Sovereignty
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Curators:
Paola Balla & Max Delany
Foreword
Arweet Carolyn Briggs

To be able to welcome people on Country at this place is an honour, this Yalukit Willam place of the Boon Wurrung peoples. Welcome to country gives a sense of connection for all people that come along with us.

If you come with integrity, you are respecting the sacred ground that this cultural space is located on, and will be honoured with respect. As an Elder, how we transmit knowledge is important, as are the ways we create a platform for our youth, in a safe environment. Dance, story, images and song – all have a role to play in knowledge transmission, and can create such an impact.

We have been creating art since the beginning of time. We are continuing an age-old practice; we all have a story, some stories are traumatic, so it is especially important to have the opportunity and freedom to celebrate culture for wellbeing. Art can be a healing space, and an opportunity to awaken the world to the impacts upon us, locally and globally.

It is very exciting to see Sovereignty take place at ACCA, seeing our artists acknowledged in a contemporary context at a national level. A place of creativity and excellence for Indigenous peoples to produce and present new work, for emerging and established artists, and for young ones to create new opportunities for expression. This is old knowledge in new ways.

Arweet Carolyn Briggs is a Boon Wurrung Elder and Director of the Boon Wurrung Foundation.
ACCA is proud to present Sovereignty, a major exhibition focussing upon contemporary art of First Nations peoples of South East Australia, alongside keynote historical works, to explore culturally and linguistically diverse narratives of self-determination, identity, sovereignty and resistance.

Taking the example of Ngurungaeta (Elder) and Wurundjeri leader William Barak (c.1824–1903) as a model – in particular Barak’s role as an artist, activist, leader, diplomat and translator – the exhibition presents the vibrant and diverse visual art and culture of the continuous and distinct nations, language groups and communities of Victoria’s sovereign, Indigenous peoples.

Sovereignty brings together new commissions, recent and historical works by over thirty artists, celebrating the continuing vitality, resilience and ingenuity of Indigenous communities and their cultural practices. Developed in collaboration with Paola Balla, a Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara artist, writer and curator, Sovereignty is based on a consultative, collaborative curatorial model, and draws upon the knowledge and expertise of an advisory group encompassing elders, artists and community representatives, to assist our aims for the curatorial process to be informed by First Nations communities, knowledge and cultural protocols. In this sense, Sovereignty is conceived as a platform for Indigenous community expression, and is accompanied by an extensive program of talks, forums, screenings, performances, workshops, education programs and events.

Sovereignty is structured around a set of practices and relationships in which art and society, community and family, history and politics are inextricably connected. A diverse range of
Sovereignty provides an opportunity to engage with critical historical and contemporary issues in Australian society. The exhibition takes place against a backdrop of cultural, political and historical debates related to questions of colonialism and de-colonisation, constitutional recognition, sovereignty and treaty. At present, Australia’s federal government is leading ‘a move towards recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’s founding document – our Constitution’, with a Referendum Council established to ‘consult widely throughout Australia’ and to ‘inform a model to take to a referendum’ on constitutional change.1

For First Nations people, however, the Constitution itself is a compromised, illegitimate document, built on the lie and legal fiction of terra nullius. Many in the Indigenous community are increasingly opposed to the principle of constitutional recognition, rejecting the idea of seeking recognition from white Australia within an imposed colonial framework, one that impinges upon Indigenous sovereignty.2 Not wanting to ‘tinker with white man’s constitution’, as Dhudhurowa Elder and Traditional Owner Gary Murray has put it,3 First Nations Australians are instead seeking recognition ‘as sovereign people’ through a process of negotiation between parties leading to a settlement or treaty. As Nayuka Gorrie has stated: ‘A treaty forces you to see me as an equal, with a separate identity, history and culture that has existed for tens of thousands of years. Recognition forces me to ask to be seen by you in a colonial system that I don’t want to legitimise’.4

Faced with a history of illegal invasion and occupation, frontier conflict, massacre sites and what has been referred to as a ‘secret war’5 — along with the accompanying inter-generational trauma associated with ongoing histories of stolen land, stolen children, incarceration and deaths in custody, and continuing socio-economic disadvantage — an overwhelming majority of Indigenous communities are demanding not constitutional recognition but acknowledgement of their sovereign identity, law and human rights through treaty. A treaty process would serve as a fundamental means of atoning for past injustices, as a contract for Indigenous communities to consent to the colonial occupation of their land, as a recognition of inalienable human rights and sovereignty, and as an instrument for reparations and for First Nations’ socio-economic participation and well-being.6 In short, arguments for sovereignty and treaty are conceived as a peace accord in relation to past injustices, and to make the nation a fairer place for Indigenous people in a settler colonial society.

The idea of sovereignty has been articulated in many ways – political, juridical, ethical, spiritual, and in relation to the actuality and assertion of human rights, autonomy and agency. In colonial settler societies, these terms often remain aligned with colonial discourses, histories and processes. As celebrated author and catalogue essayist Tony Birch notes in this publication: ‘Conversely, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Sovereignty is a reflection of a reality that people, custom and Country are inextricably linked, regardless of the impositions of colonisation.’7

These questions lie at the heart of First Nations’ cultural practices, and inform the context of an exhibition that seeks to provide a dedicated space for First Nations artists to practice and flourish and for European and settler Australians to learn to tread more carefully and respectfully, with a greater knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous sovereignty, history and contemporary art and cultural practices.


5 Tony Birch, ‘Our red sands dug and sifted’: Sovereignty and the act of being’, p.17


The recognition of sovereignty presents constructive challenges and creative possibilities for curatorial practice. As Ivan Muñiz-Reed has recently written, ‘... a decolonial curatorial practice would advocate for an epistemic disobedience, replacing or complimenting Eurocentric discourses and categories with alternative perspectives’.8 Such a practice involves questioning traditional relationships between institutional actors and cultural community participants – encouraging new voices, histories and perspectives, and a shift from authorial, institutional modes of exhibition-making towards more self-critical, consultative and collective models of curatorial practice and knowledge production. Acknowledging the challenge of developing a devolved, collective, collaborative curatorial process, Sovereignty might be seen as a first step for ACCA in a longer-term project to establish an enduring engagement with First Nation artists, their cultural practices and creative communities.

Sovereignty: Inalienable and intimate
Paola Balla

Sovereignty itself is an inalienable, innate and intimate right; its expression can be found buried within artistic works, gently emerging from inherited practices, or boldly spelled out in new artistic forms adorned with confident lines, camouflage, electric lights and bling.

The sovereignty of Indigenous peoples is being asserted in a cultural revolution of Indigenous activism, action and voice. This is happening now, across South East Australia, in the calls for treaty and in the increasingly prominent role of art and activism by Victorian Aboriginal Peoples. These actions can be considered expressions of sovereignty itself – we see evolutions and revolutions in the call and response of hip-hop artist Briggs’ *Bad Apples* 2012 and *Sheplife* 2014, and in new spaces of political resistance through video and performative public interventions.

In this charge we see incredible courage and leadership by Victorian Aboriginal women. Professor Tracey Bunda describes the ways in which Aboriginal women speak back to white Australia through art and activism by naming trauma as a ‘disruption of artistic terra nullius’.

The repeated action of shutting down the city by WAR – Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance – is such an act of courage and defiance, standing up for the rights of community self-determination and protection of Aboriginal children in detention. The particular leadership of Meriki Onus and her sister Arika Waulu continues the formidable struggles and legacy of their matriarchal precursors: their mother Marge Thorpe, grandmother Aunty Alma Thorpe and great-grandmother Aunty Edna Brown.

