plate 139, the illustration of a Godzilla-like kangaroo fighting off a pack of wild dogs that Andrew re-presents as The Island V (fig. 7.27). The text reads:

61 Andrew, “The Island.”
62 Thomas, “The Island Catalogue.”
The kangaroo is publicly known as harmless, this is a misconception. Many, even very strong dogs, die during the kangaroo hunt. Others have shattered shoulders and do not care to go near a kangaroo again, least of all near the old male kangaroo named ‘Boomerang’, who knows how to keep a whole pack of dogs at bay. Humans have to watch out for him as well, for it has happened on occasion that a kangaroo had grabbed a person, carried him to the nearest water and held him under the surface until he believes the person has drowned.63

Kangaroos have been known to attack humans and other animals when cornered or provoked, but clearly an element of mythmaking is at play here. Through his recontextualisation of Blandowski’s album, Andrew not only challenges the accuracy of these records, but also directs our attention to the filters through which Blandowski and others like him recast the lives of Indigenous Australians and determine who and what we see.

Further illustrating his concern for global issues is Andrew’s 2009 series Danger of Authority (figs. 7.29–7.35), created during a six-month residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York. Three different printing techniques were used to produce its twelve works: two woodcuts, three screen-prints and seven lithographs. The format of newspaper headlines superimposed over interior home-décor images of stately homes in England and the United States is common to each work. The newspaper headlines are from 2009 editions of the New York Times and Los Angeles Times and the images from a discarded archive of architectural and interior magazines the artist found in a thrift store in New York.64 Arts writer Kirsten Rann states that the juxtaposition of the two is “underpinned by a blend of semiotics and postcolonial theory.”65 Here Rann refers to the way the juxtaposition offers a critique of white, middle-class America and underlines persistent prejudices and attitudes introduced during colonialism.66

The series title was inspired by a lecture delivered by Justice Anthony North at the University of Melbourne’s Institute of Post Colonial Studies in 2009, in which he spoke

64 Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 110.
of the dangerous power of deciding another person’s fate. It also hints at the way people both suspect and desire power. Another interpretation is that the title underlines the conflict between those who, according to Rann, “crave influence and those that are locked out of the world of taste and opinion-makers.”

An extension of this perspective is the implied dislocation between those responsible for conflict and those who are victims of it. The series reflects Andrew’s interest in power worship and capitalism, and the way he says it has become “quite obsessive in human nature — even in how we conduct war.”

The newspaper headlines, in which the relationship between conflict and power and the complexities of global politics are recurring narratives, offer evidence of his claim. Ideas of power worship and capitalism are also reflected in the stately interiors, which allude to the growing divide between rich and poor and, as Rann suggests, extends to “the way the lifestyle and comforts of some, are protected to the detriment and misfortune of others.”

Through the work How Did Obama Win over White, Blue-Collar Levittown? (fig. 7.29), Andrew points to the historic political shift that saw voters of Levittown, a predominantly white suburb in the state of Pennsylvania, vote in favour of the Democratic candidate Barak Obama in the 2008 U. S. presidential election. This shift was remarkable for two reasons: the first relating to the town’s history and the second to its demographic at the time. Levittown was built in the shadows of a giant steel plant in the 1950s. Established as a “planned community” and promoted as an affordable modern suburb for American families, it was not open to all, as Andrew discovered. Developers Levitt & Sons initially refused to sell to African Americans, leading to the community becoming a “white” enclave. (Parallels can be drawn with Australia’s own history of racial segregation. As we have seen, under the White Australia policy, Indigenous Australians were confined to missions and reserves and in some places were prohibited access to public amenities such as swimming pools, town halls and movie theatres.) Since the 1950s, there has been only a slight shift in the Levittown demographic. Moreover, at the time of the 2008 election, only 2 percent identified as African American of the estimated 54,000 people living there. Few would have

67 Justice North has served as a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia since 1995.
68 Rann, “Brook Andrew,” 67.
69 Andrew quoted in Murray Cree, “Brook Andrew,” 52.
70 Rann, “Brook Andrew,” 67.
predicted that the town’s residents would have helped elevate a black man to the highest office in the country, regardless of his political persuasion.

The war in Iraq, which dominated news headlines at the time, is the subject of *Legions of War Widows Face Dire Need in Iraq* (fig. 7.30) and *Iraq Museum, Far from Whole, Reopens Six Years after Looting* (fig. 7.33). The latter recalls the looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad following the U. S.–led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The museum estimates the loss to be approximately 15,000 objects, some of which were precious relics more than 7,000 years old — making it one of the largest museum thefts in history.\(^2\) To date, only one quarter of the items have been retrieved. Of course, links can be made with the pillaging of Indigenous material culture, which Albert and Boyd brought to our attention. Like many of the works in Andrew’s series, war and conflict is at the centre of *Iraq Museum, Far From Whole, Reopens Six Years After Looting*. It also points to the irony of the museum’s refurbishment and reopening in 2009 being made possible with the financial assistance of the United States. This aid included a fourteen million dollar grant announced by Laura Bush, the former First Lady and wife of George W. Bush, the President at the time of the invasion. (The news headline that appears in the work came from an article outlining the details of the grant.\(^3\))

For many, this grant and the financial support offered by the United States to assist with the reopening of the museum illustrates the hypocrisy of those who express concern but who are part of the problem. These are the people who reside in the opulent, stately homes that form the backdrop of each work in the series. As Rann has written:

“America is a country where success and status are often asserted through philanthropy, charity, fund-raising and other do-good, feel good enterprises.”\(^4\) Other works in the series are in dialogue with the world of geo-politics, of which Australia is a key player. Although not directly expressed in the series, it can also be interpreted as a critique of media ownership and of the filters through which news is relayed and history is told and retold. This issue of filters is particularly true of countries with censorship or a high concentration of state-owned media. We have seen that even in Australia, privately owned media can also be problematic if the market lacks a plurality of voices. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Andrew believes all power is abused, or that news


\(^4\) Rann, “Brook Andrew,” 67.
reportage is routinely biased. He is simply making the point that the dissemination of truth “rests on what is convenient for one authority but not another,” and in order to find truth we must learn to read between the lines.\textsuperscript{75}

In 2010, Andrew was invited to present work at the 17th Biennale of Sydney. He responded with an eye-catching, inflatable children’s jumping castle known as \textit{Jumping Castle War Memorial} (fig. 7.36). This highly ambitious and experimental work was commissioned by Detached (Hobart) and the University of Queensland Art Museum in association with Urban Art Projects in Brisbane. Andrew’s trademark black-and-white, geometric Wiradjuri design dominates the surface. Rising from within is a heroic black figure standing upright with arms outstretched. The figure bears the influence of Chinese and Soviet communist sculpture and draws on the depiction of the human form in classical sculpture,\textsuperscript{76} and there are clear links with the \textit{Kalar Midday} series. Andrew would later come across an archive of images of the Stolen Generation children doing repetitive physical exercises like those seen in Communist China, which has seen the figure take on new meaning.\textsuperscript{77} The replica human skulls in the castle’s turrets recall the fate of Indigenous warriors such as Pemulwuy and Wyndradine, a Wiradjuri man who fought for the rights of his people until his death in 1829.\textsuperscript{78} As we have seen, the fate of Indigenous resistance fighters recurs in the work of many Indigenous Australian artists. The inclusion of skulls also recalls the macabre colonial pastime of collecting human remains as trophies and for scientific gain, which evidently places them in dialogue with collecting cultures.

\textit{Jumping Castle War Memorial} is the first of Andrew’s works designed for physical engagement, and it allows the audience to assume a performative role as part of its narrative. Through the work’s title we learn that there is more to the castle than its playful exterior and the underlying references to Indigenous resistance fighters and collecting cultures. The work is intended as a memorial to commemorate the loss of Indigenous life through the processes of colonisation, and it draws on the history of

\textsuperscript{75} Brook Andrew in conversation with \textit{Art Asia Pacific} in February 2008, quoted in Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 112.
\textsuperscript{76} Andrew quoted in Murray Cree, “Brook Andrew,” 52.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. The images are part of the A. O. Neville collection in the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia.
memorial sites such as Auschwitz in Poland and the Killing Fields in Cambodia. 

Andrew has stated that the work is also intended for people elsewhere in the world who have no war memorial to recall their history, such as victims of genocide, diaspora or repression. What distinguishes Andrew’s inflatable memorial from sites such as Auschwitz is its temporality, which is Andrew’s point. Memorials are not temporary fixtures but are a permanent acknowledgement of the past and a place people can visit to heal and learn about it. Hence, Andrew questions why places such as the Kinchela Aboriginal Boys’ Training Home and the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal girls, both of which are located in country in New South Wales, have not be re-established as museums for these exact same reasons.

Between 1923 and 1970, hundreds of Indigenous boys were forcibly removed from their families under the Aborigines Protection Act (1909) and placed in Kinchella Aboriginal Boys’ Training Home. They were classed as wards of the State and received training as agricultural labourers until they were old enough to work. Although they had been sent to Kinchella for their “protection,” beatings were common, and cases of sexual abuse have been well documented. To promote their successful assimilation into white Australian society, the boys were required to deny their Indigenous cultural heritage and forbidden to speak their own language. Conditions were no much better at the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, which between 1913 and 1974 housed approximately 1,200 girls. As was the case with the Kinchella boys, many of the girls were forcibly removed from their families and became targets of physical and sexual abuse. For those who arrived as babies, Cootamundra was the only home had they had ever known. Now women, they are among those called the “Stolen Generation.”

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80 Ibid.
81 Andrew quoted in Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 117.
From Andrew’s perspective, the two places are no less significant than equivalent memorial sites elsewhere in the world. Likewise, he is right to emphasize that memorials have dual functions as important sites of remembrance and as places where people can come together to engage with and learn about the past. *Jumping Castle War Memorial* fulfils this obligation, even if Andrew has broken with convention and attracted people to it with a promise of fun. In fact, the allure was so great that shortly after it was installed on Cockatoo Island as part of the Biennale of Sydney, the work became so popular that Andrew had to stop people from jumping on it because it was getting ruined. This happened despite the facts that a) access to the work was restricted to people older than sixteen, the age Andrew believes people begin to form their political consciousness, and b) he had left it up to the individual to decide how he or she wanted to engage with it. For some, choosing involved a moral/ethical dilemma, while others were simply unaware of the contradiction at play. Either way, the desired outcome was to make people more conscious of the choices they make.

Even though Andrew’s plan was thwarted, he says the decision to stop people jumping on the work ended up having a positive outcome because it made people more aware of the tension inherent in it being a war memorial in the form of a children’s jumping castle. Granted, a year later he conceded that in hindsight (and in keeping with the experimental nature of the work) that it might have been better to let the project go on unmediated: “it’s an interesting concept in a way to really let it go and be destroyed, particularly because there is also an underlying tension between it being a precious art object, and the artworld being about precious objects.” Had this been the case, the damaged work (which Andrew says would be “trying to lift itself up but can’t”) could then take on meaning as a visual metaphor that articulates Indigenous Australia’s struggle to overcome the history and legacy of colonisation. On the other hand, its preservation and portability means that it can be packed away, moved on and set up elsewhere. Yet as curator Wayne Tunnicliffe argues, “the point of a memorial is that it

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85 Andrew quoted in Rawlings, “Brook Andrew,” 117.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Andrew in conversation with Tunnicliffe, *Brook Andrew*, 25.
89 Ibid.
91 “Brook Andrew’s Jumping Castle War Memorial,” video.
92 “Brook Andrew at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2011,” video.
is permanent and suspends time.”\(^93\) This, of course, is the irony of Andrew’s makeshift memorial, which proved to be neither fixed nor durable.

Andrew’s other inflatable work, *The Cell* (figs. 7.37–7.38) emerged later that year. Commissioned by the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, it is a large cell, or room as it is also described, measuring twelve by six by three metres. Like *Jumping Castle War Memorial*, the work is experimental and is designed for physical engagement. Its exterior is dominated by a red-and-white geometric pattern, and the interior displays Andrew’s signature black-and-white Wiradjuri design. The geometric pattern shows the influence of twentieth-century Russian communist agitprop graphics, and (according to Tunnicliffe), it also reflects Andrew’s interest in high-modernist abstract paintings.\(^{94}\) Associated with socialism and communism, red signifies the conceptual underpinnings of the work. As with the previous piece, the title is at odds with its playful exterior. *The Cell* renders ideas of incarceration, the concept and understanding of which will be mediated through the viewer’s own experiences. For example, while one person might associate it with the disproportionate rate of Indigenous incarceration in Australia (as underlined by Ah Kee and Albert), others might reference the contemporary issue of asylum seekers or even the internment of the mentally ill.

Before entering the cell, participants are asked to don a patterned, hooded jumpsuit made of tyvek. These come in a range of colours and feature the same geometric design that dominates the cell’s interior and are the kind of jumpsuits worn by forensic scientists working on crime scenes and by prisoners at Guantanamo Bay — to which there is an Australian connection through former detainee David Hicks. While they certainly carry those connotations, Andrew has stated that the idea for the jumpsuits came from a less sinister place: the traditional Carnival of Venice, an annual festival where people of all ages and walks of life dress up in costume and come together in celebration.\(^{95}\) The costume strips away the individual’s identity, which he says “makes it difficult to tell if they’re rich or they’re poor, or what culture they are.”\(^{96}\) The same is true of the jumpsuits: they conceal wearers’ identities and render them anonymous, leaving them free to experience the cell in whatever way they choose. As Gardner has

\(^{93}\) Andrew in conversation with Tunnicliffe, *Brook Andrew*, 26.


\(^{96}\) Ibid.
written, the question here is whether they will see it as a liberating or constraining experience, or both. The jumpsuits can also be thought of as a skin participants don to step into the world of an inmate or asylum seeker and channel their experience, albeit temporarily.

Although the jumpsuits come in a range of colours, the uniformity of the style and pattern mirrors the collective identity assigned to inmates and asylum seekers detained in Australia and held in offshore immigration facilities such as those on Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. This forced uniformity extends to the homogenisation of Indigenous Australian identity or, as Andrew refers to it, “the colonial idea of what an Aboriginal person looks like.” Of course, collective identity can function in both a positive and negative way. It can offer individuals a sense of belonging and solidarity, but it can also impede their right to be recognised as individuals, leading to stereotyping and false characterisation. As we have seen in Australia and elsewhere, the notion of asylum has become muddied and an individual’s right to it has been suffocated by fear-mongering and the rhetoric surrounding the issue. The tenor of the debate within government and in media dialogues does little to render public sympathy for the asylum-seekers’ cause. As Andrew has stated, “we don’t really understand what it’s like unless we have experience through family or friends.” By giving us the opportunity to become inmates or asylum seekers in his cell, Andrew breaks down the barriers that impede understanding of their lived experience and prevent us from thinking of them in a more humanistic way.

In 2011, Andrew brought together his vast collection of ethnographic photographs and curio postcards with imagery of indigenous people from around the world for an exhibition called Paradise at Tolarno Galleries in Melbourne. The public display of these objects brings to mind Albert’s collection of and work with Aboriginalia, although Andrew’s collection has broader reach and includes imagery of indigenous people and ethnic minorities elsewhere in the world. The images, many of which were sourced

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98 Andrew in conversation with Perkins, Half Light, 35.
100 Ibid., 77.
101 Andrew quoted in Morgan, “Artist Creates Thinking Room, Pumped up with Politics.”
online, range from banal holiday snapshots and photographs marking personal milestones to staged studio portraits. *18 Lives of Paradise* (figs 7.39–7.40), the installation of courier boxes decorated with postcard images from the early to mid-twentieth century and with Andrew’s trademark black-and-white Wiradjuri design, is unmissable. The images are of indigenous people, circus performers, missionaries, entertainers and military personnel — an arguably eccentric cast of characters. The boxes form a makeshift wall portraying exoticism and playing with ideas of exclusion and inclusion. It also has meaning as a “barrier or border to protect or prohibit,” an extension of which are the collisional paths of colonisation and tension between the indigenous and non-indigenous cultures inherent in the postcard imagery.¹⁰²

The collisional paths of colonisation are also displayed in *Paradise* (figs. 7.41–7.47), an installation of rare ethnographic postcards framed in wood and neon that bears the same name as the exhibition. Indicating this nexus is the pairing or mirroring of the ethnographic postcards with scenes of logging, oil drilling, mining and aviation, which arts writer Dan Rule refers to as “Western agents of displacement.”¹⁰³ The six-framed postcards are arranged linearly and are illuminated with light. Viewers moving through the work are repeatedly confronted with the exploitation of indigenous people, including Indigenous Australians and minority groups worldwide. Although each image engenders a different cultural narrative, as Rule has stated, the outcome or “cause and effect” of the Western agents of displacement remains the same,¹⁰⁴ and these are the linkages Andrew intends us to make. He wants us to draw parallels between the histories and experiences of Indigenous Australians and those of displaced or colonised people elsewhere in the world. As Rule suggests, he also wants us to think about the cause and effect of colonisation, an extension of which are the power structures that maintain the divide between the coloniser and colonised in contemporary society.

