

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned
that this thesis may contain images of deceased people.**

Chapter 3

Wrap Us in Paper Bark

“Wrap Us in Paper Bark”

To wrap us in paper bark is metaphorically to wrap us together in a culture of place. In this section of the research I centre on collecting paper bark and making the paper bark bowls. The decision to go to participants’ ancestral country and collect the paper bark material to make the bowls was agreed with participants as this would give further understanding of the complexities of ‘connecting to country’. This was a crucial decision for me as I considered this an important procedure in developing my understanding and responsibilities. The paper bark is metaphorically a powerful connecting tool to the stories and was surprisingly beneficial in exploring cultural values from both Aboriginal and European perceptions. It is essential to understand paper bark as a metaphor for ‘land’. There were no objections to my collecting the paper bark material in any of my field work trips only surprise that I had asked.

Field trips¹ were made in the area of St. Clair in Singleton for the paper bark material to make **Linda Pont**’s² bowl (*figure page 7*) but no paper bark trees were found. Fred Turner³, a land and water officer at Glennies Creek Dam said they had planted a new wind break of Melaleuca paper barks way up country which he could arrange for me to access. When people found out what we were doing, they presented pieces of paper bark which they had located from a variety of areas and sources within Won:arua which extended into Pambalong and Awabakal countries through flood movement of the river. I found this engaging and in many ways valuable as it became inclusive of others. While gathering was in progress I researched the subject of education to understand Linda’s aims and achievements within the political and social arena of her story. In other words I research the history of her story to

¹ Studio 17 Screen Printing. “*Map of Lake St. Clair*”: *Total Exclusion Zone – Singleton Water Supply*. Singleton. W.R. MacKaway Tackle Singleton. September 1999

Water Resources Commission. “*Water Resources Commission Glennies Creek Catchment Management*”. New South Wales. April 1985 - pp.1-12

² Linda Pont. “*Pre-school is the Place to Be – Education is the Key*”. 2004

³ F. Turner. Personal conversation “*Looking for paper bark in the (Lake) St.Clair region*”. Land and Water Conservation – Officer in Charge – Glennies Creek Dam – State Water. Old Carrowbrook Road Via Singleton NSW 2330 – Telephone No. 02 6577 3172. Mobile 0428 492 286
Email: ftumer@dlwc.nsw.gov.au State Water is a Commercial Business of the Department of Land and Water Conservation. 2003



LINDA PONT'S

Paper Bark from Wonnarua Country. 2005

Approximately
440 x 440 x 150h

understand the struggle Aboriginal communities face to ensure an appropriate education which relates to a sense of place. This investigation becomes apparent in chapter five. Participants are busy people and we found the field trips to collect paper bark did not coincide with participants' responsibilities to their communities. Collecting the paper bark material for **Debbie Dacey's**⁴ bowl involved a trip to Wiradjuri country.

Robyn Griffiths came with me on this trip as her father is buried in the Parkes area. We looked in the Peak Hill area for paper bark trees and en route to Parkes but found none. On arriving in Parkes we found a few paper bark trees growing behind Parkes Tourist Centre.

On the way back we collected grass from Peak Hill which is used around the top section of the bowl. Peak Hill is renowned for gold mines and Parkes for the giant communication satellite, known as "the Dish", these modern landmarks had an influence in the design of the bowl (*figure page 8*). Debbie states at the beginning of her story that she feels she is swimming across the welfare system. To understand Debbie's story I researched Welfare policies which become apparent in chapter five.

The material for **Narelle Miller's**⁵ bowl came from a number of different locations, similar to that of Linda. Included is a small piece of paper bark from the Northern Territory which was given me by an Aboriginal tourist guide. The bowl also includes the use of 'ficky-foley' as Narelle calls the seeds of the Coral Tree from Central Australia (*figure page 9*). Her travel into many different countries around Australia connected to family interest in Native Title and an understanding between Native Title and Land Rights emerged.

⁴ Debbie Dacey. "*Barkuma: Swimming Across the Current*". 2004

⁵ Narelle Miller. "*It'll be Right*". 2004



DEBBIE DACEY

The bowl is made from material collected in Wiradjuri country. 2005

Approximately
500 x 500 x 200h

Figure page 8



NARELLE MILLER'S bowl

Material collected from Wonnarua Valley and beyond. 2005

Approximately
390 x 390 x 170h

Graham Ward, Allen Paget, Denise Hedges and Rhonda Ward consent to tell the stories about “Ungooroo⁶ Aboriginal Corporation” beginnings and the services they provide for the Singleton area of Wanaruah. Singleton, like Maitland, is also built on a flood plain and has a similar evasive history in regard to place-naming. Benjamin Singleton’s property was subdivided after he had lived there twenty years. This appears the sole reason for the settlement and therefore the name.

On arriving at Ungooroo with the idea of listening/interviewing one person’s story it soon became clear that the philosophy here is inclusive of everyone. Denise Hedges and Allen Paget have created an art gallery at Ungooroo. Denise teaches traditional painting techniques at the centre and in the local schools.

The decision to vary the use of creativity developed into making a linocut with Ungooroo. This started off as a means to print an image for the base of the Ungooroo bowl which included all participants who did a quick drawing on a linocut board. The Ungooroo bowl was made to take the print size and although the printing on paper bark did not come out as planned, it did have a different feel once it settled to the wax. The linocut is used as a connecting communal work (*figure page 10*).



Plate 24 “Won:arua Linocut” 2005

Linocut on left by...
 Linda Pont
 Debbie Dacey
 Elizabeth Griffiths
 Narelle Miller
 Allen Paget
 Denise Hedges
 Rhonda Ward
 Graham Ward
 Mariann McKinnon-Kidd
 & Kay Adlem 2005

⁶ Ungooroo. “*Down the Track: Ungooroo*” by Graham and Rhonda Ward, Denise Hedges and Allen Paget. 2004



The UNGOOROO bowl

Paper Bark material from Wanaruah Country. 2005

Approximately
460 x 460 x 180h

By the time we had made arrangements to visit **Elizabeth Griffiths's**⁷ country of Gamilaroi, doubts started to creep in.

Should I be doing this? These doubts were due to thinking about the difficulty of seeing things from another person's position. How would I feel? Someone goes to my country and collects my ancestral material, to make a bowl, my bowl. I reminded myself that this was the point of the research and remembered that when Americans or Australians quote history from 'my place of birth' or they take 'rubblings' from monuments to extend their knowledge or sense of connection, it always felt good in that they were interested.

Elizabeth agreed to the collecting of paper bark from Gamilaroi country but like other participants she is a working person. Robyn Griffiths, (*Plate 25*) Elizabeth's Mother, took me to Gunnedah. We waited until we had contacted local family members then we entered the Gamilaroi area which had a sense of water about it even though none was evident during our visit. This area is good grass growing country.



Plate 25 Robyn Griffiths in Gamilaroi country

We collected the Paper Bark from trees found on the Gunnedah Golf Course.

⁷ Elizabeth Griffiths. *"My Dream is the Return of Our Culture"*. 2004

This trip had a sense of history about it as Greg Griffiths and his Mother, Marie Griffiths showed us around.

Marie's late husband, George Griffiths had started the Red Chief Land Council and Greg is currently involved in re-enacting traditional stories each year. The re-enactment comes from the story of Red Kangaroo or "Red Chief"⁸.

The Griffiths families have a history in modern politics. George was the older brother of Rick Griffiths former ATSI Commissioner for the NSW North East Zone (2002-2005), now Manager (CEO) of Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council and Elizabeth's father.

As stated before, this is my journey taken with a number of people. Maybe because of circumstances Elizabeth's bowl, as with the other bowls which were entrusted to me to create, proved a meaningful catalyst and an extremely powerful learning experience.

Greg Griffiths had given us some white ochre and told us of the white stones⁹ that were buried under the road in Gunnedah High Street. He also gave us an orange rock which was significant to the area and both have been used in decorating Elizabeth's bowl (*figure page 11*).

This bowl held a lot of warmth. My first realization of this was when holding Elizabeth Griffiths's completed bowl, as I remembered the young paper bark trees on the Gunnedah Golf Course which still grew from ancestors as their roots reached down through the generations.

⁸ Ion L. Idriess. *"The Red Chief": Australian Classic. Young Red Kangaroo warrior by his mental and physical powers became Red Chief of the Gunnedah district. Handed down from Bungaree.* Angus & Robertson Publishers. Reproduced by kind permission of The Reserve Bank of Australia. 1953

⁹ Gunnedah is an Aboriginal word meaning white stones



ELIZABETH GRIFFITHS BOWL

Paper Bark material from Gamilaroi country. 2005

Approximately
500 x 500 x 60h

Marianne McKinnon-Kidd¹⁰ has recently been identified as being Aboriginal through found records and photographs and she believes her connection is with Biripi country.

I felt it important to include a person who had just found out about her ancestral ties, as it is believed many people in Australia have an unacknowledged Aboriginal past.

Marianne is an artist in her own right and it is interesting to listen to the changes she goes through as regard creativity. Marianne particularly wanted to be included in the whole process because, unlike other participants, this was all new to her.

We collected bark at Black Head and towards evening along the Wang Wauk River.

When the bowl was ready to be made Marianne was keen to participate in its construction and felt it was a journey she had to take as it was part of bringing Margaret (*Peggy*)¹¹ home. In Plate 26 (*below*), the soft bark from Wang Wauk River was folded around the outer edges of the bowl. Marianne used her own hair to stitch and hold the black crow shells in place.

This particular bowl has a further journey after the project “Wrap Us in Paper Bark” while “Relating to Country”.

Marianne enrolled at Macquarie University to do her Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies with “Warawara” Division of Society, Culture, Media and Philosophy in 2006.

¹⁰ Marianne McKinnon-Kidd. “*Permission to Exhale*”. 2004

¹¹ J. Brook & J.L. Kohen. “*The Paramatta Native Institution and the Black Town*”: A History. New South Wales University Press. 1991 - pp.83, 89 & 179

NOTE: Margaret (*Peggy*) is Margaret Read: Aboriginal great, great, great, great grandmother of Marianne, who is mentioned in the above book on the pages noted as Peggy. Her name changed to Margaret when she married.

After the bowl was exhibited in “Relating to Country” (2006) it was returned to Marianne and the ‘bowl’ became an integral part of bringing ‘Peggy’ home and featured in the exhibition “Drawn Threads: Peggy’s Legacy” at Muru Mittigar, Castlereagh from the 8th to 29th September, 2007¹².



Plate 26 Marianne and Bowl



Plate 27

The exhibition “Drawn Threads” 2007

Knowledge of bowl-making belongs to every culture, including the meaning of the bowl as a ‘vessel’, which refers to ships, boats and females. The space within the bowl has a resonance deep in the human psyche. I chose ‘a natural material’ with the intention of expressing a deep connection to participants’ stories by suggesting that an association with living close to flora and fauna¹³ and the natural environment is a positive plus to a culture.

¹² Koori Mail. “*Family threads*” Arts – National History Week 10 October 2007 – p.55

¹³ Associated animal status fell from grace with the doctrine of Christianity which implied, animals have no soul. This verifies the position of western thinking to the natural environment in very plain language and in turn launched the doctrine of ‘control’ not only over ourselves but over everything else. I believe reports on ‘land usage’ documentation aligned Aboriginal peoples with ‘flora and fauna’ which would possibly have been Corn, Cattle and Stockmen on a particular pastoral lease property. I do not believe Kangaroos or Lilly-Pillies were mentioned.

Trudgen¹⁴ explains one of his experiences of the misunderstanding of Aboriginal ‘cultural knowledge base’¹⁵ which can occur when this culture is approached from a European perspective. As an example he describes the Aboriginal understanding of ‘the sounds of the spear grass growing’ which is intended to imply the connectedness and association between all living things. Trudgen states that this concept would not be recognized “... until someone ‘qualified’ does a documentary or study on it”¹⁶ until then it will remain a strange concept. I believe this type of incomprehension of difference ignores the life styles and values of Aboriginal communities.

Understanding country involves stepping away from western teachings and values into what seems another world. On the surface a foreign language was not being spoken but a foreign philosophy was being revealed. The paper bark bowl shown on *figure page 12* is the bowl I made with guidance from an Aboriginal woman¹⁷.

I watched her and listened to the stories she told about the philosophy of paper bark, I used beeswax as part of the structure of the bowl as this related to her story. The diamond shapes, on the outer sides of the bowl, had a connection to both the paper bark material and her stories. The bee is represented by the ‘x’ and enters the hive through the black and white diamonds.

Paper bark is philosophically at the heart of my research. The research starts to expose the meaning of this material to me and the reason why it retains powerful meaning. There are publications today written by Aboriginal people who speak about connecting to country and land, but still there appears some confusion which lies in a misunderstanding of ancestral connections from a Western concept.

¹⁴ R.I. Trudgen. “*Why Warriors lie down and die*”: Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact. *Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000

¹⁵ *ibid* - p.116

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ I have been unable to contact her, so she is to remain anonymous. Not all information is included, as it varies from area to area. The information used has a connection to general research on paper bark trees already accepted. My emphasis has been towards a philosophical approach, without breaking a confidence.



PAPER BARK BOWL 1998

Constructed with string and bee's wax

Approximately
200 x 200 x 100h

This is something that needs no explanation for the majority of Aboriginal communities but for many, history has distanced us from the natural environment.

The term 'pushing up daisies' and 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' is understood but for some reason there is a separation between ourselves and the replenishing of the soil. It must be those images of boxes¹⁸. The burial of traditional ancestors over many generations contributes to the soil's replenishment and often we forget about this connection.

As one young Aboriginal man stated, he had to leave his home town because every girl he brought home was deemed a relative by his family. In the end he married a white girl. His home town was not his parents' or his grandparents' birth place as that was further north.

They had first been moved because a mining company had found copper in the place where his parents were born and the government granted a government lease to mine the area. Three language groups were removed and forced to settle in a place in which none of their ancestors lay. Two other groups were already there although they were not prominent. His aunt had said the other two groups in residence did not know that three other 'mobs' were going to arrive. They just appeared.

I had first met his aunt¹⁹ about five years ago. She is trying to gather the stories which were within her and in the landscape. She had a photograph of herself as a young child, with her grandparents in tribal dress but she knew they did not live that way. The stories told by her parents, spoke about the great secrets which belonged to their family but they were a mystery to her. These secret stories identified them to their place, not to the area where she now lived.

¹⁸ The burial of Pope John Paul (2005) in a simple pine coffin which was placed into a zinc box before both were placed in an oak cask and put into an underground vault assures Pope John Paul will never directly replenish the earth. His request to be buried directly into the earth was rejected.

¹⁹ His Aunt went back to her country. I have not been able to contact her, so she is to remain anonymous.

She told us about hiding and sudden trips into the bush usually in someone's old 'Ute'. Often they would stay away for weeks at a time and this is an experience not uncommon to many Aboriginal families. They would always come home having learnt something new. An aunty, from one of the places where she stayed as a child, told her that the women 'out west' often wore 'beanies' so that they could avoid certain family members. When the son-in-law came into sight, because of the 'avoid tradition'²⁰, they would pull the beanie down over their eyes, the other members of the group would shout the all clear when he was out of sight. This way she was able to carry on working or doing whatever without breaking customary law. We all laughed and wondered if we should all get a beanie if we wanted to get anything done.

