

*Culture Warriors*: Education and Awareness at the Inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial,  
organized by National Gallery of Australia, 2007-2009

Marie Péron

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

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By: Marie Madelaine Péron

Entitled: *Culture Warriors*: Education and Awareness at the Inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, organized by National Gallery of Australia, 2007-2009

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Signed by the final examining committee:

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Dr Loren Lerner           | Chair      |
| Stephen Gilchrist         | Examiner   |
| Dr Sherry Farrell Racette | Supervisor |

Approved by:

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Dr Loren Lerner | Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director |
| Catherine Wild  | Dean of Faculty                                  |

Date September 2010

## ABSTRACT

*Culture Warriors: Education and Awareness at the Inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, organized by National Gallery of Australia, 2007-2009*

Marie Péron

This thesis discusses the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial: *Culture Warriors* organized and hosted by the National Gallery of Australia and provides a critical analysis of the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Educational Resource* that accompanied the exhibition. The aim of this discussion and analysis is to identify elements from the educational program at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) that effectively increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous art at the Gallery. The premise behind my analysis consists of the possibility and feasibility of using similar educational programs in a Canadian context. Using an exploratory approach, this thesis brings attention to elements that could potentially be of benefit to the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) in the development of future educational programs associated with Indigenous Art exhibitions.

It is well-known that, in the past, the NGC has been criticized for its exhibition, collecting, and dissemination practices with regards to Indigenous art. Having undergone considerable changes since the 1990's, the NGC is beginning to look like a different institution especially with the establishment of an Indigenous Art Department in August 2007. One particular area criticized in the past about the NGC has been public access to and information about Indigenous art at the Gallery. As stated by Alfred Young Man, Department Head of Indian Fine Arts, at the First Nations University of Canada, in 2008; "There needs to be a better way for

people who are looking for Aboriginal art at the National Gallery to find it, and learn about it.”<sup>1</sup> Today, the NGC’s mandate seeks to “increase the knowledge, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous art in Canada and internationally.”<sup>2</sup> With its Indigenous Art Department currently in a relative stage of infancy, it is a logical time to be looking at the educational tools being developed and implemented at similar institutions, such as the NGA, for ideas as to how the NGC can fulfill its present-day mandate.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Young Man, (Department Head, Indian Fine Arts, First Nations University of Canada) in discussion with Jacinthe Soulliere, June 2008 as quoted in her MA Thesis; *The Stone that Cracked the Wall between the Institution and the First Nation Artist: the National Gallery of Canada, 1980-2008*, (Montreal: Concordia University, 2009), 68.

<sup>2</sup> National Gallery of Canada, *A Brief History: National Gallery of Canada Indigenous Art Collection*, (Ottawa: NGC, 2009), [http://www.gallery.ca/images/History\\_IndigenousArt.pdf](http://www.gallery.ca/images/History_IndigenousArt.pdf)

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## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| List of Figures .....  | vii |
| 1. Introduction .....  | 1   |
| 1.1 Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Australia .....                | 2   |
| 1.2 Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada today .....             | 4   |
| 2. Culture Warriors: The Exhibition.....                                     | 10  |
| 2.1 Framing the exhibition .....   | 14  |
| 2.2 Showcasing diversity.....  | 24  |
| 2.3 Focus on education.....  | 26  |
| 3. National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource .....               | 32  |
| 3.1 Aboriginal Moiety and Kinship Systems .....                              | 36  |
| 3.2 Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs .....                                       | 38  |
| 3.3 Importance of Ceremony.....  | 40  |
| 3.4 Power and Responsibility within Indigenous communities .....             | 42  |
| 3.5 Artistic Traditions .....  | 44  |
| 3.5.1 Maintenance and revival of customary arts practices.....               | 48  |
| 3.5.2 Torres Strait Islander Culture .....                                   | 51  |
| 3.6 Communicating ATSI historical information .....                          | 54  |
| 3.6.1 Aboriginal resistance fighters and Tasmanian Aboriginal people.....    | 55  |
| 3.6.2 Documentation and display of Aboriginals by ethnographic museums ..... | 62  |
| 3.7 Political and Social Issues .....  | 63  |
| 3.7.1 Eugenics, assimilation policy, stolen generations .....                | 63  |
| 3.7.2 Missions, Christianity, Palm Island.....                               | 67  |
| 3.7.3 Aboriginal deaths in police custody, incarceration, Palm Island .....  | 73  |
| 3.7.4 Terra Nullius.....   | 77  |
| 3.8 Communicating ATSI Art as Art .....                                      | 78  |
| 3.8.1 Colour (pigments and ochres) and Line .....                            | 79  |
| 3.8.2 Medium.....  | 84  |
| 3.8.3 Paintings on bark and hollow logs.....                                 | 85  |
| 3.8.4 Paintings on canvas .....  | 86  |
| 3.8.5 Photography.....   | 88  |
| 3.8.6 Mixed media installation .....   | 89  |
| 3.8.7 Sculpture.....   | 92  |
| 3.8.8 Fibre works .....  | 94  |
| 3.8.9 Digital media .....  | 96  |
| 3.8.10 Drawing .....   | 98  |
| 3.8.11 Printmaking .....   | 99  |
| 4. Concluding Remarks .....  | 100 |
| 4.1 Canadian Applications .....  | 102 |
| 5. Figures .....   | 113 |
| 6. Bibliography .....  | 125 |
| 7. Appendix A.....   | 131 |
| 8. Appendix B.....   | 144 |
| 9. Appendix C.....   | 145 |

## List of Figures

1. *Yabby* by Treaahna Hamm. (2005, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
2. *Ubirikubiri* by Dennis Nona. (2007, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
3. *Face Painting* by Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr (2006, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
4. *Walyer* by Julie Dowling. (2006, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
5. *Koala and Babies* by Trevor 'Turbo' Brown. (2005, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
6. *Mardayin Design at Dillebang* by John Mawurndjul. (2006, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
7. *Yawkyawk mother and babies* by Anniebell Marrngamarrnga. (2006, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
8. *Barmah Forest possum-skin cloak* by Treaahna Hamm. (2005, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
9. *King No Beard* by Daniel Boyd. (2007, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
10. *Inspecting our houses* by Elaine Russell. (2004, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
11. *Psalm singing* by Richard Bell. (2007, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)
12. *palm cluster* by Judy Watson. (2007, Photo courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)

*\*This publication might include names of deceased people that may cause sadness or distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

## **1. Introduction**

Despite being established almost a century apart the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) and the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) have reached a similar place with regards to the collection, exhibition and dissemination of contemporary Indigenous art today. While the collection of Indigenous art was first included in the collection policy of the NGA in 1982, the NGC began its collection of Aboriginal art shortly thereafter in 1985. In 1982, both museums dedicated a space for the permanent exhibition of Indigenous art from their collections.<sup>3</sup> Today, the NGC and NGA have departments of Indigenous art and employ curators and staff that are specialized in Indigenous art and culture.

While both museums' Indigenous art departments appear to share many similarities, the NGA's department of Indigenous art has been active for over twenty five years and has considerable more experience organizing and hosting Indigenous art exhibitions. Taking into account the lessons to be offered by the NGA's Indigenous Art department's longer history, the first section of this thesis discusses the Gallery's Inaugural Indigenous Art Triennial: *Culture Warriors* while providing an analysis of how the exhibition frames and disseminates contemporary Indigenous Australian art. The second section focuses on the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource* developed for the exhibition and provides an analysis of the material's cultural, historical and artistic content. The final section of this thesis discusses the potential adaptation of the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource* to a Canadian

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<sup>3</sup> It is however important to note that the exhibition space for Indigenous art at the NGC was solely allocated to Inuit art, while at the NGA there was no such discrimination. Creation of the Inuit exhibition space at the NGC was spurred by major donations of Inuit art in the 1980s from the Friends of the National Gallery, Dorothy M. Stillwell, M.D., and M.F. Feheley. These donations increased the Inuit holdings to over 350 works.



context while offering examples for the NGC to consider in the development of future educational programs to accompany Indigenous art exhibitions.

### **1.1 Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Australia**

Since its opening in 1982, the NGA has become home to the most comprehensive collection of work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists consisting of more than 4,000 works in addition to 1,000 works on paper and a significant photographic collection. Since 1984, the NGA has had an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Art Department and has employed curators of ATSI art who have built a highly regarded Indigenous art collection.

In 2002, the ATSI Art Department underwent some structural changes and grew from having three positions (Curator, Senior Assistant Curator, and Assistant Curator) to five positions (Senior Curator, Curator, Senior Assistant Curator, Assistant Curator, and Trainee Assistant Curator). By raising the profile of the highest member of staff in the department from Curator to Senior Curator and by establishing a 3-year traineeship for an Indigenous Trainee Assistant Curator, the department was acting on two of its long-term aims “to expand upon the Indigenous representation within the department – and to utilise its potential to provide training opportunities to emerging Indigenous arts workers.”<sup>4</sup> The Indigenous visual arts sector is one of Australia’s most successful and dynamic cultural and economic exports on the international scene and contributes an estimated \$400 million per year to the Australian economy. Most recently, while acting in direct response to the shortage of Indigenous people employed in this prosperous economic sector, the NGA has launched the NGA & Wesfarmers Arts National Indigenous Fellowship: 2009-14. This five year fellowship program aims to increase the

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<sup>4</sup> “Background on ATSI Art Department of the National Gallery of Australia” a document from the National Gallery of Australia’s curatorial files for *Culture Warriors*.

employment opportunities of Indigenous people in the art/cultural sector by developing the visual arts management expertise of four Indigenous Fellows and up to 28 Indigenous Associate Fellows. As stated in a media release dated 7 July 2009; “the program will deliver a combination of arts management training, and longer term internships for Indigenous Fellows.”<sup>5</sup>

In 2002, Brenda L Croft, former curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth, was appointed by the NGA to be its first Senior Curator of ATSI Art. Together with the Assistant Curator of ATSI Art, Susan Jenkins, Croft drafted a new acquisitions policy for the ATSI Art Department which would become the basis of the NGA’s 2006 Acquisition Policy still in effect today. The policy reads:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art are products of the world’s oldest continuous surviving culture. The culture has produced a distinctive and innovative visual expression. The National Gallery of Australia aims to represent Australia’s Indigenous artistic expression across all regions, styles, media and themes. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection already includes significant works in a variety of media from all major Indigenous art-making regions and communities throughout Australia. Its great strength is an in-depth collection from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the largest existing collection of this material. The handful of works from the nineteenth century will be added to selectively.

The policy for acquiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is to further develop the present considerable strengths of the collection, especially by seeking works that are of national and international significance. The Gallery will keep abreast of contemporary developments across all traditions, styles and media. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is sacred and restricted. The Gallery collects only works either intended for public display or approved for display in consultation with appropriate Indigenous representatives and communities.<sup>6</sup>

At a meeting of the Board of the NGA Council in December 2002, Brenda L Croft presented various acquisitions strategies and goals for the department. Among the various points of discussion in her presentation Croft expressed that she “liked to use Indigenous art as an

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<sup>5</sup> National Gallery of Australia, *Media Release Wesfarmers 07/07/2009*, (Canberra: NGA, 2009), <http://nga.gov.au/ABOUTUS/press/pdf/MediaReleaseWesfarmers070709.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Gallery of Australia, *Acquisitions Policy*, (Canberra: NGA, 2006), 9.

educational tool – and that means representing visual stories from all regions of Australia, not just Arnhem Land and central Australia – but regions such as Tasmania, Victoria, urban areas in Queensland, Northern Territory and Southern Australia.”<sup>7</sup> In 2005, just a few years after making her statement to the Council Board, Brenda L Croft came up with the idea for a Contemporary Indigenous Art Triennial and began discussing it with Rupert Myer, Chairman of the Board of the NGA, and Ron Radford, Director of the NGA – both of whom were very keen on it. In the fall of 2006, Croft was alerted by the Director that the planned opening of the Inaugural ATSI Art Triennial would be brought forward to the 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2007 to coincide with the NGA’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Marking the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the NGA’s history, *Culture Warriors* demonstrates how contemporary Indigenous art is presented and disseminated at one of Australia’s leading cultural institution today. Considering the 25 year history of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Art Department, the NGA is a fitting institution for the NGC to consult with regards to developing its new Indigenous Art Department and educational programs to accompany Indigenous art exhibitions.

## **1.2 Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada today**

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, as part of the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective’s Curator Camp held at the NGC, Greg Hill, Audain Curator of Indigenous Art and Head of the Indigenous Art Department at the NGC, gave a presentation entitled “Indigenous Art at the NGC: Looking Forward”. During his talk, Hill announced the department's future plans which include a major

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<sup>7</sup> National Gallery of Australia, *Agenda/Minutes NGA Board Meeting – 11 Dec. 2002*, (Canberra: NGA, 2002).

exhibition in 2013 entitled: “How we are all related”<sup>8</sup>. The exhibition will showcase international Indigenous art and, as Greg Hill stated, “focus on what Indigenous art means, how Indigeneity can be defined, broken down, and put back together.”<sup>9</sup> This is intended to be the inaugural exhibition of an international quintennial of Aboriginal art organized and hosted by the NGC.

With the NGC’s Indigenous Art Department in the midst of planning a major exhibition of Indigenous art of its own, I wanted to look at the NGA’s inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial to see how it was going about providing access to and information about Indigenous art at the Gallery. As Aldona Jonaitis states in her essay *First Nations and Art Museums*, “appreciation of art and comfort in its presence comes not from some mystical quality in a work but from the education of the viewer.”<sup>10</sup> Underlying my discussion of *Culture Warriors* and the companion Education Resource is the recognition that Aboriginal art specialists and museum curators specializing in Indigenous art are often in communication with one another whether they are situated in Canada, Australia, the United States or other parts of the world. Further, contemporary Native artists from many communities are also often in contact with one another informally, or through exhibitions and professional associations.

In addition to having recently hosted the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective’s Curator Camp in October 2009, the National Gallery of Canada has acknowledged the importance of these professional exchanges in an outline of six key priority areas with regards to Indigenous Art at the Gallery. These are;

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<sup>8</sup> “How we are all related” is the title given to the exhibition by Greg Hill during his speech “Indigenous Art at the NGC: Looking Forward” on Friday Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009 at the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective’s curator camp held at the National Gallery of Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Greg Hill quoted during his presentation “Indigenous Art at the NGC: Looking Forward” on Friday Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009 at the National Gallery of Canada.

<sup>10</sup> Aldona Jonaitis, “First Nations and Art Museums,” in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*. Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, eds. (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 20.

1. Building relationships with Indigenous artists, communities, and curators in Canada and internationally.
2. Producing special exhibitions, touring exhibitions and exhibition catalogues to increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous art.
3. Expanding and diversifying the Indigenous art collection.
4. Strengthening the outreach to Indigenous artists and communities.
5. Producing exhibition catalogues and support materials in English, French, and Indigenous languages to sustain Indigenous cultures and languages.
6. Ensuring the representation of Indigenous Art in the Gallery's permanent collection galleries and communicating the message that Indigenous Art takes pride and place at the National Gallery of Canada.<sup>11</sup>

Although the six key goals expressed by the Gallery appear to respond directly to past criticisms such as those stated by Alfred Young Man, the question they in fact raise is; how will the Gallery accomplish these goals? For example; how will the Gallery build relationships and strengthen outreach with Indigenous artists and communities? How will the Gallery increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous art? How will the Gallery communicate to the public that Indigenous art takes pride and place at the NGC?

For the purpose of this thesis, I am particularly interested in how the NGC can increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous Art at the Gallery. In correlation with Jonitis' statement where; "the appreciation of art and comfort in its presence comes not from some

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<sup>11</sup> National Gallery of Canada, *A Brief History: National Gallery of Canada Indigenous Art Collection*. Ottawa: NGC, 2009), [http://www.gallery.ca/images/History\\_IndigenousArt.pdf](http://www.gallery.ca/images/History_IndigenousArt.pdf)

mystical quality in a work but from the education of the viewer”<sup>12</sup>, this thesis analyses an educational program designed to increase an individual’s knowledge and appreciation of art while looking at how the Gallery can increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous Art in particular.

In order for an education to take place at the Gallery, the visiting public needs to be provided with tools that enable and facilitate learning. Wall text, room cards, audio guides, guided tours, lesson plans, and pamphlets all play a part in the visitor’s education. Though familiar in their form, these educational tools continue to evolve with time – serving new purposes and making new kinds of statements.

For example, at the NGC’s winter 2008-2009 exhibition *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists*, the Gallery deviated from the usual format ascribed to labels by asking the participating artists to choose their own identities to be placed on the labels. This simple gesture made the important statement that the Gallery wasn’t going to commit the colonizing act of prescribing identities to these artists. Instead, by enabling the artists to choose their own identity ‘label’, the gallery was promoting self-representation and communicating this change to the visiting public through the label itself. In addition to this change, at the entrance of the exhibition visitors were presented with a curatorial statement that was signed by the two co-curators Andrea Kunard and Steven Loft. This was an unusual practice for the NGC who traditionally presents exhibitions in a curatorially anonymous way with the institution as ‘author’ of the exhibition. In this instance, the curators’ voices were placed at the forefront of the exhibition and functioned as an introduction to the works shown. The curatorial statement read:

This exhibition draws attention to the idea that the portrait is a construct in which the subject’s individuality is captured. Yet, it is also a cultural construct that, for

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<sup>12</sup> Aldona Jonaitis, “First Nations and Art Museums,” 20.

Aboriginal people, has a long and problematic history. The portrait is a European convention. Often the photographer controlled the portrait session, representing Native peoples as stereotypes because that is what would sell and that is how they were seen. In depictions of Aboriginal people, it is important to examine the power relationship inherent in the process, how much control the subject has over the resulting image, and who controls where it goes.

The artists in this exhibition challenge preconceived notions of Aboriginal people. Beyond the simplistic notions of the coffee table book in which Indigenous peoples have so often figured, these artists mine what it is to be Aboriginal, giving agency to their ancestors, to their communities and to themselves. They are defining Aboriginal identity, collapsing perceptual barriers established by decades of misrepresentation, defiantly stating, “This is who we are”.