As European countries expanded to Europe and Asia, picture postcards were an inexpensive way to market the new colonies and to justify colonial expansion. They were also an astute way of flaunting the economic activities of the coloniser and of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
documenting the different ethnicities and cultures of the colonised. It is for this reason that scholars such as John McKenzie refer to postcards of that era as a form of European colonial propaganda. Of course, indigenous women from the colonies had a starring role in these propaganda campaigns. Women (figs. 7.48–7.49), a collage of nine postcards framed in wood and illuminated by neon, brings into focus their denigration via the colonial lens and underlines the value placed on their sexuality and exoticism. Links can be made with the sexualised imagery in Albert’s collection of Aboriginalia. Postcards with women from the colonies in various states of undress were incredibly popular in the early twentieth century. Their low cost and portability meant that they could be collected, traded and viewed by many, presumably for sexual gratification and amusement. Casting these women as temptresses, perhaps to lure European men to the new colonies, and the sexual innuendo at play even when they are clothed is deplorable and is surely why Andrew brings these representations to our attention.

Indigenous men were also denigrated via the colonial lens. In fact, one of the most extreme examples of colonial propaganda in the exhibition is the image of a group of Indigenous men performing a ceremonial dance under the watchful eye of a European anthropologist (fig. 7.50). What is so perverse about this image, which Andrew has set in a wooden box and illuminated with neon, is that two of the men have had their traditional body designs replaced with the iconography of the Union Jack. (As we have seen, the motif also recurs in the practice of Boyd.) The representation brings to mind cattle branding as a means of marking ownership, while the anthropologist’s presence can be seen to reinforce the colonial gaze and power structure at play. Parallels can be drawn between the representation in this image and imagery of that same era in which Indigenous men, women and children are seen lined up alongside missionaries and church leaders and paraded as converts and willing participants of the new regime. The idea of using Union Jack as the work’s title ensures that the perversion does not go unnoticed and that viewers are cognisant of what it implies. Christian Thompson is another artist whose practice is in dialogue with the representation of Indigenous Australians in the archive. However, as we shall see, he approaches the archive in quite a different way.

107 This was the case for the French colony Algeria.
Christian Thompson was born in Gawler, South Australia, in 1978. His father’s job with the Royal Australian Air Force led to an itinerant childhood, although his formative years were spent in Barcaldine, a small town in Central West Queensland, where his paternal family (who are Bidjara from the Kunja nation in southwest Queensland) have lived for over a hundred years.\(^1\) His maternal family are of English origin. Despite his itinerant childhood, Thompson says that the family made regular trips back to Barcaldine to visit his father’s extended family and to spend time with them on country living the “old way.”\(^2\) Of course, the small town of Barcaldine is known as the birthplace of organised labour and trade unions. It was also the site of the shearer’s strike in the late nineteenth century that was a key factor in the formation of the Australian Labour Party. The trips there cemented Thompson’s knowledge and understanding of Bidjara customs and language, references to which recur throughout his work. Thompson has stated that it is a great credit to his family that these traditions and customs have been kept alive and passed down from one generation to the next.\(^3\)

Thompson began formal art training in 1996 at the University of Southern Queensland, where he studied textiles and sculpture as part of a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree. (While he is best known for his photographic self-portraits, his training in textiles and sculpture is evident in the way he builds his photographic images and uses his body as armature.\(^4\)) He then moved to Melbourne, where he completed an honours degree at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). This led to a Masters of Fine Art,

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3. Ibid.
also at RMIT, in 2004. In 2008, Thompson relocated to The Netherlands to pursue advanced studies in performing arts at DasArts in Amsterdam. Thompson has stated that the move away from Australia was crucial to the development of his practice: “I knew instinctively, I needed to find the artist I wanted to be and that involved going outside so I could look in.” What he did not know at the time was that it would be the beginning of a much longer period spent away from home. This long sojourn was in part due to his being awarded the inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholarship, which saw him undertake doctoral studies at Oxford University in the United Kingdom — and which made him the first Indigenous Australian to be admitted to the university.

During his undergraduate years, Thompson absorbed the influence of Fluxus artists George Maciunas and Yoko Ono, which can be seen in the way he combines unexpected elements and in his many performative acts. The work of internationally renowned artists Rebecca Horn, Christian Boltanski, Eve Hesse, Andy Warhol, Magdalena Abakanowicz and Louise Bourgeois were further sources of inspiration. As is the case for several of the artists in this study, he has also looked closer to home, to the work of Tracey Moffatt. As we will see, he draws heavily on the customs and language of the Bidjara people from whom he descends. His work also makes visual reference to the landscape and native flora of his ancestral lands in Queensland’s desert hinterland. Indeed, those familiar with Thompson’s work will know that it captures the zeitgeist of the 1980s and 1990s. This represents the period in which Thompson grew up, and according to the artist, reflects the cultural filter he was provided with. Such references are also a creative way of personalising the work and making his presence felt within it.

*Blaks Palace* (figs. 8.1–8.6), an early photographic series Thompson exhibited at Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in Melbourne in 2002, demonstrates his training in textiles and sculpture and marks the shift in his practice towards photography (and, latterly, video and performance). According to Thompson, the photographic medium, was a “convenient way of documenting and demonstrating” the performative nature of his sculptures. Here they manifest as oversized knitted jumpers with elongated sleeves.

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5 Thompson quoted in McKenzie, “Christian Thompson Interview.”
6 Thompson shared the honour with Indigenous psychology student Paul Gray.
Thompson says they are “like Claus Oldenburg’s” (this celebrated Swedish-American artist, worked across multiple mediums but is best known for his enormous public art sculptures of everyday objects). The jumpers feature Indigenous imagery and motifs tied to Thompson’s Bidjara heritage and are worn in each photographic image by prominent Indigenous Australian artists, curators and academics. According to Thompson, the series continues earlier work in which he sought to “challenge notions of Aboriginality manifested in an Anglo Celtic or Western artifice.” What Thompson refers to here are identities fashioned by others and foisted on Indigenous Australians, which they contest.

The jumpers reference eighties fashion and channel the wares of Australian designers Jenny Kee, Linda Jackson and Ken Done, who looked for inspiration in the 1970s and 1980s to Australia’s cultural and natural landscape and to the art of Indigenous Australians. An image of Diana, Princess of Wales, wearing one of Kee’s hand-knitted jumpers at a polo match in 1982 sparked a nationwide trend and elevated Kee’s “technicolour statements of sartorial patriotism” to high fashion. On account of Thompson’s training in textiles and his affinity with the 1980s, it is not surprising to find these references in his work. However, he is quick to make the point that while the motifs on the jumpers might have been suggestive of Indigenous culture, they were not “representative of what Aboriginal culture meant to Aboriginal people” (the inference being that they were a form of cultural appropriation, albeit in varying degrees). The demand for Kee’s novelty knits, and those inspired by her designs, was so high that patterns were made available in women’s magazines and knitting books. It was from one of these books that the idea for the series came about.

As intimated earlier, the jumpers are oversized, with sleeves measuring several metres long. Depending on the way they are worn, the sleeves have the ability to (as Thompson puts it) “consume the model just as 200 years of representation has confused

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the Anglo experience of blakness.”\textsuperscript{15} They can also be seen as a visual metaphor for the over-consumption of Indigenous people and culture for profit. Thompson has said that the colours chosen for the jumpers are a throwback to the 1950s, and were frequently used to decorate the type of kitsch souvenir objects referencing Indigenous people and culture we have seen in Albert’s work.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, Thompson’s images offer an arresting visual statement about contemporary Indigeneity and the endurance of an age-old culture. These points are reflected in Thompson’s models, who challenge the stasis of Indigenous Australians reflected in the archive and are positioned standing tall and defiant against a history that has rendered them the invisible other.

The series title \textit{Blaks Palace} relates to a place in Thompson’s traditional country near Springsure in the Carnarvon Gorge in Queensland.\textsuperscript{17} The names of important cultural or geographical sites in Thompson’s country recur throughout his work, as an artful way of reaffirming his cultural heritage and ongoing connection with country. This is also an effective, and arguably necessary, form of documentation ensuring that the cultural significance of the many sites in his country are set down for future generations and are not lost to the fragility of the oral tradition. The name refers to the Gorge’s immense beauty. Thompson has said that the Gorge also has cultural significance as a fertility site for women and that the rock faces are interspersed with traditional paintings telling stories of the Bidjara and Karingal people\textsuperscript{18} (in fact, it is said to house the largest known collection of Indigenous Australian drawings in Central Queensland). For those not privy to this information, the title might also be inferred to be a pointed reference to the politics of land ownership or to be a means of reaffirming ownership of it.

Thompson’s 2003 series \textit{Emotional Striptease} (figs. 8.7–8.16) carries a similar theme and also offers an arresting visual statement about contemporary Indigeneity and the endurance of an age-old culture. Commissioned for the Melbourne Fashion Festival, the series of ten photographic images have an editorial quality about them that would see them sit comfortably in the pages of a fashion magazine. Of course, the slick photographic style is merely a front for a matrix of complex thoughts and ideas. According to Thompson, one of these relates to what Cuban American artist and writer Coco Fusco claims is the propensity of Western culture to deconstruct and dissect

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
subordinate cultures in order to better understand them.\textsuperscript{19} Thompson is clearly drawing parallels with the interrogation of Indigenous Australians in the name of ethnography and science. Fusco lays out her claim in \textit{The Bodies That Were Not Ours}, an essay from which Thompson draws both inspiration and the title of the series.\textsuperscript{20} While the series continues the conversation begun with \textit{Blaks Palace} (particularly with regard to representation of Indigenous people and culture by others), here he pushes the narrative further by challenging our understanding about Indigenous lived experience.

We see this in his attempt to relocate Indigenous experience to the towns and cities of Australia where the majority of Indigenous Australians now live and work, a reality not always reflected in mainstream representations of them. Thompson tells us this by situating the models — all of them the artist’s friends and chosen for the project because they share his cultural filter — within a recognisably urban setting.\textsuperscript{21} Thompson constructed this setting using photographic reproductions of iconic Melbourne landmarks and cultural institutions, including the Melbourne Museum, the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art and Federation Square. The method is in keeping with his approach to art making and his predilection for assemblage, and it is also a clever way of layering work with meaning. While it might have been easier to photograph the models on location, Thompson cites aesthetic considerations and the need for an artificial backdrop to make the end product look like more than just a fashion shoot.\textsuperscript{22}

The cultural institutions featured on the backdrops comment on monumentalisation and on the way important historical or cultural sites resonate with different audiences.\textsuperscript{23} As we have seen, Andrew makes similar representations through his work. Thompson sees these institutions as “white monuments,” saying that as an Indigenous Australian he is unsure about his place within them.\textsuperscript{24} It is clear from the images that he is not alone in his way of thinking and that his uncertainty about who and what these institutions represent is felt by other Indigenous Australians. The artefacts held by each of the models are markers of their Indigeneity. Although their inclusion can be read as a comment on collecting cultures, the objects provide further evidence of the way

\textsuperscript{19} Thompson in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 127.
\textsuperscript{20} Coco Fusco, \textit{The Bodies That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings} (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.
\textsuperscript{21} Thompson in conversation with Perkins, \textit{Half Light}, 127.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Indigenous people and culture have been deconstructed and dissected by others. Likewise, when considered in relation to the “white monuments” that dominate the surface of each image, their inclusion can be seen as a comment on the pilfering of Indigenous material culture for gain, or as a call for the repatriation of these objects to their communities of origin from equivalent institutions.

The models’ outfits disrupt Thompson’s attempt to redefine Indigeneity as contemporaneous and modern in that they recall the Victorian era and have meaning as symbols of imperialism and colonisation. Thompson has stated that he wanted the costumes to be far more elaborate, but he toned them down so they suggested a certain type of clothing or era but were not fully representative of it. He achieved this by incorporating modern elements, such as the jersey tee shirt, and by limiting his use of colour. Those familiar with the photographic archives of John Lindt and Charles Kerry, particularly their studio portraits of Indigenous Australians, will discern similarities to Thompson’s portraits. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Lindt and Kerry photographed Indigenous people in artificial settings fashioned to emulate their natural habitat. A criticism of these romanticised representations, which Andrew also directs our attention to, is that they channel the colonisers’ fantasies of Indigenous Australians at a particular period of time. Incidentally, Lindt was also known to photograph Indigenous women in colonial dress, similar to that worn by Thompson’s female models. It is not known whether Thompson had these images in mind when he made the series; however, his images definitely subvert the colonisers’ role in the construction of Indigenous identity.

In an exchange between the artist and curator Hetti Perkins in 2007, Perkins remarked that the portraits of the models wearing the crinoline (cage) skirts (figs. 8.11 and 8.13) reminded her of a print by English-born Australian artist S. T. Gill held in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. The print, which was produced in 1866 and titled Native Dignity (fig. 8.17), is of two Kooris burlesquing in European dress. The crinoline skirt worn by the Koori woman in Gill’s image is identical to the one worn by Thompson’s models. Perkins’ claim of a pun at play in the title of Gill’s work is not unfounded. Dressed in their finery, the Kooris appear to have pretensions of being

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25 Ibid.
26 Perkins to Thompson, Half Light, 127.
27 Koori refers to Indigenous Australians from Victoria and New South Wales.
28 Perkins to Thompson, Half Light, 127.
European, but have gotten it all wrong by wearing their undergarments as clothing. Thompson has stated that he was merely interested in the crinoline skirts as “sculptural objects.”\(^{29}\) Notwithstanding, there is an undeniable tension between the aspirations of the Kooris to be European and the desire of Thompson and his peers to retain a sense of their Indigenous culture and identity. In fact, despite being made over a century apart, both images deal with the encroachment of modernity on the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Thompson’s 2004 series *The Gates of Tambo* (figs. 8.18–8.22) contains five images featuring the artist and also takes its title from a place in his traditional country. Here the title relates to two bottle trees planted by his great uncle that mark the old dirt highway to Brisbane.\(^{30}\) Thompson had stepped in front of the camera for *Emotional Striptease*, but what is interesting about this series is that instead of calling again on his friends and acquaintances to join him, he engages in a performative act and assumes the identity of four artists: Andy Warhol, Rusty Peters, Tracey Moffatt and an unnamed woman from Peppimenarti. The first four images are portraits of Thompson dressed as the artists, and the fifth is a self-portrait. In contrast to Jones, whose mimicry tends to be subversive and ironic, for Thompson it is a means of playing with the nuances of identity and, as Marianne Riphagen puts it, to “deconstruct the amalgam that makes up his identity.”\(^{31}\) It is clear from the images and from the artists he chose to impersonate that the portraits mark Thompson’s desire not to succumb or be subjected to outdated modes of representation that misstate the complexity of his identity as an Indigenous man and contemporary artist.

The portraits of Thompson dressed as Warhol, Peters, Moffatt and the unnamed woman from Peppimenarti invite us to consider whether the artist thinks of them as role models or peers. Perhaps, as Riphagen suggests, he is simply challenging the “distinction made between Indigenous people living in different parts of Australia” and, by extension, Indigenous Australian artists.\(^{32}\) In the case of the latter, the portrait of the unnamed woman may refer to the practice of attributing the work of individual artists to the communities or geographical regions to which they belong. (Papunya Tula, Balgo and


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 125.


\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Utopia are examples.) A criticism of the practice is that it gives rise to a collective identity, and in doing so, subjugates the “genius” of the individual artist. Of course, the woman’s anonymity could be a pointed reference to the large volume of unnamed portraits of Indigenous Australians languishing in museums around the world, such as those excavated by Ah Kee, Albert and Andrew. As we have seen from Albert’s engagement with the Australian War Memorial, through increased research efforts the seemingly impossible task of identifying these Indigenous men and women is often being met with success.

While Thompson’s aesthetic differs considerably from that of Rusty Peters (a Gija man from the Kimberley region in Western Australia) and their lives have taken different paths (Peters having always lived in the Kimberley), they are bound by the way they use art to document their history and culture. Upon learning Peters’ remarkable story, it becomes clear why Thompson has brought the elder artist to our attention. To start with, Peters did not start painting in earnest until he was sixty-three. He was sixty-nine when Thompson made the work, which tells us that despite the age gap they were at similar stages in their artistic careers. Peters had spent his youth as a stockman on cattle stations throughout the Kimberley, after which he lived for a period at Warnum (previously known a Turkey Creek), where he was a key figure in the establishment of a bicultural school. Of course, Warnum is the community from which the talents of Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie emerged. Peters is said to have often worked alongside Thomas, who is today recognised as one of Australia’s most significant artists. It might be seen that Thompson’s portrait as Peters is a tribute to the elder artist. Either way, it articulates the breadth and diversity of Indigenous experience and brings in to focus the different types of art Indigenous Australians produce.

Riphagen’s suggestion that Thompson’s impersonation of Warhol “forms the key to his desire for himself and other Aboriginal artists to be part of global discourses on art making” is an extension of this idea. In fact, the argument could be made that Thompson’s work sits more comfortably within global art discourse than it does within the realm of Indigenous Australian art (or what has come to be known as Indigenous Australian art). Hence, his portrait as Warhol can be seen to mark his desire to be

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34 Ibid.
thought of in broader terms. Clear connections do exist between the two artists’ work, the most obvious being their predilection for self-portraiture, which now dominates Thompson’s output. Further links are their shared interest in popular culture and engagement with well-known personalities, some of which are the subject of their work. Of his interest in Warhol, Thompson has said:

Andy is the child of European migrants. I identify with him as an outsider or fringe dweller. I’m not sure why but characters like Francis Bacon, Quentin Crisp, Boy George and of course Andy Warhol have always appealed to me. Perhaps it is their larger than life exterior or their ambiguity? Their inbetweeness?36

Owing to his mixed heritage, social milieu and the strong ties he maintains with the Bidjara culture, Thompson is an experienced practitioner of this “inbetweeness.”