Recently I noticed an article about the "beanie" in the National Indigenous Times (2003) called "The born again beanie". The women of the central desert, South Australia, have perfected the art of the 'beanie' which is bringing people together in a creative celebration. It is enjoyable to hear about something by word of mouth and find it is a unique modern growing tradition²¹.

At the time, these trips had not worried her; she was only young and it was more fun than anything else because whoever was with them, stayed with them until it was time to come home. She remembered one brother close to her had been arrested and it had been mentioned on a number of occasions that it seemed almost part of modern Aboriginal initiation to spend time in one prison or another. Touching her arm and nodding in the direction of the Melaleucas, she knew what I was doing²² as

²⁰ I believe 'avoid tradition' is usually referring to Mother-in-Law and Son-in-Law avoidance. Tradition sees Mother-in-Law and Son-in-Law roughly the same age. This is because men would marry a younger woman of one full generation age difference. The attraction and connection of same age people was recognized so there was a law that stated they were to avoid the temptation by not looking at each other.

²¹ National Indigenous Times. "The born again beanie". Arts p.30 : 15 October 2003 www.burrinja.org.au
Kevin Murray. "The Alice Spring Beanie Festival": A unique craft event brings together Aboriginal and non-indigenous (sic) Australia, under the common beanie. But there are problems... www.craftculture.org/world/beanie.htm 22/08/2005

²² Melaleucas are paper bark trees. Years before we had been sitting around at the Local Aboriginal Land Council Office and in an awkward moment she had suggested making a paper bark bowl. I was the only one who went with her. This became a one to one experience and she spoke about connecting to country. I started to understand a different education system and values which used creativity up front and that connecting to country was very philosophical and emotional.

it was her²³ knowledge that had shown me this way of connecting to country.

We washed the bark in the river, still talking. As before, I copied her action of lightly brushing both sides of the pieces with the palm of the hands. As we worked she spoke about the trees, the root systems, the leaves and the flowers, the bees and animals that also used the material from the plant. The nature of the Melaleuca was revealed, how generous and thoughtful to the younger trees, allowing their growth beyond her own and how the giving freely of her bark²⁴ was part of Aboriginal philosophy.

I noticed that my listening ability was tested by my personal sense of responsibility and respect towards the information and the material but my own choice of design was encouraged.

The philosophy associated with the paper bark, links well with participants' stories. It is a symbol of infinite patience and although fragile it is able to be protective and is associated with healing²⁵. The Melaleuca-paper bark is sometimes called the Tea Tree. Unfortunately in NSW they have been cleared to make way for agriculture, industry and housing. Less than 11% of the original Melaleuca forest and woodland remain in NSW²⁶ (*figure page 13*).

Paper barks belong to the myrtle family²⁷ and reports vary as to the number of species. There are over one hundred and forty species²⁸ of paper bark in Australia.

²³ This project has an interest in today's cultural story. These stories grow with the times but we find in materials such as paper bark, the meaning remains the same as in traditional times. For the role of women in traditional art making and practices please see Diane Bell's; "*Daughters of the Dreaming*". McPhee Gribble/George Allen & Unwin. 1983

²⁴ From direct experience and conversations. 1997-8

²⁵ There are stories of 'magic healing pools' that heal wounds fast if bathed in. The Paper Bark Trees grow beside these pools and the leaves fall into the water where the tea tree oil from the leaves create healing properties

²⁶ Australian Native Vegetation Assessment (ANVA) – "*A program of the Natural Heritage Trust*" Published by National Land and Water Resources Audit C/- Land and Water Australia on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia. 2001- p.72

²⁷ The Living Australia "*Paperbark trees: hardy survivors used by Aboriginals for boat-building.*" No.37 10 Field Guide – Number 21. n.d. - pp.10-12

²⁸ *ibid*



Photographs of Paper Bark Trees in Hunter Valley, New South Wales - 2003



They are one of the most useful native plants²⁹ which survive in heavily polluted areas. They like brackish water as well as damp conditions, wet areas and coastal positions³⁰. Most commonly they grow in water with top branches in the sun but some grow successfully in dry limestone areas³¹. A shrubby species survives and grows in the centre of Australia³². The name *Melaleuca* comes from the Greek word *melas* meaning black and *leucos* white; this is associated with the black wood and the white branches³³. The black 'n' white story could also be reference to the mottled dark and light colouring to the bark³⁴. The layers of cork-like bark contain oils which are used in perfumery, germicides and pesticides as well as in the manufacturing of optical glass³⁵. Bark protects the tree from high temperatures, loss of water, climate changes and salt winds³⁶. There is a small amount of silica, about 0.5% in some species which can blunt a sharp blade. The tree is termite resistant and tolerant of salt. Some are fast growing and short lived, others live to be over 100 years old³⁷. Mild salt water can be extracted from the tree by cutting into the bark, it is just enough to quench a thirst but not recommended; it could possibly be better used as a skin healing remedy. It is said to have protective magic³⁸. Aboriginal people soak the flowers in water to produce a sweet drink. The bark was used for everything in 'traditional' times³⁹. Europeans extracted Tea-tree oil from the *Melaleuca*.

Plants are older than animals and because a plant is fixed into a position it has

²⁹ ibid - p.10

³⁰ K.W. Crèmer. (Ed.) "*Trees for Rural Australia*": *Choosing the right species*. Inkata Press, Melbourne :Sydney. n.d. - p.58

³¹ The Living Australia "*Paperbark trees: hardy survivors used by Aborigines for boat-building*." No.37 10 Field Guide – Number 21. n.d. - pp.10-12

³² K.W. Cremer. (Ed.) "*Trees for Rural Australia*": *Choosing the right species*. Inkata Press, Melbourne :Sydney. n.d. - p.58

³³ L. Robinson. "*Field Guide to the Native Plants of Sydney*." 2nd Edition. Kangaroo Press. NSW. 1994 - p.55

³⁴ The Living Australia "*Paperbark trees: hardy survivors used by Aborigines for boat-building*." No.37 10 Field Guide – Number 21. n.d. - pp.10-12.

³⁵ K.W. Cremer. (Ed.) "*Trees for Rural Australia*": *Choosing the right species*. Inkata Press, Melbourne :Sydney. n.d. - p.58

³⁶ The Living Australia "*Paperbark trees: hardy survivors used by Aborigines for boat-building*." No.37 10 Field Guide – Number 21. n.d. - pp.10-12.

³⁷ K.W. Cremer. (Ed.) "*Trees for Rural Australia*": *Choosing the right species*. Inkata Press, Melbourne:Sydney. n.d. - p.58

³⁸ The Living Australia "*Paperbark trees: hardy survivors used by Aborigines for boat-building*." No.37 10 Field Guide – Number 21. n.d. - pp.10-12.

³⁹ L. Robinson. "*Field Guide to the Native Plants of Sydney*." 2nd Edition. Kangaroo Press. NSW. 1994 - p.55

developed an inbuilt reaction to adjust through generations of Deoxyribonucleic acid which can alter if the plant is under attack by pests. This stress response to change is quicker than in the animal as it protects itself externally from environmental hazards. The changes in the animal are controlled more by internal conditions as in a 'flight or fight' situation because it can escape from hazardous conditions⁴⁰. There is an incredible amount of wild life in the folds of the paper bark tree and a good pair of gloves is advisable when harvesting the bark.



Plate 28 Huntsman spider in folds of paper bark

There was a distinct honey like smell as we removed the bark during the summer months. The air filled with a subtle smell of a distant sugar factory or pop-corn. This puzzled me because I had smelt this somewhere else. It was only when the down-loading of the photographs was complete that it came in a flood of stored experiences and research information. At first it was the recognition of parallelogram shape within the bark (*as seen on figure page 13*). The diamond is associated with the 'honey stories' of the 'sugar-bag man'⁴¹. The diamond also

⁴⁰ L. Adlem. Personal conversation on plant DNA. 2003

⁴¹ L. Hamby. "*The Bag: Design and historical placement in Aboriginal culture*". ASA Conference '91 papers 28-38. Louise Hamby works at the University of New South Wales. 1991

appears on shields⁴². Knowing honey as a healing substance, there were doubts as to why it should be on a shield. The shield, of course, is protection against injury just as the honey is protection against infection.

It was the same subtle smell of honey that was experienced as we climbed into the ‘birthing cave’ at Wollombi⁴³. This was a surprise because usually when going into an enclosed rock place it has a musty smell, normally not of honey. The ‘surprise element’ connected both associations. Being shown how to make the bowl by an Aboriginal person was essential as it went beyond a text book experience. The important part of making the bowl was ‘listening’ and creating something from a material that held deep meaning. This was all new to me and not always comfortable as the design of the bowl, and the method of construction, was completely my choice. The respect and the responsibility towards the material was the experience. Again it is a personal understanding and is different for everyone.

Making the bowls knowing they did not belong to me, shaped an extraordinary awareness which, allowed me to question myself from the eyes of another. I found the paper bark very powerful as representing more than an historical sense of place.

When it came to producing a painting from this experience, I follow the philosophy of the paper bark which culturally connects to birth: I pour on the canvas an untouched wash of colour and retain the bowl shape in these first stains. This way the bowl remains vibrant and strong, not unlike the first of anything, even though the background is red hot lettering over a yellow ochre base. The design of the shield in the background links to the native bees in the foreground and both are related to the story of the paper bark. The words surrounding the images are descriptive of the journey through life and the eventual returning to the spirit pool; a sense of place (*figure page 14*).

⁴² Shield displayed in the ‘Henry Bolt Museum’ at Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council – 1A Chelmsford Drive, Metford NSW 2323 – Telephone No.49348511. 1996-2004

⁴³ Jan and John Coombes. Personal visit to property – personal conversation. 2003



WRAP US IN PAPER BARK 2002

Acrylic painting on canvas approximately 1500h x 1200w
Words in the background describes the philosophy of the paper bark

Australia is described as ‘the best country in the world’ to “....an ecological disaster, characterized by a squalid history of greed and ignorance.”⁴⁴. In the past we took comfort in what now seems to be ridiculous; such as once thinking that wheat kernels, when activated by human sweat, produced mice⁴⁵. We also practiced the measuring of intelligence by filling the human brain with millet seeds to see how much of the ‘grey matter’ it held⁴⁶. The classic assumption of high intelligence⁴⁷ is still associated with the ability to read, write and add figures. We now understand that knowledge is relevant to survival and knowledge about paper bark and grasses is very important today. An analogy with human invasion could be made within the terminology of native grasses. Native grasses, “...present in Australia before European invasion...”⁴⁸. Naturalised grasses, “..those which have been deliberately or accidentally introduced but have now established themselves ...”⁴⁹.

It is evident that Australia has been seeing the cultural landscape of another hemisphere. Because English grasses in park areas need lots of costly irrigation, fertilisation and mowing, in the 1980’s native grasses started to be studied with an economic eye⁵⁰. To work with native grasses, it is well understood that attitudes need to change in the way we see things. To “.. accept the local landscape would reverse the European sense of tidiness”⁵¹. No mowing, not green all year round, burning off would have to occur in some cases and seeds left to disperse⁵² (figure page 15).

⁴⁴ David Suzuki. *“Inventing the Future” Reflections on Science, Technology and Nature*. Printed by Southwood Press, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Unwin Hyman Ltd. 1990 – p.135

⁴⁵ J. Pfeiffer. *“The Cell”* Consulting Editors, Prof. Rene Dudos, The Rockefeller University – Prof. Henry Margenau, Yale University – C.P.Snow, British Ministry of Technology. Time-Life International (Nederland) N.V. Time-Life Books – The Colour-Photo Science Series. 1964 - p.78

⁴⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *“Decolonizing Methodologies”*. Research and Indigenous Peoples. Zen Books Ltd. London & New York. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, NZ. 1999 – p.1

⁴⁷ E. Colson. *“The Next Generation”: An Ethnography of Education in an Urban Neighborhood*. Foreword - pp.xi-xiii. Dept. of Anthropology – University of California, Berkeley. Academic Press New York and London. 1974 – p.xii

⁴⁸ R.D.B. Whalley. *“Native Grasses” Useless or Useful?* CHIASMA: Journal of the Rural Science Undergraduate Society, University of New England. Department of Botany. 1984 - pp.39-40

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ ibid - p.39

⁵¹ ibid

⁵² M. Lodder & R.H. Groves & B. Wittmark. *“Native Grasses”; the missing link in Australian landscape design*. Landscape Australia. pp.12-19. 1986 - p.14

A single blade of
grass



..... is more
important than
we are!

Moving around the world and taking the familiar with us is not unusual as this has happened everywhere. A study from the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) describes the paper bark tree as one of the top one hundred: “World’s Worst Invasive Alien”(s). Areas such as Florida⁵³ and Hong Kong are finding that the paper bark is untouched by fire⁵⁴ and seeds so profusely that the tree is often called ‘Snow in Summer’⁵⁵. Although they do not see this species as detrimental to the areas where it is thriving they are concerned that the plant needs to be watched carefully⁵⁶ (figure page 16).

Prior to 1979 ‘environmental law’ was rarely used as it was mainly ‘planning law’ and ‘local government law’⁵⁷. A study of the structure of the Land and Environment Court (LEC) reveals there is no reference to the “natural environment”. Local Councils and State Governments speak about inner city areas as ‘environments’. The Land and Environment Court (LEC) deals with

Planning -	Waste Management -	Air-Water and Noise pollution -
Wilderness -	Building approvals -	Coastal protection –
Land valuation -	Hazardous chemicals -	Biological control of organism -
Ozone protection -	Heritage conservation -	Rating (taxation) appeals -
Marine pollution –	National Parks and	
	Wildlife Protection -	Aboriginal Land Rights.

The Land and Environment Court (LEC) is dubbed the Land and Development Court by those who have experienced the system⁵⁸.

⁵³ In California the planting of paper bark trees is used to stabilize cliff faces along fault lines

⁵⁴ Billy Hau. Porcupine! “Flora”: Is the Paper Bark tree becoming invasive in Hong Kong? Number 24 December 2001: ecology/porcupine/por24/24-folra-melaquin.htm. 5/6/2003

⁵⁵ J. Blums. “Paperbark Trees”. 2002. <http://www.user.bigpond.com/carbrook10/Melaleuca2.htm> 5/6/2003

⁵⁶ Billy Hau. Porcupine! “Flora”: Is the Paper Bark tree becoming invasive in Hong Kong? Number 24 December 2001: ecology/porcupine/por24/24-folra-melaquin.htm. 5/6/2003 - p.3

⁵⁷ Paul L. Stein. The Hon. Justice AM Judge. “New direction in the prevention and resolution of environmental disputes – special environmental courts”: *Environmental decision-making and the establishment of the Land and Environment Court (LAC)* – Delivered in Manila 6 March 1999 to “South-East Asia Regional Symposium On The Judiciary And The Law Of Sustainable Development” – Sponsored By UNEP/UNDP, Hanns Seidel Foundation And The Government Of The Philippines. 1999 - pp.12-13

⁵⁸ Thompson Norrie in the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales. No. 10923 of 2000. Statement of Evidence of Kay Joyce Adlem. 2001



DON'T LET THE FISH DRY OUT 1998-2001
Acrylic painting on board approximately 1800h x 1200w
Words used 'US' (*left*) 'I' (*centre*) 'WE' (*right*)

European intelligence for well over seventy years has been.... “If it moves, shoot it, if it doesn’t, cut it down”. It is suggested that this should be extended by adding, “if it is native, plough it up.”⁵⁹ There is definitely a ‘failure and irrelevant attitude’ of many Post-Industrial people to ‘connect’ positively to the natural environment⁶⁰. There are many studies about the abuse of the natural landscape⁶¹ and a further lack of respect for Aboriginal carved and stenciled sites⁶². Aboriginal communities firmly believe that over 70% of white Anglo Australians have an Aboriginal connection⁶³. If indeed this proves to be the case, the change in attitude to culture and the natural environment alone would be revolutionary.