Andrea Kunard, Assistant curator CMCP  
Steven Loft, Curator in Residence, Indigenous Art<sup>13</sup>

This practice of curatorial acknowledgement was further exercised by the NGC at the occasion of its first solo exhibition by a First Nations female artist, *The Drawings and Paintings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition*, from October 23, 2009 to January 3, 2010. Co-organized with the Art Gallery of Sudbury, the exhibition was curated by Bonnie Devine, an Ojibwa artist, writer and independent curator who had secured an independent curatorial research grant from The Canada Council for the Arts to bring her project to realization. When the exhibition first opened at the NGC, the gallery did not properly acknowledge her role as guest curator by failing to put her name on the exhibition. However, this was soon changed due to discussions spurred by the artists and individuals in attendance at the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Curator’s Camp held in tandem with the opening of the exhibition. A few days into the exhibition, the NGC had her name painted on a wall at the entrance of the exhibition. In addition to acknowledging the curator of this major exhibition, the Gallery broke new ground by offering the visiting public the option of an Anishnabe language audioguide and by publishing an

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<sup>13</sup> Kunard, Andrea and Steven Loft, *Steeling the Gaze: Portraits by Aboriginal Artists, Curatorial Statement*, (Ottawa: NGC, 2008).

Anishnabe edition of the exhibition catalogue alongside the habitual French and English versions.

Complementary to the educational tools such as audioguides, guided tours, wall texts, and room cards offered by the Gallery, the NGC hosts an educational website called CyberMuse. Labelled as an art education research site, the site offers a glimpse into the Gallery's collection through digital images of works, descriptions, artist biographies, and a variety of audio and visual aids. The site also makes available materials to teachers and students through a series of lesson plans. One lesson plan entitled *Aboriginal Voices in Canadian Contemporary Art* presents artworks by six Canadian contemporary artists of Aboriginal ancestry. However, even though the Gallery has hosted multiple Indigenous art exhibitions in its recent history, there are no educational materials available on the CyberMuse website that correspond to any of the exhibitions. Unlike its Australian counterpart, the NGC has yet to develop a comprehensive educational program for an Indigenous art exhibition that is available to all members of the public online. Developed in 2007, the Education Resource created by the NGA for *Culture Warriors* demonstrates how the museum can increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous Art through educational tools today.

However, this is not to say that educational programs related to Indigenous art exhibitions do not exist in Canada or anywhere outside Australia. That is simply not true. The Government of Canada makes available a wide range of educational resources and lesson plans online at the Aboriginal Canada Portal.<sup>14</sup> These resources are brought together from a variety of sources such as Curriculum Services Canada, the Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture, the National Adult Literacy Database, and even the National Gallery of Canada. Similarly, Virtual Museum

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<sup>14</sup> Resources for teachers at the Aboriginal Canada Portal are available at <http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/acp/site.nsf/eng/ao31045.html>



Canada also features a teachers' centre which provides online exhibitions and information relating to Aboriginal art, history, traditions and culture.<sup>15</sup> The Canadian Museum of Civilization also has a 'Gateway to Aboriginal Heritage' section to its website. The section features games and learning activities for children and youth from kindergarten to grade twelve. Even more extensively, the National Museum of the American Indian in the United States features multiple print resources such as school programs guides, self-guided tours for teachers, a family guidebook, and teaching posters, in addition to online resources that complement the traveling Smithsonian Institution exhibition called *Native Words: Native Warriors*.<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that there are many examples of educational materials related to Indigenous art exhibitions such as the ones listed above, for the purposes of this thesis I wanted to explore how an equivalent institution to the NGC, in a nation similar to Canada, disseminates Indigenous art while striving to raise awareness and appreciation of Indigenous art amongst its public through education.

## **2. Culture Warriors: The Exhibition**

In the spring of 2009, I had the opportunity to travel to Australia and see the NGA's inaugural Triennial exhibition *Culture Warriors*. Aware of the changes taking place at the NGC, I was curious to see how Australia's National Gallery, went about presenting Indigenous art.

Having missed the presentation of *Culture Warriors* at the NGA itself, I arrived just in time to see the exhibition while on tour at its last Australian venue, the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane. Overwhelmed by the amount of work shown in the exhibition yet impressed by its diversity, I wanted to find out as much as possible about the

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<sup>15</sup> Virtual Museums Canada's teachers' centre is available at [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/English/Teacher/aboriginal\\_people.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/English/Teacher/aboriginal_people.html)

<sup>16</sup> The traveling Smithsonian Institution exhibition called *Native Words: Native Warriors* is available online at; <http://www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/>

exhibition and the NGA. Leaving Brisbane I travelled to Canberra where I spent a week going through reports, publications, and exhibition files in the gallery's research library and archive and meeting staff members who had been involved with the exhibition. The exhibition was held at the NGA in Canberra from October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and coincided with the Gallery's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Canadian art historian Ruth B. Phillip, whose interest is the development of new approaches to museological and academic representations of First Nations art, has stated that "Museums welcome major anniversaries and events as opportunities to mount projects that would normally be beyond their scope. A simple formula usually applies; the bigger the event, the bigger the budget and the more ambitious the exhibition."<sup>17</sup> For the NGA, *Culture Warriors* was just that; it was an ambitious exhibition with immense support from every department within the Gallery, not to mention assistance from curators at State Galleries, in addition to receiving significant corporate, state and federal funding. Although the exhibition was held in tandem with the Gallery's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it also coincided with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australia's 1967 Referendum, which was a landmark vote that allowed Indigenous Australians to be counted as 'people of the Commonwealth' in the Australian census.

The exhibition's reference to the 1967 Referendum is an interesting choice for the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial. The Referendum undoubtedly marked a turning point in attitudes to Aboriginal rights in Australia, however what the decision actually entailed was a change in the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Indigenous Australians and include them in the census. Indigenous Australians already had the right to vote at that point, having gained the vote in most regions of Australia in 1962, with the state of

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth B. Phillips, "Show times: De-celebrating the Canadian nation, de-colonising the Canadian Museum, 1967-92," in *National Museums: Negotiating Histories [Conference Proceedings]*, (National Museum of Australia: Canberra), 2001, 85.

Queensland being the last to grant them the vote in 1965. Although the vote had already been granted to Indigenous people by 1967, as is stated on the Australian Electoral Commission's website "ask Australians when Aborigines got the vote and most of them will say 1967."<sup>18</sup> As this statement makes evident, the year 1967 has been imprinted in Australian popular memory as an important turning point in the history of Aboriginal rights in Australia.

Although a strongly supported exhibition, *Culture Warriors* was an immensely ambitious project for the NGA. Its ATSI art department, led by senior curator Brenda Croft, had altogether less than one year to plan and produce the exhibition and all ancillary programs and publications. These included the production of a scholarly full-colour exhibition catalogue, a symposium/artist talk day, guided tours, a film festival, opening ceremonies and more.

Subsequent to its presentation at the NGA, *Culture Warriors* was formed into a travelling exhibition, consisting of a selection of 97 works – averaging three works for each of the thirty artists – and travelled to three State Galleries in Australia; The Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide, The Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth, and the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane, where I saw the exhibition. The success of *Culture Warriors* in Australia led to a final presentation of the exhibition at the Katzen Art Center of the American University in Washington from September to December 2009 which was still in the midst of being organized during my visit to Canberra<sup>19</sup>.

The title of the exhibition, *Culture Warriors*, pays tribute to a significant group of five senior artists, colloquially referred to as the 'Big Guns', whose artistic careers span the four decades since the 1967 referendum. They are: Ramingining artist Philip Gudthaykudthay,

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, *Indigenous People and the vote*, (Canberra: AEC, 2007), [http://www.aec.gov.au/voting/indigenous\\_vote/aborigin.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/voting/indigenous_vote/aborigin.htm)

<sup>19</sup> The total visitation to the presentation of *Culture Warriors* in Canberra was the highest ever for an Indigenous visual arts exhibition at the NGA, numbering 82,317 people.

Kuninjku artist Wamud Namok (from here on referred to by his working name John Mawurndjul), western Arnhem Land artist Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO, Aurukun artist Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr, and Tiwi artist Jean Baptiste Aputimi (the only woman in the group). Including these 'Big Guns' the exhibition presented the work of thirty Indigenous artists from all regions in Australia and featured a total of 143 works. In addition to referencing the 'Big Guns', *Culture Warriors* carries a number of other connotations from historical Indigenous warriors to modern-day custodians of traditional knowledge, cultural revivalists, and activists.

Curator Brenda L Croft has stated that, "*Culture Warriors* also has an ambiguous, ironic context: *any-* and *every-one* can be a 'culture warrior'."<sup>20</sup> Some artists in the exhibition may not completely agree with this connotation, such as Shane Pickett who stated "I am not yet a culture warrior. The real culture warriors are the elders – those gifted senior men and women fighting to keep the Dreaming alive."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to understand what Croft means in stating that everyone can be a culture warrior when Pickett goes on to explain that; "In my paintings, and in my own personal Dreaming journey, I try to honour their teachings, their knowledge and their law. Together we must work to heal and rebuild, to be stronger and stronger for the Dreamings of tomorrow – to keep our culture, so that the generations to come can live and sing of their identity."<sup>22</sup> Although Pickett does not consider himself to be a cultural warrior yet, his work is centered on keeping his culture and traditions alive for the benefit of future generations.

On selecting artists for inclusion in *Culture Warriors*, Croft stated that "the hardest task has been to select only thirty of the country's many Indigenous artists (...) but this exhibition is not intended to be the full story. This is just part of the continuum of Indigenous visual

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<sup>20</sup> Brenda Croft, "Cannot buy my soul," in *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, XI.

<sup>21</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, 149.

<sup>22</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, 149.

innovation. *Culture Warriors* positions Indigenous culture as part of the past, the present and, most definitely, the future.”<sup>23</sup> Oftentimes, works included in the exhibition can be simultaneously seen as belonging to all three; the past, the present, and the future. The five senior artists, referred to as the ‘Big Guns’, featured in the exhibition engage with millennia-old artistic precedents yet, as pointed out by Jessica Dawson in her review for the *Washington Post*, “all but one or two of the elders have revolutionized ancient techniques.”<sup>24</sup> Indigenous visual innovation is clearly at the heart of this exhibition.

## 2.1 Framing the exhibition

In her essay “Cannot Buy My Soul” featured at the beginning of the exhibition’s extensive catalogue, Croft explains that “all of [the] artists consider themselves Indigenous, first and foremost, their heritage being the framework and foundation, which underpins their creativity.”<sup>25</sup> Most interestingly about this statement is Croft’s use of the term ‘framework’. As explained by Sebastian Smee in his review of the exhibition for the *Weekend Australian*, “Aboriginal art is made by Aboriginal people. But to a large extent it is framed – by which I mean bought and sold, presented in galleries and museums, and talked about – by non-Aboriginal people.”<sup>26</sup> In this regard, *Culture Warriors* and the National Indigenous Art Triennial are an interesting case. The Triennial indicates a high level of institutional commitment to the collection and display of Indigenous Australian art – a commitment that brings Aboriginal art

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<sup>23</sup> Brenda Croft, “No beginning, no middle, no end: National Indigenous Art Triennial,” *Art & Australia* (Summer 2007), 210 – 211.

<sup>24</sup> Jessica Dawson, “Australian Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors,” *Washington Post* (11 Sept. 2009), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/profile/australian-indigenous-art-triennial-culture-warriors,1158208/critic-review.html>

<sup>25</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, xi.

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian Smee, “Beyond the Frame: The Inaugural Indigenous Triennial in Canberra raises some uncomfortable questions,” *Weekend Australian* (3-4 Nov. 2007), 18.

into an institutional and largely non-Aboriginal framework – while simultaneously demonstrating a high-level of Indigenous self-representation and agency. The Triennial has been organized to be curated by a different Indigenous curator at each occasion, with the inaugural Triennial having been organized by Croft, the NGA’s Senior Curator of ATSI Art. The NGA’s commitment to the National Indigenous Art Triennial is intended to promote “a new concept that will place Australian Indigenous art at the heart of the Australia art calendar. It is to sit right alongside, and complement, existing annual, biennial and triennial events in Australia.”<sup>27</sup> By establishing a Triennial event of this kind, the NGA demonstrates that it is committed to presenting the best of Contemporary Indigenous art every three years. In July 2009, shortly before the opening of *Culture Warriors* in Washington, Brenda L Croft left her position at the NGA to pursue a teaching opportunity as Lecturer in Indigenous Art Culture & Design at the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education & Research at the University of South Australia. In her place, the NGA hired Franchesca Cubillo, the Senior Curator of Aboriginal Art and Material Culture at the Northern Territory Museum & Art Gallery and one of the driving forces behind the 2006 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. As the NGA’s new Senior Curator of Indigenous art, Cubillo will oversee the organization of the next Triennial in addition to the NGA’s planned opening of ten new gallery spaces dedicated to Indigenous art in 2010.

Curator of the inaugural triennial, Brenda L Croft is from the Gurindji and Mudpurra peoples of Daguragu/ Limbunya/ Kalkaringi region in the Northern Territory of Australia and has been a practicing artist and writer since the 1980s. Before working at the NGA, Croft was curator at the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide where she organized the first Adelaide

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<sup>27</sup> Rupert Myer, “Chairman’s Foreword” in *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, VIII.

Biennial of Australian Art to focus solely on ATSI Art in 2000. Entitled *Beyond the Pale*, the exhibition was similar to *Culture Warriors* in that it featured three works by each of the near thirty artists included while showcasing a survey of new Indigenous Australian art. As an Indigenous artist, writer, and curator, Croft has a significant amount of experience working with and within the institutional framework. In the case of *Culture Warriors*, Croft had to negotiate the fact that she was framing Indigenous Australian art and had to choose how she would do so. In curating the exhibition, writing about it, and creating the ancillary programs and publications, Croft and her staff in the ATSI Art Department had a substantial level of agency within the institution. No doubt this was also helped by the longstanding professional relationship between Croft and the NGA's Director Ron Radford, who was previously the Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia at the same time that she was curator there and oversaw the organization of the 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art.

The agency and authority enjoyed by Croft and her department are directly reflected in the works chosen for *Culture Warriors* and in the accompanying literature through the strong sense of self-representation conveyed and multiplicity of voices presented. Although *Culture Warriors* can easily be seen as an exhibition of Australian Indigenous art organized by individuals of Indigenous heritage it is at the same time an exhibition that carries an institutional, political, and corporate seal of approval. This aspect is readily evident in the exhibition's funding, where a large portion was contributed by BHP Billiton, the largest diversified resources producer in the world, while the remainder was heavily funded by State and Federal governments and by government agencies such as Australia Council for the Arts. To be precise, the NGA-hosted portion of the exhibition, which cost \$900,000, was 54% funded by BHP Billiton and other participating corporation, 25 % funded by Federal and State governments and

11% funded by the NGA itself. While the travelling exhibition which cost \$1,225,000, was 53% funded by the NGA, 28% funded by Government, and 19% funded by BHP Billiton and other participating corporations. This repartition of funding, where financing is provided by both Government and private corporations, is a common occurrence for major exhibitions or cultural events in Australia. Similar to BHP Billiton's involvement with the NGA's announcement of a new National Indigenous Art Triennial, the world-renown Sydney Biennale was also founded on a public – private partnership. In 1973, Transfield Holdings, a leading Australian private investment and management company, founded the Biennale of Sydney with the support of the Federal and New South Wales Governments and the City of Sydney. Today, Transfield Holdings continues to be founding partner of the Biennale alongside major government partners like Australia Council, Arts New South Wales, and the city of Sydney.<sup>28</sup> However, in the case of BHP Billiton, funding for the Triennial was likely spurred by its corporate interest in specifically funding Indigenous Australian cultural events.

Before its merger with Billiton, BHP was an Australian mining giant known as 'Big Australian'. Since its incorporation in 1885, BHP has had mixed relationships with Aboriginal communities that have often seen controversy. Recently, the Martidja Banyjima people from the Pilbara region of Western Australia took on BHP Billiton as it sought to expand its iron ore mining operations in the region with leases covering 200 square kilometres of their traditional lands and the construction of 23 km of dual track railway and associated rail infrastructure through the Chichester Ranges. The contested region included Karijini, the sacred heartland of their culture, where important traditional ceremonies are performed. Led by Maitland Parker, a Martidja Banyjima elder and a senior ranger at Karijini National Park, an appeal was made to

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<sup>28</sup>Biennale of Sydney, *Biennale of Sydney Partners*, 2010, <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/partners.htm>.