Aboriginal women continue to be marginalised and subjected to various forms of violence, both historical and contemporary. Despite being at the

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1 Paola Balla and Tracey Bunda, *Disrupting artistic terra nullius*, the ways in which Aboriginal women artists and activists speak back to colonial Australia through art, PhD creative thesis proposal development, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2016.
foreground of political, social and cultural resistance, our knowledge and practices are often omitted and rendered invisible in colonial academic, art and cultural institutions and public life. It is critical that this omission be addressed by situating Aboriginal women's contributions to practices of survival in art, academia and public spaces.

Within Sovereignty, we see a matriarchal space and the work of women woven throughout the narrative of the exhibition, from the depiction of events in Marlene Gilson's history paintings of Batman's 'treaty' with the Wurundjeri of the Kulin Nation, and her moving depiction of the public execution of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheener, to Megan Cope's inverted protest placards in which she subverts the explicit and disturbing racism expressed by white Australia on a daily basis, particularly through social and mainstream media.

Vicki Couzens, Bronwyn Razem, Maree Clarke and Glenda Nicholls are artists who demonstrate deep knowledge through finely crafted artistic practices that are at once poetic and political. In speaking back to the violence, oppression and subjugation of Aboriginal women, they make work that is powerful, healing and breathtakingly beautiful. So too in the work of Yhonnie Scarce, who evokes memory from the magic of glass, shaping it into precarious, fragile forms which poetically record historical events both autobiographical and familial, ensuring that her family are never forgotten or lost within the labyrinthine administration of the colonial archive.

In a newly commissioned video mixing live action and animation, Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser's Something in the air 2016 provokes and prompts consideration of Aboriginal life, personalities and identities, full of irony and joy. The bittersweet beauty in the photographs of the late, great Lisa Bellear also chronicle the everyday courage, love and gathering of Aboriginal People in Victoria, on the streets, in the parks, celebrating and commemorating life itself and the extended family of those who have gone before us.

To be sovereign is in fact to act with love and resistance simultaneously. Uncle Banjo Clarke, the late Gunditjmara statesman, said we must ‘fight hate with love.’ If there is a thread that connects all the artists across the wide diversity of practices represented in Sovereignty it is this deep love for family, for truth telling and for beauty.

As mob we proclaim our ‘sovereignty never ceded’, at rally after rally, at ceremonies and acknowledgements, in open and closed forums where the personal and political merge. In considering the social, cultural and historical implications of being sovereign people, we also experience our place and place-making being constantly under surveillance. In the gallery space and in cultural institutions, we situate ourselves to return the gaze with direct eye contact and a request that you listen to us deeply – whilst we attempt at the same time to subvert the process; to de-colonise and to Indigenise the very places that have represented us through the colonial gaze.

Politics and policies of the colonial state are thrust upon us from birth to death, from hospital wards and paper trails that lead from courts and jails, to schools and increasingly universities. Whilst we pay homage to our Ancestors – and to thousands of years of life, knowledge and creativity on our collective Countries – we are present and future-focussed peoples.

We make and write history every day. From a sound cart at Radio 3KND, Ganai-Kurnai Elder Uncle Herb Patten challenges us: ‘What kind of Ancestor do you want to be?’ Uncle Herb’s proposition is one of critical self-analysis, asking us to tune in to historical, ancestral and current frequencies. In doing so, we respond to the Old People, to ghosts, massacre victims, trauma survivors and those stolen. We tune in to the very voice of Country itself, ill from settler exploitation, ecocide and abuse. Whilst inter-generationally traumatised, we are nevertheless future focussed, responsible for the rights and wellbeing of our children and grandchildren.

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1 Banjo Clarke, Gunditjmara Elder, exhibition text, Koorie Voices, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum, 2012.

3 Herb Patten, 3KND Radio.
Nations artists awaken a sense of responsibility rarely seen in settler art or curatorial work. There is a collective consciousness and obligation, to make work that as Toni Morrison wrote, ‘at its thrust, yes, political, but also irrevocably beautiful.’

This critical body of self-analysis is deeply carved in the work of sovereign artists – in defiance of genocidal policies we are provoked into action. It is also evident in the teachings of our Old People, in the matriarchs who whisper to us to ‘tell the truth’. The seeds of self-analysis also grow from the love and the intimate suffering writ large by so many of our women continuing to suffer male violence and child removal that is increasing in Victoria as we speak, with around 1700 Aboriginal children in state care. The damage done to future Indigenous Peoples through ‘trauma trails’, as articulated by Professor Judy Atkinson, will drag long and painfully into the future, where art beckons as a healing place for that which remains unspoken and unresolved.

The work of Peter Waples-Crowe also speaks of grief, loss and love. His imagery – composed of paint, collage and text – speaks loudly and proudly of queer identity, intersectionality, and the state of being ‘mixed’, at once insider and outsider. The layered nature of his collage paintings activate a space akin to that in which LGBTQI First Nations mobs animate questions of gender, knowledge and self, beyond the binary understandings of mind-body paradigms. These are works of nuance and complexity; challenging the voices that silence whilst celebrating those voices that are otherwise silenced. Colour, history and pop, sex and love, danger and beauty are layered in complex commentaries on capitalism, religion and rejecting conformity.

Respected Gunditjmara Elder Uncle Jim Berg’s intimate and emotive photographic series Silent Witness 2005 gives poetic voice to the silenced and repressed, the surviving scar trees which mark Country, and which remain as witnesses to the ecocide and genocide committed on our lands.

Paying respect to these trees, whilst also reminding us of our own scars, is important memorial work, honouring the ingenuity and the sacrifices that our Ancestors and Old Peoples made for our survival.

As both an artist and, in this case, a curator, I am challenged working within the colonial institution, because I have a cultural and political responsibility to speak back whilst collaborating with non-Indigenous practitioners. This is done whilst developing an evolving language and practice that is also anti-colonial, responsive and resistant in ‘talkin’ up to the white cube’ to paraphrase Professor Aileen Moreton Robinson.

So, it is in this place, as a sovereign Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara woman, that I converse with Sovereignty, with ACCA and with these sovereign artists. Each is articulate in their own languages, with vocabularies that are cultural, de-colonised, de-colonising, and regenerative. This conversation involves healing works that speak to history; and rigorous, challenging conceptual works that speak to the present. It is, above all, a conversation founded upon honest, moving and irrevocably beautiful art.

The artists represented in Sovereignty demonstrate intimate knowledge and understanding of self, Country and place in a vital, diverse and intersectional way. In Dark Emu, Bruce Pascoe writes of the deep knowledge embedded within practice and Country, of people creating patterns and making marks that not only endure coloniality and genocide, but prompt re-creation, re-inscription and a return to practices of healing.

Sovereignty is a space in which to consider this endurance and resistance: a space for culture, beauty, truth and love – one in which history and the future are bound together, where us mob are always, forever stating that we are ever present, articulating survival through old and new work, in our own languages, as a call and response to a devolving western world.