To collectively conclude “Wrap Us in Paper Bark” with prior chapters my intention was to acknowledge the source of my understanding from the Aboriginal communities who have shown trust and great generosity throughout. Kathy Marika in chapter one states that; “...when she looks out at the grass she sees her family”⁶⁴ (p.37), this statement gives us an understanding of the depth of cultural connection. The experience of the Burra Gurra site and Ned Thompson’s explanation of sky connections to land, whether they be grapevines or gum trees; plus acknowledging participants’ stories in relationship to the philosophy of paper bark highlights an intense listening ability in Aboriginal communities. Listening involves

⁵⁹ R.D.B. Whalley. “Native Grasses”: *Useless or Useful?* CHIASMA: Journal of the Rural Science Undergraduate Society, University of New England. Department of Botany. 1984 - p.39

⁶⁰ Victoria Laurie. “Being Whitefella”: *Cry for the lost chances*. Chapter 4. pp.60-68 – Ed. Duncan Graham – Foreword by Sir Ronald Wilson. Published by Freemantle Arts Centre Press. 1994 - p.61

⁶¹ Gordon Rintoul. “Large Scale landscape Painting Responding To The Relationship Of Industry And Technology To Environmental Degradation”. Doctor of Philosophy –Fine Art– University of Newcastle. March 2003

⁶² Glenn Albrecht. “Rediscovering the Coquun”: *Towards an Environmental History of the Hunter River*. Address given at the River Forum - Wyndham Estate. Hunter River. (gggaa@cc.newcastle.edu.au) The University of Newcastle. 2000

L.K. Dyall. “The Swansea-Head Midden”. Citation D.A.Roberts, H.M.Carey and V.Grieves, Awaba: A Database of Historical Materials Relating to the Aborigines of the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie Region, University of Newcastle. 2002 <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/amrhd/awaba/culture/wisdom.html> 2/2/2003

R. Edwards “The Preservation of Australia’s Aboriginal Heritage”: *Report of National Seminar on Aboriginal Antiquities in Australia* - May. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies - Canberra. 1972

T.G.H. Strehlow “Geography and the Totemic Landscape in Central Australia”: *A Functional Study*. Berndt, Ronald M (Ed). 1970 - pp.92-139.

⁶³ Abie Wright. “The true colour of our hearts”: Koori Mail – Fortnightly Indigenous Newspaper – 100% Aboriginal owned. 100% self-funded. Your Say. 8 August 2001 – p.7

*A. Wright was among many to answer the letter some months earlier from Barker-Salt, in Koori Mail –Your Say – “What is Aboriginal?” 30 May 200 - p.7

⁶⁴ Kathy Marika. Personal conversation at Metford after delivering photographs from ‘education week’ launch at Mindaribba LALC. 2001

understanding and acknowledging universal connections as a place where individuals share their surroundings.

In contrast the detachment from place by European (*Western*) society can be seen in statistics on tree loss of 89% in the Hunter area since European colonization. The reference to European intelligence as: “If it moves, shoot it, if it doesn’t, cut it down, if it is native, plough it up.”⁶⁵ (pp.194 & 195) is without doubt classified as invasive behaviour. The lack of reference to the ‘natural environment’ in government reporting would further indicate no acknowledgment or respect for the natural landscape (p.194) and therefore Aboriginal cultural beliefs. And the idea of directly replenishing the soil with our decaying bodies which is alien to Western practice of burial (p.187), would suggest a society unable to comprehend an environmental crisis because of conflicting interests and no deep connection to a sense of place. These findings, between cultures, were not expected to be as extreme as the research indicates.

Collecting and making the paper bark bowls had created an emotional response as the paper bark proved a powerful material and this strengthened as it was made into a bowl. Participants’ stories are words describing the actions of people’s dedication. By listening, these words become sign posts for me to turn my understanding into further actions. Listening to Participants’ stories through the acts of collecting and making the paper bark bowls has opened a vast horizon of feelings and admiration for a culture of place. This has been evident in Aboriginal communities throughout as one of the oldest surviving cultures into modern times. My painting “Emalong” developed through the experience of coming into close contact with, what turned out to be, a male Emu (*Murrin*). Emus still carry the ‘double’ feather of the ancient birds (*figure page 17*). My interpretation of European behavior is seen in the painting “Land Grab” 2001 (*figure page 18*).

⁶⁵ R.D.B. Whalley. “*Native Grasses*”: *Useless or Useful?* CHIASMA: Journal of the Rural Science Undergraduate Society, University of New England. Department of Botany. 1984 - p.39



Guardian "Emalong" 2005
This painting now belongs to
Rick Griffiths



LAND GRAB 2001

Acrylic painting on board approximately 900h x 2400w
Words are placed on red running figures, taken from tyre patterns¹



DRAWING²

¹ The work "Land Grab" (*above*) was developed from a number of drawings which were completed on site in Yengo National Park. The images running across the white lettering, KOORI are stylized 'off road' tyre patterns (*red*) representing people, moving at speed, without their heads across some of the most significant cultural sites in Australia. (*Water over rock*).

² The drawing above was completed on site in Yengo National Park, the lines suggest a wave or the pressure and movement of an ocean; the area had a sense of swirling water but there was none.

Chapter 4

Listening and Relating

“Listening and Relating”

Listening, as an inclusive pursuit, engages a low personal profile through acknowledging the judgment, beliefs and aims of others and I learn that it is necessary to ‘listen’ equally to what is said and to what is not said or written: As often the value of working towards change happens in undetectable ways. This is important as the aim lies in ‘exchange and reciprocity’, rather than in a position of power¹ from any one identity.

Eber Hampton², as a North American Indian, speaks about the strange method of Anglo teachers who appear to layout the obvious, whereas the Indian way is to trust in the intelligence of a person to make their own judgment. This was something I found in Aboriginal teaching methods.

Willie Ermine³ explains through the words of Walt Whitman⁴ who expresses the need to look at the sky which is full of stars and to listen to the whole story of the sky. It was recommended that this was not as tiring as studying just one star through charts, instruments and diagrams and this also suggests that the seen presence of other stars changed the perception of understanding the whole story.

Grant Kester in his writings “Conversation Pieces” sees the ‘dialogical’ process working well at local levels and examines artist’s intentions in their use of art making in a social arena. He brings together projects from across the ‘globe’ in the form of conversational experiments which are making a difference in local communities. An example is ‘Routes’ (2002) where sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland had resulted in the deaths of fourteen bus drivers and 1,400 busses destroyed on public transport routes since 1970. This was defused, by the slogan:

¹ B + B About Us. “Tracing Change” <http://www.welcomebb.org.uk/aboutarticle1.html> - 19/08/2007 – p.3

² E. Hampton. “Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education”: *First Nations Education in Canada*. The Circle Unfolds. Eds. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, UBC Press, Vancouver, Canada. 1995 - pp.101-112

³ W. Ermine. “Aboriginal Epistemology”: *First Nations Education in Canada*. The Circle Unfolds. Eds. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman. UBC Press, Vancouver, Canada. 1995 - pp.101-112

⁴ ibid - The words of Walt Whitman are seen on page 103

“I’m not a Catholic – I’m not a Protestant – I’m a bus driver ..”⁵ ..

.... This slogan was coined by one of the bus company employees, who became involved with the local community working with a creative team. Later this issue was made into a film called “Kings of the Road”⁶ (2002). This project was based on an extended process of listening.

“Dialogical” theories⁷ are recognized as compatible with my research in building across multiple eras, areas and disciplines. ‘Dialogical’ theory is a process well understood by Aboriginal communities through traditional reciprocity and the system of ‘moieties’⁸ and in the use of creativity as an integral expression of everyday life. Socially engaged art practices are old art practices which are being revived by Western society.

During the 1970’s in the U.K. the low profile of ‘The Artists Placement Group’ was due to the tendency to see the artist as a civil servant. Joseph Beuys, in December 1971, organized a protest project known as “Overcome Party Dictatorship Now” to bring the issue of woodlands being destroyed solely to make way for more tennis courts⁹. It was questioned whether this approach achieved a favorable outcome for the woodlands? Many Australian artists would have had similar ideas, such as Arthur Streeton who campaigned against coalmining and logging¹⁰, Hans Heysen supporting tree preservation and John Wolseley who is recognized as a leading public protester against wood chipping¹¹, to name just a few. ‘Protesting against’ versus ‘support of’ is challenging many passions today and I see this as central to the

⁵ Grant H. Kester. “*Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*”. University of California Press. 2004 –p.7 & 8

⁶ ibid

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin. ‘Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin – Russian philosopher 1895-1975. Pp.1-11 <http://en.wikipedia.org>

⁸ Moieties - Moiety = Two halves

⁹ B + B About Us. “*Tracing Change*” <http://www.welcomebb.org.uk/aboutarticle1.html> - 19/08/2007 – p.2

¹⁰ Gordon Rintoul. “*Large Scale Landscape Painting Responding To The Relationship Of Industry And Technology To Environmental Degradation*”. Doctor of Philosophy – Fine Art – University of Newcastle. March 2003 pp.11-12

¹¹ ibid – p.12

‘dialogical’ aim. The Blair government during the mid 1990’s saw that the function of the ‘arts’ could be used for social good (*Cool Britannia*) and engaged in promoting the creative industries to become the U.K.’s third largest economy¹². This coincides with the development of ‘The Cultural Accord 1996’ (p.17) in NSW but this experience fizzled out as soon as the governing body had fulfilled their obligations to the policy, leaving participants marooned. “Dialogical” theories consider the arts to be a powerful tool beyond the art object as they are seen as a unifying force for recording and researching, as artists are able to comfortably cross multi disciplines. Dia-logic¹³ theory in this project acts as an ‘on site process’ to the concerns of social, political and landscape beliefs between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. The aim is to subvert the differences through creative involvement by generating a natural atmosphere of friendship through working together, as the ‘philosophy of listening’ suggests.

My project “Relating to Country”, as with other ‘conversational’ works, require social collaboration and community involvement for them to succeed. This research project has subtly achieved, during its progress, unexpected results and achievements which have occurred from dialogue and from being involved creativity. One most memorable event was being invited by members of the local Aboriginal community to be part of an organizational team to set-up an exhibition which was to be called “Resettlement” within Won:arua. The venue was to be the ‘Drayton Family Wines’ in Pokolbin, in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales. Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council negotiated with the Drayton Family. This exhibition has been ironic and brave in many ways and congratulations are in order to both sides of the partnership. The Drayton Family and the Aboriginal community worked well together in what might have seemed an unsuitable place in the cellar of one of the Valley’s oldest wineries. The cellar remained a busy working area for the winery industry for the duration of the exhibition. This is a good example of collaboration between cultural identities.

¹² B + B About Us. “Tracing Change” <http://www.welcomebb.org.uk/aboutarticle1.html> - 19/08/2007 – p.1

¹³ Dia = diameter = the longest distance across the inside of a circle to make two halves. Dialogic, the logic of two halves.

Exhibition “Resettlement”

Members of the Aboriginal community, living and working in Won:arua country, launched the exhibition “Resettlement”¹⁴ on the 26th August 2004 at Drayton’s Family Winery. Each Aboriginal artist was celebrating culture which was supported by the Drayton family who took no commission on the sales and charged no rent for the space as they saw value in ‘high art’ and ‘good wine’ complementing each other.



Plate 29 Rick Griffiths former ATSIC Commissioner (*right*)-(2002-2005) & C.E.O. of Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council introduces Tommy Miller Wannarua Elder who welcomes guests to Country (*left*)

¹⁴ Resettlement – Exhibition “Resettlement” held at Drayton Family Wines cellar between 26 August & 26 September 2004. Organized by Robyn Griffiths – Chantal Tanna – Pam Hall and Kay Adlem. Exhibition of local artists from the Aboriginal Community in the Hunter Valley – Pam Hall & Phillip Hall (*Bundjalung*) – Denise Hedges (*Wanaruah*) – Chantal Tanna, Lee Tanna & Shannon Rosser/Tanna (*Kuluanlgi*) – Kelly Griffiths & TC Priestley (*Gamilaroi*) – Dewayne Yates (*Wiradjuri*) – Marianne McKinnon-Kidd (*Biripi*). Steve Nicholl’s Electrical provided the lighting. The exhibition was introduced by Rick Griffiths, ATSIC Commissioner (*Gamilaroi*). Welcome to Country by Tommy Miller official Elder (*Wonnarua*) and opened by Stephen Blunden chairman of Many Rivers Regional Council. Supported by Trevor and John Drayton and family. Chantal Tanna provided the central native flower arrangement and the Drayton Family the food and drinks. Speech made by the Mayor of Cessnock Councillor John Clarence. 2004

Note: Permission to use the photograph (Plates 29, 30 & 31) has been cleared by Rick Griffiths. 2005



Plate 30 Exhibition “Resettlement” exhibit 2004

When visitor's to the winery came down into the cellar area and were greeted with an amazing array of colour, the winery-tours had no need to acknowledge Aboriginal

Culture with words as people from all over the world recognized the exhibition with smiles.

The strength of the 'works of art' stood well against the dynamics of barrel design, steel beams in the cellars construction and racks of bottles. Dialogical theory is very close to general every-day Aboriginal philosophy in bringing together a community. There is a 'resettlement' of boundaries, of stories, of culture returning through people and landscape. This is happening slowly through changes and inclusion to political systems, research systems, educational systems and through 'creative works of art'.



Plate 31

Rick Griffiths ATSIIC Commissioner (2002-2005) (*left*) introduced Stephen Blunden (*centre*) Chairman of Many Rivers Regional Council who opened the exhibition. Large painting in the background is by Kelly Griffiths.

It is a hard and long path for 'a culture of meaning' in a world of economics and consumerism. Getting involved has increased a personal respect for a culture and people who have much to offer the World.

In 1984, Paddy Carroll Tjungurrayi¹⁵ said: "We have had to learn your language. Now it is time for you to learn ours."¹⁶ I see Paddy Carroll Tjungurrayi's statement as a 'life-line'.

Analogies have been made between political heroes such as Pemulwuy and Bennelong. Pemulwuy who.....

".... attempted to maintain the culture and independence of his people on their terms, whereas Bennelong allowed himself to be assimilated according to European terms. The outcome was effectively the same; at no time in the past history of Australia have Europeans and Aborigines been able to come together without it leading to social or cultural strangulation."¹⁷

It is noted that a full study of Bennelong has been made by Keith Smith¹⁸ in his book "Bennelong" (2001). Smith shows, from historic writings, that Bennelong was a very clever politician and his strategy of assumed assimilation was part of coming to terms with the situation he found himself in.