Honourable Donna Faragher JP MLC, Minister for Environment in 2009. The appeal was dismissed on November 9, 2009. As stated in the Appeal Determination for Appeal 297 of 2009 of the Environmental Protection Act 1986:

The Minister is supportive of the view that BHP Billiton had sought to inform itself of the heritage values of the proposal area through the independent review of the ethnographic surveys previously undertaken by another party and through the recent completion of an archaeological survey. BHP Billiton had also attempted to engage the Martidja Banyjima representatives through a presentation of the proposal and invitations to inspect the proposal area. Furthermore, the Minister was informed that BHP Billiton is aware of its obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and has designed the proposed rail works to avoid archaeological sites. The Minister noted that if this proves to be impractical, BHP Billiton will apply for the consent of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs under Section 18 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972*. Taking the foregoing considerations into account, the Minister dismissed the appeal.<sup>29</sup>

Disputes of this kind are common in a region that contains ore worth many billions of dollars and where mining-giants are permitted through the ineffective Aboriginal Heritage Act to destroy registered heritage sites. This was the case at Weeli Woli Creek, one of the most cherished sacred sites on Martidja Land, where Rio Tinto was allowed to turn the natural oasis into a drain for its giant Hope Downs mine. Despite the controversial aspects to BHP Billiton's operations in Australia and around the world, the company's subsidiary BHP Iron Ore – who operates the mines in the Pilbara region – has stated that:

BHP Billiton Iron Ore is committed to operating responsibly and sustainably. We value the relationships we have with Indigenous communities. BHP is committed to reconciliation, creation of economic opportunities and improvement in indigenous well-being. The company is committed to indigenous development in the Pilbara and has a range of community programs in place across the areas of indigenous health, education, the arts, employment and economic development.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hon Donna Faragher JP MLC, *Minister's Appeal Determination against the Report and Recommendations of Environmental Protection Authority for the Chichester Rail Deviation*, (Perth: Office of the Appeals Convenor), [http://portal.environment.wa.gov.au/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/OAC/ADMIN\\_CONTENT/DECISION\\_SUMMARIES/2009/297-09\\_MINISTERS%20APPEAL%20DETERMINATION\\_10-11-09.PDF](http://portal.environment.wa.gov.au/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/OAC/ADMIN_CONTENT/DECISION_SUMMARIES/2009/297-09_MINISTERS%20APPEAL%20DETERMINATION_10-11-09.PDF)

<sup>30</sup> BHP Billiton, *BHP Billiton Iron Ore*, (Perth: BHP Billiton, 2010),  
{<http://www.bhpbilliton.com/bb/ourBusinesses/ironOre/bhpBillitonIronOre.jsp>}

As Scott Klinger, Director of Corporate Engagement, First Peoples Worldwide, explains in detail in his text *A Brief History of Corporate Engagements with Indigenous Peoples* published in December 2007:

While still facing occasional controversies – sometimes even deep and troubling ones as in Columbia – BHP Billiton has staked its future on infusing Indigenous Peoples relations deep within its business model. For instance, its mining operations in Australia are framed against a backdrop of aiding Aboriginal Australians reconciliation efforts with broader society. BHP Billiton openly acknowledges the wrong done to Indigenous Peoples both by industry and government in the past [...] All of BHP Billiton's Australian operations are guided by a Reconciliation Action Plan, spelling out specific measures for each project which include both responding to local communities and engaging on issues outside the company.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this spirit of Aboriginal reconciliation and engagement with issues outside the company that Marius Kloppers, Chief Executive Officer for BHP Billiton, framed the mining-giant's involvement with the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, *Culture Warriors*:

BHP Billiton has a long history of supporting Indigenous cross-cultural programs in Australia and we are proud of our involvement with the remarkable and culturally significant National Indigenous Art Triennial [...] As the exhibition travels across the country, it will also provide many people with a wonderful opportunity to see some truly inspired works and learn more about a unique, and beautiful art and culture. BHP is very proud to be associated with this salute to contemporary Indigenous Australian art.<sup>32</sup>

Despite BHP Billiton's varied relationship with Indigenous people around the world, it is evident that within Australia the company aspires to cooperate with Indigenous communities in order to improve upon past relations. It is largely due to BHP Billiton's partnership with the NGA that the production of *Culture Warriors* and the exhibition's tour were financially possible.

Similar to the exhibition's funding, the institutional, political, and corporate seal of approvals of *Culture Warriors* were highly noticeable in the marketing and advertising of the

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<sup>31</sup> Scott Klinger, *A Brief History of Corporate Engagements with Indigenous Peoples*, (First Peoples Worldwide, 2007), <http://www.firstpeoplesworldwide.org/publish/CorporateEngagementwithIndigenousPeoples12-07.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Marius Kloppers, "Sponsor's Foreword," *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, IX.

exhibition where full-page newspaper and magazine advertisements for the exhibition proudly displayed the logos of each contributor alongside reproductions of works from the exhibition. Additionally, the first few pages in the exhibition catalogue are devoted to forewords by Ron Radford, Director of the NGA, Rupert Myer, Chairman of Council for the NGA, and Marius Kloppers, Chief Executive Officer for BHP Billiton, each providing a frame for the exhibition before the reader reaches Croft's curatorial essay entitled "Cannot Buy My Soul".

In addition to framing the exhibition in the catalogue, the political and corporate aspects behind the exhibition were most evident at the exhibition's opening ceremony on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The lavish occasion hosted by the NGA featured performances by Ngambri and Goigi Padhai Dancers respectively, which were preceded by several speeches. The first speech was by Ron Radford, Director of the NGA, who welcomed individuals to the opening and introduced the second speaker, Rupert Myer, Chairman of Council for the NGA. In his speech, Myer acknowledged the partnership between BHP Billiton and the NGA and stated:

[BHP Billiton's] support for this national cultural institution, our National Gallery, is a warm acknowledgement of the role corporations can so beneficially play in the community. In the case of this triennial, BHP Billiton's leadership will contribute significantly to the triennial scholarship, broad public access, education programs, publications, as well as its marketing and promotion.<sup>33</sup>

After announcing this significant partnership between the Gallery and BHP Billiton, Myer prompted Brenda L Croft to introduce the artists and outline her vision for *Culture Warriors* to the audience in attendance. The official opening of the exhibition was then announced by Honourable Sir William Deane, Australia's Governor-General from 1996-2001, who succinctly outlined the multiple frameworks, interests, and expectations at play in *Culture Warriors*. As has become the custom at such events in Australia, Deane's speech began with an

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<sup>33</sup> Rupert Myer, *National Indigenous Art Triennial Launch*, transcript of speech given 13 Oct. 2007 (Canberra: NGA, 2007).

acknowledgement towards the traditional Custodians upon whose ancestral land the audience in attendance was privileged to be. With regards to the Gallery's history and responsibility in the presentation of Indigenous Australian art, Deane stated:

One consistent theme has, however, been recognition of the expectation and hope that the Gallery, as our nation's primary artistic institution, would display and encourage the art and artistic talents of our Nation's first People. This Gallery has done spectacularly well in the first quarter century of its life. This evening, the second quarter century, is introduced by an Exhibition which seems to me to be undoubtedly the most significant and important of them all. Quite apart from its own tremendous intrinsic worth, it inaugurates a National Indigenous Art Triennial which will become a permanent highlight of our national art calendar, encompassing a major exhibition of truly contemporary Indigenous art every three years.<sup>34</sup>

Moving on from the role of the Triennial in the Gallery's history, Deane addressed Indigenous self-representation and the important role of the artists' voices and emphasized the present-day importance of Aboriginal Reconciliation in Australia. In his words, Deane stated:

Brenda L Croft and her team have succeeded in demonstrating the contemporary breadth, strength, relevance and importance of our nation's Indigenous artists. They speak with a voice that is uniquely theirs. It is a voice of the present which nonetheless confronts us with the basic truth that the past is never really gone.

If there ever has been a time in our country where there is a need for the voices and skills of Indigenous "Culture Warriors" to be raised and recognised, it is now. The artists whose work is displayed are "Culture Warriors" in the very best sense of that sometimes abused phrase. In a context where, on the national front, the movement for Aboriginal Reconciliation in this country seems to have lost much of its impetus, they remind us of the basic fact that true Aboriginal reconciliation has a spiritual as well as a practical content and that it is, and has always been, a mistake to disregard either of them.

Those of us who have long been committed to the cause of Aboriginal Reconciliation can only be encouraged and sustained by the generosity of these "Culture Warriors" as they hold out the hand of friendship and share with us their abilities, their recent work, and their insights. For me, this evening's gathering is yet another notable incident of the grassroots movement for reconciliation to which we must remain committed in the interests of justice and decency in our land.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hon. Sir William Deane. *Address by the Honourable Sir William Deane on the occasion of the opening of "Culture Warriors,"* transcript of speech given October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, (Canberra: NGA, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Whilst the very nature of the National Indigenous Art Triennial organized by the NGA places many diverse nations under one ‘Indigenous’ banner, the NGA hoped that the exhibition would generate “a greater understanding and awareness of Australian Indigenous cultures, their diversity, dynamics and strength.”<sup>36</sup>

As was explained to me by Belinda Cotton, Head of Development and Membership at the NGA, the support and momentum given to *Culture Warriors* within the institution can be seen as part of a current and timely practice of what she referred to as ‘positive discrimination’. The exhibition was seen as a necessary event in the evolution of the Gallery – it was an expression of the here and now, but was also seen as long overdue. The term ‘positive discrimination’ refers to the mentality at the NGA that the Triennial was a top priority, temporarily relegating other projects to the sidelines. In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Chairman of Council Rupert Myer explains some of the intentions behind the new Triennial event:

The National Indigenous Art Triennial is a new concept that will place Australian Indigenous art at the heart of the Australian cultural calendar. It is intended to sit right alongside, and complement existing annual, biennial and triennial contemporary visual arts events in Australia, which include the Biennale of Sydney [and] Brisbane’s Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art [...] Australian Indigenous art has long formed part of the culture of this continent, but its proper recognition is relatively recent.<sup>37</sup>

Through this new Triennial event, the NGA made the important and timely statement that Indigenous Australian Art takes pride and place at Australia’s leading artistic institution. The very existence and premise of the Triennial is also an acknowledgement by the NGA that exclusively ‘Indigenous’ exhibitions continue to occupy a necessary role at this time in history. Similar to Canada, Australia is still coming to terms with its past, notably its history of state-

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<sup>36</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors: Acquittal Report for Australia Council*, (Canberra: NGA, 2008), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Rupert Myer, “Chairman’s Foreword,” *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, VIII.

mandated racism, as was witnessed when Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave an official and heartfelt apology to Australia's Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders on February 13, 2008.

Though some critics obviously disagree with the mounting of an all-Indigenous exhibition, others like Christine Nicholls, a writer for *Asian Art News*, acknowledge that there are current benefits to this distinction that are needed for the time being. In her critical review of *Culture Warriors*, Nicholls wrote:

There is also the question of curatorial/ cultural separatism to consider – has it now become passé to corral Aboriginal art into an all-Aboriginal blockbuster exhibition? On this subject a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous friends and colleagues hold a range of views. But at least the Triennial has now become institutionalized, which may account for the tactic employed. Without doubt the securing of funding for a major exhibition every three years is sufficient reason to erect a curatorial fence around Indigenous art – at least for the time being.<sup>38</sup>

Justifying the current existence of the Triennial while expressing hope for an inclusive future where there is no longer the need for a separate event operating under a pan-Indigenous banner like the National Indigenous Art Triennial, Sasha Grishin wrote in the *Canberra Times*:

*Culture Warriors* is a timely exhibition which contains some absolutely brilliant work and should not be missed by anyone interested in contemporary art. My hope is that social and political circumstances may change sufficiently to permit these triennials to become a celebration of the best in Australian contemporary art in which ATSI art will figure very prominently.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the fact that *Culture Warriors* is an exhibition that exclusively showcases Indigenous art, its emphasis on diversity amongst Indigenous peoples and cultures plays an important role.

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<sup>38</sup> Christine Nicholls, "Culture Warriors at the National Gallery," *Asian Art News*, (Jan. - Feb. 2008), 159.

<sup>39</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Weapons of a culture," *Panorama - Canberra Times* (20 Oct. 2007), 22.

## 2.2 Showcasing diversity

As in Canada, the Indigenous communities of Australia have struggled with their unity and diversity. For social and political reasons, many nations have cooperated under pan-Indigenous banners to further their collective causes, yet have struggled to have the extent of their diversity be known and represented. In Australia, there are about 250 sovereign Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and over 300 different language groups. Attempting to reflect this diversity in an all-indigenous exhibition, the NGA hoped that through the presentation of both traditional and contemporary arts practices *Culture Warriors* would generate “a greater understanding and awareness of Australian Indigenous cultures, their diversity, dynamics and strength.”<sup>40</sup>

Works selected for *Culture Warriors* included paintings on bark and canvas, sculpture, textiles, weaving, new media, photomedia, printmaking and installation. For example, the photograph *Man and Doll (b)* by artists Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser is part of an installation entitled *Colour blinded* (2005) which comprises two video projections, photographs and two display cases all flooded with yellow sodium light. Stylistically a highly contemporary work, *Colour blinded* engages directly with the viewer and casts its audience as both interloper and conspirator as the installation space is flooded with accusations like ‘What are you looking at?’ and ‘What are you doing here?’ emanating from a DVD on loop.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to *Colour Blinded*, other works in the exhibition draw from tradition like Trehna Hamm’s *Yabby* (2006) (fig. 1) which is a work woven from grasses with a coiled bundle technique that has been used to make fibre objects for thousands of generations in the south-east and southern regions of Australia. Appropriately titled *Yabby*, this fibre work represents a yabby

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<sup>40</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors: Acquittal Report for Australia Council* (Canberra: NGA, 2008), 9.

<sup>41</sup> Kelly Gellatly, “Destiny Deacon & Virginia Fraser,” in *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, 90.

which is a river crustacean that is said to reside alongside Ancestral Beings in the Murray River at Yarrawonga, a site of enormous cultural significance for Yorta Yorta people. This work showcases the continuation of traditional arts practices by contemporary artists today, however, when shown alongside works like Dennis Nona's *Ubirikubiri* (2007) (fig. 2) – a work that represents a story from the Torres Strait Islands, Queensland artist Vernon Ah Kee's *stolen/removed* (2006) – a text-based work that excavates the racist subtexts found in language itself, and Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr's *Face Painting* (2006) (fig. 3) – which represents the Flying Fox Story of the Wik-Mungkan/ Wincham peoples, it also serves to communicate difference and variety amongst the many Indigenous communities and cultures that exist in Australia.

Further to displaying the variety of contemporary and traditional media being used by contemporary Indigenous Australian artists, *Culture Warriors* was curated by Croft to present the work of artists who “tell the stories of their communities in an incredible diversity of ‘voices’ – humble, venerated, spiritual, customary, poignant, satirical, political, innovative and overt.”<sup>42</sup> Although the diversity of voices in the exhibition is undoubtedly amplified by the number of works presented, the variety of ages amongst the artists, and the fact that the artists come from all regions in Australia, this diversity is already evident when looking at just a few examples such as Julie Dowling's *Walyer* (2006) (fig. 4), Richard Bell's *Uz vs Them* (2006), and Judy Watson's *under the act* (2007).

Julie Dowling's *Walyer* is expressed in a voice that is full of veneration for her subject, a Tasmanian Aboriginal resistance fighter who lived from around 1800 to 1831. An important historical figure, Walyer was a captive amongst sealers in the Bass Strait from whom she learned

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<sup>42</sup> Brenda Croft, “The ‘big guns’ of Culture Warriors,” <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Default.cfm?MnuID=2>



to speak English and manipulate firearms. With this knowledge, Walyer eventually formed and lead several rebellions against her captors. In this painting Walyer is unmistakably portrayed as a warrior – she is seen standing in action, firmly holding onto a rifle, with a spare pistol in her belt, looking straight ahead, and ready to meet her opponents. In contrast to Dowling’s work, Richard Bell’s *Uz vs Them* is a video laced with satire and racial politics. In this work, Bell poses as a boxer who confronts and fights with – though mostly verbally – a ‘white’ opponent who is, unbeknownst to the audience, actually portrayed by a staff member of the bookstore at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane. Unlike this confrontational work by Bell, the much quieter piece by Judy Watson *under the act*, invokes the sad, poignant, and personal tragedies experienced by Indigenous Australians who were affected by Australia’s policies of assimilation and state-mandated racism. Bound together like a book, Watson presents information she collected about her grandmother and great-grandmother from government files in the Queensland State archives. This work invokes the fears that Aboriginal people lived with under the ‘Queensland Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’ which came into force in 1897 and gravely restricted the movements and basic civil rights of Indigenous peoples in Queensland. These fears included being sent away to missions such as the infamous Palm Island and being incarcerated or permanently separated from family, friends, and home.

### **2.3 Focus on education**

While the variety of works included in *Culture Warriors* effectively create awareness and an understanding of the diversity of contemporary Indigenous Australian art, the NGA extended its goal to develop a better understanding of contemporary Indigenous art practice in Australia beyond the exhibition itself. In addition to the exhibition, the NGA developed educational programs and tools to further the public’s understanding of the exhibition and create additional

awareness of Indigenous art at the Gallery. These included wall texts, room cards, audioguides, a pamphlet, guided tours, an exhibition catalogue and an education resource kit.

In a clear departure from the sparing information provided by the wall texts or labels that habitually accompany works of art in galleries, in its presentation of *Culture Warriors* the NGA offers visitors insightful quotes and detailed explanations for works by each artist. Since it is sometimes difficult to read these wall texts when the gallery is filled with other visitors, the NGA provided room cards with the same information that individuals could consult while walking around and looking at the works of art at their leisure. For example, the wall text and room card for Ricky Maynard and his work *Coming home* (2007) goes as follows:

I am by nature a deep thinker, yet find it hard to articulate my thoughts, although sometimes I go overboard. I know you should not tell people too much, but this work has a very clear intent anyway – of re-claiming our own.

Ricky Maynard, 2007

The work of Ricky Maynard, one of Australia's leading documentary photographers, and a master printer, is an elegy to his Tasmanian Aboriginal ancestors and others who have suffered. His exquisitely printed, contemplative series *Portrait of a distant land* 2005-07, which comprises ten silver gelatin images of Tasmanian Aboriginal sites, transfixes the viewer with that which cannot be seen, only imagined. The sweep of sky conjures up the windswept landscape of the main island and its surrounds. The lone image depicting a person represents the continuity of cultural affirmation in a quietly dignified and profound stance.

### **Coming home**

I can remember coming here as a boy in old wooden boats to be taught by my grandparents and my parents. I'll be 57 this year and I have missed only one year when my daughter Leanne was born. Mutton birding is my life. To me it's a gathering of our fellas where we sit and yarn, we remember and we honour all of those birders who have gone before us. Sometimes I just stand and look out across these beautiful islands remembering my people and I know I'm home. It makes me proud to be a strong Tasmanian black man. This is something that they can never take away from me.

Murray Mansell, Big Dog Island, Bass Strait, 2005<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous art triennial '07 Culture Warriors*, Room 3 text, (Canberra: NGA, 2007), from files of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art department at the NGA. Murray Mansell is the individual depicted in the photograph entitled *Coming home*, 2007.