While Thompson is certainly embracing Warhol’s penchant for “dressing up as a means of altering identity,” those familiar with the work of American conceptual artist Bruce Nauman will certainly recognise the gestural reference to his 1966 photographic image *Self Portrait as a Fountain* (fig. 8.23).37 (Incidentally, Albert also quotes Nauman’s work.) Nauman’s image pays homage to Marcel Duchamp and his most famous work, the readymade porcelain urinal *Fountain*.38 Thompson is clearly drawn to the way Duchamp and Nauman have challenged the role of the artist and tested ideas about art, particularly as a means of communication, and is intent on following a similar path. Another path he would be keen to follow is that of internationally renowned artist Tracey Moffatt, whom art writer Hannah Fink lauds as “probably Australia’s most successful artist ever, both nationally and internationally.”39 The similarities between their practices extend far beyond their Indigeneity and the fact they are both from Queensland. Self-portraiture also recurs in Moffatt’s work, albeit to a lesser degree. Both have also spent significant periods abroad to take on new experiences and to gain different perspectives. A driving force behind Thompson’s impersonation is clearly her steadfast rejection of identities fashioned by and foisted onto her by others.

A year after he produced *The Gates of Tambo*, Thompson was approached by artist and curator Gary Carsley to produce a work for an upcoming issue of *Photofile* magazine he was editing around the theme of authenticity and originality in contemporary culture. The issue was published in 2006 with the title [*better than*] THE REAL THING. Thompson responded with *In Search of the International Look* (fig. 8.24), a further photographic portrait of him dressed as Moffatt. The portrait quotes a hand-coloured self-portrait Moffatt produced in 1999 that now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra (fig. 8.25). Riphagen’s suggestion that Thompson is paying homage to Moffatt and continuing the intergenerational dialogue he began in the previous series mirrors Thompson’s own feelings about the work:40 “She [Moffatt] has really set a precedent and demonstrated to other Aboriginal artists that we don’t have to render … that we actually have more of a global message to think about.”41 As Riphagen also observes, just because Thompson draws inspiration from Moffatt and seeks to follow her path, it would be wrong to assume that he is simply an “epigone of Tracey Moffatt.”42

Thompson in fact resists such an idea. “Aboriginal people like myself form a new generation with totally different cultural and historical references, borders and boundaries. We come from our own place and are not just the niece and nephew of that generation before.”43 Thompson goes on to say, “if people want to stereotype me as the new Tracey Moffatt, I may as well do it for them.”44 This he achieves through this second portrait as Moffatt. The title, *In Search of the International Look*, comes from an interview Moffatt gave in 1998 in which she was asked whether there was a political context in her work:

I don’t want to make some grand statement on race — it isn’t about being politically correct, perhaps it’s about always striving for an “international” look to my work…. I want to say that if people want to read my art that I’m making now from a political perspective then they are welcome. I just get a little exasperated because this reading usually comes from the “left” and they are most of the time ignoring how I strive for poetry and make statements about the human condition — they can’t see that I’m trying to play with form and be inventive. I think that

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41 Personal communication between Christian Thompson and Marianne Riphagen, August 10, 2006 quoted in Riphagen, “Re-Framing Indigenous Australian Photography,” 337.
42 Riphagen, “Re-Framing Indigenous Australian Photography,” 337.
43 Personal communication between Thompson and Riphagen, June 6, 2006 quoted in Riphagen, “Re-Framing Indigenous Australian Photography,” 338.
44 Ibid.
the fact that I’m trying for a “universal” quality, not just a “black Australian” is the reason why my work is getting attention.\(^{45}\)

What Moffatt refers to are the limiting adjectives imposed on her as a result of her Indigeneity, which she has had to fight off to have her work read in broader terms. Even so, it is worth remembering that in the infancy of her career Moffatt was not a beneficiary of the many freedoms globalisation has brought to the practices of Thompson and his contemporaries. And while there are certainly similarities between their practices, as Thompson has stated, their work has different cultural and historical references.\(^{46}\)

*Australian Graffiti* (figs. 8.26–8.37), Thompson’s most recognised photographic series, sees the artist resume his position in front of the camera. In contrast to earlier work, the portraits are closely cropped and fashioned like headshots. The suite of twelve images, which includes a triptych, draws on the beauty and splendour of the Australian bush and native flora. In each of the first nine portraits, Thompson wears a garland of native flowers that changes with each image and complements the eighties-inspired jumpers he wears throughout. The juxtaposition captures Thompson’s eclectic personal style and penchant for vintage finds, yet what look like embellishments are in fact “abstracted references to native flora,” as Hetti Perkins has noted.\(^{47}\) The floral garlands also have personal resonance, recalling the landscape of Thompson’s hometown in the desert hinterland of Queensland — the “blooming outback oasis” commonly referred to as “the Garden City of the West.”\(^{48}\) In this context, the garlands signify his ongoing connection to and sense of belonging with the land.

The fact that Thompson kept the flowers separate so that each garland is composed of only one species suggests that they are in dialogue with the anthropological processes of categorisation and classification touched on in earlier work. Links can also be made with the less-than-human status assigned to Indigenous Australians prior to the 1967 Referendum, which Ah Kee and Pease recall in their work. This was a status they and other Indigenous Australians liken to the native flora and fauna (and which manifests


\(^{46}\) Personal communication between Thompson and Riphagen, June 6, 2006 quoted in Riphagen, “Re-Framing Indigenous Australian Photography,” 338.


\(^{48}\) Ibid.
today in the failure of successive Australian Governments to recognise and make adequate provision for Indigenous Australians in the Australian Constitution. The many attempts by the coloniser to classify, describe and define Indigenous Australians, which Albert recalls in Coon (fig. 3.31), are an extension of these processes. Meaning can also be found in the way the individual portraits are untitled, which is surely a further reference to the unnamed portraits of Indigenous Australians in museum collections around the world.

As we can see, even though the portraits are nostalgic and carry ideas of “patriotism” according to Thompson, they also draw heavily on the discourse of colonisation. Indeed, the way he wears the garlands, like a king or queen would a crown, is a further indicator of this reference. Yet Thompson’s garlands do not sit neatly on his head; instead they are positioned to obscure his gaze and mask his identity. Their positioning also flouts the convention of portrait photography in which eye contact is deemed a powerful and potent means of enriching viewers’ connection with the subject. Art historian Rex Butler suggests that Thompson’s frustrating refusal to let us meet his gaze is intentional because the garlands’ arrangement “on the otherwise invisible face of the Aborigine” is a visual metaphor for the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in popular culture and in the discourse of Australia’s postcolonial history. In several of the images, Thompson does peer out from behind the floral arrangements and cajole us to meet his gaze — the same gesture used by Ah Kee to confront viewers with the truth of Australia’s shared history? Or, perhaps like Andrew, he is simply intent on reminding us that he “sees us.”

Art curator Stephen Gilchrist offers a further interpretation. He suggest that the flowers, which have literally been “disconnected from country,” are a metaphor for the Indigenous Australian diaspora and the dispossession of Indigenous people from their traditional lands, the impact of which is still being felt today. What is more, they

complicate, as Gilchrist puts it: “the recurrent portrayal of Aboriginal people fused to the landscape.” While this might not have been Thompson’s intention (he has said the series was inspired by a collection of flower photographs owned by his grandmother), art historian Terry Barrett argues that “the meaning of an artwork might be much broader than even the artist knows.” Gilchrist also questions whether the portraits are an attempt by Thompson to “renegotiate the status of Indigenous men in colonial photography.” What he refers to is the way Thompson apprehends modes of self-representation. While this is doubtless the case, it is worth noting that in her recent publication Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies, historian Jane Lydon notes that not all images taken of Indigenous Australians by the coloniser had negative connotations. As an example she cites a series of nineteenth-century images taken at Poonindie, a small community in the Eyre Peninsula.

In the triptych, the colourful garlands and decorative jumpers are replaced with an arrangement of black gum flowers that obscure Thompson’s face. They are paired with a simple black hoodie that recurs in each image. In contrast to the previous nine portraits, Thompson’s position changes with each image. Incidentally, Francis Bacon (whom Thompson holds in high regard) produced a number of triptychs, many of which were portraits. Thompson’s positioning front on and from the side recalls earlier work addressing the way Indigenous Australians were photographed and made to bare all in the name of science. Of course, it is commonplace for criminals to be photographed this way. For this reason and because Thompson is wearing a hoodie (so synonymous with criminal activity in the public mind that attempts have been made to ban it from several suburbs in Thompson’s home state of Queensland), the triptych can be read as a comment on the high incarceration rate of Indigenous youth.

54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
58 For example, Emotional Striptease.
59 The mug shot has its roots in photographic portraiture of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Thompson replicates the format developed by French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon in the late-1800s. Bertillon’s format, which is based on the principles of anthropometry, offered the law enforcement community a standardised approach to the use of photography for criminal identification. For further reading see Jonathan Finn, Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society (Minneapolis, US: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), ProQuest Ebook Central.
According to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Indigenous Australians account for just over a quarter of the national prison population, yet they comprise less than 3 percent of the national population. The statistics for youth incarceration are significantly higher. A recent investigation into youth detention revealed that 54 percent of juvenile detainees between the ages of 10 and 17 are of Indigenous Australian descent. The figure rises each year, so that Indigenous youth are now twenty-six times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous youth. This trend is surely a sad indictment on the justice system and on Australia as a nation. But Thompson believes that the hoodie represents the “wholesale criminalisation” of Indigenous men as publicly played out in the media, particularly at the time of the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). It is a concern he shares with Jones and Ah Kee. Hence, the concealment of his identity is a clever way of denying the naysayers the opportunity to single him out for criticism. On the other hand, he might simply be making the point that regardless of who he is or what he has achieved, his Indigeneity is the only thing some people choose to see.

By 2008, Thompson had moved to The Netherlands to study at DasArts, the theatre school attached to the Amsterdam School of Arts. It was then that he produced Lost Together (figs. 8.38–8.48), a suite of photographic images that relay the dislocation he felt at being so far from home — a feeling familiar to many Australians, particularly those who live abroad. Thompson again stepped in front of the camera, this time wearing an assemblage of eclectic costumes and disguises. What distinguishes the series from previous work is the shift to an outdoor setting. Thompson wanted the landscape to play a central role in the new work, despite being more familiar with studio photography. Although foreign, the chosen landscape — a dense, leafy forest and isolated beach — evokes memories of home. The recurring cultural motifs do as well:

63 Ibid.
64 Personal communication between Christian Thompson and Stephen Gilchrist quoted in Gilchrist, “Shifting Identities,” 625.
66 Ibid.
the familiar didgeridoo, spear, humpy\textsuperscript{67} and kangaroo brooch from which Thompson presumably draws comfort.

In keeping with previous series, the titles of individual works contain references to home, an example being \textit{Beauty of Jellingroo}. This time Thompson refers to a place with links to his maternal family history, with Jellingroo being a property near Gundagai in New South Wales where they are from. Others bear the name of native Australian flora, such as \textit{Xanthorrhoea Australis}, a grass tree colloquially known as “black boy” because of its apparent likeness to a small black figure. As we have seen, Boyd and Pease also used the plant: Boyd in his critique of the myth of \textit{terra nullius} and Pease as an art material. In fact, the resin Pease extracted from the plant and incorporated into several works is one of the raw materials traditionally used by Indigenous Australians to make spears like those Thompson holds in several of the images. That fact that the phrase \textit{donkere jongen uit Nederland} (which reads “dark boy from The Netherlands” when translated from Dutch to English) appears in the title of these works speaks of his displacement and newfound foreigner status.

As is typical of Thompson’s photographic work, the images exude a sense of theatre and play. We see this in \textit{Isabella Kept Her Dignity} (fig. 8.46), in which Thompson, in a white wig and lace tights, appears on the vantage point of a grassy coastal outcrop peering through a neon red didgeridoo. The description of Thompson as a “sentinel scouting for a tall ship” is befitting.\textsuperscript{68} Even so, he leaves us wondering whether he is re-enacting an old colonial narrative such as the search for the “Great Southern Land” or merely yearning for home. Indeed, he might be simply looking for direction and trying to find his way in his newly adopted home. The bold text emblazoned on his tee shirt reading “realness” plays with his status as an Indigenous Australian. It can also be read as a critique of the opposition that Daniel Browning says many Indigenous Australians living in urban areas (in particular those with mixed heritage) face from people who fail to recognise the contemporaneity of their culture and continue to fix them to the past and to certain landscapes.\textsuperscript{69} This is problematic because it holds Indigeneity to be a geographical rather than a cultural construct.

\textsuperscript{67} A type of traditional shelter.
The three images in which Thompson assumes the identity of a bearded, tartan-clad character — *Beauty of Jellingroo* (fig. 8.38), *Isaac-1* (fig. 8.40) and *Dead as a Door Nail* (fig. 8.41) — evoke memories of the Australian bush and colonial frontier. As explained by Thompson, they draw heavily on the work of nineteenth-century Australian artist Frederick McCubbin, whose iconic paintings of bush life are familiar to Australian audiences. Seminal examples are *The Pioneer* (fig. 8.49) and *Down on His Luck* (fig. 8.50). McCubbin was a key figure in the Heidelberg School, a group of artists who in the tradition of the French Impressionists set up camps on the outskirts of Melbourne and painted *en plein air*. Their work, as art historian Norma Broude writes, was driven by “the impulse to paint contemporary life and experience directly from nature.” It carries ideas of nation building and is celebrated for its realistic and intensely nationalistic depiction of Australian life on the eve of Federation. However, as Jones made the point via her appropriation of Tom Roberts’ iconic painting *Shearing the Rams* (fig. 4.6), their work also marks the gradual disappearance of Indigenous Australians from the landscape and, more broadly, from visual depictions of Australian life.

As we have seen, the act of rendering Indigenous Australians invisible was key to upholding the myth of *terra nullius*. It was also a convenient way of covering up their dispossession and censoring their resistance to colonial occupation and rule. For this reason, Thompson’s presence subverts the history that has rendered him and other Indigenous Australians invisible, whether intentionally or not. Likewise, as curator Alison Ingles suggests, the subversion invites us to revisit and reassess the idea of a shared history and national identity. What is unexpected about Thompson’s interest in McCubbin is that it has little to do with what his work represents to many Indigenous Australians. To the contrary, the bearded tartan-clad figure in *Isaac-1* is an abstract reference to his non-Indigenous great-grandfather Isaac, whose history the artist was...

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70 “Christian Thompson discusses his work *Dead as a Door Nail,*” artist talk for the exhibition *Australia* (21 September 2013 – 8 December 2013), Royal Academy of Arts (UK), video, 3.07 minutes, http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibition/17.
71 The group also painted in other parts of Victoria and New South Wales.
investigating at the time.\textsuperscript{74} In this context, as explained by Riphagen, the reference to McCubbin instead “calls to mind the predicament of many of such early Australian settlers” who, like his maternal family, came to Australia as settlers and convicts and had to find their place in an unfamiliar and foreign land.\textsuperscript{75} Of course this experience mirrors Thompson’s own predicament and desire to find his bearings in his new surroundings.

One of Thompson’s most memorable works is Heat (fig. 8.51), a three-channel, high-definition video with two audio tracks produced in 2010 that has also been exhibited as a series of photographic stills (figs. 8.52–8.54). Best described as a series of digital or video portraits, the work saw Thompson return to the studio and resume his role behind the camera. The idea of using video in this way is not new: between 1964 and 1966 Andy Warhol made a series of silent, slow-motion video portraits known as Screen Tests. Typical of Warhol’s work, his subjects included actors, musicians, models and artists, including Yoko Ono, Edie Sedgwick and Bob Dylan. A more contemporary example is the work of American photographer and filmmaker Clayton Cubitt, who from 2008 to 2009 created a series of video portraits known as Long Portraits, in which subjects were filmed sitting still for five or so minutes. Unique to Thompson’s video is the triptych format, which has great visual appeal while offering a practical way of layering the work with symbolism and meaning.

The subjects of the video are three Indigenous sisters: Madeline, Lille and Thea. They are the children of art curator Hetti Perkins and the grandchildren of renowned Indigenous activist Charles Perkins. The elder Perkins was the first Indigenous Australian to graduate from university and was a key figure in the aforementioned Freedom Ride of 1965, which exposed the deplorable living conditions and discriminatory treatment endured by Indigenous Australians living in regional New South Wales. Of course, the Freedom Ride is regarded today as one of the most significant events in Australia’s Indigenous history in relation to the advancement of their civil rights. One of the qualities of the video that stands out is the minimalist setting, which evokes memories of the arid desert landscape of Thompson’s

\textsuperscript{74} Christian Thompson, personal communication with Marianne Riphagen, May 26, 2009, in Riphagen, “Contested Categories,” 16.
\textsuperscript{75} Riphagen, “Contested Categories,” 16.
He has said of the latter: “I love the mysticism and the seductive cruelty of the desert, my home, and how it can be so illusive and alluring and potentially life threatening.”\textsuperscript{77} As explained by curator Tina Baum, the desert setting “highlights the essence of the Country that is a crucial part of Thompson’s identity and his people.”\textsuperscript{78} The placement of the sisters in this setting speaks as well of intertwined histories and the familial connections Thompson clearly holds dear.