Artist, Albert Namatjira has been analytically associated with Bennelong through strategically allowing himself a 'tacit assimilation' in European imagery. In contrast

¹⁵ Vivien Johnson. "Twentieth Century Dreaming: Contemporary Aboriginal Art". Art and Asia Pacific Quarterly Journal. Inaugural Issue. Vol.1 – No.1. 1993 – pp.71-78

¹⁶ ibid - Quote from Paddy Carroll Tjungurrayi who is an artist from Papunya in the Northern Territory - p.71

¹⁷ Colin Symes & Bob Lingard. "From the Ethnographic to the Aesthetic": An Examination of the Relationship between Aboriginal and European Culture in Australian Art 1788-1988. Pp.188-215 - From "Island in the Stream": Myths of Place in Australian Culture. Edited by Paul Foss. Pluto Press Australia Limited. 1988 – p.215

¹⁸ Keith Vincent Smith. "Bennelong: The coming of the Eora – Sydney Cove 1788-1792". Kangaroo Press. 2001

the Papunya Artists of the Australian Central and Western Desert are related to that of Pemulwuy¹⁹ in the use of creativity on their own terms. It is also stated that....

“..... even the present generation of artists have consistently failed to speak out against the real conditions of Australia’s indigenous (sic) people. Aborigines are now speaking for themselves: What is clearly required now is for white Australians to accept the priorities of Aboriginal culture for the destiny of this country, as well as to act promptly to make reparations for two centuries of neglect and maltreatment.”²⁰

The Papunya Artists of the Australian Central and Western Desert between 1971 and 1972 were encouraged by Geoffrey Bardon to continue traditional image making using modern paints. The Northern Territory’s Department of Interior was hostile to the sale of Papunya works of art as the ‘department’ considered Indigenous people of the area to ‘belong’ to them and this included anything they produced.

There was also resistance from the local Aboriginal community which resulted in the stoning of an exhibition of Papunya Tula art, in 1974 at Alice Springs, as they saw the designs as sacred. It is said that this changed the design of modern Aboriginal art into a flood of dots²¹. Geoffrey Barton speaks of Johnny Warrangkula Tjupurrula’s work as the best example of the transition in painting methods. Barton explains that Johnny Warrangkula Tjupurrula’s paintings of ‘his country’ are “narratives of great visual power” and “his dotting method.... was later adopted as a convention by other artists at Papunya”²².

¹⁹ Colin Symes & Bob Lingard. *“From the Ethnographic to the Aesthetic”: An Examination of the Relationship between Aboriginal and European Culture in Australian Art 1788-1988*. Pp.188-215 - From *“Island in the Stream”: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*. Edited by Paul Foss. Pluto Press Australia Limited. 1988 – pp.188-215. The Papunya artists are clansmen of Namatjira. p.206

²⁰ ibid – p.214

²¹ Susan Allan. *“Papunya Tula: The birthplace of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art”*. Published by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) World Socialist Web Site. 24 August 2001- www.wsws.org - 9/20/2004 - pp.1-8

Tim Bonyhady. *“Papunya Aboriginal Art and Artists: Papunya Stories”*. Forum and Comment – Aboriginal Art Online Pty.Ltd. 2000 www.aboriginalartonline.com/forum/articles4.html - 9/20/2004 - pp1-6

²² Geoffrey Barton and James Barton. *“Papunya”: A Place Made After the Story. The Beginnings of the Western Desert Movement*. The Miegunyah Press. 2004 – p.157

Today Aboriginal works of art are seen all over the world and are recognized as distinct works of identity which are protected by copyright law²³.

I have focused in this section of the paper on a communicative interpretation of contemporary Aboriginal artists such as Lin Onus, Richard Bell, Trevor Nickolls, Fiona Foley²⁴ and Mini Heath.

The work of Lin Onus²⁵, through his use of Aboriginal designs, relates directly to a sense of place. Lin Onus had permission to use the cross hatching from Gumerdi Outstation in Central Arnhem Land even though he comes from South Australia. This did not stop him from criticism by many Aboriginal communities who did not agree to this arrangement.

Onus also openly admits that he has been greatly influenced by Japanese art and culture. He found the aggressiveness and gentleness in their nature an interesting paradox. His work strives for the balance between two poles in human nature as well as two very different cultures in one land²⁶.

His use of Aboriginal design is seen against images of cars and petrol pumps within photo-real painting and is highlighting an issue of youth petrol sniffing in Aboriginal

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- ²³ L. Spender. *"The Law Handbook". The easy to use practical guide.* Redfern Legal Centre - Publication Co 4th Ed. "Copyright". Pp.604-617. 1991 - p.604
- T. Janke. *"Our Culture Our Future": Report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights.* Principal Consultant, Michael Frankel & Company, Solicitors. Prepared for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). 1998
- Colin Colvan. *"Aboriginal Art and the Protection of Indigenous Cultural Rights".* Aboriginal Law Bulletin Vol.2 : No.56 - June 1992 - pp.5-8
- Stephen Gray. *"Aboriginal Design and Copy Right": Can the Australian Common Law expand to meet Aboriginal demands?* Law Institute Journal. Jan-Feb 1992 - pp.46-49
- ²⁴ Kay Schaffer. *"Reconstructing 'Our' Past: The Museum of Sydney".* The Olive Pink Society Bulletin. Ed. Julie Marcus. Vol.8 (2) Anthropology. Race. Gender. 1996 – pp.22-25
- Stephanic Britton. *"Adelaide Report".* Art and Australia Quarterly. Museum of Contemporary Art Special Issue. Fine Arts Press. Vol.29 – No.2 Summer issue 1991 – pp.174-175
- ²⁵ Liz Thompson. *"Aboriginal Voices": Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers.* 1990 – pp.128-132
- ²⁶ Lin Onus. *"Language and Lasers": Urban Aboriginal Art – Art Monthly Australia.* No.30 - May 1990
- Liz Thompson. *"Aboriginal Voices": Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers.* 1990 – pp.128-132

communities which is of great concern to Aboriginal Elders all over Australia²⁷. Through his art he remains a great advocate for a lot of unfinished business.

Lin Onus crosses the boundaries of mediums and will use Australian icons to expand a concept: The construction of a '3D' work, "Bats on Hills Hoist" makes a similar statement to that of his paintings in regard to two very different cultures in one place (*there is a background reference to this work in Linda Pont's story in Chapter 2*).

Stepping straight into Western Art is International Aboriginal Artist Richard Bell, communicating a serious message wrapped in humour.

Standing in front of his painting "Scientia E Metaphysica"²⁸ (*Bell's Theorem*) or 'ABORIGINAL ART It's A WHITE thing' (*Plate 32*), Richard Bell adds to the 'white thing' by wearing a tee-shirt with the words, "White girls can't hump". This was presumed to be a play on, 'white men can't jump' as he plays the game of a 'white thing' very well²⁹.

His art practice relates to the philosophy of the 'martial arts' where the opponents energy is used, as he speaks through the language of those he is provoking.

²⁷ Koori Mail. "The petrol-sniffing crisis": Pressure is on for more Opal (petrol). Canberra has committed \$19M over four years. 1 March 2006 – p.9

R.I. Trudgen, "Why Warriors lie down and die": Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact. *Djambatj Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000 – pp.239-241

²⁸ Telstra. 20th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award – 16 August – 7 December 2003. Anna Malgorzewicz, Director of Museum & Art Gallery of Northern Territory. Dr. Ziggy Switkowski – Chief Executive Officer Telstra. 2003

²⁹ Camden Smith. "Board can't act – Artist's T-shirt sparks call to strip top award". Artist Richard Bell – Northern Territory News, News. 20 August 2003 - p.4

Susan McCulloch. "Biting the hand: This indigenous (sic) prizewinner protests too much". The Weekend Australian: Arts. 30-31 August 2003 - R13

Telstra. 20th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award – 16 August – 7 December 2003. Anna Malgorzewicz, Director of Museum & Art Gallery of Northern Territory. Dr. Ziggy Switkowski – Chief Executive Officer Telstra. 2003



Plate 32. “Scientia E Metaphysica (*Bell’s Theorem*)” by Richard Bell 2003

A work by Trevor Nickolls was in the same show called; “Kimberley Under the Stars” but it is his earlier work, “Wrestling with White Spirit”³⁰ (Plate 33) which made a lasting impression upon me.

As part of the Yinnar Baran Bali (*women’s*) group, connected to Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, we had visited the local Aboriginal Land Council Office in Broken Hill³¹. On our visit to the Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery with Land Council members we all viewed “Wrestling with White Spirit”. Each person started to speak about a variety of meanings to the work which created quite some interest in the work by other people in the gallery. The manager made an appearance and it so happened that he was the person who had purchased the work so he was able to tell us more about the artist Trevor Nickolls. There was one image in the painting on which no one had spoken this was the orange circle below the snake. I thought it

³⁰ Liz Thompson. “*Aboriginal Voices*”: *Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers*. 1990 – From front cover

³¹ Narelle Miller tells the outcome of this cultural excursion in “*It’ll Be Right*” (Chapter two). 2004 – pp.156-162

was a symbol of a fallen sun. Our host from the Land Council said it was a piece of ochre used to outline the cross-hatched figure as his connection to the earth. This work was bringing out dialogue and understanding between cultures.



Plate 33. "Wrestling with White Spirit" by Trevor Nickolls.
Taken from front cover of "Aboriginal Voices" by Liz Thompson

Both these works use the term 'white' as a political trigger to make a point. I often hear Aboriginal communities refer to very black skinned people as a 'whitefella' because they are seen to be thinking like a Westerner. David Suzuki³² (1987) points out in his book "Metamorphosis" that although he is born of pure Japanese ancestry,

³² David Suzuki. "Metamorphosis": - *Stages in a Life*. Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd. New Data Enterprises Ltd. 1987

in that he looks Japanese, he is in fact Canadian. He felt uncomfortable in Japan, not knowing the language or being part of the culture. What he is pointing out is, our environment (*how we are educated*) not our ancestry has a very large impact on our identity³³.

Because our world is easily accessible in terms of travel and movement the physical look of people has become deceiving. Electronic travel has decreased the notions of barriers in terms of age, sex, religion, disabilities, nationalism and visual appearances. 'Dialogic Art'³⁴ crosses boundaries in disciplines and countries and is seen as a continuation of the legacy from Marcel Duchamp (*French*) and Joseph Beuys (*German*) who were interested in the 'artists' social and political position in society. There are no barriers to acknowledging other language groups. Grant Kester in his work "Conversation Pieces" (2004) brings together stories, from across the world, of artists pursuing social and political issues with some degree of successful outcomes. Many seek a dialogue with an audience to their works of art while others were concerned with changing a social situation. Onus, Bell and Nickolls are pursuing both dialogue and social change with vigor and success.

One particular work created by artists Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence from a concept by Peter Emmett; "The Edge of the Trees"³⁵ demonstrates a haunting memory in many languages and I believe is seeking social change through recognition. A number of poles stand erect outside the Museum of Sydney. As the viewer walks through the area a gentle whispering of voices speaking in local Aboriginal dialects drift on the air. These sounds stay in the ears as reminders of what happened long ago and is still happening today. Language area place names are burnt as a branding into the timber; others have silver plates with the signatures of the 'first fleet'³⁶. It is as if the poles are stepping from museum into the public

³³ David Suzuki. "Metamorphosis" – *Stages in a Life*. Stoddart Publishing Co.Ltd.. New Data Enterprises Ltd. - 1987

³⁴ Grant H. Kester. "Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art". University of California Press. 2004

³⁵ Aboriginal Arts and Culture in the City. "Barani Indigenous History of Sydney City" pp.1-4. www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au - p.3

³⁶ Kay Schaffer. "Reconstructing 'Our' Past: The Museum of Sydney". The Olive Pink Society Bulletin. Ed. Julie Marcus. Vol.8 (2) Anthropology. Race. Gender. 1996 – p.24

place to be seen in full day light as they stand against a tall building as if before a ‘firing squad’. Julie Marcus³⁷ suggests the empty space before the Museum entrance be filled with expanding cultural meaning from “The Edge of the Trees”.

The works of art by International Aboriginal artist Mini Heath³⁸, also conveys a strong message hidden in cultural knowledge. Mini is very concerned with the destruction of the natural environment and therefore Aboriginal culture. He has been a great influence and very generous with information in regard to the character of Australian animals as used in his works of art (*Plate 34*).



Plate 34. “Timer” by Mini Heath.
Silk-screen print

Mini is very popular in Japan and it was his work that reminded me of the Bayeux Tapestry³⁹. This was not in look or design but in meaning as Mini’s work uses the animals known character to tell a full story. This same form of ‘animal knowledge base’ was used in the method of storytelling by the English artisans, who told their version of the story by adding symbolic imagery in the borders of the Tapestry.

³⁷ Julie Marcus. “*Erotics and the Museum of Sydney “: The Museum of Sydney*”. The Olive Pink Society Bulletin. Ed. Julie Marcus. Vol.8 (2) Anthropology. Race. Gender. 1996 – pp.4-8

³⁸ Kay Adlem. Title “*The Problem of Straddling the Consciousness of Two Cultures*”. 1991 – IVpp.62-77

³⁹ David J. Bernstein. “*The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*”. Weidenfield and Nicolas. 1986
The Bayeux Tapestry (1077) tells the story of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066

Mini Heath is doing the same thing here in Australia. The poster by Mini (*Plate 35*), is advertising jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The abstracted background pattern is from the tail feathers of the Lyrebird which is a wonderful mimic and can deceive you into thinking it is something else. The pattern forms in steps and by following the steps around they will lead you back to where you started. These are jobs that are going nowhere. The poster deceives us⁴⁰. The animal story telling of the Lyrebird belies the human predicament.

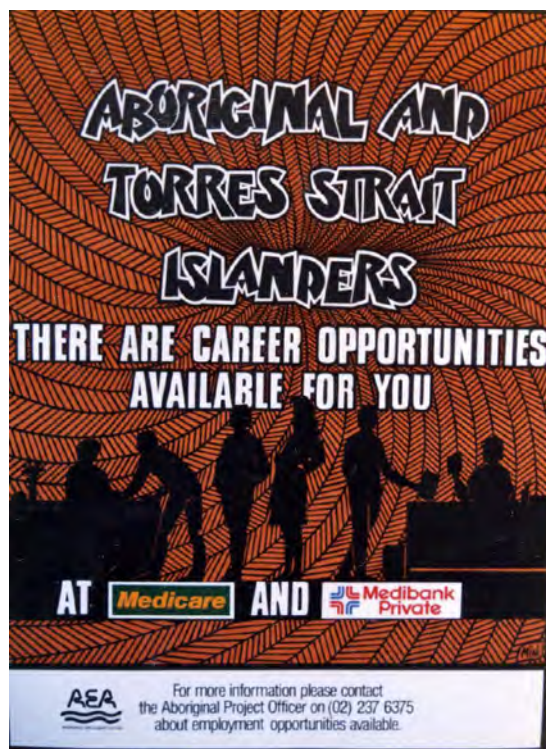


Plate 35. Poster by Mini Heath

Aboriginal ‘communication posters’ are a full art study⁴¹ as posters are used as an education tool to every aspect of life. I found Mini Heath’s work intriguing and clever as he expresses his message in mystery by pulling on thousands of years of meaning, in which he used a ‘hidden strategy’, to communicate metaphorical connotations in his knowledge of Australian animal character.