‘Our red sands dug and sifted’: *Sovereignty* and the act of being

Tony Birch

In a society stuck within a colonial mindset constructed on the denial of its own *true* existence, let alone the autonomy and authority of Indigenous nations across Australia, *Sovereignty* is a word and concept beyond understanding. Conversely, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, sovereignty is a reflection of a reality that people, custom and Country are inextricably linked, regardless of the impositions of colonisation. To borrow a phrase used by the revered Palestinian thinker Edward Said, the Indigenous artist ‘speaks truth to power’ simply by the fact of his or her existence. It is clear that the power of *presence* unnerves some in white Australia. The autonomous Indigenous body, within a colonial ideology, should *not be*. A society built on the fragility of Indigenous extinction (or at best, total pacification) remains haunted, and not by a ghost of the past, but the spectre of the present. Simply put, what the concept of Sovereignty confronts is that we, as Indigenous people, should not be here.

The haunting of a colonial fantasy began soon after the British occupation of Indigenous Country. A striking documented example of this psychosis occurred in the early 1840s. It struck one William Adeney, an early Melbourne ‘pioneer’ while peering out of the window of his salubrious city address one morning; ‘peep[ing] between the blind and window to see how the day looked out of doors’. Unfortunately, Adeney was shocked to see, not such a perfect day, but what he described as the ‘horrible black face’ of an Indigenous woman looking back at him, returning the colonial male gaze, demanding recognition of her

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*Maree Clarke*

*Born of the Land* 2014 (still)

video installation: video, particle board, sand, tree branches, plaster bandage, plaster
dimensions variable
video duration: 1:48 mins
video production: SW Productions
Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
sovereign being by her very presence. While a variety of weapons of dispossession were, and continue to be utilised against Indigenous people, including forms of violence, cultural destruction and secrecy, the colonial project of dispossession and legal disenfranchisement has failed. The works of artists in this exhibition are testament to this failure.

Vicki Couzens, in a commentary on her *The Stony Rises Project* 2010, reminds us that the history and damage of colonisation in Australia has resulted in ‘missing pieces, gaping wounds in the body of our cultural knowledge, traditions and practices.’ And yet, supported by strength and tenacity within Indigenous nations, families and communities, ‘we have regained the freedom, our birthright to to reclaim, regenerate, revitalise and remember who we are and where we come from.’ Couzens is an artist creatively driven by the richness of regeneration, including the necessary custom of mourning the dead, which is itself the first step towards a revitalised or new life. This is evident in the poignancy conveyed in a collection of small possum-skin bags that Couzens has made. They commemorate the history and custom of family members carrying the ashes of a deceased family member around their necks in such a bag. Through the act of recognition, Couzens ensures that we remember our dead while giving life to memory.

Similarly, other artists in the exhibition present work that documents, memorialises and bears witness to the courage Couzens both speaks of and presents in her work. The artists also interrogate, in varied ways, the limitations of sovereignty, as a legal and political concept framed by a colonial society incapable of addressing its depth of meaning and cultural resonance of the concept as it is understood and practiced by Indigenous people. Any society erected on the legal deception of *terra nullius* is a society adrift. It is also a society that must abrogate any claim to authority in a legal, moral and ethical sense if it is ever to be free of its own limitations. Sovereign rights cannot be granted to Indigenous people by colonial society, as sovereignty, never ceded, flows through all aspects of Indigenous life; Country, nations, ecology, kinship systems, family, the body, the heart and mind.

Sovereignty, from a perspective of Indigenous life, is also immersed in lore. It is an embodied experience, at times literally transcribed on and within the body. It is not surprising, therefore, that Indigenous artists often use the physical body to address the concept of Country and interconnection. Maree Clarke is such an artist. For her, the blood, skin, muscle and bone that sculpts our physical presence is inseparable from the earth from which we are born; for Clarke, ‘our red sands dug and sifted’, reveal a vital truth. Her work *Born of the Land* 2014 deals with grief and pays respect to the mourning processes of Indigenous women from the Murray River region, as well as ‘women from other mobs’. The power of Clarke’s work is evident in its ability to recognise, with due dignity, the losses that women have experienced, while also celebrating the potential for re-emergence, the re-birth of Indigenous life. Within the violent history of the attempted colonisation of Indigenous people and Country in Australia, no group of people have suffered greater human rights abuses than Indigenous women; having had their lives, their children, their bodies – STOLEN. The sadness of this story, conveyed in *Born of the Land* is not though a story of loss alone. Clarke juxtaposes commemoration and mourning with the enactment of Indigenous women’s empowerment. She reveals, celebrates and reclaims fertility – for women – free of the coloniser, free of violence, speaking of and for itself.

‘Wherever I go, I walk a lot. I look and I listen’ Discussing motivational factors informing his photographic series *Cultural Reflections – Up*
integrated pre and post-Invasion materials and an alien traveller. Glenda Nicholls has cleverly they were indicating their sovereign authority to bowl carved from eucalypt). Through this exchange and material value, including a tarnuk (a water presented him with goods of more significant cultural would have none of Batman's sleight-of-hand. They engage and pacify the women with the usual array of trinkets, including mirrors and beads. The women working with Country. Batman attempted to of women and their children, surveying, walking on and colonise Indigenous culture, Morris makes art that ‘[tries] to carve out a cultural space … to give form to that which is often unseen.’ Guided by this economy of thought and language, Morris articulates a key driving force behind the production of a great deal of Indigenous art. The ‘carving out’ of space is an act of physically, creatively and spiritually giving recognition to the connection between self, community and Country. Additionally, ‘to give form to that which is often unseen’ is both the act of creating work and witnessing the vitality of sovereignty, regardless of any impositions of colonisation.

Glenda Nicholls, in a similar manner to Kent Morris, draws our attention and focus to the sovereign authority of women in the creation of a group of works, woven from a range of eclectic materials, both familiar and foreign. Her cloaks include ‘jute string, dye, possum skin, wool, velvet, [a] sixpence coin, silver chain, padlock, mussel shell, quandong seeds, mirror, glass, silver crucifix [and] emu feathers.’ The symmetry between the autonomy and authority of Indigenous women and the colonial trickster should not be lost on us. Few people in Victoria would know that when John Batman arrived on Indigenous land in 1835, he came ashore on Wathaurong Country. The first Indigenous people he met were a large group of women and their children, surveying, walking on and working with Country. Batman attempted to engage and pacify the women with the usual array of trinkets, including mirrors and beads. The women would have none of Batman's sleight-of-hand. They presented him with goods of more significant cultural and material value, including a tarnuk (a water bowl carved from eucalypt). Through this exchange they were indicating their sovereign authority to an alien traveller. Glenda Nicholls has cleverly integrated pre and post-Invasion materials and objects, reconstituted them, and produced a powerful statement of the recognition and formal presence of Indigenous women. Not unlike the Wathaurong women, she is giving us something a great value. It is both a generous gift and a statement of her strength.

Lucy Williams-Connelly and Brian Martin, both producing drawings of Indigenous life and Country, do not so much reveal the ‘unseen’, but see and engage with Country in revealing and dynamic ways. The ensemble work produced by Williams-Connelly expresses a dual quality. Each drawing contains unique and infinite layers of engagement. Each drawing reflects an aspect of Country charged with meaning (although presentation is subtle and initially deceptive). Observed together, the group of drawings reflect both a collective narrative and endless threads, lines of communication, skipping between, within and beneath the surface of each work. Martin’s charcoal drawings of trees and the Country in which they are embedded (Methexical Countryscapes 2016) utilise a different technical approach to Williams-Connelly while producing, to some degree, a similar outcome. Martin’s trees at first appear to be singularly powerful (and they are). These trees are truly mighty in stature and significance. But they are also reliant on and integrated into the Country securing them. They are connected to air, soil, water and rock. They communicate with plant and animal species. They also communicate, record and remember human experience. To be in the presence of one of Martin’s trees is to begin the lifelong journey of coming to an understanding of connectivity.