The sisters appear on screen vulnerable in their nakedness yet resolute as the hot desert air swirls around them and dishevels their hair.\textsuperscript{79} Baum likens the girls to the Gorgon Sisters Stheno, Euryale and Medusa of Greek mythology, whose hair was made of snakes.\textsuperscript{80} While she is clearly referring to the visual impact of the girls’ hair, which was enhanced with a wind machine and slow-motion video, the sisters also bring to mind Meehni, Wimlah and Gunnedoo, the three Indigenous sisters whose legend is tied to the spectacular rock formation Three Sisters in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. The sisters exchange no words. Instead, they communicate through their gaze, which is charged with testimony that says: “we are here, we are strong, we have survived.”\textsuperscript{81} Their femininity and natural beauty is accentuated by the stark “teddy bear tan” set.\textsuperscript{82} What Thompson has achieved is not dissimilar to what Michael Riley captured in the series of portraits he took of Indigenous women in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (the girls’ mother Hetti Perkins being one of them). The juxtaposition of the slow-motion video and the melody of a harp playing in the background is intoxicating. On a practical level, it creates an atmosphere of anticipation and suspense that induces the viewer to wait and watch until one by one the three sisters disappear into the hot desert air.

As we have seen, family are never far from Thompson’s mind, and they present as a recurring narrative in his work. The many more examples include his 2010 photographic series \textit{King Billy} (figs. 8.55–8.61). The series pays tribute to Thompson’s

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{82} Christian Thompson, email correspondence with Tina Baum in Baum, “Christian Thompson,” 112.
paternal great-great grandfather King Billy Jagar of Bonnie Doon Lorne, and its inspiration was an old photograph Thompson came across of Billy wearing his nameplate. Also known as “King,” “breast” or “brass” plates, these are crescent-shaped neckpieces gifted to Indigenous Australians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who “distinguished themselves in the eyes of [the] non-Aboriginal population.”83 They were inscribed with the recipient’s name and an honorary title such as “King,” “Queen” or “Chief.” As explained by Jakelin Troy, the plates (or gorgets as she refers to them) were met with ambivalence; some Indigenous people considered them to be an honour that gave them special status, while others felt they were patronising symbols of Empire.84 As Troy notes, the issue is complicated by the fact that the honorary titles inscribed on the plates were not traditionally used by Indigenous Australians, and recipients were often given unfamiliar English names.85

As is often the case with his photographic work, Thompson pushes the boundaries of taste and convention and delights us with unexpected and occasionally absurd combinations. The King Billy series is no exception, and the eccentricity heightens with each passing image. The first three (figs. 8.55–8.57) mirror the triptych in the Australian Graffiti series. However, here Thompson’s identity is masked not by a tightly packed arrangement of black gum, but by strands of pearls cascading down his face. Hoodies return, but here they burst with colour. The fabric came from a fabric store in Melbourne. Thompson says he was “taken by the saturation of the colour and the complexity of the designs,” which are not dissimilar to those produced on canvases in the many art-producing communities of the Western Desert.86 Perkins interprets the designs as a “subtle nod” to the artist’s traditional lands.87 Thompson’s re-appropriation of the fabric is also in dialogue with the commercialisation of Indigenous people and culture for profit. (In a 2012 interview, Thompson referred indirectly to a boomerang that French fashion house Chanel released as part of its 2010 Sport collection.88)

84 Ibid., 38.
85 Ibid., 14.
88 “Hijacked III: Interview with Christian Thompson,” video.
Thompson has stated that although he thinks of them as self-portraits and wanted his presence to be felt within the work, he did not want to be the central figure. Rather, he was interested in exploring ideas of interpretation and what he describes as “the manifestation of culture within culture.” As with previous work, the images play with the binary oppositions that mark his existence and the “grey” space he says he occupies in-between. The striking and symbolically charged image *Untitled #7* underlines the binary opposition of being the coloniser and colonised that is manifest in his cultural identity. The fake jewelled crown and the sawn-off plastic water bottle “chalice” represent the former, and the Indigenous-themed fabric the latter. The juxtaposition of the hoodie and the strands of pearls cascading from his face in the triptych carry similar connotations. A well as being symbols of Empire, the jewelled crown and chalice have obvious meaning as ceremonial objects, but here they have agency as a conduit to the story of his great-great grandfather, the aforementioned King Billy Jagar of Bonnie Doon Lorne. Having said that, Thompson is clearly playing with the provenance and symbolism of the nameplate, and more specifically, the title bestowed on the Elder.

In 2010, Thompson received the inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholarship to study at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. In an interview for *The Australian* in 2013, he spoke of a chance encounter with Perkins when he was a teenager at school in regional Queensland. He described it as a pivotal moment and said that he was sure the experience led him to Oxford. Despite needing to learn a new set of cultural codes, he has been proud to represent his community and chosen field there. Thompson credits his traditional education and upbringing for preparing him for the transition and for his position at the university. The fact that Perkins’ daughter Hetti has been a friend and mentor to Thompson clearly added to its meaning. Shortly after his arrival in Oxford, Thompson was invited by Christopher Morton of the Pitt Rivers Museum, which is attached to the university, to develop a body of work “inspired by and in dialogue” with the museum’s historic Australian photographic collection. The

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 123.
95 Christian Thompson, artist statement in *We Bury Our Own*, exhibition catalogue (Fitzroy, VIC: Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, 2012), n.p.
museum was established in 1884 as an anthropological and archaeological resource, and its Australian collection has some 15,000 objects and 1,350 photographs.96

Thompson’s arrival at Oxford coincided with a project the museum was working on with Jane Lydon from Monash University in Melbourne funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant. Titled Globalisation, Photography, and Race: The Circulation and Return of Aboriginal Photographs in Europe (2011–2015), the project looked to address “the momentous intersection of new digital technologies and Aboriginal traditions surrounding visual imagery.”97 The idea was that Thompson’s work would form part of the content. As explained by Morton, Henry Balfour, the museum’s first curator, built up the collection of photographs Thompson worked with using his extensive network of contacts in Australia, including anthropologist Baldwin Spencer.98 Most of them were taken in the late nineteenth century. Thompson describes the months he spent pouring over the photographs as a profoundly “emotional experience.”99 Few of the subjects were identifiable by name, and there was scant information about the communities where the images were taken.100 This lack of documentation is one of the inherent problems of early research and was something researchers working on Lydon’s project were seeking to redress.

We Bury Our Own (figs. 8.62–8.69) marks Thompson’s response to the museum’s photographic collection. The series is composed of eight photographic images, all of which are self-portraits. Thompson’s approach towards the archive was unconventional yet highly imaginative. It was unconventional for two reasons: (1) he chose to work with the original material rather than digitally produced copies and (2) in contrast to the work of other artists who use archival imagery (e.g., Brook Andrew and Leah King-Smith), the source material is not re-presented or visually quoted in the resultant images. The approach is imaginative because Thompson plays with the idea of a spiritual rather than a physical repatriation of the archive. Of course, this method ties in with one of the broader aims of Lydon’s project: “to return photographs currently

100 Ibid.
housed in Europe to their subjects’ descendants.”  

Even so, as noted by Morton, the archive is manifest in Thompson’s framing, which recalls the “scientific end of nineteenth-century ‘ethnographic’ portraiture; head-and-shoulders, full face, looking directly into the camera.”

Thompson’s spiritual rather than physical repatriation of the archive points to the increasingly contentious issue in museums of repatriation, which extends beyond the return of human remains and cultural objects. Links can be made with Boyd’s work with the Natural History Museum in London. As Morton has written, what is unique about Thompson’s engagement with the archive is the creative tension between it being “a permanent ancestral resting place” on one hand, and “a reproducible, recordable, and dynamic historical resource” on the other. What Morton refers to here is one of the ways the repatriation of the photographic archives differs from that of human remains or cultural objects. In the case of the photographic archive, even when copies are made and shared with relevant communities, the spirits of the ancestors remain in the storerooms of far-away institutions. Admittedly, the repatriation of the photographic archive is far less problematic than that of human remains and cultural objects because the latter are rare and hold value as collectors’ items, in addition to their educational or scientific importance.

Thompson’s description of the series as a “departure from the archive into the contemporary” highlights the capacity of the visual arts to traverse time and place. The idea of spiritual repatriation has its genesis in the cultural traditions of his people, who used objects, such as those held in museum collections, in an emotive capacity, discarding them afterwards. The inference is that the ceremony that takes place is as important as the physical object. Thompson has stated that, in the context of his work, the ceremony occurs via the performative act of self-portraiture. The visual references to the ritual paraphernalia — the candles, flowers, butterflies and crystals that recur

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105 Ibid.
throughout — are further indicators of this intent. Of course, crystals are believed to have unique healing properties, and their inclusion implies that Thompson’s spiritual repatriation is part of a healing ritual. Thompson’s explanation differs: for him they evoke a story he heard years ago from a group of Elders, which he recounts as follows:

They told me about a ceremony where young warriors would make incisions through the flesh exposing the joints, they would insert gems between the bones to emulate the creator spirits, often enduring infection and agonising pain or resulting in death. The story has stuck with me for many years, one that suggests immense pain fused with intoxicating beauty.106

The details of Thompson’s story are consistent with several documented accounts of quartz crystals being used by Indigenous Australians in this way.107

As with previous work, Thompson’s use of self-portraiture is heavily weighted with personal meaning. As art historian Richard Brilliant points out, “with greater or lesser degrees of success, self-portraiture always makes a concentrated autobiographical statement, the manifesto of an artist’s introspection.”108 Thompson’s self-portraits are compelling visual statements because they are the means through which he negotiates the amalgam of his identity, which he describes as being in a constant state of flux.109 Here they mark his transition from small-town Barcaldine to the halls of Oxford University’s Trinity College, with the biographical marker being the Oxford formal dress worn throughout. His approach to wearing formal attire might also be an abstract reference to his dual ancestry, the coalescence of which plays out beautifully in Forgiveness of the Land (fig. 8.69), the image of Thompson wearing a headscarf with Indigenous motifs. The same image can be said to articulate his desire to be thought of in broader terms, this being a sentiment that echoes throughout his work. In conclusion, while Thompson’s engagement with the archive is clearly in dialogue with current museum practice around ideas of repatriation, it will be remembered as a unique artistic investigation that demonstrates a radically different approach to its application in contemporary art.

106 Christian Thompson, artist statement in We Bury Our Own, n.p.
108 Brilliant, Portraiture, 158.
Part Three
OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS
Art today increasingly wants to do something it hasn’t prioritised for a very long time: tell a story.

— Mike Brennan, *Neo Narration: Stories of Art*

In the preceding chapters, the work of the seven artists has been examined in detail. What emerged from these readings were significant common threads, some of them unexpected and unforeseen. This chapter will identify and bring together these threads for analysis and discussion. They fall under two headings: those that aid the telling of the artists’ stories and those that form the narratives themselves. The chapter is therefore organised into two sections: the first covers the art object as a vehicle for narrative, while the second looks at it as an encapsulation of the history and lived experience of Indigenous Australians since 1788. Because the two are interrelated, it is only by explicating the art object and paying close attention to the creative processes used by the artist to convey narrative that we are able to go some way toward recovering its meaning. The broader aim of the chapter is thus to illuminate the significance of the works. As we have seen, they are rooted in the unique and complex nature of Australia’s shared social, political and cultural history, the telling of which is noticeably more compelling and persuasive when recounted via a collective voice.

### 9.1 CREATIVE PROCESSES EMPLOYED TO CONVEY NARRATIVE

#### 9.1.1 NARRATIVE AND WORKS OF ART

To argue that the work discussed in this study is rich in narrative takes for granted that artworks are capable of sustaining stories. Is narration, as film critic David Bordwell
argues, something that can be shown as well as told?¹ Finding answers to such seemingly straightforward questions is made difficult by the lack of scholarship on narrativity in the visual arts. Wendy Steiner and Richard Brilliant, two scholars who have undertaken studies on narrative art, found this to be the case.² In fact, Steiner goes so far as to describe it as a non-topic for art historians.³ The lack of critical discourse prompted Steiner and Brilliant to adopt literary theory as the theoretical framework for their studies. Despite it not being a perfect pairing, they recognised that the traits producing literary and pictorial narratives were similar. Literary theorist Werner Wolf agrees, arguing that it makes sense to approach “narrativity” in works of art from a literary or “narratological” perspective.⁴ Even so, while few people would find fault with the scholarly description of paintings or other works of art as embodying narratives, opinion is divided over whether they “imply or call to mind a narrative” or represent it in the proper sense of the word.⁵

In one sense, the answer comes down to one’s definition of narrative. Literary theorist Gerard Prince, to take one example, defines it as “the representation of at least two real of fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other,”⁶ whereas historian Lawrence Stone suggests it constitutes “the organisation of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots.”⁷ Stone adds that its arrangement is descriptive rather than analytical and that it deals therefore with the particular and specific, as opposed to the collective or statistical.⁸ As explained by literary scholar Marie-Laurie Ryan, it is scholars’ interpretations of the nature of narrative and the features they single out as constituting narrativity that tend to set the definitions apart.⁹ To complicate the issue, Wolf (who subscribes to a broad definition of narrative that

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¹ Adversaries of Bordwell’s view argue that narration must involve a verbal act. See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, UK: Methuen, 1985), 62.
⁸ Ibid.
permits degrees of narrativity) defuses the definitional debate in arguing that the question we should be asking is “not whether the visual arts can be narrative or not, but to what extent they can be narrative.”

Making a similar point is Prince, who holds that “different narratives have different degrees of narrativity” and that some of them, as it were, tell a better story. The works foregrounded in this study are cases in point. Some artistic mediums and formats are simply more conducive to narrative. Artworks do not naturally lend themselves to narrative because time and representationality are often problematic in them: unlike novels or films with a prescribed running order, works of art often have no identifiable beginning, middle or end. As art historian James Elkins puts it: “the order of telling is not always clear, the order of reading is not always clear, nor is the order of occurrence always clear.” Obviously, not all art is narrative or tells a story (e.g., abstract and non-figurative art). Yet if we are to accept a definition of narrative that permits degrees of narrativity and is not limited to a verbal act, the question arises as to how the artist overcomes the issues of time and representationality. How do they make the narrative comprehensible to the viewer without reducing it to a slogan or one-liner (unless that is the intended outcome)?

To examine this process we must look at the relationship between artist and audience and at their respective roles in the transmission and interpretation of the narrative, with the artist as narrator and the viewer as the reader/interpreter of the work. The relationship is important because the artist does not act alone, but instead relies on the audience to play an active role in the interpretation and reconstruction of the narrative. To quote Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, “explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker.” Central to this relationship are the signals the artist provides for the viewer and the imaginative work he or she must do to decipher them. This dynamic requires a process of deconstruction whereby the viewer unpicks the elements within the artwork that offer insight into its meaning.

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10 Wolf, Narrative and Narrativity, 192.
11 Prince, Narratology, 4.
13 This is not to say they are without meaning, but simply that they are not narrative in the literal sense of the word.
As explained by art writer Will Gompertz: “it is like a cryptic crossword where comprehension comes from solving the puzzle.”\textsuperscript{15} It might be stating the obvious to observe that the audience must play an active role in the interpretation of an artwork, but as Gompertz points out, comprehension does not come solely from the artwork itself.\textsuperscript{16} As is evident from the present study, those who devote the time and energy into working out its subtleties are rewarded for their efforts.

We can derive pleasure, value or meaning from an artwork without knowing how to unlock its ins and outs. Yet narrative art requires us to look beyond aesthetics to the visual clues creating the narrative. For the viewer, this can be as simple as knowing something about the artist’s background, practice or creative processes. Or (as was often the case in this study) the task can be laborious and complex. As noted by Paul Wood, a further determinant is the skill and accomplishment of the artist, because without proficiency in either “there would be nothing to communicate.”\textsuperscript{17} Artists have a wide range of creative processes and strategies at their disposal that aid them in the transmission of narrative and make possible the telling of their stories. The creative processes they most commonly use are identified and discussed below. Contrary to the artists’ varied aesthetic, their use of the strategies and devices attached to these processes was relatively uniform. Familiarity with these processes aids not only in the interpretation of the art object, but also in further understanding of the artists’ practice and their methodological approach to making art.

### 9.1.2 APPROPRIATION, MIMICRY AND BRICOLAGE

Appropriation, a practice in the visual arts whereby an artist “adopts imagery, ideas or material from pre-existing works of art or culture,” was popularised in the 1980s as postmodernism began to take hold.\textsuperscript{18} The practice subverts the high value traditionally placed on originality and the extent to which the viewer’s familiarity with the borrowed elements is crucial. This is because artists working with appropriation prize the meaning that emerges from the recontextualisation of the borrowed elements over

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15} Will Gompertz, What Are You Looking At?: 150 Years of Modern Art in the Blink of an Eye (London, UK: Viking, 2012), 357.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{17} Paul Wood, Conceptual Art (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2002), 46.}\]
originality. The reasons why artists appropriate vary. As we have seen, those in this study use it as a mechanism for subversion and critique, as well as to perform acts of mimicry and homage. Appropriation is a favoured practice because it suggests alternative ways of thinking about the meaning, ideas and values associated with pre-existing material. It also has the potential to challenge the status quo and to prioritise unreported and untold perspectives on the past. Indeed, this aspect explains why appropriation is present in the practices of artists concerned with historical revisionism, postcolonial discourse and the paradoxes of identity.

The artists discussed here are cases in point in regard to their frequent use of elements and material tied to the narrative of Australia’s colonisation. Specific examples include Pease’s quotation of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century imagery chronicling the early history of Western Australia; Boyd’s subversion of Captain Cook’s heroic status; Ah Kee’s re-presentation of photographs of his forebears taken by anthropologist Norman Tindale in 1938; Andrew’s interrogation of William Blandowski’s illustrated encyclopaedia of Indigenous Australia; Albert’s dialogue with the Stolen Generation; Thompson’s work with the historic photographic archive at the Pitt Rivers Museum; and Jones’ summation of the massacres and frontier violence on her mother’s country in Western Australia. As expressed by art historian Joan Kerr, appropriation has proven to be a liberating and satisfactory way of “removing the European grid over Australia’s visual past.” Equally important is the artists’ use of it to set the record straight and to offer an Indigenous perspective on a hitherto hegemonic version of the past that has rendered them invisible.