⁴⁰ Kay Adlem. Title: “*The Problem of Straddling the Consciousness of Two Cultures*”. 1991 - IVp.64

⁴¹ Tex Skuthorpe. “*The Goanna & The Red Dragonfly*”: *Sharing the Schooling*. Poster NAPCAN Australia: www.napcan.org.au 2000

From the study of Aboriginal artists, a drawing⁴² by Wendy Brady on the subject of ‘difference’ furthered my creative appetite (*Plate 36*). The drawing is self explanatory. Brady sees the division between cultures with two different systems at work in Australia. The Western system is shown as an ‘Ivory Tower’ and Aboriginal traditional culture as a ‘Continuous Spiral’. By re-drawing the image, Brady’s ‘Ivory Tower’ becomes my written page (*Plate 37*). The two bridges carry language and customs between the Aboriginal knowledge base and the written page. My south bridge is not unlike Brady’s root design⁴³. This sparked a larger work from the re-drawing of Brady’s design.

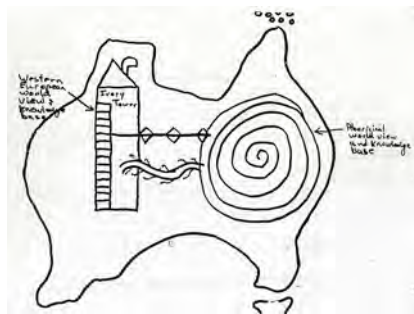


Plate 36 Brady, 1992-p.11



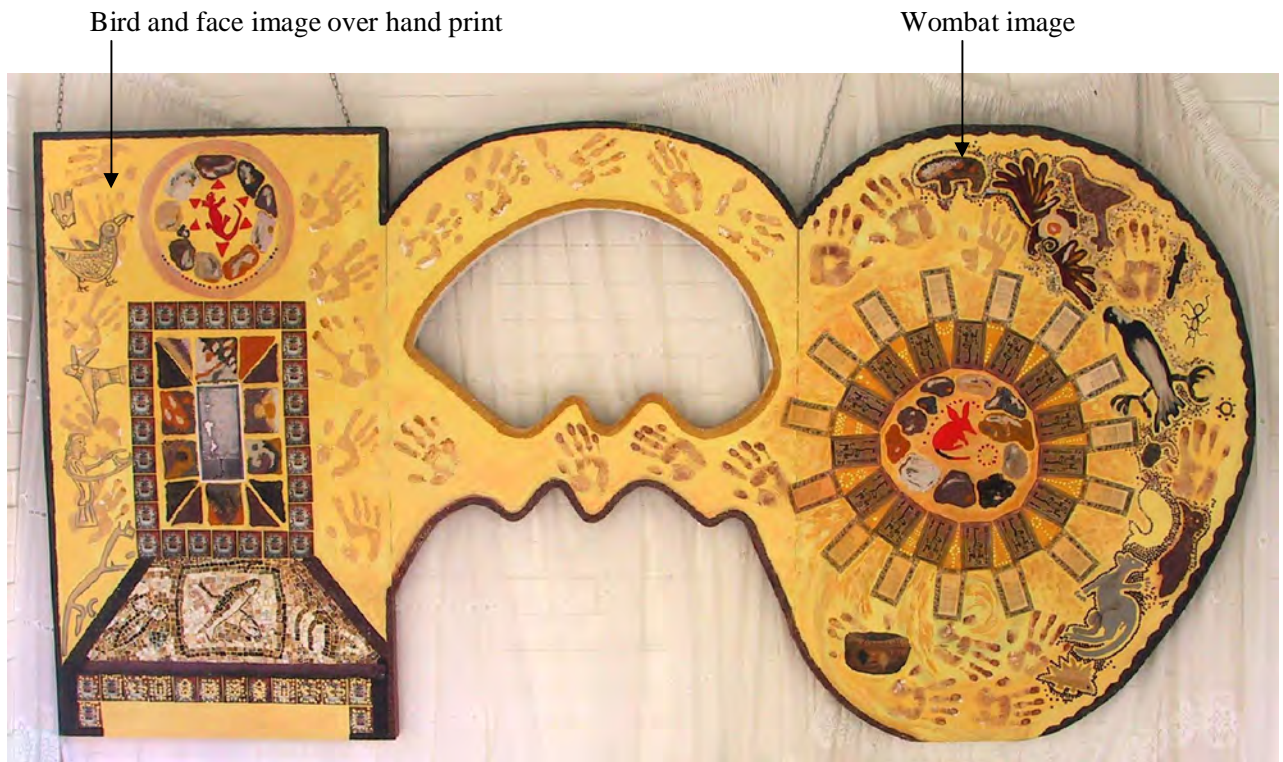
Plate 37 Sketch Drawing

The work “Bridging the Divide”⁴⁴ 2003, is used as a research tool and a connecting work for the two installations in the exhibition “Relating to Country”. This work is to be considered an ‘experimental thought drawing’ as it picks out common values such as ‘symbols of fire’, i.e. fire places being central to basic needs of all people, for gatherings and warmth, and hand stencils and stylized animal imagery which is also common to all peoples (*figure page 19*).

⁴² W. Brady. “Beam Me Up Scotty!” *Communicating across World Views on Knowledge Principles and procedures for the conduct of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research*. Paper presented to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Conference, Hervey Bay. 6-11 December 1992 - p. 11

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ “Bridging the Divide” was used as a research demonstration to the Research Training Forum at the University of Newcastle held in the Brennan Room 7th May 2003 between 4-6pm



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE - completed in 2004. (*Brady, 1992*) Approximately 1200h x 2700w
Acrylic paint, sand, raw pigment and photographic material on board.



Detail from "Bridging the Divide"
(from top left hand corner) 2004.
Images taken from 'The book of Deer'¹.



Above, Wombat image in sand surrounded by small circles of
photograph material. The surrounding dots are hole-punched
photographs used in tonal value down this side of the work.

¹ Roy Ellsworth and Peter Berresford Ellis. "The book of Deer" Library of Celtic Illuminated Manuscripts. Published by Constable & Company Ltd. 1994 – pp.10-11

The written page turns into the seat of office. This section is done as a mosaic with pieces of photographs and coloured sands. The back of the seat is again using a number of small photographs of a painting called “Land Survey”⁴⁵ (Plate 38).



Plate 38. “Land Survey” by Kay Adlem - 1993/94

Above the chair is an ancient stone fire place, the lizard dragon in the centre was used by Britons in many myths as a symbol for fire. Ancient Celtic figures (*far left*) are defused into the older hand print style. These are symbols an industrialized community remembers only rarely (*figure page 20*).

⁴⁵ This work was one of the first paintings I did after completing the Aboriginal Studies course. Reflected in the centre of the land survey instrument is Nolan’s famous Ned Kelly image; here the outlaw and national hero has the sights set on the two figures joined in the Land Rights colours. The surrounding shapes have been taken from off road tyre patterns as modern prints in the landscape. These represent people running around without their heads or not connecting directly to the natural environment. A survey instrument is a measuring device which measures future planning, such as roads and buildings. It can also measure the past.



Detail from “Bridging the Divide” the ‘seat of office’.

Crossing the bridge to the circular section, of “Bridging the Divide”, the symbolic camp fire (*community*) dominates, surrounded by the first two petitions sent to Canberra. They are both verification to land and these represent the many works of art sent from all over Australia. Different coloured sands metaphorically represent different countries. Brady’s original circle has gone through a creative process and taken on an independent development of its own. I handled the cutting of the material in an awkward manner and the circle appeared more egg shape. This was alright. Then a family member said it looked like an ear. This was obviously not intentional but considering we are speaking about an oral culture which is a ‘hearing culture’ as opposed to a literature culture belonging to ‘sight culture’⁴⁶, I was pleased the work had a voice of its own. Still other people saw the work as a ‘key’ in shape. The bridges between Aboriginal and European cultures have hand print images which belong to both cultures. Stylized animal drawings also belong to both cultures. This work unlocks not only the similarities but also the differences.

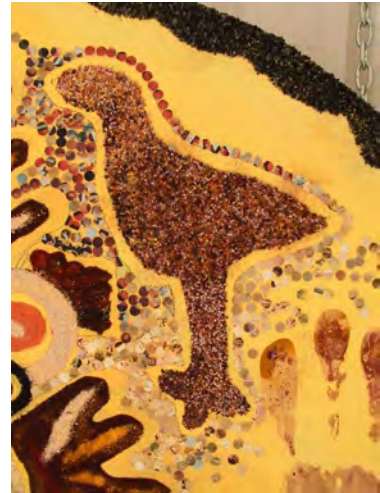
To conclude ‘Listening and Relating’ in the study of Aboriginal artists, which reveals a mood change from earlier studies of ‘celebration’ in the Won:arua landscape, the exhibition ‘Resettlement’ and the Papunya Artists (1971). It is realized that Multicultural issues appear in both Western and Aboriginal communities and this was exemplified by the exhibition “Resettlement” where six different language group areas exhibited together. The works of art all differ in imagery and material which connect to the many different areas which are now mingling within Won:arua Country bringing a rich tapestry of solidarity. Yet the work of art by Richard Bell takes the political position of total invasion in the words “ABORIGINAL ART It’s A WHITE thing”, these words are placed large over the small individual boxed patterned areas which could be aerial views of cultivated land seen through swirling cloud cover: Bell connects two fold to European language as this design of individual squared boxes is well used in Western art practice. This

⁴⁶ M. McLuhan. “*Understanding Media*” *The Extensions of Man: Television: The Timid Giant*. Abacus. 1964 - pp.329-360

statement makes us aware that he is bringing forward a catalyst for further discussion which includes all sides of society. Whereas, the work of Trevor Nickolls, “Wrestling with White Spirit” speaks of an issue I have heard many times in Aboriginal communities; ‘they have everything else, now they want our culture’: This work of art becomes an icon in that it is graphic, raw and honest, but Nickolls shows a spark of hope, in the yellow ochre outline of the central figure, which connects to a piece of ochre on the ground representing the relationship to land (pp.208 & 209). Lin Onus remains an activist, campaigning for social change through his multi-medium works of art, as does Fiona Foley with her belief in the return of culture and language. Mini Heath’s work relates to Aboriginal culture in a deep and steady way with a strong protest towards the destruction and deceit he sees. In looking at the issue of ‘protesting against’, leads me further to the violation which colonization has brought to Aboriginal communities. This is not only seen in the destruction of landscapes as found in the Paper Bark research but is also evident in studying contemporary Aboriginal artists works. It is evident that invasion has happened and is still happening through many government policies in education, health, housing and employment. One such policy is the government ‘pastoral lease’ and Trudgen explains this in saying; “The dominant culture must acknowledge the large part it plays ...” in a “...war of words”⁴⁷. A pastoral lease could be seen as a ‘war on words’ where invasion is hidden in the form of Australia’s primary industry which is a large part of the National economy. As cattle do not harmoniously relate to country, they too can be seen as invasive. To produce a work of art from my findings I feel it appropriate to use bullock hides to convey the colonization story.

Wendy Brady through her explicit drawing (p.213) has communicated and touched this research in a significant way. The two bridges can be seen as barriers or divisions or they can be seen as protective and productive (*figure page 21*). The work indicates that the crossing of cultural bridges is possible. To demonstrate this I use the Kangaroo and the Emu in a work called, “‘You Alright?’” (*figure page 22*).

⁴⁷ R.I. Trudgen. “*Why Warriors lie down and die*”: Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact. *Djambati Mala - Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc. Darwin. 2000 - p.80



Detail from Bridging the Divide showing stylized animal imagery.
 To the right .. the use of different coloured sands in animal imagery.
 Above left ... defused ancient images from different parts of European culture



Guardian “You alright?” 2003

Kangaroo image influenced by a painting by Ian Fairweather called
“Kangaroo Hunt (1955)”

Chapter 5

Reflective

Journey into the Belly of the Bull

Reflective Journey into the Belly of the Bull

To cross a cultural bridge involves an extended listening skill and a belief that it is possible. My study, of contemporary Aboriginal artists, reveals a message of 'protesting against' which extends the research to face the invasion issue. Throughout the research I am able to express the richness and terror which occurs when cultures collide. The idea of New South Wales in Australia as an invaded war zone is extreme but undeniably the colonization of Australia qualifies as conflict between cultures. Journalist Nicholas Rothwell¹ understands, through his role as Foreign Correspondent in war-torn areas of the world, the value of being a witness to the outcome of conflict. Rothwell mentions that as you describe any situation, you start to understand people's lives and although some see this as exploiting those people it becomes very homespun and pragmatic and honest as you start to see and respect the world of others. His work in Darwin with remote Aboriginal communities follows through with this conviction, as he sees that he is dealing with an emotional world in these communities not unlike those in war torn areas.

From listening, relating and reflecting, the idea of using bullock hides as an introduced species and therefore an introduced material on which to draw 'accepted slices of historical imagery' seemed a valid one. The hide becomes a metaphor for the imposition of colonization. To accomplish this I have focus on the series of works titled: "In the Belly of the Bull" and have taken the opportunity to laterally interlace images which could be considered, universal or archetypal images. These works developed in conjunction with the making of the 'paper bark bowls' and are directly related to my research in the Won:arua area. The hides can be seen as the opposite of the paper bark as one is an imported material which signifies the death of the animal and paper bark, as a native plant, with healing properties. When the paper bark is made into a bowl this signifies a birth, or a new beginning, or a vessel which continues to hold the power of tradition into modern times.

¹ Nicholas Rothwell is now working for 'The Australian' in Darwin and is author of "Another Country"
Nicholas Rothwell <http://www.abc.net.au> Aboriginal Languages: Why the Struggle to keep them Alive?

Choosing the images to be used on the hides was full of complications as participants' stories presented a vast source of material.

For example Linda Pont's story (*chapter two*) is about early education, as the title expresses. It is natural that when students can relate their education through their culture, they are interested; their learning will be meaningful². Hal Jackson in "Being Whitefella" speaks of Australian education as having nothing 'Aboriginal'³.

In more recent times there are many organizations dealing with Aboriginal education⁴, 'The Aboriginal Consultative Groups' vision⁵ is particularly interesting.

....."We do not see education as a method of producing an anglicised (*sic*)Aborigine but rather as an instrument for creating an informed community with intellectual and technological skills, in harmony with our own cultural values and identity. We wish to be Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia.

.....We see the need for a change in education for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, their teachers and their children; to create an Australia where the values and cultures of both people thrive. The process of achieving this will require many major changes in direction for your education. It is also ours, but does not serve us well as it does you; nor do we completely understand it, but at least we are aware of where it most fails us."⁶

Trudgen recorded, in the story about the 'river babies' (*p.4*) that no one questioned 'what was going on up river'. I recall a conversation with an Aboriginal man who explained to me, that for him to see the river he had to look elsewhere in order to listen to the river. This way he sees the river's depths and moods.

