

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

***Towards a monument to Batman's Treaty* 2013–19**

clay bricks, printed AO paper sheets, wallpaper paste

sheet dimensions: 84.1 x 118.9 cm

installation dimensions variable

plaque design and typography census: Ziga Testen, Vincent Chan, Dennis Grauel and Kathryn Fridman

The support of TarraWarra Museum of Art and Monash Art Design and Architecture is gratefully acknowledged

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Over the past decade, Tom Nicholson has been working towards a soon-to-be realised public art work. Taking as its starting point Melbourne's first European chimney, built for grazier, entrepreneur and colonist John Batman by escaped convict William Buckley, this major installation encompasses 3,520 bricks – the number required to build a proposed monument, poised between a free-standing chimney and an obelisk. Collected from citizens in and around Healesville, the bricks are accompanied by textual plaques presenting Nicholson's writings and reflections on the conflicted history of Batman's Treaty.

Nicholson's work engages the contradictory meanings of the Treaty – or Deed – that Batman claimed he signed with Wurundjeri people in 1835 to acquire land for a settlement which became the city of Melbourne. The plaques incorporate wide-ranging intersecting narratives and readings of the event, its significance and repercussions. It is informed by ongoing dialogues with First Nations colleagues, including Senior Wurundjeri Elder Joy Murphy Wandin AO, Wiradjuri / Kamilaroi artist Dr Jonathan Jones, and Professor Tony Birch who have contributed to discussions over the past decade, and who have formed a formal advisory group for the next iteration of the project, the public work *Buried chimney (Towards a monument to Batman's Treaty)*. A range of further dialogues have informed this project in important and generous ways, including more recently with Wathaurung traditional owner Melinda Kennedy and Boonwurrung Elder N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, among other interlocutors. Through these dialogues, Nicholson offers diverse narratives and alternative ideas that challenge inherited histories regarding Melbourne's foundation and colonial origins.

Batman's Treaty was signed on 6 June 1835, driven by Batman's commercial venture, The Port Phillip Association. The Treaty was almost immediately declared invalid by the Proclamation of Governor Bourke of New South Wales, on 6 August 1835 – under the legal terms of *terra nullius*, the British Crown did not recognise Aboriginal people as having any right or claim to the land in Australia. Notwithstanding its mendacious commercial motivation, Batman's Treaty inadvertently acknowledges Indigenous sovereignty over the land now known as Melbourne.

As a proposition towards the future realisation of a public monument, as well as the suggestion of the appearance of its own ruin, *Towards a monument to Batman's Treaty* grapples with the complex meanings of the Treaty, and, through the form of the chimney – a familiar hearth – implicates the Treaty in the proliferation of chimneys across the city, inherent to the most intimate and convivial spaces of our urban environment.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

After action for another library 1999–2001/2019

digital prints on aluminium composite

47 panels, each 90.0 x 120.0 cm

2 panels, each 90.0 x 600.0 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

After action for another library is a work borne from the question of how to show solidarity from a distance, whilst also displaying the traces of an action that crosses boundaries. One of Nicholson's earliest works, it was developed following the 1999 UN-sponsored East Timorese Independence referendum in which the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly to become an independent nation. The Indonesian military response to the referendum saw several thousand civilians murdered (a precise number is unknown) and 200,000 forcibly transported to concentration camps in West Timor and other parts of Indonesia. During this time, books from public and private libraries were systematically destroyed, as can be seen in a number of photographs of burnt-out libraries which punctuate the series.

As a member of USET, a student solidarity group in Melbourne, Nicholson organised for 5,000 donated books to be shipped to Dili in containers where they now form part of the nascent National University Library of East Timor. The title pages of some of these books were photographed before they were sent. The chosen pages are a trace of the artist's extended action, and a reflection on the histories that precipitated this action. Rather than a representative sample of books, they represent a syntax of title pages, chiefly around history, language and anti-colonial struggle, that also acknowledges the tensions in this political moment of beginning, and around language itself.