Of other works in exhibition none bear witness to the connection to Country more so that Jim Berg’s scar tree photographs. Silent Witness – A window to the past 2005 is both an act of documentation and creation. Uncle Jim’s project is also an act of collaboration, between Jim’s heart and eye and those who originally carved out a space on the trees that he photographed. The trees are scarred in a multitude of ways, both physical and metaphorical. The trees are also inscribed with the stories of autonomous
Indigenous life and the legacies of colonisation. The practice of removing the bark from trees is one of technical, cultural and ecological skill. It is also a practice of respect for Country. Uncle Jim reminds us that ‘these scarred Trees are a testimonial to the skills of the People who harvested the canoes, coolamons and shields without taking the life of the tree.’ Scar trees, for Jim Berg are also ‘a window to the past. They reflect both the spiritual uplifting presence of the traditional owners and the often chilling events that happened after mish times.’

The repeated vandalism, desecration and destruction of scar trees across Australia must be understood as a colonial tradition. A scar tree, as with ‘rock-art’, is evidence of Indigenous agricultural practice and domestic settlement, destroying the myth of terra nullius. It is a sad reality, although not surprising, that colonial society, in an effort to alleviate its anxiety, has destroyed much of the evidence of Indigenous cultural practices that underpin sovereignty, in order that a fragile lie can be maintained. Jim Berg’s photographs of scar trees enact a sovereign claim of their own. His work offers us a generous and sustaining invitation. It is one that cannot be refused:

These scar Trees are a reminder of the past, and they are linked to all Trees. Take the memory of these scarred Trees with you forever. Share their story with your Family. Take too this gift. Close your eyes and hug a Tree. The heartbeats you hear are your heartbeat and the heartbeat of the Tree. For a brief short moment, you and the Tree are One. In time, you, the Tree, will become as One, as we return to our Spiritual Mother, the Land. Close your eyes and hug a Tree.

‘Sometimes what you get is like a kick to the head’ Within contemporary Indigenous society, sovereignty is articulated in many ways. Companion pieces are often produced between political activism and various forms of media. In recent years Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR) have taken to, and sometimes taken over the streets of Melbourne, and other cities across Australia, to give voice to, and demand action to recognise and protect the human rights of Indigenous people. WAR have been at the forefront of actions concerning the Commonwealth’s ‘Intervention’ into the Northern Territory, the forced closure of Indigenous communities in Western Australia and the shocking rates of incarceration of Indigenous people in Australia, underpinned by a culture of state violence. Their banners, media presentations and ephemera are not mere artefacts of protest. They are a contemporary version of cultural documentation, performance and articulation of Indigenous autonomy. WAR also follow in the footsteps of more recent traditions, evident from the 1960s forward, when Indigenous activists across Australia began to utilise forms of media to produce creative, political and documentary work. This history and practice is present here in the film works of Bill Onus, and Bruce McGuinness’ Black Fire 1972, and the more recent digital storytelling project produced by young people involved with the Korin Gamadji Institute.

The photographic work of Lisa Bellear has the ability to bring the self-consciously political, the domestic and everyday, and the self-determining Indigenous voice together in the the one remarkable project. Her photographs are an example of the definitive family album, containing images, memories, glimpses and histories of insiders, outsiders, matriarchs, misfits, occasional enemies, friends, events, happenings, performances, protests, subtle moments, heartbreak and joy. Through the camera lens of Lisa Bellear we have somehow managed to become who we are. Such is the strength of sovereignty. In the words of a man of many great words, Briggs (from Bad Apples 2014) ‘sometimes what you get is like a kick to the head.’ It is the truth. And yet, we manage to find a way to stand tall, because like the power of a Briggs track, we always bounce back. We make claims for ourselves. We carve out that space. You know the one. It’s out there. And when we listen it speaks back to us – ‘always was, always will be.’
Sovereign art and the colonial canon;
Are we lost until we are found?
Kimberley Moulton

Sovereignty – my place, my belonging, my body, my mind, my blood line to Yorta Yorta Woka flowing through my veins and those who have come before me for over two thousand generations.

The muddy water of the Dungalalah and eucalypt smell of home stays with me, within the cells of my body. When I go back up to the river and stick my head under the muddy eucalypt waters it takes me back – as I walk forward. It seeps into my body and meets the existing memories, they bind and strengthen, going home is so important.

I have memories that run through me that I have not lived, my country with its energy and aromas send a wave of familiarity and knowing, when my body touches that water and earth it reconnects to what is within me.

My Ancestors, their goodtimes and their fights, my land, my rights.

We live our sovereignty, in body, in existing, as we walk on our own country or another, we live it as we persist to stop the colonial disease that continues to grow.

— Hyllus Maris, ‘...I am this Land, and this land is me, I am Australia’

Our sovereign being as First Peoples manifests in many ways, our existence is the ultimate act. Throughout our invasion history we have never ceded our lands, we have maintained connection even when removed and disenfranchised, this is the strength of how far our roots go down. Our sovereignty beyond the living being has been presented in many ways,

1 Yorta Yorta Woka (Yorta Yorta land).
2 Dungalalah is commonly known by its colonised name as The Murray River.
through rebellions and walk-offs from the missions, to petitions and deputations marching for rights, through the power of the pen and creative expression – our voices cannot be ignored.

The works of William Barak are an example of such power, they are legacies which remind us of why we continue to stand our ground. Recording the history of the Kulin people for future generations, Barak ensured his knowledge was recognised and remembered. Barak was witness to the genocidal mission that invaded his country of the early settlement of Melbourne. The breakdown of life as he knew it happened rapidly however his sovereignty and his fight for country only grew. Barak's works are as much an artistic recording of history as they are acts of defiance against the colonial regime, and in a time when he was not allowed to physically practice ceremony he painted them. Through the brushstroke and pencil he enacted ceremony, lore and his sovereign authority in front of his oppressors, they even hung it on their walls.

Our art and creative practices play a crucial role in positioning concepts of sovereignty within view and vernacular of the broader people of 'straya', however a large majority of the nation cannot extend their intellect beyond their own settler sentiment to the understanding of First Peoples' sovereign rights. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes this position of entitlement: ‘this sense of belonging is as a profound feeling of attachment. It is derived from ownership and achievement and is inextricably tied to racialised social status that confers certain privileges: a social status that is enhanced by a version of Australian history that privileges the exploits of white Australians by representing them as the people that made this country what it is today’.4

In the space of the museum and gallery these racialised social and intellectual statuses play out through the hegemonic western lens of anthropology and Eurocentric art history. How do we assert sovereign artistic practice in spaces of the white cube and government institutions that are driven by colonial denial and regulation of First Peoples’ rights?

Should we be aiming for a non-colonial or anti-colonial space instead of trying to deconstruct the current imposing hold? Looking at de-colonial practice, Métis artist and academic David Garneau states: ‘De-colonial theory may make sense in places that have actually shed their colonisers but in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA what is done in the name of de-colonisation and reconciliation is not premised on the restoration of native land or sovereignty, these words and activities are smokescreens concealing the machinery of assimilation. Reconciliation is an effort to make settlers more comfortable with their inherited crimes and privileges.’