² F.J. Foreman & Sowton Caoran. "Taking Our Time": *Feminist Perspective's on Temporality*. 1989

³ Hal Jackson. "Being Whitefella": *A Late Learning*. Chapter 7. pp.84-92. 1994 – p.84

⁴ Wollotuka. Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) et al -(DEET)-(DEETYA)-(NAEC)-(NATSIEP)-(VET)-(VEGAS)-(UNESCO)-(FAECG)-(ATAS)-(ASSPA)-(ALS)-(AEDA)-(AEW's)-(ALES)-(ALIP)-(AILF) et al. Studies made by Kay Adlem during time at Wollotuka. Awarded a Diploma in Aboriginal Studies on 29 April 1995 and a Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies on 4 April 2002

⁵ Aboriginal Consultative Group. "Education for Aborigines". *Report to the School Commission*. June 1975 - p.3

⁶ ibid – First and last paragraph only

To look at the history behind participants' stories provides the opportunity to explore and expose the depths and struggles that these stories contain, making their achievements more powerful.

Trudgen mentions the importance of body language in Aboriginal communities as a form of speaking in pictures and I wondered if I was reading the body language of history.

A story was told in 1989⁷, by Cecil King an Indigenous educator, about a dream (*delivered at the 88th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association*). All the peoples of the world are gathered in one place. It is a very cold place and no fire could be found anywhere.

Then it was found that a group of North American Indians (*Indigenous peoples*) were gathered around the remains of a very small fire, they were protecting the smallest of flames against the slightest breeze so that it did not go out altogether.

“They were working to build the fragile, feeble flame. They added minuscule shavings from toothpicks to feed it”⁸.

When the people knew this they all rushed over to try and get warm. The stampede would have put the fire out so the rush had to be stopped as it was the responsibility of the North American Indian (*Indigenous peoples*) to preserve the flame.

Only when the flame grows will all people be warmed by the fire⁹.

⁷ Willie Ermine. “*Aboriginal Epistemology*”: *First Nations Education in Canada*. The Circle Unfolds. Eds. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, UBC Press, Vancouver, Canada. 1995- pp.101-112

⁸ *ibid* - p.111

⁹ Willie Ermine. “*Aboriginal Epistemology*”: *First Nations Education in Canada*. The Circle Unfolds. Eds. Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, UBC Press, Vancouver, Canada. 1995 - pp.101-112
“*Aboriginal Epistemology*” reflects similar theories found in T. Janke. “*Our Culture, Our Future*”. 1998



Plate 39 - Left in photograph: Keelan Patten and a group of children drawing their hand shape with fiber tip pens at the exhibition “Together” 1999 at Mindaribba LALC¹⁰
(Refer chapter two – Narelle Miller – “It’ll be Right” – p.162).

This story is pertinent to my research as the underlying meaning of the story is that the people have been dispersed and their culture fractured, they are carefully rebuilding the culture and preserving this flame. The story places no emphasis on the reason why this fracturing occurred, but instead focuses on rebuilding. I found this same quality in participants’ stories, however, when it came to researching around these stories I inevitably had to confront issues of colonization as the reason for the fragmentation. In this short exegesis I condense a history of colonization onto the hides which becomes a complex, sensitive and very emotional experience. As a recent migrant to Australia and having come from a British/European background my justification in drawing well established visual images on the bullock hides is because this is very much part of my history.

¹⁰ Verbal permission by Trevor Patten to use photograph in project “Relating to Country”. 2004

I quote Paul Keating's "Redfern Address"¹¹ when he admitted the problems faced by Aboriginal Communities starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.

"We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.
We brought the diseases. The alcohol.
We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers.
We practised (*sic*) discrimination and exclusion.
It was our ignorance and our prejudice.
And our failure to imagine these things being done to us."

But he goes on to say further along in his speech

"And we can have justice. I say this for two reasons:
I say it because I believe that the great thing about
Australian social democracy reflect a fundamental belief
in justice. And I say it because in so many other areas we
have proved our capacity over the years to go on extending
the realms of participation, opportunity and care."

It is clear from Keating's words that a great injustice has occurred in Australia and it is also clear that he believes that there is a way forward. In this paper I have used listening, relating, reflecting and creating as a means to move forward.

Lucy Lippard in 1990 expressed her ideas about the value of art making.

"One's own lived experience, respectfully relates to that of others,
remains for me the best foundation for social vision, of which art is
a significant part."

..... The real risk is to venture outside of the imposed art contexts,
both as a viewer and as an artist, to live the connections with
people like and unlike oneself. When culture is perceived as the
entire fabric ... one begins to see art itself differently."¹²

¹¹ Koori Mail. "Time to reflect, understand, be sorry, and look ahead". The full text of the speech made by the Prime Minister Mr. Paul Keating, in Redfern, New South Wales, on December 10' for the Australian launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. *Known as the "Redfern Address"*. 13th January 1993 – p.11

¹² Vivienne Dadour. "Artmaking practices and the cultural frame". 2005 - pp.1-19 – quote used from Lucy Lippard from *Mixed Blessings* Pantheon. New York. 1990 - pp.16 & 17

Linda Smith tells us:

“On the international scene it is extremely rare and unusual when indigenous (*sic*) accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place. And yet, the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.”¹³

She goes on to say, we are;

“... “writing back” whilst at the same time writing to ourselves.”¹⁴

Lucy Lippard in “The Arts Provide a Common Language in a Complex Global Culture” adds to the understanding of cultural bridging in describing a good Latin American ...

“.... soup in which the ingredients retain their own forms and flavours. fresher and healthier.....often unfamiliar....”¹⁵.

Participants’ stories have retained their own forms and flavours throughout this project. The philosophies surrounding the paper bark, which are unfamiliar to Western values, are undoubtedly encouraging in the understanding of maintaining a healthy environment. Listening to the unfamiliar alongside the familiar has been refreshing, stimulating and an experience full of hope.

While travelling around Australia there is evidence of many Aboriginal success stories and many have been supported by ATSIC. Legislation of land is recognized usually in a creative way. The women artists at Fitzroy Crossing painted their land. On our visit they spoke about the banner which had gone to Canberra some years earlier with a similar intention to that of the Marika Bark paintings.

¹³ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. “*Decolonizing Methodologies*”: *Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zen Books Ltd. London & New York: University of Otago Press, Dunedin. NZ. 1999 - p.35

¹⁴ *ibid* – p.37

¹⁵ William Cleveland. “*Bridges, Translations and Change: The Arts as Infrastructure in 21st Century America*”. www.artandcommunity.com 18/09/2007 – quote from Lucy Lippard in “*The Arts Provide a Common Language in a Complex Global Culture*” - p.3

Honeychild (*Plate 40*¹⁶) was in the front room area sorting through some paintings. There was a film being made out the back and we could hear all the laughing. Honeychild kept smiling and nodding as if directing the procedures from where she was. We were outsiders passing through, but even so we could see people just getting on with it in a happy manner each supporting the other.



Plate 40
Honeychild working on banner

The ‘land question’ becomes more evident as I make the connections in history to participants’ stories: Yet the ‘land question’ is not openly evident in reading participants’ stories. It is important to listen to what is not said as, Trudgen explains in his ‘river babies’ story (*refer to p.4*), we need to look at the cause not the symptom. My intention has not been to create one hide per participant story because all stories have been affected by the meaning behind the images on each hide. I want these images¹⁷ to cross over from hide to hide to create a sense of mixture in meaning just as political policies do. The idea is to allow viewers to travel through at their own pace. Knowledge of the images will naturally expand the meaning but I believe viewers will understand the struggle of participants from the images alone. The process of listening becomes “unexpected, meaningful and revealing”¹⁸ by degrees of commitment. Participants’ stories start to reveal their healing power within this project.

¹⁶ Mangkaja_Arts@bigpond.com. “A View from Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency”. Acknowledgements to: ATSIC. Australia Council of the Arts. Department of the Arts, Government of Western Australia and Mangkaja Arts. Photograph: *Paji Honeychild and the Wakartu painting the “Images of Power” banner*. Fitzroy Crossing Hall January - 1993; Resource Agency Aboriginal Corporation. 1994

¹⁷ The images referred to are drawn on the hides with felt tip pens, from coloured map pens to white-board and laundry markers, mainly black. Some of these marker-inks changed colour over time.

¹⁸ Fiumara, Gemma Corradi. “*The Other Side of Language: A philosophy of listening*”. Routledge. 1990 – p.191

Hide I, “Our Great Democracy” (*figure page 23*) contains images of power and oppression. My intention was to imply the confusion and mayhem unleashed by the imposition of one set of cultural values upon another. The drawing of Charlie Turner by Tom Roberts dominates this hide. He is representative of a people looking to their own higher place¹⁹. Behind Charlie Turner are seen the works of Newcastle’s ‘forger’ Joseph Lycett²⁰ (1775-1828) which show Aboriginal people enjoying their way of life²¹. Charlie is surrounded by symbols of invasion from Greek, Roman, Spanish, Medieval English and French nation building embodying Christian Religion and the Industrial Revolution²². Yet originally these works of art were not made as invasion statements but about knowledge and the endeavors of industry, science and beliefs. These works speak the neo-classic language and the medieval triumphs of wars defending a way of life. Christianity played a large part in the destiny of Australia. My stealing of Piero Di Cosimo, “The Virgin and Child with Dove”²³ is placed against Roman and Greek cultures²⁴, between the power of thought and the sword²⁵. I have used images from the Bayeux Tapestry (1077), Goya’s ‘The Third of May’ (1808) and Picasso’s ‘Guernica’ (1937) these are images of war conveying social, political and cultural decline somewhere. These strangely juxtaposed images are all part of the colonization story of Australia (*figure page 23*).

¹⁹ N. Parbury. “*Survival*”: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.84

²⁰ J. Turner. “*Joseph Lycett*”: Governor Macquarie’s convict artist. Hunter History Publications. 1997
Note: The Joseph Lycett watercolours can be viewed at Newcastle Region Gallery.

²¹ Daniel Thomas (Ed.) and Ron Radford. “*Creating Australia: 200 years of Art 1788-1988*”. 1988 – p.51

²² From Greek, Roman...
Marcia Hall. *Raphael’s “School of Athens”*. Cambridge – New York – Cambridge University Press. 1997
Medieval English and French nation building....

David J. Bernstein. “*The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*”. Weidenfield and Nicolas. 1986
Christian Religion

Tom Thompson. “*Paintings of the Mother and Child: An Artist’s Analysis*”. Tommo Tom Studio – Braidwood. 1986 – pp.39&42

To the Industrial Revolution...

Marshall Cavendish. “*The Great Artists: Their lives, works and inspiration*”: No.65 Wright of Derby “*An Experiment with the Air Pump*” (c.1767-68) by Joseph Wright. Published by Marshall Cavendish Partworks Ltd. 1986 – pp.2062-2063

²³ Tom Thompson. “*Paintings of the Mother and Child: An Artist’s Analysis*”. Tommo Tom Studio – Braidwood. 1986 – p.42

²⁴ Marshall Cavendish. “*The Great Artists: Their lives, works and inspiration*”: No.31 Raphael “*The School of Athens*”. Published by Marshall Cavendish Partworks Ltd. 1986 – pp.976-977

²⁵ Marshall Cavendish. “*The Great Artists: Their lives, works and inspiration*”: No.59 David “*The Oath of the Horatii*” by Jacques-Louis David – Louvre, Paris. 1986 – p.1871



HIDE I - OUR GREAT DEMOCRACY: 2004

Hide II, “Our Great Welfare” (*figure page 24*): The creation of this hide was an emotional experience for me right from the start. In researching the historical background to Debbie Dacey’s story my perception of our welfare system, which is envied by many around the world, changed dramatically. It went from giving people support during a difficult change-over period from Farming to Industrial society, to the complete suppression of people and their rights. This emotional acknowledgment happened during the drawing of John Ruskin, educationalist, architect of the welfare state²⁶, and it became increasingly intense as each subsequent image was included. It took many months to complete this hide as I became agitated and uncomfortable and had to work on two other hides at the same time, these being “Federation” and “Democracy” both of which were finished before “Welfare”.

John Ruskin stands besides the power of water which will drive the Industrial Revolution and the sea power of ‘colonization’ built on the experience of trade and war. Nestled (*top right*) in the images of an Australian bicentennial ten dollar note (*which developed into a copyright issue with the Reserve Bank*) is the pea and thimble trick of ‘welfare’ “... giving to people what had previously been taken from them.”²⁷ These are not images to be proud of when seen through the eyes of the Aboriginal experience. Ruskin stands on the ‘mast’ image in Tom Robert’s painting, “Coming South” 1886²⁸, which in turn rests on the Viking history of the Norman Conquest and again in turn the Roman triumph columns. It was a pouring of history which was normally distant enough to accept but in this situation it became very real and very close through an educational system.

In the words of Paul Keating ... “We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol” (*refere to p.222*) and this hide shows, all this (*figure page 24*).

²⁶ F.O’Gorman. “*Ruskin*”. Sutton Publishing Ltd. 1999 – p.1

²⁷ P. Beilharz. M. Considine & R. Watts. “*Arguing About the Welfare State*” - *The Australian Experience* Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd. 1992 – p.38

²⁸ NGV 997 Roberts Tom “*Coming South*” 1886 oil Australia 759.04 ROBE-159 HIHE Slide Lib. S 40401



HIDE II – OUR GREAT WELFARE: 2005

Listening to participants' stories generated a co-operative creative look at history through making the paper bark bowls. I believe the involvement with the powerful paper bark material together with the inner skin of the bullock hides amplified an outburst of emotional relapsing. Everyone is a prisoner of history²⁹ and Sidney Nolan demonstrates this by the transference of a green floor pattern of the English court³⁰ (Plate 41) to a red one seen in the Australian law court³¹ painting of Ned Kelly (Plate 42).



Plate 41 English court of Law³²



Plate 42 Australian court of Law
"The Trial"³³ by Sidney Nolan 1947

²⁹ Mabo et al .v. The State of Queensland - Judgment of the High Courts of Australia. "175 CLR.1". 3 June 1992 - p.20

³⁰ BBC. "The History of Britain". Simon Schama. (Video) Vol.1 – 3000BC-1803AD

³¹ T.G. Rosenthal. "Sidney Nolan". Chapter Three Ned Kelly. 373 illustrations, 270 in colour. "The Trial" 1947. Thames & Hudson. 2002 - p.81

³² BBC. "The History of Britain". Simon Schama. (Video) Vol.1 – 3000BC-1803AD

³³ T.G. Rosenthal. "Sidney Nolan". Chapter Three Ned Kelly: 373 Illustrations, 270 in colour. "The Trial" 1947. Thames & Hudson. 2002 – p.81

Governments have often used artists in defining a Nation. Plates 43 and 44 tell us about European Australia³⁴.



Plate 43
“A break away!” 1891 by Tom Roberts



Plate 44
“Glenrowan” 1946 by Sidney Nolan

“A break away!”, “Glenrowan” and “The Trial” are used in **Hide III, “Our Great Federation”**. This work (*figure page 25*) highlights the myth of Federation. “The Trial” scene of Sidney Nolan’s Ned Kelly (*lower section*) is extended by squatter baron Edward Ogilvie³⁵ (*left of the ‘Judge’*) who appears in this work to be a greater authority to that of the Judge. Ogilvie came to the Hunter River area, as a boy, with his parents. In 1840 Edward decided to go north to the Clarence River looking for land to run sheep³⁶. Baryulgil country, which is about 100 kilometers inland up the Clarence River, is the place Trevor Patten (*p.38-39*) grew-up speaking the Bungjalung language. Trevor remembers stories of ‘the castle’ called “Yulgilbar” built by Ogilvie and believed that the name was a re-verse of “Baryulgil”.