The project has since been represented in various forms and manifestations, including an artist book of the same name, with the current iteration presenting a selection of title pages as a frieze.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

***Comparative monument (Ma'man Allah)* 2012–14**

62 found archival photographs (framed);
69 Eucalyptus camaldulensis seeds, collected from 69 Eucalyptus trees in the Ma'man Allah cemetery, Jerusalem; 69 bilingual texts (framed);
7 Lambda prints from Barmah Forest, Victoria, photography by Christian Capurro (framed)
installation dimensions: 280.0 x 3,567.0 cm (overall, frieze)
Commissioned by Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem
Monash University Collection
Courtesy Monash University Museum of Art

Articulating historical links and echoes between Jerusalem and Australia, *Comparative monument (Ma'man Allah)* begins with the remarkable and dominating presence of Australian native *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* trees (River Red Gums) in the Ma'man Allah / Mamilla cemetery, Palestine's oldest and most important Islamic cemetery in Jerusalem. These River Red Gums that now cover the cemetery originate from early Zionist plantations; but they are known in Australia for their connection to Barmah, an area in the South East of Australia where the Cummeragunja Walk Off took place in 1939, in a landmark act of anti-colonial resistance.

The work consists of seeds collected by Nicholson from each of the sixty-nine Eucalypts at Mamilla, accompanied by bi-lingual texts and a sequence of archival images that indirectly describe various histories that criss-cross the cemetery site, intersected with photographs of River Red Gums from the Barmah Forest, Victoria.

The Barmah-Milewa Forest is the largest surviving Red Gum forest still extant in the world. It is a Ramsar site – a wetland of international importance – and is at least 4,000 years old. Within the forest of veteran Red Gums, many of which are over 500 years old, seventy-five percent of the gums in the area are stressed, dead or dying because of threats to the Murray-Darling basin due to poor environmental management. In the local language of the Yorta Yorta, River Red Gums are called *Biyaia*. Traditionally, the gums were manipulated by binding and looping as they grew to indicate tribal borders. Often regarded as sacred, many River Red Gums across Australia hold the scars of excised canoes and coolamons and are often called on during Native Title negotiations.

Nicholson considers the concept of these botanical forms as markers of Country and place, and the way that they hold histories and draw on Indigenous cultural knowledge. The work also reflects upon the importance of trees in Israeli, Palestinian and Australian commemorative traditions, such as the Lone Pine. The frieze-like form of *Comparative monument (Ma'man Allah)* promotes the idea of walking – as an itinerary through the cemetery, from one Eucalypt to another, also suggesting a form of repatriation – while raising questions as to the future and significance of these trees. As with much of Nicholson's practice, *Comparative monument (Ma'man Allah)* is an attempt to rethink the nature and possibilities of the monument itself, its linkages to drawing and walking, and to questions of place and belonging.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

Evening shadows 2011–12/2019
Installation of multiple parts, including:

H.J. Johnstone, Australia, 1835–1907

Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia 1880

oil on canvas, 120.6 x 184.1 cm

Gift of Mr Henry Yorke Sparks 1881

Collection of Art Gallery of South Australia

21 painted copies of H.J. Johnstone's *Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia* borrowed from citizens in and around Adelaide, painted by artists including Alice. M. Back, Mavis Jeans, Annie Papin (nee. Butler), Alfred Payze, Max Ragless, Alice Cordellia Richardson, Reginald Rogers, Alfred Emmanuel Reynolds, Elsie May Walgos (nee. Evens), B. Wiesneir, among other anonymous artists

Tom Nicholson, ***Evening shadows*** 2011–12 charcoal on paper, 121.0 x 80.0 cm,
Collection of Art Gallery of South Australia

Tom Nicholson, ***Evening shadows*** 2011–12, stack of 10,000 A1 offset posters

Tom Nicholson, ***Evening shadows*** 2011–12, HD video, silent, 7:30 mins

Tom Nicholson, ***Evening shadows*** 2011–12, HD video, silent, 9:49 mins

Dr Wayne Atkinson, ***Cummeragunga Centenary 'Walk On'*** 1988, video, sound,
21:25 mins

Tom Nicholson's *Evening shadows* installation draws together two historic sources to tease out a new narrative lodged within the much-loved Australian landscape painting, *Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia* 1880, by H.J. Johnstone – the first work acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia and the most copied painting in Australia. Nicholson reanimates this colonial painting in relationship to the historic event known as the Cummeragunja Walk Off of 1939, in which 200 Yorta Yorta men and women crossed the Murray from New South Wales into Victoria in protest against their treatment at the Aboriginal reserve.