The wall texts and room cards provided for *Culture Warriors* provide a significant amount of information yet are geared towards a mature audience and are not meant for all visitors to the exhibition. Responding to the need of material for a younger audience the NGA created *ARTIMALS*, a pamphlet for children and youth visiting the exhibition. *ARTIMALS* includes colour reproductions of nine details of works in the exhibition that are accompanied by short descriptive texts, questions and looking activities. For example, the text accompanying Dennis Nona's bronze sculpture *Ubirikubiri* explains that *Ubirikubiri* is a story and dance of the Torres Strait Islanders and is adapted from Papua New Guinea. The story goes:

A girl wanted a pet but not a puppy or a piglet. Her father caught a baby crocodile that she named Ubirikubiri. The father went on a journey and forgot to look after it. When he returned the crocodile grabbed him and carried him to the river on its back. The girl pleaded with the crocodile to return her father but it would not.<sup>44</sup>

The text goes on to state that “this story reminds us that animals taken from their natural environment must be looked after and treated properly.”<sup>45</sup> At the end of the text, students are prompted to engage with the work and “search the crocodile's body to find the pets the daughter did not want.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to providing written texts that visitors could consult in the gallery spaces, guided tours of the exhibition were also offered to the public. Approaching this habitual task in a new way, the NGA developed an Indigenous Awareness and Guiding Program especially for the exhibition. The overall aim of the Indigenous Awareness and Guiding Program developed for *Culture Warriors* was to build knowledge and awareness within institutions for the staff and volunteers who present information to the public. The program was a first for the NGA who had never organized or held such an awareness program for staff or volunteers before. It was

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<sup>44</sup> NGA, *ARTIMALS*, pamphlet (Canberra: NGA, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

designed and implemented in two parts: The first part of the program enabled staff at the NGA to work with the Indigenous curators in their ATSI Art Department. The aim of this internal collaboration and dialogue was to increase awareness of Australian Indigenous culture amongst all NGA staff. The second part of the program was to enable Indigenous curators, educators and guides from the NGA to work with staff at the travelling venues. This training was offered to “develop knowledge and strategies to incorporate [cultural] awareness in [the venue’s] programming associated with the exhibition.”<sup>47</sup>

The awareness program conducted at the National Gallery of Australia was offered to all members of its staff and to the NGA voluntary guides. The training session was designed as an open forum to increase the staff’s understanding of the Triennial exhibition and help them feel more comfortable in talking about Indigenous Australian art and culture in the course of their duties. With specific references to issues addressed in *Culture Warriors*, the training session focused on:

- Indigenous perspectives of Australian history
- Terminology in discussing Indigenous art and cultures
- Pronunciation of names and words
- Customs and laws that Indigenous people live by
- Regional differences between Indigenous people
- The difference between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In turn, the Indigenous Cultural Awareness and Guide Program developed for the travelling venues consisted of a two day training program. The first day of training was conducted by an external Indigenous Awareness consultant from the venue’s local area and consisted of an introduction to Australian Indigenous cultures while providing a solid contextual background for the second day of training which would focus on the exhibition. The second day

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<sup>47</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors: Acquittal Report for Australia Council*, (Canberra: NGA, 2008), 9.

was led by NGA staff and volunteers and featured an in-depth discussion of the works of art in the exhibition with references being made to Indigenous Australian history and aspects of Indigenous cultures. This was followed by a workshop for the venue's guides led by Peter Naumann, Head of Education and Public Programs at the NGA. Through the various discussions and activities held at the travelling venues, the guides received training on the same issues as at the NGA training session listed above.

Further to its commitment of presenting quality information to the public, the NGA produced a 245 page scholarly soft-bound full colour exhibition catalogue for *Culture Warriors*. First published in 2007 featuring a photograph from Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser's *Colour Blinded* series (2005) on the cover, a revised edition of the catalogue – where all text errata were corrected, and which features Richard Bell's *Australian Art it's an Aboriginal Thing* (2006) on the cover, was released in 2009. Besides changing the cover image and correcting textual errors, there are no differences between the two editions released. The need for the second edition largely arose from the successful sales of the first edition of which only 3500 copies were printed.

The catalogue contains forewords to the triennial and exhibition from the Director, Chairman and sponsor and features a curatorial essay by Brenda L Croft entitled "Cannot buy my soul". Following her essay is a collection of essays dedicated to the 'Big Guns' presented in the exhibition; Jean Baptiste Aputimi, Philip Gudthaykudthay, John Mawurndjul, Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO, and Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr. These are followed by essays dedicated to each of the remaining artists shown in the exhibition. In addition to featuring scholarly essays for each artist, the catalogue includes colour photographs of at least three works by each artist in the exhibition alongside a quote that expresses the artist's voice. In the 'project

outcomes' listed in the exhibition's acquittal report for the Australia Council for the Arts, the NGA states that the publication and distribution of the exhibition catalogue will "increase exposure of Australia's Indigenous Contemporary artists nationally and internationally"<sup>48</sup> in addition to being a "significant publication that will exist independently of the exhibition".<sup>49</sup> The catalogue acts at once as a record of the exhibition and an educational source of information about the artists and their works. It allows *Culture Warriors* to exist beyond the timeframe of its presentation in Australia and Washington and be accessed by a broader audience that does not necessarily live in Australia. As Rupert Myers succinctly states in his foreword to the catalogue:

A major component of the National Indigenous Art Triennial is this monograph. Such publications provide enduring records of documentation, discussion and criticism, and are an integral part of the contemporary visual arts sector. They promote and give international and national visibility to living Australian artists and their work. They are an education resource and contribute to the development of audience, to marketing the work and to advocacy for the whole arts sector."<sup>50</sup>

The catalogue is an extensive resource that offers in depth information relating to the exhibition, the curatorial premise, the artist and their works. It complements and supplements all other educational tools developed by the NGA for *Culture Warriors*.

Similar to the catalogue, the website produced by the NGA for the Triennial provides a record of the exhibition, gives international and national visibility to living Australian artists and their work, and acts as an educational resource.<sup>51</sup> The website continues to be active today and can be accessed by anyone connected to the internet. It features a mixture of information drawn from the catalogue, audioguide and Education Resource kit. Featuring a brief introduction by Brenda L Croft, the website makes available artist biographies, images of the works in the

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<sup>48</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, acquittal report, (Canberra: NGA, 2008), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Rupert Myers, "Chairman's Foreword" in *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, VIII.

<sup>51</sup> The NGA's website for the National Indigenous Art Triennial is available at: <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/>.

exhibition, an audio description of each work, listings of events related to the exhibition, transcripts of speeches made at the opening ceremony, pdf versions of the *ARTIMALS* pamphlet, the *National Indigenous Art Triennial '07: Education Resource*, in addition to selling copies of the exhibition catalogue. As the NGA developed several different educational tools for *Culture Warriors*, this thesis focuses on the *National Indigenous Art Triennial '07: Education Resource* designed for teachers and students as a companion to the exhibition as an example as to how Australia's leading artistic institution disseminates Indigenous art today and encourages knowledge and awareness through education.

### **3. National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource**

The *National Indigenous Art Triennial '07: Education Resource* is a 65-page educational kit for use by students of primary and secondary level education. The kit contains thirty full-colour reproductions of works in the exhibition, one for each artist, and a page of explanatory text for each work in addition to primary and secondary school activities. Copies of the Education Resource were mailed and handed out to educators who had requested copies however the kit was also made available online on the Triennial's website in a downloadable pdf format which can be obtained by anyone.<sup>52</sup>

Outlining a variety of classroom uses for the material such as the study of Contemporary politics, the kit also suggests themes for educators to discuss with their students. These include;

- Aboriginal moiety and kinship systems
- Indigenous spiritual beliefs
- Power and responsibility within Indigenous communities
- Importance of ceremony

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<sup>52</sup> The education kit is available at <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Default.cfm?MnuID=3&GalID=EDU>.

- Artistic traditions
- The power of art to inform and change opinion
- Political and social issues

The explanatory texts that accompany each of the thirty works illustrated in the kit cover a wide range of topics. Through individual stories about the artists and the works, students learn about many themes addressed in the exhibition such as; Indigenous Australian history, contemporary political issues, Indigenous arts practices, and Indigenous culture and spirituality (see chart in Appendix A). Some of the more confrontational or explicit works presented in *Culture Warriors* are not included in the kit largely due to the targeted school-aged audience and the intent for the kit to be used in a classroom setting. Despite this, the kit does tackle many of the underlying themes referred to by the artists in their works. Designed for use at school (ideally following a class visit to the exhibition), the kit is unable to address all of the works and subjects presented in the exhibition and is thus limited to a selection of thirty works.

The kit's thirty texts follow a pattern that provides a certain amount of consistency in the information being communicated about each work. The information provided in each text includes; a visual description or visual analysis of the work, the significance of the work/ an explanation of the subject matter (be it personal to the artist, cultural, political, an artistic statement, etc...), and biographical information about the artist (including information such as date of birth, local region/ place of residence, artistic achievements and interests, awards and exhibition history, works held in collections, overseas exhibitions and achievements outside of Australia). For example, the text accompanying Trevor 'Turbo' Brown's work *Koala and Babies* (2005) (fig. 5) begins with a visual description that states:



The images of a mother koala and two babies dominate this painting. The two babies, cut off by the green border below, can be seen nuzzling their mother. The mother has a broad white front and is also outlined by a white line, which makes the figure stand out from the yellow and green background. Her red eyes and mouth add a comical and lively quality to the painting. The brushstrokes are energetic and spontaneous, creating illusions of fur, grass, and foliage.

This visual description is followed by an explanation of the significance of the work which begins with a statement by the artist:

“When I paint I feel like I’m in the Dreamtime and can see all the animals and birds that live there.” This statement by the artist makes us realise that his images of animals are more than illustrations. They refer to another time before European invasion. Since then, over-grazing, erosion and environmental changes have endangered the habitat for these animals.

Finally, the text is concluded with biographical information about the artist and states:

Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown, born in 1967, is a Latje Latje man from Mildura, Victoria. His nickname is derived from his breakdancing ability and the speed with which he makes his paintings.<sup>53</sup>

The thirty works discussed in the kit all follow the above-mentioned format however the amount of information pertaining to the artists and the works varies from text to text. In some instances, the visual aspects of works are emphasized while other teachings are sometimes secondary. The texts weave together pieces of information surrounding each of the thirty works of art yet in doing so also assume a certain degree of pre-existing knowledge amongst readers. This can be seen in the type of vocabulary employed by the NGA in various texts. For example, in its explanation of the context surrounding Ricky Maynard’s work *Coming home* the accompanying text includes the word Euro-centric:

Most of the history we read has been written by Europeans and the artist is interested in challenging this point of view. Many history books relate the story of the alleged

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<sup>53</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007), 8.

‘extermination’ of Tasmanian Aboriginal people by the European settlers, through disease, massacre, and transportation to other islands... [Ricky Maynard’s] personal viewpoint as a local Indigenous artist adds strength to the idea that there is another history of survival to counteract the Euro-centric idea of eradication.<sup>54</sup>

This particular text does not explain to its readers what the term Euro-centric means as it does in other instances with words such as *ochres* and *yawkyawk*. It assumes that its readers know what Euro-centric means.

The thirty texts in the kit are presented in alphabetical order by the artists’ last names, except for the text on Julie Dowling’s work *Walyer* which for unknown reasons has been placed at the very end. The kit does not group together artists or their works by region, age, style or medium. Each text is followed by two interactive sections, one for primary level students and the other for secondary level students. The interactive sections include a question for discussion, a looking activity, and an artistic or cultural research activity. For example, the section for primary students that accompanies Trevor ‘Turbo’ Brown’s work features the discussion question; “Why is the artist called ‘Turbo’ Brown?”<sup>55</sup> The looking activity; “find pairs of objects in the paintings,”<sup>56</sup> and the activity/research question; “find out about koalas. Do they often have twins?”<sup>57</sup> In contrast, the section for secondary students asks students to “discuss the rarity of images of the koala in Aboriginal art.”<sup>58</sup> The looking activity asks; “How has the artist made this image seem powerful and possibly related to the Dreaming?”<sup>59</sup> While, finally, the activity/research section asks the students to “research the habitat of koalas and how they have

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>55</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007): 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

been affected by European settlement.”<sup>60</sup> These complementary classroom activities serve to engage students with the exhibition on several levels – culturally, historically and artistically – and can be used in the teaching of a variety of classroom subjects such as social studies, arts and crafts, history, and politics.

The texts for each of the thirty artists featured in *Culture Warriors* present and explain pertinent cultural information pertaining to Indigenous people and touch upon important aspects such as the Dreaming, Ancestral Creation Stories, ceremony, custodianship, moieties and kinship, symbols, traditional styles, and the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices. This information not only helps to explain the personal connection between an artist and his or her work, but also the subject matter and intentions behind a work. The texts effectively generate awareness of the differences between regions, languages, beliefs, local customs and practices and ultimately aid the public in understanding the cultural aspects addressed by the artists in *Culture Warriors*.

### **3.1 Aboriginal Moiety and Kinship Systems**

The text accompanying artist Christine Christophersen’s work *The past, the present, the future* (2006) explains that, “Moieties are an important and complex system of family and group relationships in Aboriginal communities.”<sup>61</sup> Aboriginal clan groups in Australia are divided by the moiety system into two groups; the ‘sun side’ and the ‘shade side’. Clan members are born into either one of the groups inheriting their affiliation from their mothers. Moiety is an exogamous system that prevents marriage between close relatives. The system dictates that an individual must marry outside his or her group by marrying someone of the opposite moiety.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 9.

Moieties are further sub-divided into four to eight 'skin groups' which are based on the skin names of an individual's parents to indicate the sub-section to which they belong. In some instances, skin names are used as personal identifiers like someone's first name in English.

While moiety defines an individual and dictates certain aspects of family and community relationships, kinship is the all-encompassing system that determines how people relate to each other in Aboriginal society. Forming a part of Aboriginal Law, kinship determines peoples' roles, responsibilities, and obligations in relation to one another, and governs many aspects of everyday behaviour. Beyond dictating familial responsibility and interaction, further rules defined by the kinship system extend to dancing, ceremonies, land, camp layout and choosing hunting parties. This social aspect of Aboriginal culture is directly addressed through the presentation of Christophersen's work in the exhibition. The Education Resource explains that Christophersen's *The past, the present, the future* is "part of [the] *Kinship series* in which she investigates identity, belonging, and relationship to country and to each other in Aboriginal society."<sup>62</sup> In this work from the series, the artist directly references moieties and skin groups through the application of colour in the central geometrical shapes. Each coloured shape denotes a skin group in the artist's language group while the elliptical chain-link connecting the shapes references the work's title and the continuous aspects of the social system.

Though it is not mentioned in the Education Resource, it is important to note that each Aboriginal clan in Australia is in effect a separate language group made up of people sharing the same language, customs, and general laws. This means that social organization and the complex set of rules determined by the system of kinship vary between each clan. Aboriginal clans in Australia are not lead by chiefs and are generally not war-making groups. The systems of kinship

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<sup>62</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 9.

used by Aboriginal clan groups in Australia are similar to those used by Indigenous Nations in North America in that they define relationships within and between generations, and through both mothers' and father's lines of descent across many generations.

### **3.2 Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs**

Indigenous spirituality is an important aspect of ATSI culture that is communicated in this exhibition. As can be seen in many of the works included in the exhibition, the land is a vibrant spiritual landscape for Indigenous Australians. The Dreaming and Ancestral Creation Stories – the basis of Aboriginal spirituality and Aboriginal cosmologies – are addressed in fourteen of the thirty works described in the Education Resource. Although today it is a term somewhat overused in Australian popular literature, 'The Dreaming' is an important component of Aboriginal cosmologies and refers to the time of world creation, the ancestral past, and the place where Ancestral and Creation Beings reside. The Dreaming can also be described as laws, customary stories, or a series of social structures, behavioural rules and traditional ceremonies that ensure the continuity of life and land and ultimately the continuity and prosperity of the people. The Dreaming is a code of life that has been passed down through countless generations.<sup>63</sup> As expressed by artist Trevor 'Turbo' Brown in the text accompanying his work *Koala and Babies* (2005); "When I paint I feel like I'm in the Dreamtime and can see all the animals and birds that live there."<sup>64</sup> Here, 'The Dreamtime', as used by Brown, refers to time before European invasion and modern-day destruction of animal habitats.

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<sup>63</sup> Descriptions of 'The Dreaming' have been drawn from a variety of sources including *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Sylvia Kleinert and Margot Neale, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40-41, and the Australia Government's Culture Portal at <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/>

<sup>64</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 8.

Related to The Dreaming, Ancestral Creation Stories are tribal stories about the creation of the world when Ancestral or Creation Beings created people, the landscape, and aspects of the environment. Each Indigenous clan group has its own deities with an overlap of beliefs. No one deity covers all of Australia. Although the existence of different deities is not directly addressed in the kit, it is implied through the presentation of a variety of deities from different regions in Australia as seen in Jimmy Baker's *Katatjika* (2007) and Philip Gudthaykudthay's *Wagilag Sisters, with child* (2007).

Artist Jimmy Baker's *Katatjika* is the depiction of an underground rock-hole where Malilu, an Ancestral Being from the *Tjukurpa* (creation period) is sitting, frightened and hiding in the safety of a cave. Though it is difficult for someone without local knowledge to identify the story being told in this painting, to an Australian audience familiar with Western Desert art and dot paintings, the painting clearly defines a significant site with paths etched by ancestral beings in the landscape. Jimmy Baker, a senior member of the Pitjantjatjara people, is a *ngangkari* (healer) and is the senior custodian of the stories attached to *Katatjika*, the place depicted in this painting.

In Philip Gudthaykudthay's *Wagilag Sisters, with child* (2007) a major ancestral creation story is referenced by the three figures represented in the painting, the Wagilag Sisters and child.