Over the past decade, advances in technology have given artists new methods of working, some of which are conducive to appropriation. The simple cut-and-paste technique Jones used to hijack the icons of Australian art history comes to mind. A less obvious example is Ah Kee’s use of computer software, which allows him to play with the design of letters and forms of words to manipulate the meaning imbued in those words. Yet as interesting as these developments are, they do not help to explain how appropriation aids the transmission of narrative. For this aspect we must look to the borrowed elements, which offer entry points into the reading of the works. These elements might point to or recall a specific landscape or period in time, such as the

recognisably urban landscape that forms the backdrop to Albert’s *Optimism* series (figs. 3.15–3.24) and the colonial one recalled in Jones’ appropriation of Von Guerard’s *Barwon River Geelong* (fig. 4.1). Similarly, the artist might implicate a noted historical or contemporary figure. Examples include Thompson’s appropriation of Tracey Moffatt’s *Self Portrait* (fig. 8.24), Jones’ quotation of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (figs. 4.26–4.29), and Ah Kee’s quotation of Stephen Crane (fig. 2.12) and Malcolm X (fig. 2.13).

The extent of appropriation also varies. In the case of Jones and Pease, the adjustments are often so subtle that they only become apparent on close inspection, whereas Boyd’s appropriations tend to be more deliberate and pronounced. Andrew and Ah Kee often make no adjustments, choosing instead to preserve the integrity of the source material as a definitive reminder of the past. The ethnographic photographs and postcards omnipresent in Andrew’s work are an example. The artists’ approaches to appropriation also differ. The simple cut-and-paste technique with which Jones replaces pre-existing elements in an artwork with something new has already been mentioned. Her approach differs from that of Boyd and Pease. As we have seen, their appropriation occurs not through substitution, but via incorporating iconography and cultural motifs that create a dialogue with the borrowed elements so that a narrative emerges from the amalgamation of the two. As has been pointed out, the onus is on the viewer to piece together the elements and make sense of the relationships occurring as a result of the appropriation.

Acts of mimicry are also popular in the work discussed. As with appropriation, mimicry contains vital hints and clues that assist the viewer with the reading of the work (although they will be detectable only if the viewer is familiar with who or what the artist imitates). Contrary to expectations, the artists’ engagement with mimicry was relatively uniform. The three artists engaging with the practice, Jones, Albert and Thompson, all used it as a mechanism to communicate issues of identity — more specifically, the nuances of urban and cultural identity. What set them apart was their varied outcomes: some works were primarily humorous and entertaining, whereas others were insightful and self-reflective. Albert dressed as “gangsta” rapper 50perCENT (fig. 3.1) is a clear example of the former; instances of the latter include Thompson’s impersonation of art figures Andy Warhol, Tracey Moffatt, Rusty Peters and an unnamed woman from Peppimenarti (figs. 8.18–8.19 and 8.21–8.22) — all of
whom are allegorical representations of his complex and evolving artistic identity. Both examples nonetheless carry elements of self-identification: Albert’s in relation to his dual heritage and Thompson’s in the self-portrait (fig. 8.20) that forms part of the series.

For mimicry to be an effective means of communicating issues of identity, these artists had to ensure that their presence (more specifically, their Indigeneity) was still evident within the work. They achieved this objective by remaining recognisable. Even though they had taken on the identity and mannerisms of someone else, they left visual clues as to their real identity. Of course, mimicry is an increasingly important term in postcolonial discourse because of the way it has come to describe what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe as the “ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized.”20 This sentiment is reflected in the writings of prominent postcolonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha, who defines colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” and outlines its destabilising effect on the authority of colonial discourse.21 The artists’ use of mimicry as a means of self-representation is clearly consonant with Bhabha’s definition, even though that may not have been a stated aim.

Despite not being as widely adopted as appropriation and mimicry, bricolage (a French term meaning “do-it-yourself”) also warrants consideration because it dominates the practices of Albert and Andrew. In the visual arts, bricolage involves using pre-existing materials and recombining them to make something new. The practice draws on assemblage and collage, and like appropriation and mimicry, requires the viewer to be cognisant of the relationships occurring within and around the assemblage of objects. One of many examples is Ash On Me (fig. 3.13), Albert’s politically charged installation of reclaimed ashtrays decorated with kitsch images of Indigenous people and culture. Another is Andrew’s 18 Lives of Paradise (figs. 7.39–7.40), the makeshift wall depicting exoticism and playing with ideas of exclusion and inclusion. One common element in Albert and Andrew’s bricolage is the items sourced from second-hand shops and online sites selling pre-owned goods. The artists’ ownership and use of this material gives it new meaning. Also complying with the practice of bricolage are the installation of new and decommissioned human remains boxes Boyd exhibited at the

Natural History Museum in London (figs. 6.22–6.23) and *Crime Scene* (fig. 4.49), the assemblage of objects Jones excavated from the site of the murder of Englishwoman Sarah Cook and her infant child, which sparked a series of massacres of Nyungar people on the Western Australia colonial frontier.

### 9.1.3 SATIRE, SCALE AND EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

Seen as the expression of thoughts and ideas intertwined with skill and imagination, art is a social activity with the capacity to produce a variety of emotions. The argument can even be made that an artwork is only read correctly when the audience feels or understands the emotion the artist is trying to convey. Artists can trigger emotion by engaging with particular subject matter or, as is the case here, with narratives. Emotion can be expressed through works of art in many ways. Examples include satire, scale or emotive language, all of which have affective properties that maximise the impact of an artwork by commanding our attention and encouraging us to take a closer look.

Comparison can be made with the way a person raises their voice for emphasis or uses exaggerated gestures for dramatic effect. These three artistic options can offer different kinds of art experiences. This is particularly true of scale, the use of which can complicate our expected understanding of the relative size of objects.

Satire, as defined by Robert Elliot, is “an artistic form in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.” As manifested in contemporary art, the practice is distinguished by the potent political and social dimensions that give it agency. As noted by Sheri Klein, “satire prompts us to re-examine our values, social behaviours and morals.” In other words, it entails more than just humour: satire is not simply a device for lightening the mood or softening the blow of what is to come. Hence, its appeal is clearly that it can pack a mean punch by ridiculing or disrupting the status quo.

Boyd’s recontextualisation of Cook and his men as a cast of thieving buccaneers (fig. 6.4) and Jones’ intervention on Dupain’s iconic Sydney beachscapes (figs. 4.9–4.10 and 4.14)

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22 By this I refer to the interpretation and display of art, both of which are social activities.


are cases in point. In both instances the use of satire exposes the inconsistences in the prevailing account of Australia’s written and visual history. What is more, it “inspires social reform” by prompting us to reconsider what we think or have heard about Australia’s shared history.25

Scale also commands attention. As we have seen, it has the power to transform the unmonumental and mundane into something powerful and dynamic. Likewise, when used effectively, it can affect the viewer in ways not possible with objects or imagery made to scale or, as is the case with text, removed from its original context. Common to the artists in this study is their manipulation of scale to maximise the visual impact of their work and to bring into focus detail that might otherwise be missed. Examples include the absurdity and spectacle in William Blandowski’s illustrated encyclopaedia of Indigenous Australia as re-presented by Andrew (figs. 7.23–7.28) and the gaze common to Ah Kee’s charcoal portraits of family members (figs. 2.7 and 2.14–2.23). As explained by Ah Kee: “drawing on a large scale gives the opportunity to incorporate lots more detail into the face — the architecture of the face itself, the lines and the character.”26 Likewise, it elicits an emotional response far greater than would be experienced with regular-sized photographs, such as those in the archive from which he drew.

The many ways of using scale include Jones’ appropriation of iconic colonial paintings by Von Guerard (fig. 4.1) and Glover (fig. 4.3). Here she plays with scale and proportion to bring Indigenous Australians to the fore as subjects.27 It is also an ingenious way of reminding us, albeit symbolically, that Indigenous Australians are more than just a footnote in Australia’s shared history. A more abstract example is Thompson’s “Oldenburg inspired” knitted jumpers with elongated sleeves (figs. 8.1–8.6), which form a visual metaphor for the overconsumption of Indigenous people and culture for profit and gain. As previously stated, scale can also make possible different kinds of art experiences. Andrew’s large-scale inflatable sculptural works Jumping Castle War Memorial (fig. 7.36) and The Cell (figs. 7.37–7.38) are examples. What

25 Elliot, “Satire.”
27 Scale and proportion are often used interchangeably, but there are subtle differences. Scale implies the relationship between an object and the human body, whereas proportion refers to the relative size of the parts of an object.
sets these experimental works apart is not their commanding presence, but rather the fact that they were designed with physical engagement in mind. As we have seen, the ensuing implications are profound because the participatory element sees the viewer become part of the work’s narrative, which evolves over time instead of being fixed.

The incorporation of language can also stir our emotions and command our attention. Ah Kee, Albert, Andrew and Thompson are part of a large pool of contemporary artists who draw on the affective properties of language and use text as an artistic medium. As explained by curator Timothy Morrell, text is an appealing platform because “words give artists the opportunity to be more direct than they usually are with images.”

Ah Kee believes that the act of making someone stand in front of words increases the likelihood of them being remembered. Common to Ah Kee and Albert is the use of language as a means of subversion and provocation. Of considerable note is Ah Kee’s subversion of the language of the coloniser (or, as Morrell has written, the language with which Australian history is written). Even so, few things command more attention than profanity, especially when it appears in duplicate, such as in Albert’s aptly titled Pay Attention (Mother Fuckers) (figs. 3.37–3.39). The gratuitous graffiti scrawled across the disused toilet block Ah Kee presented at the 2008 Biennale of Sydney (figs. 2.28–2.31) is another example. Andrew and Thompson’s use of language has elements of provocation, but instead of subverting the colonisers’ language they reinstate their own as a marker of their cultural identity and an affirmation of their cultural ties.

9.1.4 COSTUMES, PROPS AND STAGED SETS

Costumes, props and staged sets also contain vital hints and clues that aid the viewer in reconstructing the narrative. Specifically, they tell us where, when and who. Examples are the urban setting of Ah Kee’s He Said…She Said series (fig. 2.6), the Victorian period dress worn in Thompson’s Emotional Striptease (figs. 8.7–8.16) and the

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30 Morrell, “In Black and White,” 34.
Indigenous idols Jones looked for as a child (figs. 4.30–4.34). Thompson’s use of costume in *Emotional Striptease* directs our attention to a specific period in time. He also uses it to add personal references to his work (e.g., the Oxford formal dress worn in the photographic series *We Bury Our Own* [figs. 8.62–8.69]). Elsewhere costume functions as a marker of culture: for example the slick sportswear and gaudy bling worn by Albert’s alter ego 50perCENT (fig. 3.1) is synonymous with hip-hop culture, and the tartan outfit worn by the bearded character in Thompson’s *Lost Together* (fig. 8.38) denotes colonial Australian artist Frederick McCubbin’s cultural heritage. Their approach differs from Ah Kee, who uses surf clothing (*Cant Chant*; fig. 2.41) to broaden ideas about Indigenous lived experience and to challenge the perception of Indigenous people as belonging to the remote interior of Australia.

Similarly, props offer pathways into the reading of a work and can push the narrative further. A good example is the traditional *jawun* (woven basket) worn by Albert’s cousin Ethan Rist in the photographic series *Optimism* (figs. 3.15–3.24). It is used to mark Rist’s cultural identity, which is uncertain because the viewer cannot see his face. Equally important are the contents of the *jawun*, which change with each image and, like the surf clothing in Ah Kee’s *Cant Chant*, challenge mainstream representations of Indigenous people and culture. Other examples are the fake artefacts, ritual paraphernalia and regalia found in Thompson’s work. Props such as these can, however, have multiple meanings and be interpreted in different ways. For instance, the garlands of native flora in Thompson’s *Australian Graffiti* series (figs. 8.26–8.37) are in dialogue with Indigenous Australians’ dispossession of their traditional lands, as well as with the systems that have reduced them to classificatory types. As has been pointed out, the artists often do not tell us this, but rely instead on the imaginative work of the viewer to make the connections and recover the meaning.

The setting of a work is another important visual element. This is especially true for artists working across photography and video, where the setting is a key consideration. They choose a location as part of the creative process, so if working in a studio they might design or build a set that fixes the narrative to a particular time or place. The artificial desert environment Thompson recreated for the video installation *Heat* (fig. 8.51) exemplifies the latter. The setting can also influence the mood or tone of a work. For example, to give the impression of an everyday conversation between two Indigenous people, Ah Kee set the *He Said…She Said* series (fig. 2.6) in an
unremarkable suburban location. Similar representations are found in the work of Thompson, Albert and Jones, who also draw on the suburban landscape to convey a sense of the ordinary and everyday. To counter the misrepresentation of Indigenous men in the media, Jones photographed the men in her family at home and in their respective communities, where they are recognised as family men and as positive role models (Men’s Business; figs. 4.41–4.48).

Their representation in this way counters the often negative and inaccurate portrayal of Indigenous men, which Jones clearly seeks to readdress. Parallels can be drawn with Andrew’s Kalar Midday series (figs. 7.3–7.6), which also challenges the mainstream representations of Indigenous Australians. Rather than using an everyday setting, however, he draws on the moonlit sky and reimagines their “blakness” by literally casting them in a different light. Whether or not it is a stated aim, the urban setting is a mechanism for the contemporisation and relocation of Indigenous experience from the remote communities in the desert and far north of Australia to the bustling cities and towns where the majority of Indigenous Australians live. The physical environment (more specifically, the exhibition space) in which a work is presented also has agency. For Boyd, the idea of presenting his installation of new and decommissioned human remains archival boxes within the walls of the Natural History Museum in London was a particularly creative way of building a context around the work and, it could be argued, of creating an open dialogue between artist, viewer and museum.

9.2 KEY THEMES AND NARRATIVES IN THE WORK

9.2.1 THE RESURGENCE OF NARRATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Storytelling has been an intrinsic part of culture since humans developed language. Whether real or imagined, stories add value and meaning to our lives. Moreover, as Richard Brilliant argues, they are the means through which we “construct, maintain and repair our reality.”31 Likewise, as noted by art theorist Mary O’Neill, it is through stories that we form relationships that “bind us to those with whom we have shared

As evidenced by this thesis, storytelling also plays a vital role in transferring knowledge, particularly from one generation to another. Art has long been a popular means of telling stories. To appreciate the role narrative has played in art throughout time, we need only look at seminal works in Western art history such as Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, Francisco Goya’s *The Third of May, 1808*, Jacques-Louis David’s *Oath of the Horatii* and Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*. Although the predilection to recount stories has endured over time, narrative has been more or less cast aside in significant periods of Western art history. Modernism, which deposed the high premium placed on well-established subject matter, is a case in point. This is not to say that narrative had disappeared, but rather that artists looked to new modes of expression as definitions of art broadened to accommodate a growing range of creative processes.

In contrast to their predecessors, modernists held radically different ideas about the nature and function of art. One of these is reflected in the French mantra *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art’s sake"), which meant that art needed no justification and was not required to serve any moral, religious, didactic or political function. The essence of modernism, as outlined by art critic Clement Greenburg in his seminal essay *Modernist Painting*, “lies in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself — not in order to subvert it, but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.”

Rather than using art to tell stories, as had been the case, modernists began creating previously unimagined objects that challenged conventional methods of art making and brought forward new experiences of art. In the period that followed, the boundaries of art were again redefined. Postmodernism reversed the modernists’ hierarchy of values: to quote art historian Christopher Reed, it “dislodged the wedge” modernism had driven between art and life.

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33 Narrative still played a role in a number of smaller independent art movements such as Social Realism (not to be confused with Socialist Realism), a form of propaganda and social commentary that conveyed the hardships of everyday life, the plight of the working class and poor and the social structures that caused inequity. See David Shapiro, “Social Realism Reconsidered,” in *Social Realism: Art as a Weapon*, ed. David Shapiro (New York, US: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973), 3.


Modernism redefined ideas of art, whereas postmodernism redefined the role of the artist.

Postmodernists’ opposition to traditional authority (along with their distrust of the “grand narratives” that French theorist Jean-Françoise Lyotard believed maintained stability and order in society) led to art becoming a popular mechanism for highlighting social and political concerns, for promoting justice and for driving social change.³⁶ Thus, the tenets of postmodernism were not only suited to storytelling, but they actually favoured it. The effect of decolonisation, which multiplied the number of voices and perspectives throughout the world, was also being felt at this time. As noted by art critic Thomas McEvilley, “many of these newly heard voices insisted angrily on expressing points of view that differed prominently from those of Western colonisers.”³⁷ The voices emanating from the artworks discussed here are cases in point. In fact, their critique of national identity and their distrust of existing cultural values align with postmodernist thinking. The same is true of their engagement with issues of identity, which are crucial to postmodernism and recur as narratives in postmodern art.³⁸ The artists central to this study have benefited not only from the conditions of postmodernism, but also from the return to narrative in art.