Nicholson's elaborate installation poses many questions: what happens if we think about this painting of an unnamed woman crossing the Murray river at twilight in relation to an event more than half a century after the painting? What happens if we think about Johnstone's *Evening shadows* in relation to anti-colonial resistance and the heroic and meaningful actions of Yorta Yorta men and women in 1939?

Nicholson's *Evening shadows* installation brings together multiple components to tell this story, including the original painting on loan from the Art Gallery of South Australia alongside dozens of copies of the work sourced from a public call-out. The installation is accompanied by a series of videos, one of which is filmed by Uncle Wayne Atkinson

recording the 1988 'Walk On', a gathering commemorating 100 years since the establishment of Cummergunja. Marking the event is a stack of 10,000 posters, to be displayed in people's front gardens, as a call to action. As the artist has noted:

Just as Johnstone's image is remarkable for its proliferation into people's homes as posters, other photographic reproductions and painted copies, so too does the poster's call to 'Walk Off' address the domestic space, implicating 'home' in the contestation of sovereignty which is the walk off's enduring reverberation.

Evening shadows uses the suspended time of the painted image and the logic of the political poster to reconsider an historical event – specifically referencing the charged gathering of people for a collective action and an announcement towards the future as a set of potential meanings always yet to be realised.

Please take a poster and display it in front of the place where you live.

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Tom Nicholson acknowledges the generous engagement, support and knowledge of the following Yorta Yorta men and women during the development of the work in 2011–12: Dr Wayne Atkinson, Jackie Walker, Neville Atkinson, Denise Morgan-Bulled, Sharon Atkinson, Monica Morgan, Auntie Merle Jackomos, Sandra Bailey, Dr Naomi Mayers.

The video component of this project includes archival footage of the Cummeragunja Centenary 'Walk On', November 1988, filmed by Dr Wayne Atkinson, as part of the Oral History Program at the State Library of Victoria. This footage is now held by the Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, and was included amongst the material presented at the Art Gallery of South Australia courtesy of the Trust in 2012, with the kind permission of Dr Wayne Atkinson, Monica Morgan, Naomi Mayers, Auntie Merle Jackomos and Sandra Bailey. Particular thanks also to the support, generosity and work of Ed Story, Oral History Librarian at the Trust, as well as Judy Williams and Nerissa Broben.

ACCA also acknowledges the Art Gallery of South Australia for their support and assistance in reconvening this work.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

Comparative monument (Shellal) 2014–17

glass tesserae mosaics, wooden boxes, dimensions variable

dual channel digital video, colour and sound

left channel: 6:01 mins; right channel: 13:39 mins

display dimensions variable

mosaics created with the Mosaic Centre, Jericho, with Rafat Al Khatib and Renan Barham,

and project management by Osama Hamdan and Iyad Jammed

artist assistant on mosaic cartoons: Jamie O'Connell

videography: Issa Frej, Christian Capurro, Tom Nicholson

editing: with Alex Archer

Commissioned by Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, with support from the Australia Council for the Arts, and a Sidney Myer Fellowship

Collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales

Contemporary Collection Benefactors and Patrick White Fund 2017

Comparative monument (Shellal) draws on the complex history of the Shellal mosaic, the extraordinary sixth-century Christian mosaic uncovered on a hilltop in Palestine by Australian soldiers in May 1917. At the same time, Australia was conceptualising the building of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra which led to the subsequent relocation and permanent installation of the mosaic into the building's central symbolic axis; the Hall of Valour.

Comparative monument (Shellal) imagines the repatriation of this Byzantine mosaic and the realities of stolen objects and shifting borders.

The Shellal mosaic later inspired the decoration of the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial, created by artist Napier Waller in 1939, which was installed from 1947–50. Waller's geometrically symmetric mosaic was inspired by the Art Deco movement of the time, reflected in the blue and gold colour scheme and symbolic designs referencing the artist's interest in spiritualism.