The text in the Education Resource explains the story as follows:

In the distant past two Wagilag Sisters were travelling with their children across the countryside to a waterhole at Mirarrmina. The younger sister accidentally let blood fall into the waterhole, the python that lived there was furious and swallowed the sisters and the children. Storms raged and the first wet season took place. Disturbed by the flood all the other sacred pythons stood up, and spoke with voices like thunder. The Mirarrmina python confessed to swallowing the sisters and fell to earth making a huge depression

in the ground. The first dry season then occurred as a strong wind blew across the land.<sup>65</sup>

This ancestral creation story from the Liyagalawumirr people of Ramingining in the Northern Territory of Australia serves to describe the coming of the first monsoon. Though not addressed in this kit aimed at primary and secondary level students, this ancestral story also recounts the incestuous rape of the youngest Wagilag sister by a man in her own moiety. The story serves to explain the loss of women's religious power base through the theft of their sacred objects by man. By presenting a variety of Ancestral Stories and Beings from different clan groups and regions, the exhibition and the companion Education Resource effectively communicate difference in the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal peoples. In addition, they reinforce the fact that Ancestral Beings and their stories belong to the physical, spiritual and ceremonial character of the land and its people<sup>66</sup>.

### **3.3 Importance of Ceremony**

Another aspect of ATSI culture communicated through the kit is that of Ceremony. To this day, ceremonies are an important part of Indigenous life and a variety of ceremonies and rituals continue to be practiced across Australia. Spiritual practices incorporating chanting, singing and dancing are commonly interwoven with daily life to invoke Ancestral Beings and ensure good supplies of rain and food. While larger ceremonies are often held for the initiation of boys and girls into adulthood. During these ceremonies (which sometimes last for weeks) there is singing, dancing, storytelling, and the display of body decoration and ceremonial objects. Ceremonies also take place upon the death of a person. These ceremonies and their

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<sup>65</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

accompanying rituals vary greatly throughout Australia. Three works included in the Education Resource make direct reference to this important aspect of Indigenous culture.

First, Jean Baptiste Aputimi's *Yirrikapayi* (2007) draws from the artist's Tiwi heritage through the use of triangles, rectangles, and squares, which are shapes from customary body designs used in Tiwi ceremonies. The kit explains that; "Traditional Tiwi people painted *jilamara* or triangle and square designs on their bodies with sacred ochres for ceremonies. These designs disguised their bodies from the evil spirits of the dead."<sup>67</sup>

In his paintings, carvings and sculptures, artist Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr draws from the traditions of his ceremonial group Winchanam. As described in the kit, his work *Face Painting* (2006) directly references the patterns and colours of body painting used by Wik people in their performances of the *Kalben* (Flying Fox Story Place) and *Walkaln-aw* (Bonefish Story Place) ceremonies. As explained in the kit; "*Kalben* is associated with the first stages of an initiation ceremony and is the story of a group of young initiates who disobeyed the elders by hunting and killing more flying foxes than they needed."<sup>68</sup> In the biographical section of the text, it is explained that "[Pambegan Jr's] involvement with ceremonies began when he was a child; he learnt how to carve and how to perform traditional ceremonies from his father, who was also an important artist and ceremonial leader."<sup>69</sup>

The third work referencing ceremony included in the Education Resource is Christian Bumbarra Thompson's *The Sixth Mile*. This six-minute long DVD presents a customary Bidjara greeting ceremony between the artist and his father and is explained as a "private ceremony made public [...] which reveals the contemporary nature of Indigenous ceremony."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 25.



Through the texts provided for the three above-mentioned works, the Education Resource communicates the importance and variety of ceremonies among Indigenous Australian cultures. In addition, the kit effectively positions ceremony as an integral part of the past, present, and future. Through explanations relating to ceremonial traditions and the roles of senior ceremonial leaders, ceremony is positioned as a tradition from the past. While in the modern-day portrayal of a greeting ceremony in Bumbarra Thompson's work, ceremony is clearly positioned as part of the present. While finally, explanations pertaining to the practice of initiation ceremonies demonstrate the continuity of these traditions well into the future, being passed on from generation to generation.

### **3.4 Power and Responsibility within Indigenous communities**

Another underlying aspect of Indigenous culture communicated in the kit is that of custodial responsibility. Custodians retain important cultural knowledge for their communities including sacred and secret knowledge. As explained in the text accompanying Jimmy Baker's *Katatjika* (2006); "Baker has the authority to paint this site because he is the senior custodian of the stories attached to it."<sup>71</sup> The responsibility of custodianship is reserved for senior elders, both male and female. Through intergenerational practice, custodians maintain and transfer knowledge that relates to the natural environment, peoples, sacred and secret business, and daily life on their land. This knowledge can be communicated through dance, story, song, ceremony and visual art like painting, printmaking, drawing, ceramics and the more contemporary mediums of video and film. There are two fields of Aboriginal knowledge: the secret-sacred and the everyday. Aboriginal law prescribes that secret knowledge must be concealed from the

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<sup>71</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 3.

uninitiated. In order to represent sacred knowledge and sites, artists must first seek permission from a custodian responsible for that knowledge or sacred place.

A senior member of the Pitjantjatjara peoples, Jimmy Baker is custodian of many stories including *Kipara* (Bush Turkey), *Kalaya* (Emu), *Pilati* (Sacred Rockhole Site) and *Wunampi Kutjara* (Two Serpent's Men Creation Story). As explained in the kit; "Baker began painting in 2004 because in his own words he 'wanted to put down stories for the younger generation and to teach you fellas'."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Kuninjku artist John Mawurndjul is involved in teaching and mentoring a younger generation of Kuninjku artists. An experienced artist who has been active since the late 1970s and has become well known on the international stage, Mawurndjul concentrates on painting his land and his *djang* (sacred places) while finding new styles and ways to interpret them. He is a custodian of important Kuninjku places such as Milmilngkan, Kakodbebuldi, Mukkamukka, Dilebang and Mumeka and grants permission to other artists who seek to paint and interpret these sites. Included in the Education Resource is a text of his work *Mardayin design at Dilebang* (2006) (fig. 6) which explains some of the meanings associated to this abstract composition: "[Mawurndjul] uses a fine *rarrk* (crosshatching) to create a zigzag pattern of light and dark wedges across the length of the bark. The rippling effect of the horizontal shapes suggests the movement of water in the Billabong at Milmilngkan, and the power of the Ancestral Beings that live in the water."<sup>73</sup> In the biographical section of the text, Mawurndjul's role as custodian is described in the closing sentence which states that; "Although his status as an international artist requires him to travel widely, he is also involved in teaching

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 15.

and mentoring a younger generation of Kuninjku artists who seek his permission to paint particular subjects or to develop their own style.”<sup>74</sup>

### 3.5 Artistic Traditions

Indigenous symbols used in contemporary ATSI art are the direct continuation of artistic traditions developed over millennia. The symbols used today are the same as those found on cave paintings and rock engravings that were executed tens of thousands of years ago. As can be seen in the works presented in *Culture Warriors*, customary styles and the use of symbols in Aboriginal art vary greatly from one area to another. The customary practices of rock art, *rarrk* (crosshatching), and x-ray art come from Western Arnhem Land in Australia’s Northern Territory. X-ray art is a term used to characterize works that typically depict the internal and external organs of human and animal subjects. Further south, from the deserts of Western and Central Australia come the traditions of dot and sand paintings.

Works by Western Arnhem Land artist Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek included in *Culture Warriors* showcase the tradition of rock art in addition to x-ray art and *rarrk*. In the text accompanying his work *Dulklorrelorrkeng and Wakkewakken* (2005), it is explained that “[Nadjamerrek] is the last of the painters of the magnificent rock art galleries of the region. His paintings, with their stark figures outlined against plain backgrounds, remind us of his rock painting tradition.”<sup>75</sup> Also included in the exhibition is *Kurdukadj (Emu)* (2004), an example of Lofty’s colourful x-ray art. Using the same decorative hatching as in *Dulklorrelorrkeng and Wakkewakken*, in *Kurdukadj (Emu)* Lofty has carefully depicted the internal and external organs

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 18.

of the emu creating an effect similar to that of the modern-day x-ray. Called *rarrk*, the crosshatching technique used by Lofty to fill his subjects is a clan-specific pattern. This technique can also be seen in works by artists John Mawurndjul and Philip Gudthaykudthay shown in the exhibition. In the text accompanying John Mawurndjul's *Mardayin design at Dilebang* (2006) the artist's use of *rarrk* is described as follows:

He uses a fine *rarrk* (crosshatching) to create a zigzag pattern of light and dark wedges across the length of the bark. [...] In this bark painting, John Mawurndjul is creating a completely abstract composition that hums with the ancestral light and energy that he is tapping into through his intricate and complex *rarrk*.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, artist Philip Gudthaykudthay's use of *rarrk* in his work *Wagilag Sisters, with Child* (2007) is described in the following way:

The background of the painting is left bare, whereas other parts of the figures and animals are decorated with finely painted lines that cross in a coloured grid pattern called *rarrk*. This technique is very characteristic of Philip Gudthaykudthay's work. His fine like *rarrk* painting with silvery white, brown and brilliant yellow creates an energy that makes the surface of the painting vibrate or 'sing'. For the artist and his people this invokes a connection to an ancestral presence.<sup>77</sup>

Although the above-mentioned works by Nadjamerrek, Mawurndjul, and Gudthaykudthay all have *rarrk* (crosshatching), stylistically they are all quite different and unique. Against a black background, the figures outlined in Nadjamerrek's work are stark and convey feelings of terror appropriate of the evil spirit he has depicted. Mawurndjul's composition of *rarrk* is abstract and conveys the rippling and movement of water. In contrast, Gudthaykudthay, who uses the entire surface of the canvas to paint three giant figures (the Wagilag sisters and child) fills any remaining surface on the canvas with the depictions of a python, five goannas, sharp triangles and circular shapes. Though these works all employ the tradition of *rarrk*, the many differences between them serve to highlight the individuality of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 11.

each artist's style whilst positioning the artists' use of tradition as part of the continuum of Indigenous visual innovation.

Further showcasing the continuation of tradition with contemporary visual innovation is the exhibition's inclusion of a variety of dot paintings. Included in the Education Resource are two colourful landscapes that employ this desert tradition. First, *Katajika* (2006) by Jimmy Baker uses brilliant red, orange, black, white, and yellow dots to illustrate the shapes, patterns, and geography of this sacred site. While Maringka Baker's *Kuru Ala* (2007) is a landscape of lush green, yellow, white, and red ribbons made up of individual dots that emulate the artist's local grasslands. In both works, the viewer's attention is drawn to prominent black circles, each surrounded by white or coloured dots that make them stand out from the rest of the landscape. The black circle is in fact an Indigenous symbol that represents a waterhole. As explained in the text accompanying Maringka Baker's work;

In the dry season, knowledge of waterholes is essential for survival. The black circles in this landscape painting are the waterholes, but they have a deeper significance for the artist. They are the sites where Ancestral Beings were born, rested, fought or played. Knowledge of these sacred sites and the authority to relate these stories rests with the Indigenous custodians of the land.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to addressing the importance of water in Western Desert culture, this text explains that artists relate stories about the land and their ancestors in their dot paintings. In *Kuru Ala*, "Maringka Baker has recorded the Seven Sisters Creation Story"<sup>79</sup> while in *Katajita*, Jimmy Baker portrays the Ancestral Being Malilu hiding in the safety of a cave. Incorporating the symbol for water in their works, these artists demonstrate how Indigenous symbols, a pictorial form of language, are utilized by artists and local custodians to tell stories and record

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<sup>78</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007): 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

important and sacred knowledge. R. Lewis, author of books such as *Elder Law in Australia* (2004) and *A Beginner's Guide to Australian Aboriginal Words: A first step to cross-cultural understanding* (2003), describes these symbols in his book *Beginner's Guide to Australian Aboriginal Art* (2008) (see Appendix B for examples of symbols and their meanings).

In the above-mentioned works by Jimmy Baker and his cousin-in-law, Maringka Baker, water is an important theme that is often portrayed by artists from desert regions through the use of symbols. In her work *All the Jila* (2006), artist Jan Billycan portrays *jila* (waterholes) on eight vibrantly painted panels using oval and rounded geometric shapes to represent waterholes. Born around 1930, Billycan grew up in the Great Sandy Desert in the north of Western Australia. As explained in the text accompanying this work, “The subject of the painting is the living water that makes surviving in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia possible. Water appears as springs and also in wells and each striped shape may relate to a particular water source.”<sup>80</sup> Water not only represents survival in the arid desert regions of Australia, but also life and the time of creation. For Billycan all are one. Billycan is a traditional healer with the ability to ‘see’ inside the human body. Her paintings represent both the land and the human body. In the text this aspect of her work is explained as follows; “Her landscape paintings may refer to human organs as well as water and sand dunes. A living waterhole can also be interpreted as a liver or kidney as without these organs people would not survive. It is as if she is painting the landscape as a living, breathing being.”<sup>81</sup> The explanations provided in this companion text help students learn about the existence of multiple meanings in a work of art while also being reminded of the necessity of water for the creation and survival of life, and its overall importance in Indigenous culture and spirituality. Due to its very necessity, water is often symbolized by artists in their paintings. Yet

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>81</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 6.

many other symbols are also frequently used (see Appendix B for examples of customary desert symbols). Artists representing their Dreamings often paint trails of dots that symbolize the paths of their Dreamings. Certain arrangements of lines and dots can represent man, woman, child and family. These symbols allow artists to relate stories to audiences and enable them to record customary stories to pass on to future generations.

### **3.5.1 Maintenance and revival of customary arts practices**

Another important aspect with regards to artistic traditions addressed in *Culture Warriors* and the companion Education Resource is the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices. The exhibition includes a large variety of mediums and techniques which showcase the breadth of contemporary Indigenous art being created in Australia today. As already discussed above, the exhibition includes works on bark and canvas, examples of dot paintings, rarrk, and x-ray painting in addition to sculpture, photography, text-based art, installation, video, and various fibre works.

Although many of artists represented in the exhibition are shown to work with modern mediums and address contemporary political and social issues, the inclusion of a number of bark paintings, sculptures, fibre works, and paintings on canvas using customary symbols and imagery that have spiritual significances emphasize the fact that ATSI art is the oldest continuing art tradition in the world. The important continuation of customary arts practices is directly addressed in the companion Education Resource as is made evident in the text accompanying Anniebell Marrngamarrnga's work *Yawkyawk mother and babies* (2006) (fig. 7). As explained in the text, this work is:

Made from fibre from pandanus leaves, which is collected by women, usually after the monsoon season [...] the leaf fibres are dyed with natural dyes made from certain roots, berries, and bark. The frame, which gives the work its shape, is made from bamboo [...] this is the same weaving technique used to make twine bags. Techniques in weaving coiled baskets, dilly and string bags, fish traps and mats have been passed down for thousands of years in Arnhem Land.<sup>82</sup>

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga is a member of the Kuninjku people of Western Arnhem Land. She learned how to weave from her mother and how to paint from her father. Her favourite subject is the Yawkyawk which means ‘young woman’ or ‘young woman spirit being’ in the Kuninjku/ Kunwok language. In addition to explaining how this customary leaf fibre work is made, the text also explains the spiritual meaning associated with this work which originates from the region’s traditional ancestral and creation stories. It states:

Oral ancestral stories tell how during the time of creation these spirit beings, through a series of events and travels, turned into animal forms. These spirits are sometimes compared with the European idea of mermaid. They exist as spiritual beings living in freshwater streams and rock pools, particularly in stony country. Sometimes they leave the water and walk about the dry land at night. Today, the Kuninjku believe that *yawkyawks* are alive and well and living in freshwater sites in sacred locations.<sup>83</sup>

Through the texts accompanying works by the following fifteen artists; Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, Jimmy Baker, Marangka Baker, Jan Billycan, Philip Gudthaykudthay, Treahna Hamm, Anniebell Marrngamarrnga, John Mawurndjul, Lofty Nadjamerrek, Doreen Reid Nakamarra, Dennis Nona, Arthur Koo’ekka Pambegan Jr, Shane Pickett, Christian Bumarra Thompson, Owen Yalandja, and Gulumbu Yunupingu, one is able to see that half of the thirty works chosen for the Education Resource directly reference the continuation of ATSI traditions and customary arts practices.

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<sup>82</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.



Showcasing the continuation of tradition, Yorta Yorta artist Trehna Hamm's *Yabby* is a work woven from grasses with a coiled bundle technique that has been used to make fibre objects for thousands of generations in the south-east and southern regions of Australia. Representing Hamm's work in the Education Resource, *Yabby* showcases the continuation of customary arts practices by contemporary artists, yet unlike most other texts in the kit, the text accompanying *Yabby* also addresses another important work by Trehna Hamm which demonstrates the revival of a customary arts practice that has been dormant for over a century. Created especially for *Culture Warriors* as the artist's tribute to the exhibition's theme, *Barmah nurrtja biganga* (*Barmah Forest possum-skin cloak*) (2005) (fig. 8) is a possum-skin cloak as made by Yorta Yorta people before the mid 1800s. Today, of the original possum cloaks made over a century ago, there are only six known specimens in museums around the world. After seeing two of these cloaks in the collection of the Melbourne Museum in 1999, Hamm and two fellow Koori artists were prompted to recreate the cloaks and teach themselves the processes and skill involved in their making.

Cultural revival and the maintenance of traditions has been an important mission for many Indigenous people since the 1960s. The continued assertion of ATSI tradition and culture is directly connected to the recognition of Indigenous Australian rights, standing against the Eurocentric idea that Australia was terra nullius – a land without people or culture. In the text accompanying *Yabby*, the historical importance of Hamm's practice of cultural revival is explained:

[Hamm] has helped revive the traditional practice of making possum cloaks. Through research into the traditional incised designs on the possum cloaks she discovered stories about the animals of the Murray River plain, and the Ancestral Beings that emerge from the river. The artist's inspiration also comes from listening to Yorta Yorta elders relating stories from the past. In this way, Trehna Hamm's art defies the claim that the 'tide of history has washed away' (as stated

by a High Court judge in 1998) a connection between the Yorta Yorta people and their land and that it was a connection ‘not capable of revival’.<sup>84</sup>

In 1998, the Federal Court of Australia ruled against the Yorta Yorta people in their claim for land under the Native Title Act citing that the Yorta Yorta had not maintained unbroken contact with the land. Despite appeals, the decision made by the 1998 Federal Court ruling was upheld by the Australian High Court in 2002. Finally in 2004, a cooperative agreement was made between the Australian government and the Yorta Yorta people that included recognition of public land, rivers, and lakes throughout north-central Victoria. Even though the courts may not have sided with the Yorta Yorta people, the appeals led the Australian Government to act and acknowledge the important connection between the people and their land.