9.2.2 HIDDEN HISTORIES, OBSCURED PASTS AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The artists considered in this thesis engaged with aspects of Australia’s past and shared history in two distinct ways. First, they revisit existing and often well-known narratives and re-present them from an Indigenous perspective and via a contemporary lens. Second, they relay aspects of the past excluded from the dominant discourse of Australia’s written and visual history and those that sit outside the so-called legitimate forms of knowledge, most obvious of which are stories passed down via the oral tradition. As we have seen, these artists revisit familiar narratives to challenge the official account of history (which for so long rendered Indigenous Australians

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³⁶ See Jean-Françoise Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984). In its simplest form, grand narratives are the stories we, or nations, tell ourselves to explain the world we live in.
³⁸ Reed, “Postmodernism and the Art of Identity,” 274.
invisible), and they offset it with counter narratives that expose its flaws and inconsistencies. Fundamentally important is the artists’ engagement in a research-driven practice, which has led many of them to study archival collections in Australia and abroad as part of the creative process, particularly with regard to uncovering aspects of the past that have been hidden or obscured from public consciousness. Moreover, their research has revealed evidence of mythmaking and fabrication in relation to the colonisation of Australia and in visual representations of Australian life.

As noted by French theorist Pierre Nora, history and the reconstruction of it “is always problematic and incomplete.”\(^{39}\) This is because history is not a direct or neutral reading of the past. Rather, it is a reconstruction that changes with time and perspective,\(^{40}\) and its biases and failings must be recognized. Yet as historians Max Friedman and Padraic Kenney argue, the problematic nature of history does not detract from its value or legitimacy as an academic discipline.\(^{41}\) As they put it: “to say that history is subjective is not to say that it is illegitimate, or not useful, or unscholarly; it is merely to recognize the production of history as a human activity.”\(^{42}\) Moreover, as Friedman and Kenney go on to say, “histories tend to be partisan and to be produced with a specific goal in mind — for example, to win arguments or to overcome political struggles.”\(^{43}\) For this reason they argue that history must constantly be revisited and that different perspectives on it be held up to public scrutiny, particularly ones omitted from official accounts.

The artists discussed here are part of a large group of contemporary artists who, to quote art historian Hal Foster, “make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present [in their work].”\(^ {44}\) They engage in historical revisionism because they believe that the official account of Australian history as sanctioned by the government underplays the history of Indigenous Australians. The issue is complicated by misinformation and false narratives, such as those upheld (albeit unwittingly) when passed down by an authority figure such as a parent or schoolteacher. That Captain James Cook “discovered” Australia in 1770 is one of the more well known of these

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\(^{40}\) Ibid.


\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 1.

falsehoods. Yet it was a narrative that generations of Australian children heard at school. Albert, who was born in 1981, is one of them ("as a young Australian person I still went through an education system which taught exactly what my work is stating — that Captain Cook discovered this country"). Boyd’s interrogation of the key figures in the colonisation of Australia, whom he recasts as thieving buccaneers, marks his reply to this version of history, and more importantly, sets the record straight.

The telling of Australian history has been a source of controversy for many years. In his 1968 Boyer Lecture *After the Dreaming*, W. E. H. Stanner argued that there was a “cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale” in regard to the defeat and dispossession of Indigenous Australians. As noted by Ann Curthoys, Stanner’s lecture had a profound impact on historians and inspired new work on Indigenous Australian history. By 1984, historian Henry Reynolds declared that the “great Australian Silence had been shattered, the culture of forgetfulness abandoned.” The debate then shifted to the obligations of the historian and the demands of patriotism in recounting the national story — the exchange of views sparking what Australia has come to call the “history wars”. This debate arose alongside a new strand of Australian historiography conveying an alternative perspective on Australia’s colonisation and, as mentioned earlier, it centres on the extent to which the colonisation of Australia was marked by violence and conflict. In the later years of John Howard’s Prime Ministership, the debate spilled into the national Australian school curriculum. In 2011, a history curriculum charting 50,000 years of Australian history (i.e., one offering a significantly broader view of it than Albert and many others were taught at

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school) was implemented in schools nationwide in a bid to broaden the existing narrative.

Through their engagement with Australia’s Indigenous war history, Albert and Jones point to inconsistencies and failures in the Anzac narrative. As historian Frank Bongiorno points out “there is a long and rich history of contention over the significance and meaning of the Anzac legend.”\textsuperscript{51} That said, Noah Riseman describes Australia’s Indigenous military history as a “very niche academic area.”\textsuperscript{52} Riseman further notes that Indigenous communities were well aware of this history, despite the lack of public interest in it prior to 2000.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, he says that the push towards recognition was “spearheaded” by Indigenous war veterans, who have met with varying degrees of success over the past decade.\textsuperscript{54} Albert’s YININMADYEMI Thou Didst Let Fall (fig. 3.54), the sculpture in Sydney’s Hyde Park that commemorates Indigenous military service, is one of their more successful endeavours. Likewise, Jones and Boyd point through their work to the exclusion of Indigenous Australians in the narrative of “nation-building,” which they consider does not adequately reflect the contribution of Indigenous Australians. Jones’ appropriation of Tom Roberts’ Shearing the Rams (fig. 4.5) underlines their contribution to the pastoral industry, and Boyd’s work with the history of the South Sea Islanders points to their contribution to the sugar and cotton industries, all of which have been fundamental to Australia’s economic development.

The artists were concerned with much more than revisiting existing narratives and representing them from an Indigenous perspective. They also sought to capture stories and aspects of the past that sat outside what Jen Webb succinctly describes as


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
“conventional zones of knowledge” (e.g., official histories and government records). Some of these accounts were uncovered through research undertaken as part of the creative process, whereas some were passed down (often from family members) through the oral tradition. A good example of the former are the anecdotes Ah Kee extracted from the archive and incorporated into the This Man Is...This Woman Is... series (fig. 2.4). Illustrating the latter is the information passed on to Jones from a relative about the 1839 murders of English settler Sarah Cook and her infant child, which took place on her mother’s country in Western Australia. Her investigation also drew attention to the ensuing violence and massacres of Indigenous people. The violence was, of course, part of a larger campaign waged against Indigenous Australians from 1788 onwards, in which many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people lost their lives. Reference to the violence appears elsewhere in the work of Albert (Headhunter; fig. 3.10) and Ah Kee (Hang Ten; fig. 2.39). Although well documented, many of these acts of violence were endorsed by the authorities and tend to fall outside the realm of public consciousness. Hence, as noted by Kerry McCallum, references to them tend be met with suspicion.

Forming a core part of this history is social injustice, which tends to be overlooked and met with inaction. Among many examples are the alarmingly high incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians, particularly the youth, and the disproportionate number of Indigenous deaths in custody. One could argue that the imprisonment of Lex Wotton after the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee is typical of these injustices. A further example is the demonisation of Indigenous men in the aftermath of the NTER, which inspired Jones’ photographic series Men’s Business (figs. 4.41–4.48). Others are the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, referenced by Ah Kee (Stolen Removed; fig. 2.11) and Albert (Sorry; figs. 3.11–3.12 and Sorry 13.02.08; fig. 3.26), and the abuse many of them encountered at institutions such as the Kinchella Aboriginal Boys’ Training Home and Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for

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56 The frontier conflict in Australia is the subject of rigorous academic inquiry. Two seminal examples are: Henry Reynolds, Forgotten War (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2013); and John Connor, The Australian Frontier Wars: 1788–1838 (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2002).
Aboriginal Girls. The laws governing Indigenous Australians in Western Australia recalled by Pease, which restricted their movements and made them trespassers on their traditional lands, also exemplify social injustice. While the artists are not the sole disseminators of these histories, or even the first to discover them, their perspectives and commentary on them contribute significantly to the broader discussion.

9.2.3 REGIMES OF REPRESENTATION

The representation and misrepresentation of Indigenous people and culture, historically and in contemporary society, is another recurring narrative. Visual representations of Indigenous people and culture by others have been a particular concern because they tend not to reflect the diversity, complexity and contemporaneity of Indigenous experience and identity (i.e., “that Aboriginal people can be tall, skinny, short, have dark hair, light hair, light skin, dark skin”). Moreover, they tend to fix Indigenous people and culture to the past and to certain landscapes (“we’re all supposed to look like the guy on the back of the $2 coin”). Imagery has long been the basis for modern communication, and its dominance in the digital era has only increased — with both negative and positive outcomes. The artists responded to representations of Indigenous people and culture by others in two distinct ways: first by quoting the representations of others in their work and second by employing modes of self-representation in a bid to recast Indigeneity in a more contemporary light. They do the latter to bridge the divide between how they are seen by others and how they see themselves and want to be seen. These modes of self-representation are also fundamental to the artists’ collective desire to broaden the dialogue around Indigenous lived experience and to reimagine Indigeneity as a multicultural space.


The starting point for many of the artists was the photographic archive. Cases in point are Ah Kee’s engagement with the Tindale Collection at the Museum of South Australia, Andrew’s frequent work with photographic archival collections in Australia and abroad at the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology and the Royal Anthropological Institute in London and Thompson’s work with the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Photographic collections such as these have also been the subject of several publications, such as Jane Lydon’s *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies* (2015) and *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (2005). The photographic archive offers evidence of the intense curiosity and scrutiny Indigenous Australians have been subjected to by others, particularly under colonial rule. As noted by Sue McKemmish and others:

> The archives within colonial and post-colonial societies have been implicated in the continued oppression of Indigenous people. As in other circumstances where oppressive regimes have existed, archives in these societies have historically been agents of human rights abuse and collusion. Today, they can play a critical role in the recovery of Indigenous knowledge and language. They provide evidence for re-establishing familial heritage, enabling family link-ups, supporting community regeneration, pursuing land claims and seeking redress relating to dispossession and human rights abuse.

The artists here re-present the archive to defend their claims of misrepresentation and to remind us of the way Indigenous Australians were photographed from all angles, reduced to classificatory types and forced to bare all in the name of science and curiosity. Thompson’s 2003 photographic series *Emotional Striptease* (figs. 8.7–8.16) is an example of the latter. Similarly, Andrew’s appropriation of William Blandowski’s illustrated encyclopaedia of Indigenous Australia (figs. 7.23–7.28) reminds us that the visual archive is not a neutral repository: like accounts of history, it has its biases and imperfections.

The archive can be dangerous territory for the novice. As with the imagery used by Andrew and Thompson, strict protocols surround its use and reproduction. The issue is

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further complicated by the re-presentation of imagery that denigrates or diminishes indigenous people and culture. Even if it is not the artist's intention, a valid argument is that re-use of such imagery perpetuates or reinforces the denigration. A counter argument is that its use can have positive outcomes, such as those outlined above. That said, some of the most perverse and extreme representations of Indigenous Australians (e.g., those found in Andrew and Albert’s work) are found not in the archives of collecting institutions worldwide but are in the public domain and are easily acquired from second-hand shops and online sellers. These representations illustrate the manifold ways Indigenous Australians have been romanticised and exoticised by being cast in roles such as the noble savage, little piccaninny and, in the case of Andrew’s work, circus freak or sideshow attraction. Such caricatures are potentially menacing because they can perpetuate stereotypes, obscure individual differences, trigger memories from the past and have a lingering negative effect on those who experience them.

The representation of Indigenous people by others is also reflected in the many attempts to define who or what is “Indigenous.” Marcia Langton’s claim that “Aboriginal” is one of the most disputed terms in the Australian language is well founded.63 John McCorquodale reports no fewer than sixty-seven definitions of Indigenous people throughout the course of Australia’s postcolonial history.64 Several of these (e.g., fullblood, half-caste, quadroon, octoroon and coon) are quoted in Albert’s reclaimed velvet painting Coon (fig. 3.31). Although these terms are no longer used officially, we learn from the work that Indigenous Australians are still characterised and defined by the colour of their skin and the percentage of their blood. However, the conversation between Ah Kee and Miller that plays out in Ah Kee’s He Said…She Said series (fig. 2.6), tells us that the characterisations come from both sides, both inside and outside of Indigenous communities. As noted by Stephen Pritchard, Indigenous people are more than capable of defining the meaning of “Indigenous person” or “culture” to satisfy their own needs and interests, however what tends to differ is the legal definition, which “determines who is eligible to claim Indigenous rights and entitlements under Commonwealth and state law and legislation.”65

65 Stephen Pritchard, “Defining ‘Indigenous’: Between Culture and Biology,” Cultural Studies Review 10, no. 2 (Sept 2004): 51. To make these claims and access these services Indigenous Australians must
Extending from this debate is the artists’ collective call to look beyond racial purity as a key determinant of who and what is Indigenous. Albert makes the call via his hip-hop alter ego 50perCENT, whose name is a positive affirmation and public declaration of his dual heritage and cultural identity. Thompson also uses modes of self-representation to defuse the flux and anxiety that surrounds his cultural identity. Like Albert, he refuses to pick sides, choosing instead to move the conversation on through acceptance of his “difference.” Although Jones had not personally experienced the prejudice encountered by many Indigenous people who lack obvious markers of their Indigeneity, the series of portraits she produced of her nieces and nephews cast as Mona Lisa (figs. 4.26–4.29), one of the most revered figures in the Western art world, certainly prompts awareness of an issue that affects many Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) Australians. As we have seen, this can be achieved by establishing cultural norms that better reflect Australia’s evolving cultural identity. This shift is important because Albert, Thompson and Jones’ nieces and nephews are typical of the growing number of Australians whose cultural identity cannot and should not be reduced to a single identity.

The artists also demonstrated a desire to see Indigenous Australians represented in landscapes that more accurately reflect their lived experience and the contemporariness of their culture. A good example is the recognisably urban setting of Albert’s photographic series Optimism (figs. 3.15–3.24). Others are the recurring city beaches in Jones and Ah Kee’s work and the urban facade backdrop of Thompson’s Emotional Striptease (8.7–8.16). To quote Ah Kee, these works tell us that Indigeneity is “more than we think.” As well as playing with the perception of Indigenous Australians as belonging to the remote interior of Australia, they are fundamental to the relocation of Indigenous experience to the towns and cities where the majority of Indigenous Australians live. With his Kalar Midday series (figs. 7.3–7.6), Andrew takes the representation of Indigenous people a step further by looking beyond the physical landscape and reimagining them, as subjects, in ways they tend not to be seen by others.
([the images] confront the ordinary perception of Aboriginal people, of being human of being embodied, and of being emplaced). For Jones, however, the issue is not how others represent Indigenous people, but that they are not represented at all. As Langton has stated, “the easiest and most ‘natural’ form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible.”

9.2.4 CULTURAL ALIENATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Another narrative is what Ah Kee refers to as the “profound sense of exclusion and invisibility” many Indigenous Australians believe to be a result of their Indigeneity. At the heart of the issue is the aforementioned indifference about Australia’s shared history and Indigenous past. Also exacerbating feelings of cultural alienation and displacement is the continued misrepresentation of Indigenous people and culture by others and the underbelly of racism (and denial of it) that Ah Kee, Albert and Jones offer anecdotal evidence of through their work (“I’m not racist but … you just can’t expect too much of them really”). A further contributing factor is the cultural divide maintained in contemporary Australian society, which disenfranchises those who disrupt the narrative of white normativity. As we have seen, the divide plays out through Ah Kee’s frequent use of binary oppositions (“them vs. us,” “Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous,” “white vs. black” and “coloniser vs. “colonised”) and is propped up by anecdotes such as those he presents in *If I Was White* (figs. 2.1–2.3). As well as underlining the subtle ways racism occurs (e.g., Ah Kee suggesting that the failure to act or speak out constitutes a racist act), these anecdotes articulate the effect of whiteness on the lives of Indigenous Australians. More specifically, they demonstrate the way that everyday tasks such as getting a job or making friends are made difficult for them.

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68 Langton, “Aboriginal Art and Film,” 113.
69 Vernon Ah Kee, “Art and Confrontation” (lecture, School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra, August 29, 2012).
As we are told by Ah Kee, “the obviousness of the Aboriginal condition is the most telling indicator of the level and nature of racism in Australia.”\(^\text{72}\) Stark evidence lies in the gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in key areas such as life expectancy, health, education, employment and social and economic well-being.\(^\text{73}\) The most alarming indicator of the gap in social well-being is the dramatic increase in Indigenous suicide, which rose sharply from 5 percent of the national total in 1991 to 50 percent in 2010.\(^\text{74}\) Contemporary disadvantage among Indigenous Australians should be viewed in the context of colonisation and failed government policies and initiatives. As we have seen, it is also the result of the kind of intergenerational and institutional racism that Albert underlines in his appropriation of Gordon Bennett’s vexing work *Daddy’s Little Girl* (fig. 3.43–3.45), which he contemprosises to expose its continued manifestation in Australian sport. The racial vilification of AFL player Adam Goodes in 2013 saw the “cultural battlefield” of Ah Kee’s *Cant Chant* (figs. 2.32–2.42) shift to the sporting arena, where decades earlier Winmar had been subjected to vitriolic abuse. As former Olympian Nova Peris observed, Goodes was unfairly targeted because “he’s a proud Aboriginal man who spoke out.”\(^\text{75}\)

Racism exists at all levels in Australian society and is not exclusive to the sporting field. Jones cites the example of her father and brother being stopped by police when they were helping her take photographs for the *Men’s Business* series (figs. 4.41–4.48). Their experience is not dissimilar to that of Indigenous journalist Danny Teece-Johnson, who in 2015 was pulled aside by police at a Sydney train station, searched for drugs and forced to empty his bag in a case of “mistaken identity.”\(^\text{76}\) Earlier that year, two Australian Federal Police officers were found to have breached the agency’s code of

\(^{72}\) Ibid.


behaviour (which states “an AFP appointee must act with fairness, reasonableness, courtesy and respect, and without discrimination or harassment, in the course of AFP duties”)\(^\text{77}\) for intimidating Indigenous journalist Myles Morgan whilst he was covering the Frontier Wars memorial march in Canberra on ANZAC day.\(^\text{78}\) Instead of being isolated, the incidents recounted by the artists are illustrative of wider cultural concerns, such as the failures of the judicial system as regards Indigenous Australians (cases in point being Cameron Doomadgee’s death in police custody and Lex Wotton’s imprisonment).