De-colonial theories are continuing to be developed and practiced by First Peoples from within these spaces, however whether this is a possibility when we do not have formal acknowledgment of sovereignty and a treaty, I am unsure. As Krautungalung man of the Gunai Nation Robbie Thorpe states ‘they need to have a treaty; they need to end the war against the Aboriginal people. We know we’ve had a war here, but they can’t tell you what day it ended. That may be the national day this country could celebrate’.6

The position of power and privilege within the contemporary art space presents itself regularly when attempting to position First Peoples’ art within its western canon. There is still the undercurrent of thought that until the non-indigenous person ‘encouraged’ Aboriginal people to paint their land through western methods, and to make their sacred designs available for sale on board and canvas, that Aboriginal art was ‘undiscovered’. The preference for the ‘authentic’ Aboriginal aesthetic of the western desert or northern art sits within a different category of contemporary art than that of the south-eastern mob. Is Aboriginal art only accepted within the western canon when it suits a capitalist agenda?

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This notion also conveniently neglects the fact that our acts of sovereignty – as evidenced through rock art, body painting, stone formations and cultural material carved of wood – are part of this practice. These forms do not align with a Eurocentric understanding, which has a limited capacity to comprehend where this sits within art history. Our art has been practiced for thousands of years before any ‘master’ picked up a brush. The frustration for many First Peoples is that, from my observation, until a non-Indigenous art historian or curator places First Peoples’ work in an exhibition, writes about and ‘legitimises’ it as contemporary art, or authenticates it through their ‘expertise’, the artwork and/or cultural material is only then validated within the canon of art history. Considering that cultural institutions have incredible influence upon the market, and how culture is presented to the broader public, this non-sovereign way of defining art begs the question: are we lost until we are found?

Although many can move beyond this restricted white paradigm, I continue to read art historians and critics placing our contemporary works within the historic past, questioning whether it fits within the contemporary art canon. It is my belief that rejecting these colonial modes of defining art and culture furthers the opportunity for a determined Indigenous vision – for our own representation and revolution in these spaces.

This nation is built upon the ideology of ‘discovery’; the fallacy of terra nullius, and, again, the ‘discovery’ of Australia’s First Peoples, and their art, is a grand myth. First Nations Saulteaux artist Robert Houle writes: ‘Making a radical ideology challenge to the authority and authenticity of a national identity requires a process of change. Splintered by modernity, anthropological theories that have legitimised the economic and cultural supremacy of the West must be openly questioned; the idea that all creativity of value must be of European provenance is a superiority complex, perhaps one of the most demeaning and dysfunctional agents of self-image.’

When thinking about the state of the nation – and the state of museums and galleries within it – is sovereign assertion through art and culture only possible when we reject the western canon of art history? There is strength in challenging the status quo, rejecting the pattern that our art, bodies and culture are only noticed when recognised by the white centre. We do not need this, our First Peoples’ ways of being and understanding surpass this, and we do not need to be defined within this canon as we can never fit within something that is constructed from our exclusion.

It is integral to ask these questions and challenge the system, and yet I also feel that our art and culture has an important place within these spaces. I am interested in how, as Yamatji curator Stephen Gilchrist describes, we make ‘spaces of Indigeneity and not only for Indigeneity.’ The critical element is for these art spaces to have First Peoples curating and leading the charge for our material, our representation and our art acquisition. As Faith Wilson has noted: ‘It is only by diffusing stereotypes and expectations from within the paradigm of the oppressor that an entire shift of consciousness may occur.’

What do these non-colonial spaces of Indigeneity look like? Is it enough for mob to be working in them? How do we push this further in a climate that is increasingly going backwards in relation to First Peoples’ employment and autonomy in museums and galleries? For Samoan and Persian curator Léuli Eshraghi, ‘Indigenous artistic and curatorial practices are part of ceremonial-political responsibilities that view action in the world as restorative in a context of climate apocalypse, environmental and socio-cultural decline and economic disarray.’

The self-determined, non-colonial art spaces of First Peoples are the future – where history, language, first person knowledge, ceremony, cultural making, activism and art can all be present. First Peoples must drive this, but to achieve within this space, it is important that collaboration with non-indigenous
people working in partnership is also a part of this journey. These are approaches of non-colonial action, defined by Garneau as being ‘productive work in the recovery and restoration of native language and territories, modes of knowing and being prior to contact. It also recognises adaption as a fundamental quality of being native. We have the right to be contemporary, to adapt, to be indigenous without sacrificing our heritage and country.’

Sovereignty is the collaboration between curators, Gundjimara/Wemba-Wemba woman Paola Balla and Max Delany, artists and community. It is not just an exhibition that brings together people that challenge the western canon and evoke their birth rights – it is a space of First Peoples and of political and cultural sovereignty in action. The paintings, photographs, archival records and sculptures included in this exhibition are markers of our sovereign state over body, mind and spirit.

bell hooks once said that art works that made a difference ‘lingered because, while looking at them, someone was moved, touched, shaken to another place, momentarily born again.’

The artists, writers and activists that present their works and histories in this show take you to another place, a place of our past and what we live daily as First Peoples. It is my hope through this exhibition that the understanding of our sovereignty – what it is and what it can be – will be born again in the minds of us all.

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Artists

Brook Andrew
William Barak
Lisa Bellear
Jim Berg
Briggs
Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown
Maree Clarke
Megan Cope
Amiel Courtin-Wilson and Jack Charles
Vicki Couzens
Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser
Marlene Gilson
Korin Gamadji Institute
Brian Martin
Bruce McGuinness
Kent Morris
Clinton Nain
Glenda Nicholls
Mandy Nicholson
Bill Onus
Steaphan Paton
Bronwyn Razem
Reko Rennie
Steven Rhall
Yhonnlie Scarce
Peter Waples-Crowe
Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Lucy Williams-Connelly
William Barak
Shield 1897
wood
94.5 x 12.6 x 6.7 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

William Barak
Club 1897
wood
75.0 x 11.2 x 6.1 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

William Barak
Untitled (Ceremony)
c. 1880-1890s
paint, pencil, wash, pigments on paper
56.5 x 69.3 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection
Bill Onus in doorway of his shop in Belgrave, late 1950s
Courtesy Tiriki Onus

Bill Onus radio broadcast advocating a Yes vote for The 1967 Referendum, 1967
Courtesy Tiriki Onus
Marlene Gilson
Land lost, land stolen, treaty
2016
synthetic polymer paint on linen
120.0 x 150.0 cm
Courtesy the artist

Marlene Gilson
Tunnerminnerwalt and Maulboyheenner 2015
synthetic polymer paint on linen
142.5 x 198.5 cm
City of Melbourne Arts & Culture Collection
Steaphan Paton
Cloaked Combat #3 2013
(still)
single-channel HDV
0:32 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Tristian Koenig, Melbourne

Steaphan Paton
Cloaked Combat #2 2013
(still)
single-channel HDV
0:37 mins
Courtesy the artist and
Tristian Koenig, Melbourne

Steaphan Paton
The magistrate 2016
paper, archival glue,
oil pastel and synthetic
polymer paint on canvas
128.0 x 160.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Tristian Koenig, Melbourne
Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Resist, revive, decolonise
2015
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153.0 x 152.0 cm
Courtesy the artists

Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Lest we forget the frontier wars 2016
synthetic polymer paint on calico
113.5 x 213.0 cm
Courtesy the artists
Yhonnie Scarce
Strontium 90 2016 (details)
sandblasted glass, acrylic and
found hospital cribs
Courtesy of the artist and
THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne
tanzer gallery, Melbourne
Glenda Nicholls
A woman’s right of passage 2015
3 cloaks: jute string, dye, possum skin, wool, velvet, sixpence coin, silver chain, padlock, mussel shell, quandong seeds, mirror, glass beads, silver crucifix, emu feathers
Welcome Cloak: 139.0 x 294.0 cm (spread)
Acknowledgement Cloak: 153.0 x 275.0 cm (spread)
Elder’s Cloak: 153.0 x 203.0 cm (spread)
Courtesy the artist
Maree Clarke
*Born of the Land* 2014 (stills)
video installation: video, particle board, sand, tree branches, plaster bandage, plaster
dimensions variable
video duration: 1:48 mins
video production: SW Productions
Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
Lucy Williams-Connelly
Mother and six baby emus
2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
21.5 x 35.0 cm
Courtesy the artist

Lucy Williams-Connelly
Three men and canoe
2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
36.0 x 40.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Jim Berg
Silent witness – A window to the past
2005
C-type photographic prints
30.0 x 20.0 cm (each)
Courtesy the artist
Vicky Couzens
Prangawan
poodpakyodamo yoowa
2010
possum skin cloak
150.0 x 110.0 cm
Courtesy the artist

Vicky Couzens
Tarnberee gundidj 2010
digital print
84.0 x 59.5 cm
Courtesy the artist

turnbeere roady killed by abities at parryuwuy morung yipuy (murdering salty) 1899
Bronwyn Razem
Koomakarrak ngarrapan
(new eel basket) 2016
raffia
50.0 x 200.0 x 50.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Brian Martin
Methexical Countryscape
Bundjalung #6 2016
charcoal on paper
209.0 x 146.0 cm
Collection: The Australian Club, Melbourne
Clinton Nain
Water bottle bags 2013-16
plastic bottles, emu eggs,
emu feathers, electrical
cable, wire, string
91.8 x 472 x 38.6 cm
Courtesy the artist
Mandy Nicholson
*Mandy Nicholson*
*Dhulín (Goanna)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on paper
75.0 x 95.0 cm
Courtesy the artist

Mandy Nicholson
*Mindy the devil snake* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on paper, wire
85.0 x 105.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Korin Gamadji Institute
InDigeneity: Aboriginal young people, storytelling, technology and identity 2014-16 (stills)
digital storytelling video workshops, production stills
Courtesy Korin Gamadji Institute
Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser
Something in the air 2016
HD video, single channel projection, looped
Courtesy the artists and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Megan Cope
Resistance 2013
enamel on cardboard, core flute and timber
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne
Brook Andrew
*Black and White: Special Cut* 2005
*Hope and Peace series*
screenprint
100.0 x 98.0 cm
Private Collection, Melbourne

Brook Andrew
*The weight of history, the mark of time (sphere)* 2015
coated nylon, fan, LED
500.0 cm (diameter)
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney; and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris and Brussels
Kent Morris
Boonwurrung (St Kilda) – Rainbow Lorikeet 2016
archival print on rag paper
100.0 x 150.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Vivien Anderson Gallery,
Melbourne

Kent Morris
Boonwurrung (St Kilda) – Magpie 2016
archival print on rag paper
100.0 x 150.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Vivien Anderson Gallery,
Melbourne
Briggs [Adam Briggs]
Shoplift 2012 (stills)
music video
3:31 mins
Oli Sansom (director)
Michelle Grace Hunder (producer)
Golden Era Records
Courtesy Briggs and Golden Era Records

Briggs [Adam Briggs]
Bad Apples 2014 (stills)
music video
4:11 mins
Heata & Josh Davis (directors)
Golden Era Records
Courtesy Briggs and Golden Era Records
Steven Rhall

The biggest Aboriginal artwork in Melbourne metro 2014-16

Courtesy the artist
“An unforgettable portrait... extraordinary... a must see” - Filmink

“Absorbing...confronting...a festival highlight.” - The Age

“Magnificent.” - InsideFilm

“An unforgettable portrait... extraordinary... a must see” - Filmink
Bruce McGuinness
*Black Fire* 1972 (stills)
16mm film, sound
23:58 mins
Courtesy Kelli McGuinness
Reko Rennie

Always Here 2016
dye sublimation on satin banner
490.0 x 140.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and blackartprojects, Melbourne
Peter Waples-Crowe  
*Soldiers* 2015  
synthetic polymer paint,  
felt tip markers, glitter pen  
and collage  
19.5 x 13.0 cm  
Courtesy the artist

Peter Waples-Crowe  
*Gone hunting* 2015  
synthetic polymer paint,  
felt tip markers and collage  
30.0 x 22.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist
Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown
Spirit daylight owls in springtime 2009
synthetic polymer paint
on linen
91.5 x 122.0 cm
Collection of Hans Sip,
Melbourne

Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown
Jackie Charles 2009
synthetic polymer paint
on linen
122.0 x 91.5 cm
Collection of Hans Sip,
Melbourne
KOORI KIDS
STOP GENOCIDE NOW
YES TREATY & SOVEREIGNTY
AND RIGHTS NOW
Captions pp. 90–93
Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Koori kids 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
143.0 x 228.0
Courtesy the artists

Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Rally against child detention and torture
State Library of Victoria, 30 July 2016
Courtesy the artists

Captions pp. 94–95
Korin Gamadji Institute
InDigeneity: Aboriginal young people, storytelling, technology and identity 2014–16
digital storytelling video workshops, production stills
Courtesy Korin Gamadji Institute
List of works

Brook Andrew
Born 1970, Sydney
Wiradjuri
Lives and works in Melbourne

Against all odds 2005
Hope and Peace series
screenprint
100.0 x 98.0 cm
Private Collection, Melbourne

Black and White: Special Cut 2005
Hope and Peace series
screenprint
100.0 x 98.0 cm
Private Collection, Melbourne

Maralinga clock 2015
inkjet and metallic foil on linen
280.0 x 160.0 x 120.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney; and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris and Brussels

The weight of history, the mark of time (sphere) 2015
coated nylon, fan, LED
500.0 cm (diameter)
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney; and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris and Brussels

William Barak
Born 1824, Melbourne
Woiworung/Wurundjeri Ngurungaeta (Elder) of the Wurundjeri-willam clan
Died 1903, Melbourne

Untitled (Ceremony) c. 1880-1890s
paint, pencil, wash, pigments on paper
56.5 x 69.3 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Club 1897
wood
75.0 x 11.2 x 6.1 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Lisa Bellear
Born 1961, Melbourne
Minjungbul/Goernpil/Noonuccal
Died 2006, Melbourne

Selected photographs c.1985-2006
digital images from c-type photographs
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Jim Berg
Born 1938, Melbourne
Gunditjimara Elder
Lives and works in Melbourne

Silent witness – A window to the past 2005
c-type photographic prints
30.0 x 20.0 cm (image size)
Courtesy the artist

Silent witness – A window to the past 2005
wallpaper
Courtesy the artist

Briggs [Adam Briggs]
Born 1980, Shepparton, Victoria
Yorta Yorta
Lives and works in Melbourne

Sheplife 2012
music video
3:31 mins
Oli Sansom (director)
Michelle Grace Hunder (producer)
Golden Era Records

Bad Apples 2014
music video
4:11 mins
Heata & Josh Davis (directors)
Golden Era Records

Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown
Born 1967, Mildura, Victoria
Latje Latje
Lives and works in Melbourne

Jackie Charles 2009
synthetic polymer paint on linen
122.0 x 91.5 cm
Collection of Hans Sip, Melbourne

Spirit daylight owls in springtime 2009
synthetic polymer paint on linen
91.5 x 122.0 cm
Collection of Hans Sip, Melbourne