Tom Roberts painted Edward Ogilvie’s portrait³⁷. The story goes that Edward never allowed smoking in the ‘big house’ as he detested it. Tom Roberts enjoyed a pipe

³⁴ R. Radford. “Tom Roberts”. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. 1996 - pp.108-9

T.G. Rosenthal. “Sidney Nolan”. Thames & Hudson. 2002 - p.81

³⁵ Portrait of Edward Ogilvie by Tom Roberts 1894 from front cover of “Squatters’ Castle” by Farwell. Late 1960’s

³⁶ George Farwell. “Squatter’s Castle”: The story of a pastoral dynasty. late 1960’s

³⁷ ibid – cover of “Squatter’s Castle” Art gallery of South Australia - Portrait of Edward Ogilvie by Tom Roberts in 1894 at “Yulgilbar”. 1996 – p.85

while he painted. The household staff waited for Ogilvie to explode at this habit, but he never did. Ogilvie is seen on this hide flanked by Tom Roberts on horseback³⁸.

Tom Roberts' portrait of the 'squatter' tells the settlers' story under the 'Impressionist' banner for the pending Federal Government. We understand why it is often referred to as a form of propaganda. The word 'propaganda' was used by the Catholic Church in 1622 as meaning "Propagating the faith"³⁹. Gough Whitlam stated that Australia would be remembered, in history, by the way Aboriginal people have been treated⁴⁰. Goanna has been placed central to the approaching alliance as a symbol of tremendous patience and tenacity.

The works of art explain the rhetoric in their titles: "Head of bull"⁴¹, "leaping cow"⁴² and "galloping horse"⁴³ from Lascaux" plus "the English saddle"⁴⁴ of law to "the trial"⁴⁵ of "city bushmen"⁴⁶ and "miners panning out"⁴⁷ to become the "gold diggers at work"⁴⁸. This "bailed up"⁴⁹ "shearing the rams"⁵⁰ and became "the breakaway"⁵¹ to "the big picture – the opening of the first parliament"⁵² (*figure page 25*).

³⁸ *Tom Roberts on horseback at Yulgilbar 1894* – Photograph taken by Kathleen Ogilvie by courtesy of K. Bland from "Squatters' Castle" by George Farwell. Late 1960's

³⁹ J.A. Walker. *"Art in the Age of Mass Media"*. Pluto Press, London. 1994 - p.3

⁴⁰ K. Gilbert. *"Because a whiteman'll never do it"*. Angus & Robertson Publication. 1973 re-printed in 1994 - p.49

⁴¹ Huxley slide Library. *"Head of Bull from Lascaux"* S 56622 759.012 PreH-5

⁴² Huxley slide Library. *"Leaping Cow from Lascaux"* S 56625 759.012 PreH-B

⁴³ Huxley slide Library. *"Galloping horse in black and brown from Lascaux"*. S 56621 759.012

⁴⁴ "The English Saddle" is a still-life drawing by Kay Adlem

⁴⁵ T.G. Rosenthal *"Sidney Nolan"*. Chapter Three Ned Kelly: 373 Illustrations, 270 in colour. "The Trial" 1947. Thames & Hudson. 2002 – p.81

⁴⁶ L. Astbury. *"City Bushmen": The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*. Oxford University Press. 1985

⁴⁷ L. Astbury. *"City Bushmen": The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*. Oxford University Press. Julian Ashton 1887. 1985 – p.89

⁴⁸ L. Astbury. *"City Bushmen": The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*. Oxford University Press. Nicholas Caire. 1985 – p.89

⁴⁹ Huxley slide Library. *Tom Roberts 1875 - "Bailed up"* - S 21410 759.04 Robe-136

⁵⁰ Huxley slide Library. *Tom Roberts 1890 - "Shearing the Rams"* - S 40850 759.04 Robe-163 National Gallery of Victoria.

⁵¹ Huxley slide Library. *Tom Roberts 1890-1891 - "The Breakaway"* - S 21408 759.04

⁵² R. Radford. *"Tom Roberts"*. *Tom Roberts 1906 - "The Big Picture"*. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Art Exhibitions Australia, Sydney. Selected and co-ordinated by Ron Radford, assisted by Jane Hylton. Cataloguing-in-Publication data National Library of Australia. 1996



HIDE III – OUR GREAT FEDERATION: 2004

Hide IV, “Our Great Land War” (*figure page 26*), develops a concept close to participants’ stories which is evident throughout this exegesis. The central images are from engravings by Charles D. Richardson, 1881⁵³ and Tom Roberts, 1881⁵⁴ which shows that conflict was a concern of the population at the time. The Maitland Mercury printed, under the title “The Land Question”⁵⁵, the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Hunter River Agricultural Society held at West Maitland on 23 September 1873.

The Hunter River Agricultural Society asked

“....What would be the thought of a king who when sending his subjects to war, and to fight his battles for him, first demands that they should be stripped of their weapons, and sent unarmed to the combat? It would be monstrous.”⁵⁶

The Mercury accurately refers to ‘war’ and in war and invasion reprisals occur. A description of reprisal in Tasmania illustrates the level of resentment which was expressed fully in the method of death to stock keepers. Cow dung filled the mouth and the eyes had been torn out and waddies thrust into the sockets resembling the horns of oxen⁵⁷. This hide remains as ‘unfinished business’, in a continuing struggle.

The photograph by Mervyn Bishop in 1975, of Gough Whitlam’s⁵⁸ clenched fist and Vincent Lingiari’s diverted knowing gaze, captured an interesting retrospect on body language.

Surrounding the two men, Whitlam and Lingiari, are Aboriginal place names from the South East of New South Wales which are burnt into the bullock hide as a similar

⁵³ L. Astbury. “*City Bushmen*”: *The Heidelberg School and the Rural Methodology*. 1985 – p.62 - plate 71

⁵⁴ L. Astbury. “*City Bushmen*”: *The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology*. Oxford University Press. 1985 – p.62 - plate 72

⁵⁵ Maitland Mercury. “*The Land Question*” of 23 September 1873 - Agricultural and Horticultural Association. President John Wyndham. 14th A.G.M. 1873

⁵⁶ *ibid* – p.5 of abridged report.

⁵⁷ Robert Manne. “*Whitewash*”: *On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Black Inc. Agenda. An Imprint of Schwartz Publishing. 2003 – p.21

⁵⁸ M. Neale. “*Yiribana*”: *An introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection*. The Art Gallery of New South Wales. Ed. Vivien Johnson. 1994 - pp.120-121.

branding technique used by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence in “The Edge of the Trees”. I use the letters as an extension of the trees and the grass. These place names (*below*) are seen between firearms, represented here by two paintings one by W. A. Cawthorne⁵⁹ (1840s), and a second by Tom Roberts (*viewed in the top section of hide*) and slow sifting promises, as the earth filters between cultures.

**ABORIGINAL PLACE NAMES FROM THE SOUTH EASTERN
COUNTRIES AND FROM THE RIVERINE AREA**

THARAWAL	GUNDUNGURRA	NGUNAWAL
NGARIGO	YUIN	WATHAURONG
BOONWARRUNG	GULIDJAN	GADUBANUD
GUNDITJMARA	GIRAIWURUNG	DHARUG
KURING-GAI	DJARGURDWURUNG	WIRADJURI
KAMILAROI	EORA	GEAWEGAL
BIRIPI	DARKINUNG	AWABAKAL
WORIMI	BUNDJALUNG	NGARABAL
GUMBAINGGIR	NGANYAYWANA	DAINGGATTI
JAITMATANG	BIDWELL	KURNAI
WOIWORING	WON:ARUA	

Most Aboriginal people, I spoke with, connected to this hide. There are many images on the hides which interconnect from hide to hide and all were chosen with participants’ stories in mind (*figure page 26*).

⁵⁹ Parbury, N. “*Survival*”: *A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.59



HIDE 1V – OUR GREAT LAND WAR: 2005

In **Hide V, “Our Great Law”**⁶⁰ (*figure page 27*) the choice of one work of art from history known as, “Governor Davey’s Proclamation to the Aborigines 1816”⁶¹ is used as an example of European law in visual terms.

There are up-dates to the correct acknowledgment of these images which now have been accredited to the administration of Governor Arthur’s proclamation of 1828 and designed by Surveyor General George Frankland in 1830.

Further conflicting claims to the size and medium of the original work is apparent in the description of a lithographic handcoloured sheet 40 x 32cm and a further description of an ‘oil on huon pine board’ 35.5 x 22.6cm⁶².

Despite the increase in size on the hide this image changed only minimally. There appeared a greater emphasis on a law system that would punish. To view the ‘proclamation to the Aborigines’⁶³ in the larger format in ‘Hide V’ increased the statement that punishment would be made by the authority of the dominant cultures military.

Some saw the top section of this work as a statement for mixed marriages but it is probably a declaration that suggests, we look after each other’s children and work together. Taking into account the control of the dominant culture in the statement on law and punishment the message could be a similar influence on the domestic scene. This is the only hide in which I did not include a drawing of my own (*figure page 27*).

⁶⁰ N. Parbury. “Survival”: *A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales. Governor Davey’s Proclamation to the Aborigines 1816*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.67

The Australian . “Who’s still **afraid** of Keith Windschuttle” *Academics are busy gearing up for yet another battle in the history war*, writes Ean Higgins. Features 22 July 2004 – p.9

⁶¹ UP DATE: *From the State Library of Tasmania comes a correction to the attribution of “Governor Davey’s Proclamation to the Aborigines 1816” which now has been attributed to the administration of Governor Arthur’s proclamation of 1828 and designed by Surveyor General George Frankland in 1830.*

⁶² One description is of a lithographic hand-coloured sheet 40 x 32cm – <http://images.statelibrary.tas.gov.au/7/01/2006>. A further description of ‘oil on huon pine board’ 35.5 x 22.6cm – <http://nationaltreasures.nla.gov.au/7/01/2006>

⁶³ Parbury, N. “Survival”: *A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.67. Note: citing included in lower section of Hide V before public exhibit.



HIDE V – OUR GREAT LAW: 2005

Hide VI, “Our Great Struggle” (figure page 28) is about recognizing the struggle of all cultures and people. By choosing political moments in history, as seen in

Day of Mourning⁶⁴ 1938 (*Shown on page 38*)
and the image of Eddie Mabo⁶⁵ 1997

..... under the wings of Ka-Wul, it is hoped that as Eagle Hawk fly’s over the age of ‘observation’, (*shown here by a painting from the Leyden School, National Gallery, London*) where constellations are depicted as animals, and seamen navigated by the stars⁶⁶, we again ask, ‘how far have we come from our beginnings and what has it done to our values?’ I found it necessary to ground lofty ideals by the inclusion of Antoine De Saint-Exupery’s⁶⁷ “The Little Prince” which brings to our attention the simple need in us all. Antoine explains through his story that the time spent on things we care for is important, he goes on to express that he does not want anyone to read his story carelessly, as he suffered too much grief setting down the memories⁶⁸.

The images below are seen in the top right section of Hide VI (*figure page 28*) from “The Little Prince” by Antoine De Saint-Exupery....



..... p.35



p.36



p.38

Plate 45

⁶⁴ N. Parbury. “Survival”: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. 1986 – p.107

⁶⁵ Film Australia. “Mabo”: Life of an Island Man. Documentary Sydney Film Festival’97. A Film Australia National Interest Program. 1997

⁶⁶ Marshall Cavendish Ltd. “The Great Artists” Their lives, works and inspiration. Ruisdael - In the Background. ‘The Age of Observation’. Part 68 - Vol.5 – p.2170. The dawn of the Dutch Republic brought with it remarkable upsurge of scientific as well as artistic achievement. This was directly related to new needs and new ways of looking at the world. Ed. Clive Gregory. 1986

⁶⁷ Antoine De Saint-Exupery. (1945) “The Little Prince”. William Heinemann Ltd., translated by Katherine Wood Published as ‘A Puffin Book’-Penguin Books. 1962

⁶⁸ ibid – Editor Kaye Webb (*approx p.5*)



HIDE V1 – OUR GREAT STRUGGLE: 2005

“In the Belly of the Bull” addresses the key areas of the research by using a suitable material, leather to extend the meaning of colonization by implicating a government pastoral lease policy. Cattle as an introduced species to Australia do not relate harmoniously to country and as such have been considered an ideal vehicle for transmitting Western historical events. These events change from their original meaning when seen through the eyes of Australian history and especially in connection to Aboriginal history.

In conclusion, the greatest surprise has been the ‘listening’ aspect of the project because, after the initial shock and tremendous sadness it worked in a very positive way as ‘listening’ has created a shared experience. The relationship between creating the paper bark bowls (*listening creatively*) and the benefits of listening to the stories inevitably brought my attention to the historical and political components which belong to participants’ stories. This project has been mindful that the creative and political analysis in cross-cultural practices have retained the **“unique identities of individual speakers”**⁶⁹. This journey has taken me through an exploratory study of mainly contemporary Aboriginal artists to understand their concerns today. The hides are a reminder of those concerns which remain hidden in worded documentation: In this project I have used an example of a pastoral lease policy. The act of ‘mark making’ on a bullock skin is steeped in history which goes back to cave drawings; and the use of map pens and white board markers brings this ancient creative pursuit into a contemporary focus.

By responding to country in the spirit of respect, reciprocity and participation as listeners there is room to strive towards understanding Aboriginal philosophies which are proving to be both ancient and ultra modern at the same time.