Nicholson takes inspiration from both mosaics, reimagining an exact replica of the Shellal mosaic interchanged with tiles referencing the rich yellow hues of Waller's new chromatic order. Replicating tile-for-tile the original mosaic in the fragmented form in which it was transported to Australia, this double of the Shellal mosaic is presented within its crates, mirroring their transport from Palestine, and remaining in perpetual transit with no conceivable option for repatriation. The placement of the mosaics leaning against the wall sits purposefully in-between the horizontal nature of the mosaics in their original location as an early Byzantine church floor, and their vertical siting when incorporated into the Australian War Memorial.

In the accompanying video, *Comparative monument (Shellal)* imagines the repatriated mosaic as a platform atop a hill where Gaza City and Beersheba might be regarded at once – a ground where these two cities might begin to come into view together from the same point, conceiving this mosaic anew as a form for the place from which the Shellal mosaic was taken in 1917.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

***Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* 2008**

single-channel SD video projection, silent

9:49 mins

Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Monument for the flooding of Royal Park describes a proposed monument, which focuses on the Nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*), a native fern common across Australia, which the nineteenth century explorers Burke and Wills feverishly consumed during their final days around Cooper's Creek in South Australia.

The video of the proposed monument suggests the scattering of Nardoo seeds across Royal Park in anticipation of flooding which would result in a sea of red created by the Nardoo as it dries – a fleeting reminder of the explorer's resistance to Indigenous knowledge which ultimately led to their demise.

The Yantruwanta people of South Australia had introduced the famous travellers to the habit of grinding the Nardoo's sporocarp (equivalent to seeds in other types of plants) into flour and making cakes in the coals of the fire. Due to Burke's documented antipathy towards Aboriginal culture and his hostility towards his reliance upon it, they failed to observe the correct preparation of the seed and skipped the vital step of roasting them. Without utilising fire in its preparation, the sporocarp contains high levels of enzymes that disable human digestion. Combined with malnutrition and possible scurvy, this fatal mistake resulted in their death.

Developed during a Creative Fellowship at the State Library of Victoria, *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* is a narrative of encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, reframing what remains of historical memory, as well as a rethinking of the form of monuments and memorials.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

Nardoo flag-wave 2009–10

composited photographic image output as Ilfotex wallpaper

300.0 x 450.0 cm

photographic imaging by Christian Capurro

Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

The dynamic image of *Nardoo flag-wave* is an extension of the work *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park*. Expanding on the story of the native fern and its implications for the ill-fated colonial explorers Burke and Wills, Nicholson has created a flag showing a degraded image of a red field of dried Nardoo. Created from tens of thousands of sporocarps sewn before a flood, dispersed across the vast open spaces of the park which overlooks Melbourne's skyline, Nicholson draws on the latent and ephemeral nature of the sporocarps to create a perpetual monument that blooms and is then hidden again awaiting the next floods. The waving of the flag also alludes to Nicholson's engagement with the histories of pageantry and procession, and the act of collective walking, rallying and demonstration in public space.

ANDREW BYRNE

Born 1966 Melbourne

Lives and works in Melbourne

TOM NICHOLSON

Born 1973 Melbourne

Lives and works in Melbourne

Music for an imaginary launch (Monument for the flooding of Royal Park) 2010

recording of musical composition for eight hands on prepared piano and voice

6:00 mins

piano: David Shively, Alex Lipowski, Richard Carrick, David Shotzko

voice: Anna Schoo

Courtesy of the artists

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

***Gorge photograph, 13 September 1939* 2017–18**

6 charcoal drawings on paper

(i) 140.0 x 108.0 cm; (ii) 140.0 x 108.0 cm; (iii) 145.0 x 108.0 cm; (iv) 140.0 x 108.0 cm; (v) 135.0 x 108.0 cm; (vi) 135.0 x 108.0 cm

artist book: first edition 2018

co-commissioned by Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

design: Brad Haylock; editor: Stephanie Jaehrling, publisher: Surplus

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Gorge photograph, 13 September 1939 unfolds as a reimagining of a specific place and time, highlighting the remarkable relationship of Victorian watercolourist Rex Battarbee with the Western Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira and the critical (and largely overlooked) importance of photography in their personal and professional exchange. While Battarbee and Namatjira were camped at Kwartatuma / Ormiston Gorge in 1939, they received news informing them of the outbreak of WWII. Battarbee, who had suffered greatly in the previous WWI, was deeply affected by this news, and his artistic production was momentarily disabled. Nicholson's new series of drawings was created in response to this moment, reimagining the negatives Battarbee might have taken during this time of personal turmoil.