### **3.5.2 Torres Strait Islander Culture**

The Torres Strait Islands and their Indigenous inhabitants have long been grouped together with Aboriginal Australia for administrative reasons. Due to their small population and remote location, Torres Strait Islanders have largely remained in the shadow of Aboriginal Australians. Situated between the northern most tip of Australia and the coast of Papua New Guinea, the Torres Strait is dotted with over 100 islands, coral cays, reefs and sandbanks. Although they may often be grouped together with Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders actually have stronger cultural links to Papua New Guinea than they do to Australia. Melanesian by ethnic origin, Torres Strait Islanders were seafaring and trading peoples whose spirituality and customs reflected their dependence on the sea. Today, two thirds of all Torres Strait Islanders live on the mainland of Australia while the nineteen island communities of the Torres Strait have

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<sup>84</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 12.

a total population of approximately 8000 people which include 6000 Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people.

Seeing as *Culture Warriors* presented the work of thirty artists from all regions in Australia, the exhibition included three works by Dennis Nona, an artist from Badu in the Torres Strait Islands. Two of these works were shown in the travelling portion of the exhibition; the larger-than-life bronze sculpture of *Ubirikubiri*, and the print entitled *Yarwarr* (2007). Chosen for discussion in the Education Resource, *Ubirikubiri* brings together traditional carving designs and stories from the Torres Strait Islands. The designs are clan patterns and are also used by Nona in his linocut prints. As explained by Leilani Bin-Juda, Executive Officer of the ATSI Program at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra; “[Dennis Nona] diversified into the linocut prints that have set the tone for contemporary art and culture in the Torres Strait... Linocuts have become possibly the most popular and effective way of communicating cultural stories to audiences today.”<sup>85</sup> Telling these stories in an engaging way, Nona’s work gives audiences a greater understanding of Torres Strait Islander culture regardless of the medium he chooses to work with.

Nona’s work *Ubirikubiri* is made using the non-traditional medium of bronze. Nevertheless, as in the print *Yarwarr*, Nona has covered the entirety of the sculpture with delicate and complex patterns. These contemporary applications of traditional patterns and designs are reminiscent of the traditional wood carving learnt by Nona as a boy. As described in the companion text for this work, Nona’s *Ubirikubiri* is; “covered in very delicate and complex patterns. The black patterns are indented and look as if they are carved into the surface;

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<sup>85</sup> Leilani Bin-Juda, “Dennis Nona,” *Culture Warriors*, catalogue. (Canberra: NGA, 2007), 138.

surrounding these patterns are areas of smooth shining bronze.”<sup>86</sup> In relating the traditional story depicted by Nona in this work, the text explains that;

The legend of *Ubirikubiri* is from Papua New Guinea, the near neighbour of the Torres Strait Islands, and is the story of a father who offers his daughter a series of pets that she doesn't like until one day he brings home a baby crocodile. She names it *Ubirikubiri*. The crocodile grows up in captivity and is later neglected when the father travels away. When he returns, *Ubirikubiri*, hungry and neglected, kills him and carries him away to the river, and despite the daughter's pleas, *Ubirikubiri* refuses to return the man's body to her.<sup>87</sup>

Providing a visual connection between the story and Nona's sculpture of the crocodile carrying a man on its back, the text states that;

The man appears to be merging with the crocodile and the river it lives in... The man is clutching a spear and he has fish tails on his head and in place of his feet... The shapes of other animals, including a shovelhead shark, and a human are visible along the crocodile's sides. The designs interlock and weave themselves across the surface of the sculpture, almost as if they are moving, linking the crocodile and the man together.<sup>88</sup>

This text effectively describes how Nona has incorporated the customary narrative surrounding *Ubirikubiri* into a contemporary sculpture. While appealing to what the audience is able to see and infer from the sculpture, the text informs students about Torres Strait Islander culture in a general way, alluding to clan patterns, wood carving, island culture, and the visual interpretation of traditional stories. While as an artist, Nona clearly merits to be included in *Culture Warriors*, his inclusion as the sole Torres Strait Islander artist can also be seen as tokenistic. Although the exhibition catalogue touts that “the exposure of visual arts from the Torres Strait to national and international audiences has increased dramatically over the past few years”<sup>89</sup>, the fact that there is only one artist of Torres Strait Islander heritage in this exhibition serves as a statement that

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<sup>86</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue. (Canberra: NGA, 2007), 138.

Torres Strait Islander cultures continue to be represented at the peripheries of Indigenous Australian culture.

In this analysis of the cultural content discussed in the Education Resource we have seen how students are taught about the Dreaming, Ancestral Creations Stories, ceremony, custodianship, moieties and kinship, symbols, traditional styles, in addition to the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices in relation to the exhibition *Culture Warriors*. Additionally, as exemplified by the text accompanying Treahna Hamm's *Yabby*, students learn how the continued expression of ATSI culture has played an important part in campaigns for land rights, social justice, and overall equality in Australian history. While finally, through the discussion of Dennis Nona's work, students are taught about Torres Strait Islander culture and how traditional stories can be interpreted and communicated through contemporary art.

### **3.6 Communicating ATSI historical information**

In addition to teaching students about ATSI cultures, the texts included in the Education Resource also address historical information pertaining to Indigenous Australians addressed by the artists in the exhibition. The manner in which the NGA has chosen to address Australian history is very important to the success of *Culture Warriors*. In choosing to represent multiple voices in the exhibition, Croft managed to present aspects of Australian history in a straightforward, approachable, and personal manner, carefully tiptoeing around what some call a black-armband view of history<sup>90</sup>, while addressing very important parts of Indigenous Australian

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<sup>90</sup> The Phrase 'black armband view of history' was coined by Professor Geoffrey Blainey, an Australian historian, in 1993. Blainey used the phrase in the context where the acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian history meant for him that Australian history had moved from an unduly positive story to an unduly negative view – that of the 'black armband'. Blainey's phrase references 'the history wars'; an ongoing public debate over the interpretation of Australia's history and its colonisation.

history in a poignant and informational way that clearly contest Eurocentric views of Australian history.

Although made between 2004 and 2007, many works in *Culture Warriors* address important persons, ideas, and events in Australian history from before colonization in 1788 to today. As explained in the Education Resource, the variety of subjects matters addressed in *Culture Warriors* include Aboriginal resistance fighters, the alleged extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the introduction of Christianity, Palm Island, mission life, the documentation and display of Aboriginals by ethnographic museums, government assimilation policies, the concept of eugenics, stolen generations, Aboriginal deaths in police custody, land claims and recent political and judicial developments such as the Native Title Act.

### **3.6.1 Aboriginal resistance fighters and Tasmanian Aboriginal people**

Important figures in Australian history, Aboriginal resistance fighters are addressed in two works shown in the exhibition; Julie Dowling's *Walyer*, and Daniel Boyd's *King No Beard* (2007) (fig. 9). Although it can be said that Aboriginal resistance fighters continue in their plight against settler domination today, their conflicts with colonists began as early as 1788 when the First Fleet headed by Captain Arthur Phillip entered Botany Bay.

At the time of Cook's voyage in 1770, 'official' guidelines clearly stated that "no European nation has the right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent [... and that] they may naturally and justly attempt to repel intruders."<sup>91</sup> However, secret instructions to Lieutenant Cook dated 30 July 1768, which were contained in the

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<sup>91</sup> National Library of Australia, "Lord Morton's hints," *National Treasures from Australia's Great Libraries*, (Canberra: NLA, 2005), <http://nationaltreasures.nla.gov.au/%3E/Treasures/item/nla.ms-ms9-113-s003>

letter book carried on Cook's ship 'the Endeavour', included additional instructions from the King. These instructions authorised Cook to take possession of "a Continent or Land of great extent"<sup>92</sup> believed to exist in the southern latitudes and instructed Cook "with the Consent of the Natives to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain"<sup>93</sup>. Following these instructions, Cook declared possession of Australia's eastern coast on 22 August 1770 and stated:

Notwithstand[ing] I had in the Name of His Majesty taken possession of several places upon this coast, I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast . . . by the name New South Wales, together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast.<sup>94</sup>

By the time Captain Arthur Phillip, first governor of New South Wales and captain of the First Fleet, settled with 160 marines and 729 convicts in 1788, the veritable impacts of colonization upon local Aboriginals started to take shape. In 1790, Governor Phillip began his first punitive expedition against Aboriginals when his gamekeeper was speared by Pemulwuy, a resistance fighter who would lead a guerrilla campaign in the Sydney area for many years to follow. At the time, Governor Phillip instructed colonists to "strike a decisive blow, in order, at once to convince them of our superiority, and to infuse an universal terror."<sup>95</sup> Since then, the domination of Aboriginals by European settlers and their accompanying Eurocentric ideals have shaped the course of Australian history.

Artist Daniel Boyd's *King No Beard* is based on an original portrait of King George III as painted by Nathaniel Dance in 1773. In relation to Eurocentric views of Australian history, the

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<sup>92</sup> \_Secret Instructions for Lieutenant James Cook Appointed to Command His Majesty's Bark the Endeavour 30 July 1768, (Canberra: NLA, 2000-2010), <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?sdID=67>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Watkin Tench, *A Complete Account of the Settlement of Port Jackson*, (Adelaide: University of Adelaide eBooks@Adelaide, 2006), 168.

accompanying texts goes on to explain that; “the artist challenges the European view of history by adding references to piracy, where the stealing of land and other cultures’ treasures to enlarge European empires was commonplace.”<sup>96</sup> Boyd makes these references through subtle changes to the original portrait. As explained to students through the kit; “The artist has added important details such as the eye patch, the parrot on the shoulder and the head within a jar on the left.”

In *King No Beard*, Daniel Boyd makes a direct reference to the colonial practice of decapitating Aboriginal resistance fighters in his depiction of a severed head in a jar. As explained in the Education Resource; “[the] jar replaces the King’s crown in the original painting.”<sup>97</sup> Referencing the practice of capturing Aboriginals to be sent to England like zoological specimens, Boyd explores his relationship to the beginnings of colonial settlement. Held by King George III, the head in the jar is in fact a self-portrait of the artist. In this work, Boyd simultaneously depicts himself as a specimen preserved in a jar and as a martyr for his people.

Boyd’s reference to King George III in relation to Australia’s colonial history is very fitting as he was King of Great Britain at the time of Captain Cook’s three voyages to Australia from 1768 to 1779 as well as at the time of arrival of the First Fleet headed by Governor Phillip in 1788. Additionally, King George III was the first King of the British Empire to meet Aboriginals when Governor Phillip captured an Aboriginal man named Bennelong and a boy named Yemmerrawanie and brought them to England for presentation to the King around 1790. Since King George III ultimately changed the fate of all Aboriginals in his decision to colonize ‘Terra Australis’, it is a fitting statement that Boyd has replaced the crown in the historical

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<sup>96</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



painting with the depiction of his head within a jar. Here, Boyd represents himself as captured, martyred – a possession of this foreign King.

In its explanation of Boyd's work, the Education Resource does not shirk away from addressing the colonial history addressed by Boyd in the painting. It clearly explains that "King George III was the King of Great Britain during the time of the three voyages of Captain Cook"<sup>98</sup>. After stating that "the stealing of land and other cultures' treasures to enlarge European empires was commonplace"<sup>99</sup>, the text goes on to quote *The Secret Instructions* to explain that "documents given to Cook by the King stated that Cook was, 'with the consent of the Natives, to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the name of Great Britain'"<sup>100</sup> This notion of stealing brings us back to the Aboriginal resistance fighters who fought against British colonization and ultimately the theft of their land. Although the text does not explain the connection between Aboriginal resistance fighters and the head depicted in the jar, the text does position Boyd as somewhat of modern-day resistance 'fighter' in his direct challenge to "the European view of history" through his re-interpretation of the original painting.

Aside from Boyd's work, Julie Dowling's *Walyer* also references the important plight of Aboriginal resistance fighters in Australian history. As mentioned earlier in section 2.2, Dowling's work addresses the role of Aboriginal women and Aboriginal resistance fighters in Tasmanian history in her depiction of the famous resistance fighter Walyer who lived from around 1800 to 1831. Quoting the artist, the accompanying text states;

Walyer represents to me the hundreds of women who fought for their land against the invading colonial forces ... I painted Walyer gesturing towards a group of colonial houses in the distant right ... she is gesturing to the viewer as if they are a

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<sup>98</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007), 7.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

member of the fighters she has assembled to fight the colonial encroachments upon their land and hers.<sup>101</sup>

The text also provides valuable information pertaining to the life and personality of Walyer – a mistreated woman who not only learned the language of her captors but who led rebellions and learned to wield her captors' arms. Upon Walyer's subject, the text states;

In her teens Walyer was abducted by men from another clan and traded to sealers for flour and dogs. During her time with the sealers she learnt English and how to use firearms. After she escaped she joined the Lairmairrener group of Emu Bay and began to lead attacks against settlers and other Aboriginal groups. She was the first Aboriginal warrior to use firearms against the colonists.<sup>102</sup>

Dowling's veneration for the female warrior is evident in this painting where careful details relate to the subject's significant life and historic accomplishments. Wrapped in a kangaroo cloak, Walyer stares directly at us while holding onto a fowler's rifle with a small flintlock pistol tucked into her belt. Arm outstretched, her gesture suggests an invitation to join her fight. This portrait of Walyer not only overturns the Eurocentric myth of passive submission in the face of colonization, it also addresses very the existence of Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

For long a part of the Eurocentric version of Australian history, the eradication and extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people has been a persistent myth. In another culturally charged work, artist Ricky Maynard confronts this myth through visual affirmations of local Aboriginal cultural practices. A member of the Big River and Ben Lomond people of Tasmania, Maynard is living proof that Tasmanian Aboriginal people survived the vicious onslaughts and genocide carried out by British authorities.

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<sup>101</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

The Indigenous population of Tasmania has seen incredible fluctuations since 1803 when British settlers first arrived in Tasmania. At that time, there existed nine clan groups with a total population between 4,000 to 10,000 people. From 1803 to 1847, the local population suffered its largest decline. By 1835 fewer than 300 individuals had survived the ethnic cleansing institutionalized by Lieutenant Governor Arthur in his declaration of martial law against aborigines in 1828. However, the final phase of frontier genocide suffered by Tasmanian Aboriginal people was caused by the forceful removal and incarceration of the last 300 survivors to camps such as that of Flinders Island. When the last camp on Flinders Island closed in 1847, only 46 survivors are said to have remained. Today, approximately 16,000 Tasmanian Aboriginal people of mixed descent reside in Tasmania. In 1995, the Supreme Court of Tasmania passed the Aboriginal Lands Act representing an official acknowledgement “of the historical fallacy that Aboriginal people were eliminated from Tasmania by British colonisation.”<sup>103</sup> However, as explained by Benjamin Madley in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, “Although the 1995 Aboriginal Lands Act returned 12 small parcels of land to the community, most land claims remain unrecognized by the Australian government. Aboriginal Tasmanian activists now seek control of sites with historical, cultural or religious significance as well as reparations and self-government.”<sup>104</sup>

Illuminating local Aboriginal history, artist Ricky Maynard’s work invites the viewer to see things from his perspective. Maynard states that; “We now tell our own history.”<sup>105</sup> *Culture Warriors* presents a series of ten black and white photographs by Maynard. From the series, the photograph entitled *Coming Home* is discussed in the companion Education Resource.

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<sup>103</sup> Supreme Court of Tasmania, *Aboriginal Lands Act 1995*, (Hobart: Supreme Court of Tasmania, 1995), <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?dID=79>

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Madley, “Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910: the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California, and the Herero of Namibia,” *Journal of Genocide Research*. 6.2 (June, 2004), 176.

<sup>105</sup> Ricky Maynard as quoted by Keith Munro in *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, 120.

Appropriately, the text for this work addresses interpretations of history, the European occupation of Australia, the alleged extermination of Aboriginal Tasmanian people, and the present-day maintenance and revival of local customs and cultural heritage. The text begins by saying that: “Ricky Maynard’s photographs of contemporary Indigenous Tasmanians make us think about what has happened during European occupation of Australia. Most of the history we read has been written by Europeans and this artist is interested in challenging this point of view.”<sup>106</sup> In addressing the alleged extermination of Aboriginal Tasmanian people, the text goes on to state: “Many history books relate the story of the alleged ‘extermination’ of the Tasmanian Aboriginals by the European settlers, through disease, massacre and transportation to other islands. The artist’s photographs address this one-sided view of history by presenting images of community members who have maintained and upheld their local cultural heritage.”<sup>107</sup> Describing the photograph entitled *Coming Home*, the text goes on to say that; “In this photograph, an Aboriginal man is standing in a field of native grass, carrying over his shoulder a stick of dead mutton-birds. Mutton-birds were hunted for their oil by Europeans and were always a rich source of nutrition for local Indigenous custodians.”<sup>108</sup> In talking about Maynard’s photographic series as a whole, the text explains that: “these photographs trace an ancient surviving culture that has adapted and evolved alongside the recent and at times violent interaction between Aboriginal and European cultures. They capture important aspects of cultural practice, both from the past – the images of massacres sites, middens and sacred cultural sites – and from present-day – the images of Aboriginal people living and working in Tasmanian today.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 16.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 16.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Finally in referencing the artist's own heritage as a member of the Big River and Ben Lomond people of Tasmania, the text highlights Maynard's powerful viewpoint as an Aboriginal Tasmanian person when stating that: "his personal viewpoint as a local Indigenous artist adds strength to the idea that there is another history of survival to counteract the Euro-centric idea of eradication."<sup>110</sup> This text helps students achieve a better understanding of Tasmanian history and related historical accounts. They learn that history is largely written by those who conquer, meaning that there exists another and very important side to local history that needs to be told. From the text, students learn that despite European settlement, disease, massacre and forceful removal, Tasmanian Aboriginal people have survived and continue to maintain and uphold their local cultural heritage today.