Amiel Courtin-Wilson (Director)
Born 1979, Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

Jack Charles (Actor)
Born 1943, Cummeragunja, Victoria
Yorta Yorta
Lives and works in Melbourne

Badtasy 2008
colour and black & white
Dolby sound
83:00 mins
Philippa Campey, Amiel Courtin-Wilson, Lynn-Maree Milburn and Andrew de Groot (producers)
Courtesy Amiel Courtin-Wilson and Film Camp Pty Ltd

Maree Clarke
Born 1961, Swan Hill, Victoria
Mutti Mutti/Yorta Yorta/ Boon Wurrung
Lives and works in Melbourne

Born of the Land 2014
video installation: video, particle board, sand, tree branches, plaster bandeage, plaster dimensions variable
video duration: 1:48 mins
video production: SW Productions
Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne
Clintan Nain
Born 1971, Melbourne
Meriam-Mir/Ku-Ku
Lives and works in Melbourne
Bill Onus
Born 1966, Cummeragunja, New South Wales
Yorta Yorta
Died 1966, Melbourne
Glenda Nicholls
Born 1954 Swan Hill, Victoria
Waddi Waddi/Yorta Yorta and Ngarrindjeri
Lives and works in Wood Wood, Victoria
Milolo (blue net) 2015
woven dyed jute
343.0 x 1363.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
A woman’s right of passage 2015
3 cloaks: jute string, dye, possum skin, wool, velvet, sixpence coin, silver chain, padlock, mussel shell, quandong seeds, mirror, glass beads, silver crucifix, emu feathers
Welcome Cloak: 139.0 x 294.0 cm (spread)
Acknowledgement Cloak: 153.0 x 275.0 cm (spread)
Elder’s Cloak: 153.0 x 203.0 cm (spread)
Courtesy the artist
Mandy Nicholson
Born 1975 in Healesville, Victoria
Wurundjeri-william
Lives and works in Melbourne
Mindi the devil snake 2003
synthetic polymer paint on paper, wire
85.0 x 105.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Dhulin (Goanna) 2006
synthetic polymer paint on paper
75.0 x 95.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Bronwyn Razem
Born 1966 in Wamambool, Victoria
Kirrae Wurrong/Gunditjmara
Lives and works in Geelong, Victoria
Koomarakrr ngarrapn (new eel basket) 2016
raffia
56.0 x 200.0 x 50.0 cm
Courtesy the artist
Steaphan Paton
Born 1985, Mildura, Australia
Gunai/Monero
Lives and works in Melbourne
Cloaked Combat #2 2013
single-channel HDV
0:37 mins
Courtesy the artist and Tristian Koenig, Melbourne
Steven Hall
Born 1974 on Waathi Country
Taungurung
Lives and works in Melbourne
The biggest Aboriginal artwork in Melbourne metro 2014-16
synthetic polymer, vinyl, aluminium composite, wood, neon
361.0 x 386.5 x 100.0 cm
 Courtesy the artist
Yhonne Scarce
Born 1973 in Woocmera, South Australia
Kokatha/Nukunu
Lives and works in Melbourne
Fall Out Baby II 2016
sandblasted glass, acrylic and found hospital crib
crib: 81.0 x 82.0 x 42.0 cm
bush plum: 38.0 x 20.0 x 20.0 cm
(each, approx.)
Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne
Fall Out Baby IV 2016
sandblasted glass, acrylic and found hospital crib
crib: 81.0 x 82.0 x 42.0 cm
bush plum: 38.0 x 20.0 x 20.0 cm
(each, approx.)
Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne
Reko Rennie
Born 1974, Melbourne
Kamilaroi
Lives and works in Melbourne
Always here 2016
dye sublimation on satin banner
490.0 x 140.0 cm
Courtesy the artist and blackartprojects, Melbourne
Peter Waples-Crowe
Born 1987, Naarm/Melbourne
Ngarigo
Lives and works in Melbourne
Outlaw 2015
synthetic polymer paint, felt tip markers and collage
21.0 x 14.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY + dianne tanzer gallery, Melbourne
Gabi Briggs
Born 1990, Armidale, New South Wales
Himberrong, Anaiwan and Gumbangber
Lives and works in Melbourne
Meriki Onus
Born 1987 Naarm/Melbourne
Brayakaloong,Yigar an and Tjapwurrung
Lives and works in Melbourne
Arika Waulu
Born 1985, Naarm/Melbourne
Brayakaloong, Yigaran and Tjapwurrung
Lives and works in Melbourne

Dtarmeen Onus-Williams
Born 1993, Gunditj country
Yigar, Yorta Yorta, Wakka Wakka, Bindal and Dja Dja Wurrung
Lives and works in Melbourne

Australia Day???, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
1470 x 120.0 cm

Australia Day celebrating 228 years, 2016
synthetic polymer paint on calico
98.0 x 197.0 cm

Australian flag spit mask, Don Dale, 2016
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, adhesive tape
1570 x 175.0 cm

Hands off our children, 2016
synthetic polymer paint and indelible marker on cotton sheet
178.0 x 296.0 cm

Healing centres not detention centres, 2016
synthetic polymer paint on card
80.5 x 101.0 cm

Indigenous land theft, 2015
synthetic polymer paint, adhesive tape and wood
163.0 x 162.5 cm

Invasion Day banner (Genocide), 2016
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153.0 x 196.0 cm

Koori kids, 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
143.0 x 228.0 cm

Massacre map Victoria 1836-1850, 2014
synthetic polymer paint on calico
183.0 x 282.0 cm

No climate justice on stolen land, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on cotton sheet
772.0 x 88.0 cm

No justice on stolen land, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on vinyl
735 x 280.5 cm

Resist, revive, decolonise, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
153.0 x 152.0 cm

Resist, revive, decolonise, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on calico
356.0 x 89.5 cm

Stop the forced closures / Shut down Don Dale, 2016
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, adhesive tape
86.0 x 716.0 cm

WAR banner, 2014
indelible marker on vinyl and wood
180.0 x 192.0 cm

All works courtesy the artists

Lucy Williams-Connelly
Born 1940 Narrandera, New South Wales
Waradgerie
Lives and works in Swan Hill, Victoria

Four men catching ducks, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
36.0 x 40.0 cm

House, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
18.5 x 35.0 cm

Man with spear, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
30.0 x 31.0 cm

Mother and six baby emus, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
21.5 x 35.0 cm

Tent and four men, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
21.5 x 36.0 cm

Tent and trees, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
25.0 x 35.0 cm

Three men and canoe, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
36.0 x 40.0 cm

Three men around fire, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
36.0 x 39.5 cm

Six hills, seven trees, 2016
hot poker drawing on custom board
48.0 x 60.0 cm

All works courtesy the artists
Contributors

Paola Balla is a Wemba-Wemba and Gunditjmara artist, curator and writer. Currently the inaugural Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit at Victoria University, Paola was recognised as the National Cultural Preservation and Cultural Language in Oral and Written Form. Most recently Executed in Franklin Street, which she curated for the City of Melbourne, was Highly Commended in the Australia & New Zealand Museums and Galleries Awards for Indigenous Project 2016.

Tony Birch is the inaugural Bruce McGuinness Research Fellow in the Moondani Balluk Academic Unit at Victoria University. His research is concerned with climate change; its impact on Indigenous communities and Indigenous ecological knowledge. He was most recently awarded the 2016 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing for his novel Ghost River, University of Queensland Press, 2015.