For many Indigenous Australians, the feelings of alienation and displacement they experience as a result of their Indigeneity take hold at an early age. Albert, for example, has spoken about the isolation he and his sister felt in being the only two Indigenous children at their school (“I’ve always thought of myself as an alien”).\(^\text{79}\) Similarly, Jones recounts the sense of isolation she felt growing up in a predominantly white culture and never seeing herself represented in magazines, advertising and television shows.\(^\text{80}\) (“There’s a certain feeling that you get if you never see yourself and you constantly have this feeling where you’re not there. It’s a bit like sadness. You think. ‘Why?’”).\(^\text{81}\) Her response is to dress up as her teenage idols and hijack the popular imagery that rendered her the invisible other. The Australian media is slowly heeding calls for greater ethnic diversity, yet the failure of commercial television networks to create non-stereotypical roles for people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds remains an ongoing issue.\(^\text{82}\) Obviously, the continued failure to represent “real world” Australia extends far beyond the lives of Indigenous Australians. Although many other Australians do not conform to the industry’s white cultural norm, \textit{Screen Australia} reports that between 2011 and 2015, 82 percent of TV drama characters across 199


drama programs were of Anglo-Celtic cultural background, despite it constituting only 67 percent of the Australian population.\footnote{Screen Australia, Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama (Sydney, NSW: Screen Australia, 2016), 10, https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555b44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf.}

Further exacerbating these feelings of cultural alienation and displacement are the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in the Australian Federal Parliament and their ongoing fight for sovereignty and constitutional rights. In fact, Australia is one of the few Commonwealth countries not to have signed an official treaty with its Indigenous people. In contrast to the many countries whose national day celebrates their independence or unity with its Indigenous people (e.g., New Zealand and South Africa), Australia’s national day marks the arrival of the First Fleet and the beginning of their dispossession. Although the celebration of Australia Day on this anniversary has divided opinion for many years (one of the first organised protests was led by the Aborigines Progressive Association in 1938; fifty years later, forty thousand Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians made their position clear by marching from Sydney’s Redfern Park to Hyde Park in protest of the significance of the day), the dialogue around Indigenous recognition and perspectives on the day grows with each passing year.\footnote{As an example, the City of Fremantle in Western Australia announced plans to defer its 2017 Australia Day celebrations to January 28 in a bid to be more inclusive to Indigenous Australians. See “Fremantle Axes Australia Day Celebrations for ‘Culturally-Inclusive Alternative,’” ABC News Online, posted on November 25, 2016, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-25/fremantle-axes-australia-day-celebrations-changes-to-january-28/8057116.} While the artists under discussion are unable to settle these issues on their own, their art does bring us a step closer to understanding the cultural alienation and displacement many Indigenous Australians experience.

What is also clear from a reading of the artists’ work is that these distressing feelings result not only from the relationship Indigenous Australians have with non-Indigenous citizens. For many Indigenous Australians, including several of the artists whose work has been examined, they are deeply rooted in the estrangement and disconnection they feel from their Indigenous heritage as a result of colonisation, which severed vital familial and cultural links. Contributing factors are the stigmatisation of Indigeneity and, more specifically, the systems that caused many Indigenous Australians to feel ashamed of their heritage.

I have only recently identified as being an Aboriginal person. You see, where I came from in Queensland, it was not popular to be known as an Aboriginal
person. So every Black Australian living in Queensland was Fijian, Samoan, Torres Strait Islander, Indonesian, Malayan — anything but Aboriginal.  

Pease’s maternal family bore the brunt of successive government policies that saw Indigenous children removed from their families. His practice is typical of the “extraordinary salvage operation” Lin Onus argued was characteristic of the practices of many urban-based Indigenous artists. Boyd’s engagement with the Natural History Museum’s First Fleet collection and his work with the history of the South Sea Islanders, to which he has a familial connection, are further examples. By publicly recounting these histories, Pease and Boyd not only add to our understanding of Australia’s shared history, but they also reconnect with their culture and reclaim what has previously been denied to them from others: a sense of belonging within their own people.

### 9.2.5 HEROISM, IDOLISATION AND FAMILIAL CONNECTIONS

The sense of estrangement and disconnection from culture many Indigenous Australians experience is not felt by all. In fact, through their work Albert, Thompson and Ah Kee demonstrate the strong ties they foster and maintain with their culture and communities. These ties are often the fruits of strong familial connections and reflected in the artists’ engagement with their family histories. Ah Kee’s inquiry into his grandparents’ life on Palm Island, Boyd’s research into the indentured labour scheme that brought his grandfather to the sugarcane fields of North Queensland and Albert’s engagement with his grandfather’s military service are examples of strong familial connections. The incorporation of the Bidjara and Wiradjuri languages in the work of Thompson and Andrew exemplify the passing on of traditional knowledge. The regular appearances of artists’ family members in their work is further evidence of these ties. Among many examples are Albert’s cousin Ethan (figs. 3.14 and 3.15–3.24), who appears in two of his photographic works; Jones’ nieces and nephews Jeulisa, John, Kristy and Murray (figs. 4.26–4.29), whom she posed as Mona Lisa; and Ah Kee’s cousins (fig. 2.41), who feature in the video and photographic images of Cant Chant (fig. 2.41).

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Several of the artists also expressed their familial connections through references to their traditional lands. Albert’s photographic series No Place (figs. 3.32–3.36) was shot in Girramay country. Jones’ most recent work, Crime Scene (fig. 4.49), recounts the massacres of Indigenous Australians in the aftermath of a brutal crime that occurred on Nyungar land in Western Australia. Nowhere is this familial connection more apparent than in the practice of Pease, the narrative of whose work is ensconced in the landscape of his Nyungar ancestors. In some cases the connections are abstract and symbolic. The black-and-white Wiradjuri design common to Andrew’s work, for example, is a clear marker of his cultural ties. Another instance is the recurring jawun in Albert’s photographic series Optimism (figs. 3.15–3.24) made by his aunty Ninni Murray, who had introduced the craft of jawun making to him when he was twelve. More abstract examples are the titles of Thompson’s work (e.g., Blaks Palace and The Gates of Tambo), which are places in his country. We can see that these familial connections not only matter to the artists, but they also enable the transfer of knowledge and cultural traditions for generations to come.

The idolisation of family members was another a strong conceptual thread. A good example is the aforementioned public declaration Jones makes about her family’s contribution to the Australian pastoral industry via her appropriation of Roberts’ painting (fig. 4.5). (“All my family have worked on farms. There’s a pride in my family that we work and work hard.”) More obvious ones are Jones and Albert’s homage to their grandfathers for their military service (figs. 4.40 and 3.54). As we have seen, their work forms part of a larger movement towards recognition of Indigenous servicemen and women in Australian war efforts. Notwithstanding, debate continues about the inclusion of the frontier wars in the Anzac narrative, and its place, if any, at the Australian War Memorial. Director Brendan Nelson believes the institution is not the appropriate place to tell that story.

The Australian War Memorial, as I say, is about Australians going overseas in peace operations and in war in our name as Australians. The institution that is best to tell those stories, in my view, is the National Museum of Australia and

88 Jones in conversation with Perkins, Half Light, 83.
perhaps some of the state-based institutions who are most likely to have whatever artefacts or relics that exist from this period in our history.  

Recognition of the frontier wars, which roughly spanned the period 1788 to 1930, is important because of the significant number of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) lives lost. Historian Henry Reynolds estimates the former to be between 25,000 and 30,000; however Raymond Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen argue that the figure could be as high as 60,000 in Queensland alone. As noted by Reynolds, these figures “effortlessly place the frontier wars in the same league as the two world wars.”

Inspiration was also drawn from the accomplishments of Indigenous Australians outside of the artists’ families. For Thompson it was Tracey Moffatt, the critically acclaimed artist he impersonates in The Gates of Tambo (fig. 8.22) and In Search of the International Look (fig. 8.24), and Charles Perkins, the renowned activist and advocate for Indigenous rights who led the aforementioned Freedom Ride in 1965. Thompson describes a chance meeting with Perkins as a teenager as a “defining moment” in his life. Interestingly, Thompson was not the only artist to cite the influence of Moffatt. In the developmental stage of his career, Albert also looked to her practice. Artist Gordon Bennett was another influential figure. To quote Jones: “at the time it [Bennett’s work] worked perfectly for me because I thought I can understand this. I can make my own interpretations on this and go away with that and do something else.”

Notwithstanding, the practices of many non-Indigenous artists (e.g., Bruce Nauman, Francis Bacon, Christian Boltanski, Rebecca Horn and Gerhard Richter) have also been influential.

The visual arts is an area in which many Indigenous Australians have excelled and forged successful careers, not only as artists, but also as curators and art writers. The artists under discussion have added to and been beneficiaries of this success. These curators and art writers sit alongside others, such as academic Marcia Langton. Her far

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90 Ibid.
94 Jones in conversation with Perkins, Half Light, 84.
broader contribution has left a mark on Thompson and Andrew, who have both made representations of her in their work. Likewise, Ah Kee cites the writings of Indigenous poet and playwright Kevin Gilbert (in particular his 1973 text *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It*) as giving him “a clear and unapologetic summation of the Aboriginal position, politically, historically and socially.”95 The artists also celebrated Indigenous achievement in sport, with Albert singling out Adam Goodes, Greg Inglis and Nicky Winmar and Andrew zeroing in on the sporting prowess of rugby league player turned professional boxer Anthony Mundine. Likewise, in his critique of white Australian beach culture, Ah Kee introduces us to professional surfer Dale Richards, who is the only Indigenous Australian to have competed in an Association of Surfing Professionals World Tour event.96

These athletes are heroes to many Indigenous Australians. As noted in a 2013 Parliamentary inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous well-being and mentorship, however, their contribution to the Indigenous community is often underestimated.97 The inquiry found that the participation of Indigenous athletes in mentoring programs, such as those developed by AFL and ARU, opened doors to education and created new pathways for Indigenous youth. In its submission to the inquiry, for example, Titans 4 Tomorrow (an organisation supporting youth throughout Queensland and Northern New South Wales) outlined the power of mentors to raise the sense of identity and confidence of its participants:

Kieran is an 18 year old. In Year 12 by his own admission he was ‘in a dark place’ and contemplating self-harm. In his own words he thought he would become another statistic of an Indigenous kid not completing Year 12: “Without that person to talk to I would have been out on the street at nights getting into trouble or being put into lock-up or even worse.” A workshop with Preston Campbell [Indigenous Australian former rugby league player] was a turning point and he has not only completed Year 12 but is now a marketing trainee working at

the Titans and is contemplating going to University.\textsuperscript{98}

Attributing his success as a mentor to the fact that the children identify with him is Rod Jensen, Manager of the Take Pride Program that provides rugby league development in communities in Far North Queensland, Cape York and the Torres Strait, (“I have come from where those kids have come from — they want to see how I got out, they want to know what I have learned”).\textsuperscript{99}

Equally important are historical figures such as Pemulwuy and Windradyne, whose leadership Boyd and Andrew espouse through their work. Along with their contemporaries Jandamarra, Dundalli, Yagan, Mosquito and others, these men are heroes to many Indigenous Australians, despite not being ratified yet as national heroes like Cook and other key figures in the colonisation of Australia (e.g., those referenced by Boyd).\textsuperscript{100} As we have seen, however, momentum is growing for official recognition of the wars they fought for their people and paid for with their lives. A more contemporary example is Lex Wotton, who stood against injustice and refused to be silenced by authorities after the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee. A testament to his character is the legal action he later pursued on behalf of the Palm Island community against the Queensland Government and Police Commission in the years following Doomadgee’s death and his own imprisonment. In December 2016, the Federal Court of Australia ruled that the police had acted with a “sense of impunity,” awarding damages to Wotton and the Palm Island community. As noted by Wotton’s lawyer Stewart Levitt, the finding is significant because “it’s the first time an entire community has been represented in a class action against a state of Australia alleging racial discrimination and being vindicated in that cause.”\textsuperscript{101} Importantly, it will bring a sense of closure to the community and forever change the narrative built around Wotton’s criminal conviction and Doomadgee’s death.

\textsuperscript{98} Titans 4 Tomorrow (Submission 22) in Sport — More Than Just a Game: Contribution of Sport to Indigenous Wellbeing and Mentoring, 95.


\textsuperscript{100} See David Lowe, Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians Who Fought Back (Melbourne, VIC: Permanent Press, 1994).

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I set out to better understand the work of seven contemporary Australian artists whose practices are rooted in what has been called the urban Indigenous art movement that come into prominence in the mid-1980s. Notwithstanding the fact that it continues to be used in some circles, the term “urban Indigenous art” is problematic not the least because it is rejected by many of the artists studied here who believe it is a disabling label and a reductive form of categorisation foisted on them by others. As we have seen, this is because their work flows into other, increasingly global, networks and their sense of themselves are far too complex to be compartmentalised or reduced to a singular entity. While it is true that their practices are now being spoken of in broader terms, debate is ongoing as to how we can, as Glenn Iseger-Pilkington puts it: “redefine the terms in which their work is read, critiqued, interpreted and dissected.” Research is one way. As is evident from this study, new research not only adds to the available data on their work, but also offers new insights into their practice. Suffice it to say, their work did not emerge in isolation, it is ensconced in a larger history, one that is clearly evolving in new and untold ways.

Building a dialogue around the work that didn’t reinforce some extant paradigms at the expense of others or reduce the artists’ identity to limiting adjectives were two challenges of the research. Admittedly, it is difficult to avoid all forms of characterisation. A third was situating the work within an art historical context. The artists’ desire to be thought of in the broader parameters of Australian art, which need to be reassessed and redefined to better reflect the nation’s evolving cultural identity, added to the complexity of the task. As expressed by the artists time and again, this is not easily done in a country where not everyone shares the same proprietary rights, and the practices of Indigenous Australian artists continue to be measured against dated cultural norms. That the practices of urban-based Indigenous artists have sat on the margins of mainstream artistic narratives is a case in point. Their marginalisation is

reflected in the existing literature, and in the curation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian art, and is evidenced by the artists’ need to navigate two cultural sites and occupy a third space. The finding underlines the need to move towards an approach that recognises the multiplicity in Australian art and, as noted by Paul Meredith, “avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and acknowledges and negotiates not only difference but also affinity.”2 From the research that has been carried out, it is clear that a thematic approach could be usefully applied to Australian art history.

The thesis offered an in-depth reading of the work of Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Brook Andrew, Daniel Boyd, Dianne Jones, Christopher Pease and Christian Thompson since 2000. The artists’ Indigeneity was the common factor used as the initial basis of selection, however as the research progressed, other, and arguably more significant, linkages emerged. One of the most striking of these is the strong intergenerational dialogue between the artists and those who had pioneered the urban art movement in the 1980s. These links are yet to be explored in fully; here was not the time or place, however they could be usefully explored in further research. The research also revealed clear and compelling links that offer new pathways to approaching the work of urban-based Indigenous artists. The artists’ high-level art school training is one of these. Continued research might look beyond the narrative and further explore the influence of the academic environment on the conceptual and aesthetic development of the artists’ work. Fundamentally important, however, is the need to establish a more robust critical framework for understanding the practices of Indigenous Australian artists. The study has shown that international perspectives can help in this regard. Accordingly, it would be interesting to compare the artists’ work to that produced by artists in other postcolonial situations or whose work invokes similar themes.3

Using a case study approach has facilitated an in-depth reading of the artists’ practices, comparative analysis of their work and a consideration of some of their shared life stories and experiences. Together this has revealed things that might not have been otherwise apparent. That several of the artists had realised their potential by drawing on the practices of Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett and the fact that all had been beneficiaries of formal art training being two obvious examples. I have argued that

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3 For example Shane Cotton (Aotearoa New Zealand), William Kentridge (South Africa), Kara Walker (United States) and Yinka Shonibare (Nigeria/Britain).
their work should be seen as a form of narrative, which provides compelling and convincing testimony of lived experience, and, as we have seen, a better understanding of their contributions to a broader reading of Australia’s Indigenous history. By undertaking a comparative study I have shown the work adds to the discourse on Australia’s shared history. We better understand how their use of research driven practices provides forms of knowledge, including those passed down through the oral tradition and which are not to be found in conventional historical sources. Given that many non-Indigenous Australians, including thousands of international visitors to our galleries and cultural institutions have their first, and sometimes only, contact with Indigenous people and culture, the power of their narratives must be recognised and not underestimated. Importantly, here we have explored the narratives of Indigenous people who live in cities, stories of which often connect them to remote Australia but which also essay life in the city.