### **3.6.2 Documentation and display of Aboriginals by ethnographic museums**

A popular and racist excuse used in the past for policies against Indigenous Australians, such as declaration of martial law against Tasmanian Aborigines in 1828 by Lieutenant Governor Arthur, has consistently been that Aboriginal people are a 'primitive' people that are fated to vanish and become extinct with the advent of civilization. Benjamin Madley explains in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, "By claiming that so-called "primitive" people and cultures are fated to vanish when they come into contact with white settlers, a deadly supposition emerges: the extinction of indigenous people is inevitable and thus killing speeds destiny."<sup>111</sup> Not only did this supposition legitimize acts of genocide towards Australia's First peoples it inevitably founded the European need to document dying 'primitive' races.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Benjamin Madley, "Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910: the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California, and the Herero of Namibia," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 6.2 (June, 2004), 176.

Believed to be relics in the natural course of human evolution, European explorers and anthropologist recorded the perceived traits and habits of Indigenous Australians. These records were commonly collected and displayed by museums as the artefacts of a ‘dying’ or ‘dead’ race. This anthropological and museological practice is directly addressed in the text for artist Vernon Ah Kee’s work *mythread* (2007) where it is explained that the two self-portraits of the artist and the close-up of the artist’s grandfather which make up this work are meant to “suggest the ‘mugshot’ photographs of Aboriginal people – often only identified by number – which are lodged in museums like artefacts.”<sup>112</sup> The text then goes on to explain the direct connection between the artist and this past practice in stating that “after requesting photographs of his own family from the collection of the South Australian Museum, Vernon Ah Kee began to make sensitive drawings from these photographs, emphasizing the eugenicist subtext of the original photographs.”<sup>113</sup> Not only does this text explain to students the past anthropological practice of recording Aboriginal images in order to record a ‘vanishing’ race, it introduces them to the eugenicist ideas underlying governmental policies against Indigenous Australians.

### **3.7 Political and Social Issues**

#### **3.7.1 Eugenics, assimilation policy, stolen generations**

Simply put, eugenics can be defined as the ‘science’ of selective breeding for the ‘improvement’ of genetic qualities. Coined in 1883 by the English scientist Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, eugenics was based on social Darwinism – a late nineteenth century movement that promoted the ‘perfection’ of the human race using the premise of the ‘survival of the fittest’ from Darwin’s theory of evolution. The ideal promoted under social Darwinism was

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<sup>112</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

deeply rooted in the social prejudices prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century. Indigenous Australians, thought to be a 'primitive' species at the time, belonged to an 'inferior' race that would disappear with evolution. Problematic to Australians of the time was the existence of children of mixed Indigenous and European descent. At a time when evolution was synonymous with civilization, it was believed that Australians of mixed-descent needed to be assimilated in order to evolve and fit into a white Australian society. Unlike those of mixed descent, Indigenous Australians deemed to be of full-blood were kept as much as possible in isolation from 'white' society.<sup>114</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century, legislation was passed in all Australian states and territories which gave Aboriginal protectors guardianship rights over Aboriginals up to the age of sixteen or twenty-one. Policemen and agents of the state such as Aboriginal Protection Officers were given the power to locate and transfer babies and children of full blood and mixed descent from their communities into institutions or fostered out to white families. Government and missionary institutions were established throughout Australia for children who had been separated from their parents. The first of such institutions was set up in 1814 at Parramatta near Sydney with the aim of 'civilizing' Aboriginal children.

In these institutions, Aboriginal children were taught farm labouring and domestic work in efforts to prepare them for their future lives in white society. The Australian government policy to 'civilize' Indigenous Australians through the removal of children is known as the Assimilation policy and existed until 1969 when the Aborigines Welfare Board (formerly the Aborigines Protection Board) was abolished. Due to poor record keeping, the loss of records and changes to departmental structures, it is not known precisely how many Aboriginal children were

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<sup>114</sup> In 1905, with the passing of the 'Aborigines Act', Western Australia had legislated to keep full-blood Aboriginal populations in isolation from white society. Additionally, legislation prohibited sexual cohabitation between white people and all full-blood Aboriginal people.

taken away between 1909 and 1969. Today, the children affected by the policies of child removal are collectively known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. Not only was this devastating for the children themselves, almost every Indigenous Australian family has been affected in some way by the policies of child removal.

Released in 1997, the report *Bringing them home*, stemming from a ‘National Inquiry into the Separation of ATSI Children from their Families’ conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, strongly recommended that all Australian Parliaments apologise to the Stolen Generations. For over ten years, the conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard refused to apologize for past government policies. On 13 February 2008, declaring that it was time to start “righting the wrongs of the past”<sup>115</sup>, newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd finally gave a formal apology to the Indigenous people of Australia on behalf of the Australian Parliament. With direct reference to the Assimilation Policy and the Stolen Generations, Rudd stated:

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation. We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Department of Education and Training, “Formal Apology to Indigenous Australians,” *Racism No Way: Fact Sheet* (Canberra: Racism No Way, 2008), <http://racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/70.html>

<sup>116</sup> Department of Education and Training, “Formal Apology to Indigenous Australians,” *Racism No Way: Fact Sheets*, <http://racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/70.html>



While they are not directly addressed in the Education Resource, the Stolen Generations are very much a part of the history addressed in *Culture Warriors* through the discussion of missions, displacement, assimilation, and the loss of traditional culture. Due to the fact that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of the Australian Labour Party took office as recently as December 2006 (finally defeating the incumbent John Howard who had been Prime Minister of Australia since 1995), and only gave the apology to the Stolen Generations after the exhibition's presentation in Canberra, it was not possible for *Culture Warriors* to incorporate the speech. In a way, *Culture Warriors* highlights and embodies the change of government that was taking place during the planning stages of the exhibition. Notorious for his persistent denial to apologize to Indigenous Australians for past government actions, John Howard was a proponent of *One Australia* – an immigration and ethnic affairs policy that called for an end to multiculturalism and opposed a treaty with Aboriginal Australians. In contrast to Howard, Rudd made it his first order of business as Prime Minister of Australia to address the recommendations made in the report *Bringing them Home* and apologize on behalf of Parliament to all Indigenous Australians. *Culture Warriors* coincides with a historical turning point in the relations between the Australian Government and Indigenous people. Like Rudd, *Culture Warriors* makes it a point to expose the lies and tell the truth while addressing some of the darker chapters of Australian History.

Although the apology was not incorporated into the exhibition or ancillary materials, it is interesting to note that Brenda L Croft, Ron Radford, and several other staff from the NGA were present at Parliament House to watch Prime Minister Rudd issue his apology on behalf of Parliament. Wearing a t-shirt depicting artist Daniel Boyd's painting *Treasure Island* from *Culture Warriors*, Croft explained her own connection to the history of the Stolen Generations and the importance of the apology:

I'm here because my father was taken away when he was a baby. He was fortunate to meet up with his mother again but many of the people that are here haven't had that opportunity. My dad is no longer with us. I'm here in his memory and also for all the other people who were affected by the removal of children. You know that you are not alone with what's happened. This is long overdue and it's fantastic that it's one of the first acts of the new Government to do this, because it isn't just about moving on, it's about understanding that we are all human beings and the reality of being big enough to say 'yes we can do this' and acknowledge it, rather than trying to pretend it didn't happen, because it did.<sup>117</sup>

Similar to the spirit of acknowledgment in Rudd's speech, the Education Resource accompanying *Culture Warriors* addresses Australian history in a straightforward manner where, rather than trying to avoid certain subjects, it acknowledges and explains the darker chapters of history. Although the kit does not directly mention the Stolen Generations, it does address other darker histories connected to the Assimilation policies which continue to have repercussions for many today; such as life on missions (or Aboriginal reserves), displacement, loss of culture, and incarceration.

### **3.7.2 Missions, Christianity, Palm Island**

Missions, stations, and Aboriginal reserves are all terms that refer to sections of land allocated by colonial or state governments on which Aboriginal people could live. While some stations were run by the Government, others were in the control of missionaries of various denominations. Regardless of their secular or religious affiliation, life on Aboriginal stations was managed in a way to control and 'civilise' Aboriginal people. As explained through the project "Mission Voices: hear our stories" lead by the Koorie Heritage Trust, a not-for-profit Aboriginal community organisation that aims to protect, preserve and promote the living culture of

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<sup>117</sup> Ping Lo, "The Apology is bringing us together," *ABC Canberra* (13 Feb. 2008), <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/02/13/2162084.htm>

Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia, residents of missions suffered many devastating hardships:

While living on Aboriginal stations, many people experienced forced confinement, the imposition of strict religious observance, separation from and removal of their children, the breakdown of traditional values and the banning of their languages and cultural practices.<sup>118</sup>

Bitter memories associated with aspects of control and the regimented ways of life on a mission are revealed by artist Elaine Russell in her work *Inspecting our houses* (2004) (fig. 10). The text accompanying this work provides significant details that describe the artist's childhood in the 1940s and 1950s while living on the Murrin Bridge Mission in central New South Wales. *Inspecting our houses* is a depiction of the orderly Murrin Bridge mission complete with road boundaries, defining six plots of land each adorned with a colourful house, a cemetery, a schoolhouse, the river, and the mission manager's house. Explaining to students why Russell has depicted the homes of the Aboriginal residents in bright colours, the text states that "the different colours of the houses suggest an expression of individuality within a system seeking uniformity."<sup>119</sup> In relating the painting to the way of life experienced on the mission, the text goes on to explain that; "Residents of the mission were overseen by the mission manager, who had absolute control and authority over the Aboriginal residents' lives. The tight composition and highly defined parameters within the work reflect the regulated nature of mission life."<sup>120</sup> Referencing the title, *Inspecting our houses*, the text goes on to explain Russell's bitter memories associated with the regular humiliations she experienced while living on the mission:

In this painting, Russell recalls her spotless family home being inspected on a weekly basis by the mission manager's wife, who was greatly disliked as she decided what

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<sup>118</sup> Koorie Heritage Trust, "Mission Voices: hear our stories," *Missions and Reserves Background*, (Canberra: ABC, 2004), [http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/general/missions\\_and\\_reserves\\_background/default.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/general/missions_and_reserves_background/default.htm)

<sup>119</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 24.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

was an acceptable standard of cleanliness. This unnecessary intrusion into family life is a bitter memory for Elaine Russell – the insistence that such visits would be necessary cut at the heart of a family’s respectability.<sup>121</sup>

The regulated nature of mission life is also alluded to in the text accompanying the work *No more drinking* (2006) in the biographical section on the artist H. J. Wedge. The text explains that; [Wedge] grew up on the Erambie Aboriginal Reserve (Cowra) where the government managers of the mission controlled his life.”<sup>122</sup> An artist that has lived through the effects of displacement, the text explains that “Wedge often paints confronting images dealing with the social and political issues relevant to Aboriginal people living in an urban and rural context, communities which have felt the longest effects of displacement and colonisation.”<sup>123</sup> Missions not only affected the day-to-day life of Aboriginal people through their regimental management, their aims to assimilate included missionary efforts to convert Aboriginal people to various denominations of Christianity.

While Christianity is not a central theme explored in *Culture Warriors*, it is however one of the principle elements behind other subjects discussed in the exhibition such as the missions – whose aim was to ‘civilise’ and ‘Christianize’ Australia’s Aboriginal population, and the Assimilation policy – which was largely carried out with the help of missionaries who established stations in the most remote parts of Australia. In his work *Psalm singing* (2007) (fig. 11), artist Richard Bell makes a bold reference to Christianity while encapsulating many contentious issues for Aboriginal people living today. The large and colourful canvas has at its centre black circles like that of a target upon which Bell has superimposed a quote from the 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 27.

Psalm in white lettering that says; “I live in the valley of the shadow of death”.<sup>124</sup> At the left of the canvas, in black lettering that blends into the background, Bell has written “there is no hope.”<sup>125</sup> Instead of being presented alongside a habitual wall label, this work is accompanied by a powerful statement by Bell which clearly contextualizes his work. His statement reads:

IF WE CAN'T EXPECT PROTECTION FROM THE LAW, THEN HOW CAN WE BE EXPECTED TO RESPECT THE LAW? OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY YOUNG MALES, ARE ROUTINELY CRIMINALISED FOR MINOR OFFENCES THAT RARELY ATTRACTS POLICE ACTION IN WHITE NEIGHBOURHOODS. YOU HAVE CONVINCED YOURSELVES TO BELIEVE THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE DIRTY, LAZY, LYING, DRUNKEN CRIMINALS. BUT, DEEP DOWN YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE RIPPING US OFF. YOU KNOW THAT WE DON'T GET A 'FAIR GO'. WORSE, YOU KNOW WE HAVE NEVER HAD A FAIR GO IN THIS, OUR OWN COUNTRY. THEN YOU JUSTIFY THE ACTIONS OF YOUR FOREBEARS. YOU DENY ANY EVIDENCE THAT CLAIMS VIOLENCE BY YOUR ANCESTORS AGAINST ABORIGINAL PEOPLE. THEN YOU ABSOLVE THEM OF ANY BLAME FOR SOMETHING THAT YOU CLAIM THEY NEVER NEVER DID IN THE FIRST PLACE. NOT TOO FAR FROM THIS RATIONALISATION YOU ARRIVE AT THE CONCLUSION THAT WE WOULD ACTUALLY BE THANKFUL THAT IT WAS THE ENGLISH WHO 'CONQUERED' AUSTRALIA RATHER THAN THE FRENCH OR, GOD FORBID, THE SPANISH OR DUTCH OR PORTUGUESE. YOU HOLD THAT WE MUST BE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL FOR THE GREAT FAVOUR YOUR ANCESTORS DID FOR US BY DISSPOSSESSING US. WE SHOULD BE NO LESS GRATEFUL FOR EVERY BIT OF WELFARE THROWN OUR WAY EVEN THOUGH YOU WILL BEGRUDGE US EVERY SINGLE THING THAT WE GET. YOU MAKE UP LIES ABOUT US TO EXPATIATE YOUR GUILT ... BE WARNED ... JUDGEMENT DAY COMMETH.<sup>126</sup>

In this statement, Bell enumerates those issues which persistently and contemptuously find themselves at the intersections of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations both past and present. Amongst these, Bell lists racial stereotypes, disproportionate and unfair incarceration, ‘white guilt’, the absolution of ‘white guilt’ through the justification of colonization and past government policies, and the dispossession and lies experienced by Indigenous Australians.

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<sup>124</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 5.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Wall text for Room 6*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007).

Addressing this aspect of his work, the companion Education Resource states that; “in the same way that there are many layers of paint in Richard Bell’s composition, there are also many layers of meaning. He makes powerful statements about the troubled intersections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories and the present”.<sup>127</sup> Assuming that many of the students using the Education Resource at school would have seen this work in the Gallery alongside the artist’s statement, it is interesting to note that the text in the Education Resource does not quote Bell or even mention of the work’s accompanying statement. Instead, the text places emphasis on the many sections and layers of meanings in the painting without going into depth as to what these meanings are.

Back to the work’s title *Psalm singing* and Bell’s reference to Christianity, the text explains that “Bell is referring to the 25<sup>th</sup> Psalm but, taken out of context, there is no sense of safety or protection... The quotation from the Bible refers to the way religion was forced upon Aboriginal people.”<sup>128</sup> Although the text does not explicitly make the connection, this reference to the way that religion was forced upon Aboriginal people implies assimilation, the dispossession of traditional culture, and being sent to missions. Bell’s statement accompanying *Psalm singing* highlights many of the grave injustices inflicted upon Indigenous Australians that could be taken into account should there be a ‘judgement day’ for the perpetrators of these crimes. Quite ironically, the lack of safety or protection conveyed by the excerpt from 25<sup>th</sup> Psalm emulates how those responsible of the dispossession and mistreatment of Aboriginal people should feel come their ‘judgement day’ as forewarned by Bell in his statement.

Often incorrectly labelled an ‘urban Aboriginal’ artist, Bell is in fact a self-appointed liberation artist whose work speaks of contemporary injustices against Aboriginal people. In an

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<sup>127</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

attempt at explaining some of the many layers of meaning addressed in *Psalm singing*, the text explains that Bell uses the phrase “I live in the valley of the shadow of death”<sup>129</sup> to “refer to a recent Aboriginal death in police custody on Palm Island.” This was the death of thirty-six year old Mulrindi, also known as Cameron Doomadgee, a victim of police brutality who was left to die from internal injuries on the floor of a police cell on 19 November 2004. Although this devastating event took place almost six years ago, the Queensland state Crime and Misconduct Commission is still pushing for the Police Commissioner to take disciplinary action against the officers involved with Doomadgee’s death. In June 2010, the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) released a damning report which confirmed that both the initial police investigation and internal review of the case were seriously flawed. Brian Hine, Queensland Deputy Chief Magistrate who is presiding over the CMC inquest, has accused Senior Sergeant Hurley (the officer who arrested Doomadgee and inflicted the fatal wounds) of fabricating evidence and lying about the circumstances of the death. As the case continues to be battled in court, six years have gone by where no one has been held accountable for wrongful arrest, manslaughter, evidence fabrication, and more which the public cannot know due to strict non-publication orders with regards to video footage of the victim in the watch-house cell on the night of his death. This event is well known across Australia and continues to resurface in the media. Corresponding to the public’s widespread knowledge of the event, the text does not explain the details surrounding Doomadgee’s death but simply makes mention of it and how it resulted in major protest and despair for Indigenous people throughout Australia.

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<sup>129</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 5.