Arweet Carolyn Briggs is an Elder of the Yalukit Willam of the Boon Wurrung language group from Victoria, and is recognised as a keeper of the history and genealogies of her people. Aunty Carolyn is Chair of the Boon Wurrung clans, which she established to help connect Aboriginal youth to their heritage. Aunty Carolyn is a language and linguistics expert and is dedicated to recording her Boon Wurrung language in oral and written form. She has been active in community development, particularly in the areas of health, cultural preservation and cultural promotion. In 2013 Aunty Carolyn was recognised as the National Naidoc Week Elder of the Year and is on the 2006 Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

Max Delany is Artistic Director and CEO at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. He was formerly Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Since 2011 he has also held the position of adjunct Associate Professor, Curatorial Practice, in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, Monash University.

Kimberley Moulton is a Yorta Yorta curator and writer and is Senior Curator of South Eastern Aboriginal Collections at Museums Victoria. She is an alumni of the National Gallery of Australia/Wesfarmers Indigenous Leadership Program, 2010; British Council ACCELERATE program, 2013; and the National Gallery of Australia International Curatorial Fellow, 2015. Kimberley’s practice looks at the intersection of First Peoples’ art and the museum and First Peoples’ self-representation and access in museums and galleries.

Acknowledgements

ACCA sincerely acknowledges and extends our respect to the Elders, families and forebears of the Boon Wurrung, the traditional owners and sovereign custodians of this Yalukit Willam place. We also acknowledge the neighbouring Wurundjeri peoples, and all Kulin Nations, along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who call Victoria home.

We sincerely acknowledge and thank the participating artists for their inspiring vision and generosity. The research and development process has been an especially rewarding experience, meeting with artists and communities to discuss the exhibition, their work, and their cultural contexts and aspirations, and we thank each of the artists for welcoming us into their studios and community contexts, and for their support, knowledge and encouragement. We are privileged that many artists have chosen to make new works especially for the exhibition, and are equally appreciative to others who have entrusted us with the display and animation of key works from their collections.

We would like to especially acknowledge Curator Paola Balla for her unwavering commitment to the exhibition and her passionate involvement with the artists and communities involved. It has been an extraordinary pleasure, privilege and inspiration to work with Paola, to whom we are especially grateful – for her collegiality, the brilliance of her ideas, the clarity of her communication, and the ambition and compassion that she brings – as both an artist, writer and curator – to her engagement with First Nations Victorian artists, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples nationally, and their cultural practices and communities. With Paola, I would like to especially acknowledge and thank the Sovereignty Advisory Group: Arweet Carolyn Briggs, broadcaster Daniel Browning, curator Kimberley Moulton and artist Steaphan Paton, who along with many other artists and colleagues with whom we have consulted – were especially generous in their contribution of expertise and advice. We are honoured to have their involvement, and especially appreciative for the engaging feedback and knowledge that they have contributed to the project, and the advocacy and ambassadorial role that they have played in the development of the exhibition.

In developing this publication, we are also honoured to publish new, critical writing by essayists Tony Birch and Kimberley Moulton, and we thank them for numerous inspiring discussions and conversations, and for their insightful texts which underline the profound significance of the cultural practices and ideas at the heart of the exhibition.

An exhibition of this scope would not be possible without the support of many generous public and private lenders we would especially like to thank Tom Mosby, Charlotte Christie and Jan Duffy at the Koorie Heritage Trust; Eddie Butler-Bowden and Victoria Garton at the Arts and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne; and Clare Norton and Siobhan Dee at the National Film and Sound Archives for the significant loan of key historical and contemporary works; along with private lenders, gallery owners and artist’s representatives and estates for their generous assistance.

We would like to especially thank Kelli McGuinness, Gary Foley and Edwina Howell; John Stewart and the family of Lisa Belleair; Destiny Deacon, Virginia Fraser and Kim Kruger for their work in curating Close To You: The Lisa Belleair Picture Show at the Koorie Heritage Trust, from which a selection of Lisa’s images are presented; Genevieve Grieves; Jonathan Jones; and the dedication and generosity of Uncle Jim Berg.

The exhibition has benefitted from many generous collaborators including Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit at Victoria University, where Paola is currently a PhD candidate and the inaugural Lisa Belleair Post Graduate Scholarship holder; Luke Murray and the Korin Gaman Institute; Fred Edmonds and the Research Unit in Public Culture at the University of Melbourne; Tiriki Onus at the Koorie Heritage Centre, Victorian College of the Arts; and Dr Alec Morgan, Macquarie University; among others.

As always, we sincerely appreciate the work of ACCA’s wonderful staff and installation team, who have contributed to all aspects of the exhibition with great commitment, expertise and Wurrung fluency, and we acknowledge the contribution of Exhibition Manager Liam O’Brien and Curatorial Intern Stephanie Berlangieri.

Sovereignty has been conceived as a platform for Indigenous community expression, and, if we are also grateful to The Honorable Martin Foley MP, Minister for Creative Industries, for Naidoc Week’s support of the public, education and professional development programs associated with the exhibition. We are also grateful to Elizabeth Liddle, Manager, Aboriginal Partnerships, and Jeremy Gaden, Senior Manager, Partnerships Programs, at Creative Victoria, for their support.

And finally, heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Arweet Carolyn Briggs, Director of the Boon Wurrung Foundation, for the deeply inspiring welcome to Country and for the wisdom of her remarks in the Foreword to this publication, and on the occasion of the official opening of the exhibition.

— MD
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Credits</th>
<th>ACCA Board</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curators</td>
<td>John Denton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paola Balla and Max Delany</td>
<td>Chair</td>
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<td>Editors</td>
<td>Lesley Alway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paola Balla and Max Delany</td>
<td>Deputy Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition Manager</td>
<td>Peter Doyle</td>
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<td>Liam O’Brien</td>
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<td>Stephanie Berlangieri</td>
<td>Annemarie Kiely</td>
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<td>Shelley Penn</td>
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<td>Photography</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Captions pp. 103-08</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jim Berg</td>
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<td>Silent witness – A window to the past 2005</td>
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<th>ACCA Staff</th>
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<tr>
<td>Max Delany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artistic Director &amp; CEO</td>
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<td>Linda Mickleborough</td>
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<td>Executive Director</td>
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<td>Debra Lyon</td>
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<td>Finance &amp; Operations Manager</td>
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<td>Annika Kristensen</td>
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<td>Alison Lasek</td>
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<td>Zoe Theodore</td>
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<td>Eliza Devlin</td>
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<td>Education Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jessie Bullivant</td>
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<td>Hanna Chetwin</td>
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<td>Jacqui Shelton</td>
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<td>Arini Byng</td>
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<td>Maya Chakraborthy</td>
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<td>Hanann Al Daqqa</td>
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Sovereignty
Paola Balla and Max Delany (ed.s)
17 December 2016 – 26 March 2017
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

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Cover image: Lisa Bellear
RADIO Sovereignty 2006
C-type photograph
Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Captions pp. 103-08
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Silent witness – A window to the past 2005
C-type photographic prints
30.0 x 20.0 cm (each)
Courtesy the artist
Brook Andrew
William Barak
Lisa Bellear
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Briggs
Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown
Maree Clarke
Megan Cope
Amiel Courtin-Wilson and Jack Charles
Vicki Couzens
Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser
Marlene Gilson
Korin Gamadji Institute
Brian Martin
Bruce McGuinness
Kent Morris
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Peter Waples-Crowe
Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR)
Lucy Williams-Connelly