We have seen that many urban-based Indigenous Australians retain strong connections to their culture and communities. Where there are gaps we can see in their narratives of lost connections how they seek to rekindle links and forge new ones. Having said that, some art narratives are encoded and even obfuscated. These works don’t give up their stories easily. I have shown that a meticulous analytical approach can repay the time and energy devoted to it. Taking a collective approach increases the pay off. I have highlighted the way in which they were confronting many of the same issues, the intergenerational impact and legacy of colonisation being at the fore of these. We can see it in the way the artists offer counter narratives to a history that has rendered them typically “invisible” and expose the abuses and indignities suffered to greater scrutiny. It is also manifest in their steadfast rejection of identities foisted on them by others, which reduce Indigenous Australians to stereotypes and fail to reflect the complexity, and diversity of their culture. Contrary to expectations, the feelings of exclusion and invisibility experienced by many Indigenous Australians were not limited to their interaction with non-Indigenous Australians; but also experienced within their own communities and among their own people. The narratives embedded in the work studied here also contain hope and triumph. There are depictions of heroes and role models Indigenous Australians can identify with. It is not only Indigenous Australians who can see themselves in these faces.

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The study has sought to enhance our understanding of Indigenous history and lived experience since colonisation by drawing out new narratives from a group of significant urban-based Indigenous Australian artists. However, as we have seen, it has broader implications. It tells us that more must be done to acknowledge Australia’s Indigenous history and reaffirm their place in the social fabric of contemporary Australian life. Admittedly, the absence of constitutional recognition and a treaty between Australia and its Indigenous people hints at the enormity of the task. The work also suggests that more must be done to chip away at the false assumptions many non-Indigenous Australians bring to their understanding of Indigeneity in our cities. Their art represents Indigeneity as a multicultural concept, which moves the conversation on from one of authenticity to the acceptance of difference. More than that, it is a conduit to understanding and an invitation for dialogue that facilitates discussion and learning in the context of reconciliation.

What is remarkable about this body of work, however, is that it succinctly speaks to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. As we have seen, many of the works were consciously made with an Indigenous audience in mind. By doing so they offer Indigenous Australians the opportunity to see themselves represented positively in ways that engender a sense of cultural pride. Likewise, the work provides an opportunity for them to learn more about the events that are part of their history. In other words, it offers points of departure for them to understand aspects of their own lives. For non-Indigenous audiences the work is an invitation to engage with aspects of Australia’s shared history that have not been widely disseminated. It also offers an unmediated cultural self-portrait that guides them to a different understanding of Indigeneity. Why is this important? For all viewers the art narrates crucial questions about who we are as a nation. As Tess Allas writes:

Where else will you find our unembellished histories if not through contemporary art? How else are we to learn about who we are if not for artists such as these? For without knowing who are and where we have come from, how can we forge ahead as a nation whose confidence is rooted in acceptance of the past?6

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5 Albert’s *Gangsta Supastar* series and Jones’ portraits of her nieces and nephews as Mona Lisa are two examples.


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**BLOGS**


VERNON AH KEE (b. 1967)

Vernon Ah Kee is a multi-disciplinary artist best known for his large-scale charcoal drawings and text-based installations. He was born in Innisfail in far north Queensland in 1967, and commenced his art training in 1986 when he enrolled in a screen-printing course at Cairns Technical and Further Education (TAFE). After a brief period working as a screen-printer he moved to Brisbane where he now lives and works. The move led to studies at Griffith University, from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Indigenous Australian Art in 1998 and honours degree in 2000. Post-graduate studies followed. In 2007 he was awarded a Doctorate in Visual Arts. Ah Kee is co-founder of the Brisbane Indigenous artist collective ProppaNOW and is represented by Milani Gallery in Brisbane.

The activism and writings of African American figures Malcolm X and James Baldwin, and Indigenous Australian writer Kevin Gilbert have influenced the conceptual development of Ah Kee practice. The influence of Russian Constructivism and work of Barbara Kruger and The Guerrilla Girls is reflected in his aesthetic and straightforward literary style. To date Ah Kee’s practice has been dominated by investigations into race, identity and the exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the social, cultural and political landscape of contemporary Australia. His work is anchored in his family history and draws on their lived experience on Palm Island in North Queensland. Contemporary relevance can be found in his critique of Australian popular culture and recontextualisation of the Indigenous subject via a contemporary Indigenous lens.

Since his first solo exhibition in 1999, Ah Kee has exhibited widely in Australia and abroad. His work was selected for inclusion in *Culture Warriors: 1st National Indigenous Art Triennial* (2007) and *Undisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial* (2012) held at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra. In 2008 Ah Kee was invited to exhibit work at *Revolutions — Forms That Turn: 16th Biennale of*
Sydney, and in 2009 he represented Australia at the 53rd Venice Biennale of Art in Italy. Ah Kee’s work is represented in the collections of the major public art institutions in Australia and has also been acquired for public and private collections in Canada, the United States and Hong Kong. Accolades for his work include the 2014 Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize for his portrait of Indigenous elder and activist Lex Wotton. An earlier portrait of Wotton saw him become a finalist in the 2012 Archibald Prize.

TONY ALBERT (b. 1981)

Tony Albert was born in Townsville in 1981. His formative years were spent in Brisbane where he undertook formal art studies at the Queensland College of Art. After graduating from Griffith University with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Indigenous Art in 2004, he worked for several years at the Queensland Art Gallery as an exhibition projects officer and Indigenous trainee coordinator. He currently lives and works in Sydney. Albert studied painting, however moved away from the medium as social and political concerns began to inform his work. He is best known for his large-scale mixed media assemblages of “Aboriginalia,” a word he uses to describe the mass-produced objects featuring naive and reductive representations of Indigenous people and culture he began collecting as a child. Albert is a founding member of the Brisbane-based Indigenous art collective ProppaNOW and is represented by Sullivan + Strumpf in Sydney.

Albert cites the work of Gordon Bennett, Richard Bell, Gordon Hookey, Tracey Moffatt and Vernon Ah Kee as influential on the conceptual development of his practice. He draws inspiration from found objects, which he re-presents from an Indigenous perspective to examine the cultural legacy of racial and cultural misrepresentation. The urban landscape reoccurs throughout his work and is used to relocate Indigenous experience to the towns and cites of Australia where the majority of Indigenous Australians live. A notable aspect of Albert’s practice is his engagement with Indigenous youth, who he incorporates into his work and seeks to empower with a sense of cultural pride. In 2012 the Australian War Memorial appointed Albert “Official War Artist.” The appointment made him the first Indigenous artist to be commissioned by the institution, and the first artist commissioned to work on Australian soil since the
Second World War. He was later commissioned to create a public artwork in Sydney’s Hyde Park to honour the thousands of Indigenous Australians who have served Australia in war efforts.

Albert is a highly awarded artist. His first major win was the Sunshine Coast Art Prize in 2007 for the *Gangsta Supastar* series, which he later exhibited at the Havana Biennial in Cuba. In 2014 he was the recipient of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA), and the highly coveted sport-themed Basil Sellers Art Prize. His most recent win was the 2016 Fleurieu Art Prize for landscape. In 2015 Albert completed a residency at International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York where he examined the American Civil Rights Movement in relation to his practice. Earlier this year he was a recipient of the 2016 Asialink Arts Kerjasama residency between Australia and Indonesia, which saw him work with Indonesian artist Timoteus Anggawan Kusno in Yogyakarta and Alice Springs. Albert’s work is represented in the collections of Federal and State public art institutions in Australia. Since his first solo exhibition in 2008, his name has appeared regularly on *Australian Art Collector’s* 50 Most Collectable Artists list.

**DIANNE JONES (b. 1966)**

Melbourne based photo-media artist Dianne Jones was born in Perth, Western Australia in 1966. Jones spent her childhood in Northam, a small town ninety-seven kilometres northeast of Perth. She later relocated to Perth where she completed an Art Foundation course at Perth Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in 1994, and then went on to study painting at Edith Cowan University, from which she graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2000. Jones’ art training is contrary to her reputation as a photo-media artist, however its influence is reflected in her engagement with iconic Australian art works, and in particular, paintings from the colonial era. A reoccurring element in her work is a simple cut-and-paste technique she employs to redress the homogeneity of dominant visual ideologies and redress the invisibility of Indigenous Australians in visual representations of Australian life and endeavours. The practices of Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffatt and Brenda L. Croft are cited as being instrumental to Jones realising her own potential as an artist.
Iconic representation, cultural identity, invisibility and remembrance are reoccurring themes in Jones’ work. A key concern is the relationship between iconic imagery and national identity, and its potential to give rise to a mythology that fails to accurately reflect the culture it informs. Another is the absence of Indigenous Australians in significant periods of Australian art history, which she redresses by hijacking images that underline their invisibility. Her work also plays with the nuances and complexities of urban Indigenous identity, and underlines the need for broader representations of Indigenous Australians in popular culture. Recent work has seen Jones return to her mother’s ancestral home near York in Western Australia, which is a landscape marked by a history of frontier violence and massacres. As part of the creative process, Jones conducts research and collects evidence that demonstrates the differing perspectives of the coloniser and colonised and exposes the inconsistencies in the dominant account of Australian history.

Jones’ work has been exhibited in a number of significant group exhibitions including the 26th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award Exhibition (2009), Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia (2008) and Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770 (2008). In 2007 Jones was the recipient of the City of Perth Art Award. The National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Monash University Museum of Art (Melbourne), University of Wollongong and the Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht (The Netherlands) have acquired her work. Outside of her practice Jones works as a curator and art writer. She is currently represented by Niagara Gallery in Melbourne.

CHRISTOPHER PEASE (b. 1969)

Christopher Pease was born in Perth, Western Australia in 1969. He currently lives in Perth. Before embarking on a career in the arts, Pease studied graphic design at Perth Technical College and worked as a graphic designer for The Aboriginal Independent Newspaper in Perth. It was at the latter that he came into regular contact with Perth’s Nyungar community; the experience had a profound effect and inspired him to learn more about Nyungar culture and history. The outcome is reflected in his practice, which is built around eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial landscapes of Western Australia and forms part of a personal investigation into his family history. Pease is a
research driven artist and, like many of his contemporaries, undertakes periods of research as part of the creative process. A notable element of his practice is the use of traditional media such as resin and ochre gathered from his own country in southern Western Australia.

Pease’s work recounts the story of a picturesque, but troubled land marked by the dispossession of the Nyungar and establishment of a new order that was in conflict with their way of thinking and relationship with the land. His use of appropriation underlines the tension between opposing cultures and articulates the devastating impact and legacy of colonisation on successive generations of Nyungar families. He does this by subverting the European landscape with Indigenous iconography and scientific diagrams. Contemporary relevance can be found in Pease’s critique of the settlers’ approach to land management and narratives that relay the environmental degradation brought on by the Europeans’ intensified agricultural practices.

Pease has been exhibiting regularly since 2000. His work has been included in major exhibitions including Culture Warriors: 1st National Indigenous Art Triennial (2007) and The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age: 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010). In 2002 he was awarded the painting prize at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA), and in 2009 he was a finalist in the Western Australian Indigenous Art Awards. Pease’s work is held in significant public and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Aboriginal Art Museum Utrecht (The Netherlands), Westfarmers Collection, Holmes à Court Collection and Kerry Stokes Collection. He is represented by Michael Reid Gallery in Sydney.

**DANIEL BOYD (b. 1982)**

Daniel Boyd was born in Cairns in 1982. He currently lives and works in Sydney. Boyd is a graduate of the Australian National University School of Art, where he completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts. Boyd learned to draw at an early age by copying pictures in books and comics and his talent caught the eye of family members and teachers at his school who encouraged him to apply for art school. Since graduating in 2005, Boyd has exhibited regularly in Australia and abroad. His preferred medium is
painting, however over the last few years installation and video have become a more visible aspect of his practice. Appropriation reoccurs throughout Boyd’s work and is used to interrogate visual representations of Australia’s colonial history and key figures in the colonisation of Australia. The practices of Destiny Deacon, Vernon Ah Kee, Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley and Brenda L. Croft have been influential on the development of his practice.

In 2011 Boyd was artist in residency at the Natural History Museum in London where he researched the museum’s First Fleet Collection as part of an investigation into his family history. His engagement with the museum was also the inspiration behind a body of work in dialogue with the museum’s changing curatorial policies regarding the care, conservation and repatriation of human remains. Boyd’s research into his family history has also led to a highly awarded body of work that recounts the history of the South Sea Islanders who were brought to Queensland in the late nineteenth century to work the State’s sugarcane and cotton plantations. Through his interrogation of the archive, Boyd exposes the subjective nature of history and offers readings of Australia’s colonial past that subvert the totemic status of those responsible for the dispossession of Indigenous Australians and subjugation of their history and cultural traditions.

Boyd’s work has appeared in major local and international exhibitions including *Culture Warriors: 1st National Indigenous Art Triennial* (2007), *Contemporary Australia: Optimism* (2008), the *7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (2012), *A Time for Dreams: 4th Moscow International Biennale for Young Art* (2014) curated by David Elliot and *All the World’s Futures: 56th Venice Biennale* curated by Okwui Enwezor. His work was recently included in *The Future is Already Here — It’s Just Not Evenly Distributed: 20th Biennale of Sydney* (2016). Boyd is the recipient of two major art awards: the 2014 Bulgari Art Award and the Young Artist Award at the 2015 Melbourne Art Foundation Award for Visual Arts. He has undertaken residencies at the Natural History Museum in London and International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York. He has also completed commissions for Macquarie Bank and Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. His work has been acquired by public and private collections in Australia and abroad. Sydney-based gallery Roslyn Oxley9 represent him.
BROOK ANDREW (b. 1970)

Brook Andrew is a research driven multi-disciplinary artist whose practice spans neon, photo-media, mixed media, performance and video. Andrew was born in Sydney in 1970 and is of Wiradjuri heritage, references to which reoccur throughout his work in the form of language and traditional design. His formal art training includes a Bachelor of Visual Arts from the University of Western Sydney (1993) and Master of Fine Arts, Research from the UNSW Art and Design (previously the College of Fine Arts), University of New South Wales (1999). Andrew’s practice is built around archival material, which he collects and sources from second hand shops and online resellers. Over the past decade he has studied Indigenous Australian collections in Australia and abroad at the Royal Anthropological Institute and Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in the United Kingdom. He currently lives and works in Melbourne.

Andrew is drawn to the work of Christian Boltanski, Oscar Munoz, Marcelo Brodsky and Gerhard Richter, the influence of which is evident in the way he challenges cultural and historical perception. It can also be seen in the way he employs text and imagery to comment on local and global issues regarding race, consumerism and history and make clear the cause an effect of inequality and way power structures maintain the divide between the coloniser and colonised. Andrew’s quotation of the archive invokes the complexity of Australia’s colonial history and misrepresentation of Indigenous Australians by others. As well as exposing the bias in the recording of history and perpetuation of myth, the archive has meaning as a form of remembrance to the lives lost through the processes of colonisation. Common to his work are the links he establishes between the history and experiences of Indigenous Australians and colonised and minority groups elsewhere in the world.

Since 2000 Andrew has exhibited widely in Australia and abroad. Recent highlights include The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age: 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010), Artist and Empire at Tate Britain (2015) and the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Gallery of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery (2015). His work has also be the subject of numerous solo exhibitions. Andrew has undertaken residencies and fellowships in Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Chile, Lithuania, Hawaii, India and Turkey, and has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants including the Georges Mora Foundation Fellowship.
(2013), the Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship (2012–13) and the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Japan: International Program, Cultural Exchange (2011). He recently completed a public art commission for The Cutaway at Barangaroo Reserve on the edge of the Sydney CBD. Andrew’s work is represented in major public and private collections in Australia. He is represented by Tolarno Galleries (Melbourne), Roslyn Oxley9 (Sydney) and Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Paris and Brussels).

CHRISTIAN THOMPSON (b. 1978)

Christian Thompson is a multi-disciplinary artist works across photography, textiles, sculpture, installation, video and performance. He was born in Gawler, South Australia in 1978. His formative years and school holidays were spent in Barcaldine, a small town in central west Queensland where his paternal family are from. For the past decade Thompson has been based in Europe, first in The Netherlands where he studied performance at DasArts (2008), and then in the United Kingdom where he undertook Doctoral studies at Trinity College, University of Oxford as a recipient of the Charlie Perkins Scholarship for Post-Graduate Studies (2010). The move saw him become the first Indigenous Australian to be admitted to the university. Prior studies include a Bachelor of Visual Arts from the University of Southern Queensland (1996), a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (1999) and a Master in Fine Art from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (2004).

Thompson cites the work of Tracey Moffatt, Rebecca Horn, Christian Boltanski, Eve Hesse, Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois and Fluxus artists such as Yoko Ono as influential on the development of his practice. Inspiration is drawn from his Bidjara culture and the zeitgeist of the 1980s and 1990s, visual references to which reoccur throughout his work. Common to Thompson’s practice is the use of self-portraiture and performance to explore the nuances of his identity and navigate the space in-between. The profound spiritual, physical, social and cultural bond many urban-based Indigenous Australians maintain with country is another dominant theme. While Thompson’s work is deeply rooted in the Australian landscape and its postcolonial history, the themes and issues he explores transcend cultural boundaries and speak about universal human experience.
Thompson’s group exhibition history includes the *Culture Warriors: 1st National Indigenous Art Triennial* (2007), *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (2009), *The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age: 17th Biennale of Sydney* (2010), *Undisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial* (2012) and *8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (2015). Since 2002 his work has also been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions in Australia and abroad. His work is held in major public, corporate and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Museum of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery and Art Gallery of Western Australia. Thompson has undertaken residences in Australia and abroad in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Singapore and Thailand, and has been the recipient of several grants, awards and fellowships. In 2015 acclaimed performance artist Marina Abramović selected Thompson for a residency as part of the Kaldor Public Art Project in Sydney. Thompson is represented by Michael Reid Gallery (Sydney), Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi (Melbourne) and Future Perfect (Singapore).