Gorge photograph started to take shape amidst the vast but little-known body of negatives and transparencies in the Battarbee collection, in the store rooms of the South Australian Museum. This photographic material originates in the early years of Battarbee and Namatjira's shared painting expeditions *en-plein-air* through Tjoritja / West MacDonnell Ranges, when they would paint and photograph during the day then develop their photographs in dry river beds at night. Some of these photographs closely resemble the compositions of watercolours, others are more wide-ranging in address, and some are experimental, such as photographs of mirages, and night photographs (perhaps prompted by the nocturnal space of their processing).

Gorge photograph consists of a new suite of charcoal drawings and an off-set printed artist's book of imagined correspondence which takes its cue from the wide-ranging nature of Battarbee's journals and the importance of letters within them. Nicholson's drawings are based on imagined negatives from this time, with the lens pointed directly at the sun (a subject which neither Battarbee nor Namatjira ever pictured directly in their watercolours). The dramatic lens flare in these negative drawings produces a type of mirage within photography itself. The black from the negative's flare also saturates the vertical rock faces of Kwartatuma / Ormiston Gorge, vast surfaces that enfold the act of image-making deep within the landscape's matter.

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Tom Nicholson acknowledges the generous engagement of artists at Iltja Ntjarra Many Hands Art Centre, Alice Springs, in the development of this project during 2016 and 2017: Benita Clements, Tiara Doolan, Kathleen France, Noreen Hudson, Reinhold Inkamala, Cathy Inkamala, Clara Inkamala, Vanessa Inkamala, Dellina Inkamala, Ricky Connick Jakamara, Kumantjai L. Namatjira, Hubert Pareroultja, Ivy Pareroultja, Gloria Pannka, Mervyn Rubuntja, Betty Wheeler, and Marcus Wheeler. These artists participated in a related project facilitated by Nicholson, *What if this photograph is by Albert Namatjira?*, shown at Tarnanthi at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2017, with generous and vital work from Iltja Ntjarra's art coordinators Iris Bendor, Marisa Maher and Elle Misios. These artists have also been generous hosts, advisors and interlocutors for the project *Gorge photograph, 13 September 1939*. The realisation of the project was generously supported by the Art Gallery of South Australia and Australia Council for the Arts, as well as through a Sidney Myer Fellowship. Drawing assistants: Lauren Burrow and Nicholas Smith. With thanks to John Kean, Dr Jonathan Jones, Gayle Quarmby, Nici Cumpston and Lisa Slade.

TOM NICHOLSON
Born 1973 Melbourne
Lives and works in Melbourne

Action for 2pm Sunday 6 July 1835 2005

A1 colour posters pasted on walls

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Action for 2pm Sunday 6 July 1835 uses the direct communication of a poster to engage the public with an obscure historical event involving William Buckley. Buckley was an escaped convict, originally from Macclesfield, England, who lived in the first three decades of the 1800s with the Wathaurung people of the Kulin Nation, whose Country includes the area around Geelong. The work centres on the events of 6 July 1835, when Buckley re-joined European settlers, arriving with several Wathaurung men at a camp site at Indented Head established by John Batman and his commercial venture, The Port Phillip Association.

Numerous paintings were produced during the late nineteenth century depicting the meeting of Batman and Buckley on this day, an event which in reality did not take place as Batman had already returned to Van Diemen's Land. Nicholson's work was conceived as a meditation on this moment, its political complexity, potential, and repercussions.

An earlier iteration of this work in November 2005 involved 1,000 pairs of posters pasted in and around the city over ten consecutive nights. The action was undertaken in a nocturnal space, connected to the work's function as a kind of memorial, at the same time that it deploys the poster and its prospective character to imply a future meeting we do not yet know.

Please note: This work is located on the exterior of the building in the undercroft