⁶⁹ Grant H. Kester. “*Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*”. University of California Press. 2004 – p.8

Conclusion

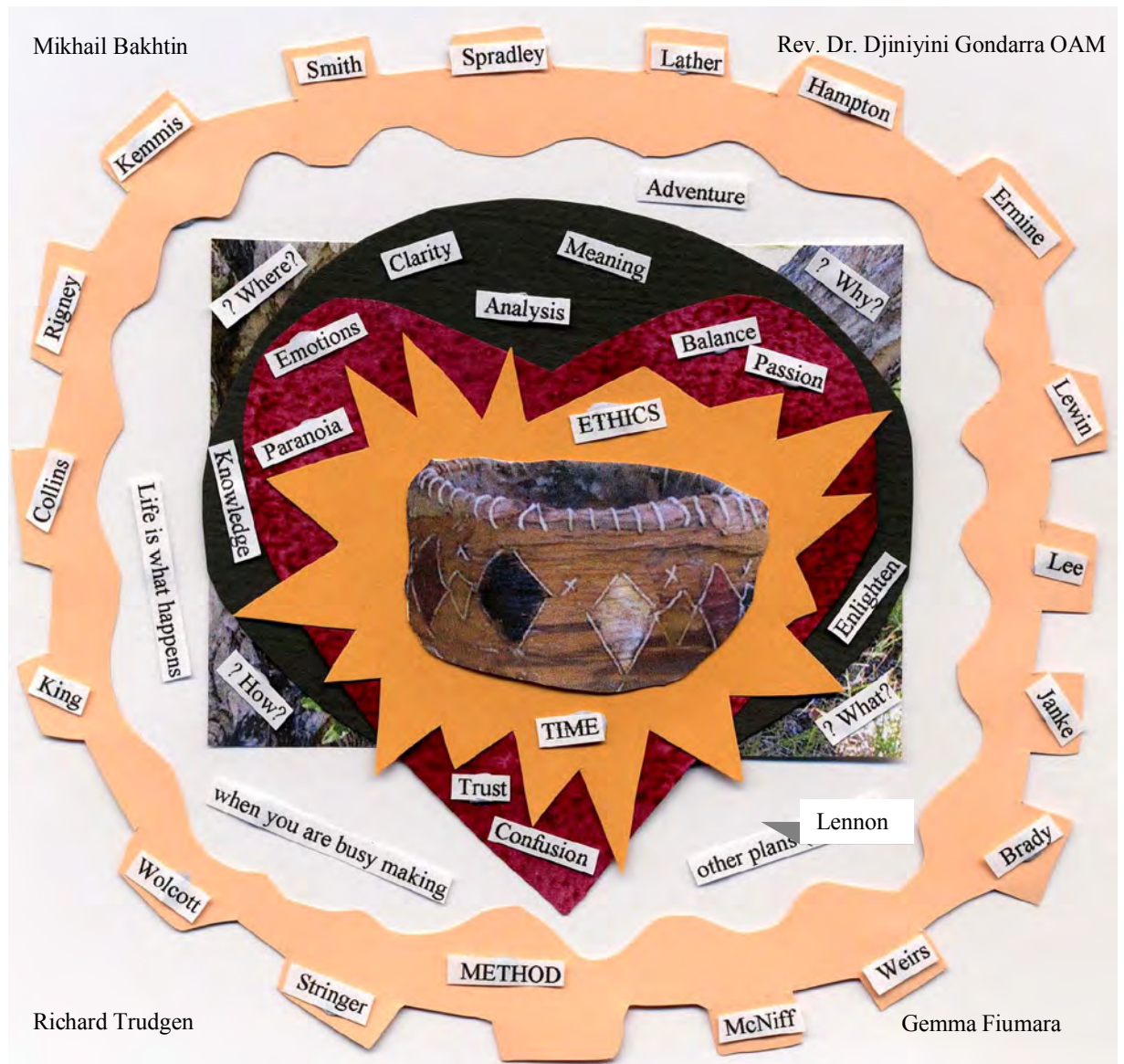
Conclusion

During the exploration of “Relating to Country”, by listening to participants’ stories and becoming involved with the notion of wrapping us in paper bark, I was fully aware and prepared for the pitfalls and criticism from an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspective: But I was surprised to find that the, sometimes harsh, criticism contributed greatly to the project.

Through the process of listening I have understood that words are only sign posts to other places. It is also interesting to find, in hindsight, that photography has played a silent yet important role. Photographs are used throughout this project and stand as a witness to social events and people’s lives and involvements, therefore, forming an important part of the research alongside the aspects of listening.

My research has focussed on Aboriginal culture as it is today, through the people of today who are living and working, in Won:arua country. The research is significant not only in acknowledging a remarkable culture of place but also in understanding the metamorphic, magnitude of works of art as experienced at the Burra Gurra site.

I found the methodologies chosen for this research to be a sustaining influence throughout the exegesis, as they complimented each other even though they were from different backgrounds and crossed the boundaries of various disciplines. It has been refreshing to look at general educational research theories, which have included feminist and Indigenous approaches, plus ethnographic and action research methodology alongside a dialogical fine art research practice. Together these methodologies have connected and provided the practicalities for this study to advance (*figure page 29*).



Research Mind Map – Approximately 250 x 200

Chapter 1

In the first chapter, “Won:arua in the Hunter Valley”, I set the scene for participants’ stories and I acknowledged a different history for the Hunter Valley by recognizing Won:arua country. The research has documented different approaches to mapping in this area through acknowledging the cultural map sites as, not only maps but, works of exceptional fine art. My investigation has included political, social, environmental and creative ‘active listening’ which was made clear at the Burra Gurra site. The experience at Burra Gurra¹ points out the extraordinary capacity of Aboriginal communities in the art of listening, as this involves listening to the universe and celebrating the natural environment and therefore Aboriginal cultural beliefs. We all spoke of the privileged witnessing, bare foot in the pouring rain, of such an array of animals coming to life².

This contrasts with memorial public sites, such as Maitland’s Sculptural Landscape which reflects a distancing attitude to an ancient local culture and therefore the landscape identity. This research makes an in depth contribution to establishing cultural differences through listening to our surroundings in a creative way which has been achieved by valuing Indigenous researchers approach to a different logic. The research has not pursued an ‘argument’ as such, as the driving factor has been an investigation and interpretation of strategies and how best they can be employed in a healing process of understanding.

Public and community “dialogic art” are spread worldwide and give general support to aspects of this project although I align with well established beliefs in Aboriginal Culture: Both philosophies do not correct or silence previous philosophies as they build on and use multiple possibilities of society’s functions by becoming involved and slowly changing those environments.

Chapter 2

Chapter two, “Participants’ Stories”, is composed of the unedited stories of participants which highlight the ‘listening’ component in understanding different

¹ Chapter 1 - pp.22,23,24

² Protocol was followed on approaching the site.

views of social concerns which affect us all. My agreement was not to analyse the stories but to accept them as they were with individual copy right to each participant. This action establishes the philosophy of listening already inherent in Aboriginal Communities which tested and developed my listening abilities. This was the most difficult and significant achievement for me during the ‘listening process’ and formed the first stage of a more in depth listening process which continued during the making of the paper bark bowls.

Chapter 3

In chapter three, “Wrap Us in Paper Bark”, unplanned and unexpected results occurred through my developing an understanding of the power of the paper bark material especially when seen in conjunction with Aboriginal beliefs in relating to country. The paper bark bowls are at the heart of the project not only as a fine art object but also as a unique research tool. I have used the creative process to ‘actively listen’ and although I had permission in this pursuit, it proved a very emotional undertaking as I knew the paper bark represented land, plants, animals and people and it was this that opened the listening process further. Through listening I crossed many boundaries which was sad in many respects, as listening forced me to ‘reign-in’ my head, listening allowed me to be ‘still’ for a while and the creative process complemented this situation. What seemed a restriction started to open up and to generate a wider understanding of everything surrounding the participants’ stories: I believe the use of creativity in research field trips established better communication and therefore the possibility of enhanced listening. This research has already contributed to a life beyond this study as Marianne McKinnon-Kidd enrolled at Warawara, Macquarie University in a Masters degree (2006), to bring her ancestor ‘Peggy’ home by using the paper bark bowl we made together. To ‘wrap us in paper bark’ is intended to represent the idea of wrapping us in a culture of place.

Chapter 4

In chapter four, “Listening and Relating”, I develop an understanding of a different logic which is one of inclusion, complication and even contradiction. When a

different logic is seen from 'other points of view' it opens the listening process. This was achieved by seeing the barriers (*and there have been many*) which form an understanding of 'inclusive decision making' methods. Many of these barriers, at first, heightened a sense of my helplessness which occurred through my connection to participants' stories and the admiration of their strength which I remember sensing at their initial telling. These barriers have become points of interest and important signposts. They still make me stop and listen to what is happening and why they are there.

A study of contemporary Aboriginal artists takes the listening process a step further and there is a change in the result of the research as a strong sense of 'protesting against' enters the project. Whereas the exhibition "Resettlement" (2004) looked at 'supporting the survival of a culture' by using strong cultural designs as this exhibition was a celebration of culture.

Chapter 5

Chapter five, "Reflective Journey into the Belly of the Bull", investigates the historical link to participants' stories which I explore by establishing the series "In the Belly of the Bull". I provide an analysis of the images which have been selected to tell various stories which have had an impact upon my research.

The choice to appropriate well known works of art from history on to the 'hides' is to indicate the extent of participants' struggles. This section of the research was as emotional as making the paper bark bowls but in a different way.

It is understood that not everyone will recognize all these works that have been drawn onto the six hides. By using a variety of images, most viewers will distinguish meaning somewhere in the labyrinth. There are no barricades in choosing different era's (*Roman, Medieval*) and areas (*European, Australian*) as styles hold together in the unification of a drawing.

Relating to Country

This project has been looking at a society which is rich in an irreplaceable culture of place. Through looking at works of art we are able to look at people, their societies and communities, their lives, their hopes and fears, their attitudes and assumptions. This research has explored alternative social values for generating ‘a sense of place’, in the name of Won:arua, by ‘listening’, ‘reflecting’ and ‘relating’ to participants’ stories. To exhibit these works together as one work in the appearance of the Bayeux Tapestry was to connect to an invasion history: Because the Bayeux Tapestry evolved from the idea of Roman triumph columns I saw a further reason to use the design to display participants’ stories which are triumphs against unjust odds. Participants’ stories describe exceptional achievements and together are as politically charged as any of the great battles in any era.

Throughout this project “Relating to Country” it has been inevitable to face a history of colonization. This was also supported through looking at the contemporary message Aboriginal artists were transmitting, which was one of ‘protesting against’. This, on the surface, appears not unlike many a message in Western Art which protests against pollution and the destruction of natural environments to name but a few examples. Richard Bell, Lin Onus, Trevor Nicholls, Fiona Foley and Mini Heath use Aboriginal cultural knowledge in their works of art to a high degree to protest about the invasion of Aboriginal land and culture.

The important part of listening, to the stories, has been not only in the therapeutic unlocking of a history we share in the bullock hides, but also in respecting a culture of place through the paper bark bowls. The act of giving back the paper bark in the form of bowls has more to do with what is carried within the vessels; within the space cradled (*within this exegesis*) and in the exhibition “Relating to Country”: through “Listening, Reflecting and Relating to Contemporary Aboriginal Stories from Won:arua Country in the Hunter Valley”.

Exhibition - “Relating to Country” 2006

The exhibition “**Relating to Country**” was held at the University of Newcastle Fine Art Gallery on the 12th July to the 23rd July 2006³ and was officially opened on 15th July 2006 at 2.00 pm. An introduction was given by Allan Chawner. A Welcome to Country by Caril Connors (*Pambalong*) and opened by Marianne McKinnon-Kidd (*Biripi*).

I have kept as close to the research findings as possible in the direction of exhibiting. As there are two very different cultures involved in the research, the exhibition consists of two installations: Installation I, “**Guardians**”, is connected to a contemporary Aboriginal cultural celebration of place and is structured from a primary source. Whereas, installation II, “**In the Belly of the Bull**”, is a memorial work incorporating well known and accepted visual slices of history which constitutes a secondary source of information. The exhibits complete the concept of triangulation in research methodology by including a work called “**Bridging the Divide**” which stands alone between the two installations as an artistic research work. All the works in the exhibition developed slowly during the development of the listening process by relating and reflecting.

“Bridging the Divide” (*figure page 30*)

The work “Bridging the Divide” is a research study that recognizes value in the legacy of all ancestors. Notably this was triggered by a drawing by Wendy Brady⁴ (1992), where she describes two systems at work in Australia.

The left section of this work, from a distance, looks like a small ‘i’ or a person image. At the centre of the chair back is a copy of the Magna Carta, looking boxed and controlled (*by ‘land survey’*). This ‘seat of office’ stands out against the defused hand prints and the ancient Celtic stylized animal images. The mosaic seat base has been constructed with square photograph pieces, placed in tonal values, to show the ancient symbols of Christianity. These images characterize the cornerstones of Western society’s laws and customs of male dominance.

³ The Herald. “Art Exhibition”: School of Fine Art. Monday July 17th 2006 – p.58

⁴ Chapter 4 - Brady-pp.213-215



Exhibition “Relating to Country” 2006



“Bridging the Divide” 2003 a connecting research work to both Installations

The circular area (*right*) resembles the sun. The community aspect is larger and wider. Australian animal images in this section symbolize the many community areas, linking and coming together around the symbol of fire. The same material has been used in both sections but in different ways. For example the photograph pieces in this section are circular and have been used to surround the communities. The paper bark bowl represents a philosophy of place (*figure page 30*).

Installation 1 - “Guardians” (*figure page 31*)

This installation is warm in colour and views participants’ stories backed by the powerful presence of the paper bark bowls in relating to country. The

- ❖ Participants’ stories are pinned to the walls:
- ❖ Paper bark in the form of bowls are displayed on white plinths:
- ❖ The stylized paintings of Australian animals stand like sentinels, surrounded by heavy square frames, looking on at a changing history:
- ❖ All are an integral part of cultural meaning through imposed standards.

Despite the separation of images, there remains behind the mask of memory, a quiet, steady resistance which is seen in the telling of a different history from Won:arua⁵. We do not all see the same struggles. Participants’ stories are modern Aboriginal cultural stories which cradle the paper bark bowls not unlike the long arms of Biamme or the wide wing span of Ka-wul (*Eagle-hawk*). The bowls have a commanding presence and in turn are guardians of the stories. I return to the analogy of native grasses To “ accept the local landscape would reverse the European sense of tidiness”⁶. This could be interpreted as reversing the European sense of control. Making the paper bark into a bowl did not change the meaning of the material. These bowls are made with respect, in appreciating the trust and the deep meaning they hold. Paper bark is still a symbol of ancestors and land and is the heart of this study and as such remain the property of participants who have been the foundation of this project from the start (*figure page 31*).

⁵ This includes: Wonnarua: Wanaruah: Wiradjuri: Gamilaroi, Biripi, Rirratjuinu, Awabakal, Pampalong and Baryulgil Countries.

⁶ Chapter 3 – p.193 ... From R.D.B. Whalley. “Native Grasses” Useless or Useful? CHIASMA: Journal of the Rural Science Undergraduate Society, University of New England. Department of Botany. 1984 - pp.39-40



Installation I Guardians 2006



Figure page 31

Installation II - “In the Belly of the Bull” (figure page 32)

This installation is mute in colour as the images on the hides are deliberately placed in hidden shadow of mainly black drawings. Six ‘bullock hides’ hang suspended in the gallery space partially hidden by a seventh reversed plain hide. Simply, this is referring to the hidden history of pastoral leases and refers to the grass which recalls Kathy Marika’s⁷ statement that: “...when she looks out at the grass she sees her family.” As Western culture is detached from this way of thinking, there is denial that Australia’s economy has been made on the foundation of Aboriginal families.

Familiar works of art are chosen from history and re-drawn onto the hides: These works change in ‘meaning’ from the original ‘understanding of the images’, when they are placed beside Aboriginal cultural pursuits and imagery. This memorial installation becomes a work of protest. This verifies, that it is only the ‘seen presence’ of other cultures or stories or people that changes the perception of a given issue. To address social issues in a collaborative and inclusive approach has reflected on being part of history and taking part in changes. By suggesting that Aboriginal culture can be seen as ‘present’ (*modern*) and Colonial culture can be seen as ‘past’ (*primitive*) I see that there is room to breathe in both spheres. To walk through these hanging slices of history I hope people will see and understand their position, in space and time, as we are all part of this history (figure page 32).

“The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence.” Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*⁸.

⁷ Chapter 1 – p.37

⁸ David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell. “*The Sacred Balance*”: *Rediscovering our place in nature*. Allen & Unwin. 1997 – p.240



Installation II In the Belly of the Bull 2006



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