### 3.7.3 Aboriginal deaths in police custody, incarceration, Palm Island

Richard Bell's *Psalm singing* demonstrates how the death of Doomadgee continues to be an open wound not only for the residents of Palm Island, but for all Indigenous people across Australia. In the painting, Bell refers to a history of racial profiling by Australian police which has helped Indigenous Australian become overrepresented in the Australian prison system today. As stated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics "at June 2004, there were 5,048 Indigenous persons in prisons across Australia (21% of all prisoners) ... [Meaning that] Indigenous persons were 11 times more likely to be in prison compared with non-Indigenous persons."<sup>130</sup> Not only are Indigenous Australians overrepresented in prisons, in 2003 it was reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that "10 of the 39 deaths (26%) that occurred in prison custody were Indigenous prisoners".<sup>131</sup>

In 2004, approximately six months before Doomadgee's death on Palm Island, Australians saw one of the loudest expressions of anti-police sentiment during the Redfern riots in Redfern, Sydney. These internationally-covered riots were spurred by the death of a 17 year old Aboriginal youth named 'TJ' Hickey who died after he crashed his bike and was impaled on a fence while being chased by police in the Sydney suburb. As explained by ActNow, an Australian not-for-profit community website for young people, in their issue on racial profiling; "This tragedy later caused tension between police and the Indigenous community in the local area. Residents felt that the incident was a result of ethnic profiling and discrimination on the

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<sup>130</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends, 2005*, (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005), <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/a3c671495d062f72ca25703b0080c>  
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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



part of the police.”<sup>132</sup> These recent confrontations involving racial profiling and discrimination against Indigenous Australians by police are the contemporary vestiges of racist government policies that saw to the establishment of penal colonies for Aboriginal people such as that of Palm Island, established in 1918 by the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs.

Beginning in 1918 and continuing for over twenty more years, dispossessed Aboriginal people from forty-two different language groups were removed to Palm Island and forced to live together under notoriously harsh conditions (which included the lack of hot water). In 1986, departmental rule and supervision of Palm Island finally ended when a new community council was given title to the island. Legislation that segregated Indigenous Australians to reserves or Aboriginal penal colonies was passed at different times throughout Australia as the various acts were passed on a state by state basis. By 1911, all states and territories with the exception of Tasmania had passed some form of 'protection' legislation with an emphasis on segregation and restriction for Indigenous Australians. These acts of legislations, such as the *1911 South Australia Aborigines Act*, included provisions for the arrest of individuals who attempted to leave or refused to go to the reserves. Having been the target of racial profiling by Australian police since the beginning of the twentieth century, it is not surprising that mentalities of a racist nature continue to plague law enforcement in Australia and create an environment of distrust between Aboriginal communities and police.

While Richard Bell’s work addresses the contemporary existence of racial profiling and the disproportionate criminalization of Indigenous people for minor offences, artist Judy Watson addresses the realities of forceful removal to the Aboriginal penal colony of Palm Island in her

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<sup>132</sup> The Inspire Foundation, “Ethnic Profiling,” *Act Now* (2005), [http://www.actnow.com.au/Issues/Ethnic\\_profiling.aspx](http://www.actnow.com.au/Issues/Ethnic_profiling.aspx)

works entitled *palm cluster* (2007) (fig. 12) and *under the act* (2007). *Palm cluster* is a map-like depiction of two islands in the Palm cluster of islands. Surrounded by dark blue hues imitating the sea and sky, the text for this work explains that “the dark brown colour [used to depict the islands] suggests a place with an unhappy history.”<sup>133</sup>

Although *palm cluster* is the piece by Watson chosen for discussion in the Education Resource, the text for this work also discusses *under the act*. In making a connection between these two works of art, the text explains that:

Two events made Palm Island a place of traumatic significance for Judy Watson. First, in 2004 Mulrindi Doomadgee, an Aboriginal man from Palm Island, died in police custody. He was from the same language group, Waanyi (from north-west Queensland), as the artist. Second, while researching her grandmother’s files, Judy Watson found that some of her relatives had been sent to Palm Island in the early twentieth century. This island, which was established as an Aboriginal settlement for ‘troublemakers’ in the early twentieth century, therefore becomes associated with death and incarceration in the artist’s mind.<sup>134</sup>

*Under the act* is an illustrated book which Watson made using print techniques and drawing based on personal family photographs and photocopied pages of letters and official documents that she found in her Aboriginal grandmother’s and great-grandmother’s government files in the Queensland State Archives. As already explained in the section ‘Culture Warriors: The Exhibition’, in this work, Judy Watson invokes the fears that Aboriginal people lived with under the ‘Queensland Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’ which came into force in 1897 and gravely restricted the movements and basic civil rights of Indigenous peoples in Queensland. These fears included being sent away to missions such as the infamous Palm Island and being incarcerated or permanently separated from family, friends, and home. Displayed under a glass case so that one can view the contents of Watson’s book, one is

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<sup>133</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

able to see her great-grandmother's 'exemption card' – an official government paper that Aboriginal people were required to carry in order to prove that they indeed had the permission of the 'Protector of Aborigines' to be in a public space such a train station, or any other such place that was off the government reserve. Also included in this work are documents and letters from Watson's grandmother seeking permission from the government to marry Watson's grandfather who was white. While looking through the various family documents in the Queensland State Archives, Watson found references to a great aunt who had been sent to Palm Island. In the catalogue for *Culture Warriors*, Watson recalls a conversation with her grandmother who explains that she was also threatened with being sent away to an island; "[I] didn't know which island it was, but I was always told I'd be sent there."<sup>135</sup>

Despite the fact that the text accompanying *palm cluster* does not mention the particular letters and documents shown in the display of *under the act*, it does however encapsulate the dark history associated with Palm Island and provide a poignant and emotional connection to Watson's family history and the recent death of Mulrindi Doomadgee which is still an open wound for many Australians.

Although the Education Resource does address the darker and more sensitive issues of Aboriginal deaths in police custody, the past removal of Indigenous Australians to missions and reserves, and contemporary issues relating to the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous Australians, it does not really discuss the underlying myth that has served to dispossess Indigenous Australians of their land and rights for over 100 years – the myth of Terra Nullius.

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<sup>135</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, exhibition catalogue, 168.

### 3.7.4 Terra Nullius

On 7<sup>th</sup> February 1788, the first colonial fleet from Britain arrived in Sydney Cove and raised its flag in possession of a ‘new’ land – Terra Australis, the infamous land ‘discovered’ by Captain James Cook in April 1770. Deemed terra nullius – land belonging to no one – the British Crown claimed ownership of Australia. Over the next 200 years, the fiction of terra nullius became entrenched in the Australian legal system and was used to deny Australia’s First peoples their land, culture, and traditions. Finally on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1992, in the historic Mabo judgement, the High Court of Australia overthrew the legal fiction that Australia was no one’s land prior to colonization in 1788. The judgement led to the creation of the Native Title Act, which acknowledged that native title to land existed in 1788 and continues to exist provided “it has not been extinguished by subsequent acts of governments and provided Indigenous groups continue to observe their traditional laws and customs.”<sup>136</sup> This is the very legislation that was contested by the Yorta Yorta people of Victoria which is discussed in the Education Resource and which I have made mention to in section 3.5.1 on the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices.

In the text accompanying Hamm’s work *Yabby*, it is explained that the Yorta Yorta people’s claim to traditional land was persistently rejected by the courts due to the belief that the ‘tide of history’ had washed away the connection between the people and their land and that the connection was not capable of revival. In *Culture Warriors*, Hamm defies this claim through her work *Barmah nurrtja biganga* which demonstrates the revival of the customary Yorta Yorta practice of making possum skin cloaks. Additionally, Hamm’s work draws from stories about the past which she learnt by listening to Yorta Yorta elders. This passing down of knowledge from

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<sup>136</sup> City of Melbourne, Victoria. *Terra Nullius*. (Melbourne: City of Melbourne, 2009), <http://www.visitvictoria.com/displayobject.cfm/objectid.0003A614-D962-1A88-8B4680C476A9047C/>

one generation to another effectively demonstrates the contemporary continuation of their traditional knowledge and serves to reinforce important ties that were believed by some to have been lost. Despite the fact that the Education Resource fails to mention or explain ‘terra nullius’ it does however make reference to the ongoing legal battles that many Indigenous communities face with regards to obtaining legal rights to traditional land and country.

In this analysis of the historical content discussed in the Education Resource we have seen how students are taught about Aboriginal resistance fighters, the alleged extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the introduction of Christianity, Palm Island, mission life, the documentation and display of Aboriginals by Ethnographic museums, government assimilation policies, the concept of eugenics, stolen generations, Aboriginal deaths in police custody, land claims and recent political and judicial developments such as the Native Title Act in relation to the exhibition *Culture Warriors*.

### **3.8 Communicating ATSI Art as Art**

In addition to teaching students about ATSI cultures and history, the texts included in the Education Resource also address the works of art in the exhibition as what they are, works of art. Discussing the works using formal artistic terms such as colour, line, medium, composition, and technique, the kit enables students to understand the works beyond the above-discussed cultural and historical contexts.

### 3.8.1 Colour (pigments and ochres) and Line

Featuring a total of 143 works, *Culture Warriors* is an incredibly diverse exhibition that showcases many applications of colour and line, colour theory, the use of traditional pigments and ochres, the use of colour to convey meanings, and the use of patterns and textures to create depth and movement.

Colour and line can both be used to evoke optical and spatial illusions or effects. This possible use for colour is commonly explained through practical applications of colour theory – where specific colour combinations are used for visual effect. This type of colour use is discussed by the Education Resource in three particular instances; first, in reference to Jimmy Baker’s *Katatjika*, second, in reference to Doreen Reid Nakamarra’s *Untitled* (2006), and third, in reference to Judy Watson’s *palm cluster*.

In the companion Education Resource, Baker’s use of colour in *Katatjika* is described as follows; “Brilliant reds, oranges, black, white and yellows enliven this landscape painting.”<sup>137</sup> After listing the various colours used in the painting, the text explains how Baker’s use of coloured dots creates a visual effect; “The lines of coloured dots run in many directions and create shapes and patterns, swirls and circles. Coloured circles surround black circles, creating rich contrasts between light colours and dark colours.”<sup>138</sup> In effect a landscape painter, Baker uses the visual effect created by the various juxtapositions of colour in order to evoke the physical, spiritual and ceremonial character of the land – in this case the sacred site called *Katatjita*.

In her untitled work, Doreen Reid Nakamarra uses both line and colour to depict a mesmerizing landscape of valleys and peaks. As described in the companion text, “the intricate and dazzling optical effect of this painting is created from thousands of finely painted zigzag

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<sup>137</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 3.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

lines.” In order to emphasize the undulating quality of the zigzag pattern, Nakamarra has made use of closely related tones of beige and brown. This use of colour adds a necessary element of softness to the landscape painting which would have looked quite rigid and stark had it been rendered in black and white. In describing her use of line, the text continues by stating that; “there is no focal point, no image against a background, the whole surface undulates with obsessively repetitive lines which, by their diagonal nature, create an illusion of peaks and troughs.”<sup>139</sup>

Rather than using colour to create an optical effect like Nakamarra, in *palm cluster*, Judy Watson uses deep blue hues to invoke a spatial illusion. Made by scrubbing intense dark Prussian blue and purplish ultramarine blue pigments onto the background of the canvas, the text explains how the blue background can create confusion for the viewer; “Are we looking down at the sea, up at the sky or at a reflection of the sky in the water?” In addition to explaining that Watson deliberately plays with spatial illusion in this work, the text also explains the connection between the blue colour and the subject matter of the painting. “For the artist, blue is the colour of memory and is associated with water.” Seeing as this painting recalls memories from Palm Island, Watson’s use of blue in this instance is most fitting.

As seen in Doreen Reid Nakamarra’s symbiotic use of colour and line, visual effects are as much created by colour as they are created by line. Through the texts provided for John Mawurndjul’s *Mardayin design at Dilebang*, Arthur Koo’ekka Pambegan Jr’s *Face Painting*, and Shane Pickett’s *On the Horizon of the Dreaming Bodja*, the Education Resource brings attention to the movement, visual dominance and energy created by these artists’ use of line.

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<sup>139</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 19.

*Mardayin design at Dilebang* is a bark painting that vibrates with light and movement. The text explains that Mawurndjul “uses a fine *rarrk* (crosshatching) to create a zigzag pattern of light and dark wedges across the length of the bark.”<sup>140</sup> Drawing attention to this pattern, the text continues to explain that; “The rippling effect of the horizontal shapes suggests the movement of water in the Billabong at Milmilngkan.”<sup>141</sup> Using the term ‘abstract’ to describe this painting, the text demonstrates how colour and line are used by the artist to emulate nature in a non-figurative way.

With regards to Arthur Koo’ekka Pambegan Jr’s *Face Painting*, the text brings attention to the dominant horizontal lines of the ceremonial body-paint design that the artist has depicted. Worn by performers at an initiation ritual for the artist’s ceremonial group, Winchanam, the designs are associated with traditional sites in the Australian state of Queensland. Bringing attention to the artist’s use of line and colour, the text describes *Face Painting* as “dominated by strong horizontal stripes of red-brown, black and white. These stripes are broken up with vertical lines on either side of a black field patterned with downward curving white lines.”<sup>142</sup>

In bringing attention to the use of colour and line in customary Indigenous designs, the text also talks about the traditional use of pigments and ochres that artists such as Pambegan Jr continue to use today. With regards to *Face Painting*, the text explains that “the strong colours of black, white and red-brown come from natural earth pigments and hibiscus charcoal collected by the artist from his traditional country and bonded to the surface of the canvas.”<sup>143</sup> Natural earth pigments or ochres are employed by nine of the thirty artists discussed in the companion Education Resource for *Culture Warriors*. Including the discussion of *Face Painting*, there are

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<sup>140</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*



altogether four texts that talk about the artists' use of ochres in paintings and in fibre works. In the discussion of Philip Gudthaykudthay's *Wagilag Sisters, with child* the text explains that "the painting is made with ochre paint from rock pigments; this gives the surface of the canvas a dry, dusty appearance."<sup>144</sup> Here, as in *Face Painting*, the use of natural earth pigments makes the colour in the works seem dry, thick and saturated in appearance. Inspired by Tiwi body designs, *Yirrikapayi* by senior artist Jean Baptiste Apuatimi also showcases the continued use of ochres in contemporary Indigenous art. With regards to this work, the Education Resource explains that; "Underneath the painted shapes there is a deep black background that makes the yellow, white and black lines stand out. These colours are natural earth pigments made from rocks from the artist's country and are called ochres."

Showcasing an altogether different application of natural pigments in *Yawkyawk mother and babies* (2006), artist Anniebell Marrngamarrnga uses the pigments to dye fibre from pandanus leaves. Alluding to the extensive process involved in her work, the text explains that; "the leaf fibres are dyed with natural dyes made from certain roots, berries and bark."<sup>145</sup> Although the process may be labour intensive, Marrngamarrnga herself states that; "I use lots of different colours and I like it. Colours are important in my work."<sup>146</sup>

The application of colour is integral to the artistic practice of many artists included in *Culture Warriors*. In the Education Resource, the texts bring attention the strategic application of colour by some artists in order to invoke particular meanings or atmospheres. In its discussion of Richard Bell's *Psalm singing*, the Education Resource brings attention to the background of the composition where Bell has used black and white in terms of their racial implications. As explained in the text; "The concentric black circles are like a target and the black and white sides

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<sup>144</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 11.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

of the composition highlight a racial difference.”<sup>147</sup> Bell’s strategic use of black and white can also be seen in the text he has superimposed onto the quilt-like background. Written in black on the far-left side of the canvas are the words ‘there is no hope’ while in the centre, the words ‘I live in the valley of the shadow of death’ are depicted in white. Although it is not discussed in the text for this work, the reason why Bell has depicted the biblical reference in white could allude to the fact that Christianity was brought to Australia by white Europeans and imposed upon the local Indigenous population. While the reason for which ‘there is no hope’ is depicted in black, could allude to the collective sentiments felt by many Indigenous Australians affected by this forced ‘Christianization’ and the persistent discrimination that continues to have affect on the lives of Indigenous people living in Australia today.

While colour is seen to denote racial difference in the case of Bell’s work, artist Judy Watson uses colour in a slightly different way in *palm cluster*. In contrast to the beautiful and rich blue hues applied in the background of this work, a muddy brown has been used to depict an aerial view of Palm Island. Explaining why Watson has used these particular colours, the text states that; “For the artist, blue is the colour of memory and is associated with water. [...] Although the shape of the island looks like a view from an aeroplane, the dark brown colour suggests a place with an unhappy history.”<sup>148</sup>

Differing from Judy Watson and Richard Bell’s use of colour, artist H.J. Wedge uses colour to invoke a particular atmosphere and setting in his painting *No more drinking*. The text for this work begins by explaining the particular scene depicted in this painting: “These three wild figures with their staring eyes and wriggling hair communicate clearly what happens when alcohol takes over.” The text then explains how the colours used to depict the sky and the three

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<sup>147</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

figures relate to this scene: “The sky is a startling pink and together with the bright colours of blue, orange and brown the artist creates an effect that is crazed and disturbing, almost hallucinatory.” Without the application of these bright colours Wedge’s painting would have little to no effect in communicating the crazed-nature of this scene. Although the three figures are clearly intoxicated, this depiction of their drunkenness is clearly heightened by the bold colour combinations used to depict their wild hair, wicked grins and piercing eyes.

While the formal artistic concepts associated with colour and line are discussed to various extents throughout the Education Resource, in their consultation of the texts students are taught about elements of colour theory, the relationship between line and colour, the textures and movements evoked through the use of line, the use of traditional pigments and ochres, and the use of colour to convey meaning and a sense of atmosphere.

### **3.8.2 Medium**

In concert with *Culture Warrior’s* objective to showcase the variety of contemporary Indigenous art practices taking place in Australia today, the Education Resource purposely talks about every type of media featured in the exhibition. Through the individual sections provided for each of the thirty artists, students learn about a variety of traditional and contemporary media. Works discussed in the kit include: paintings on bark and canvas, photography, mixed-media installation, sculpture, fibre work, drawing, printmaking, and new media.

### 3.8.3 Paintings on bark and hollow logs

Included in the Education Resource for *Culture Warriors* are three examples of paintings on bark and hollow logs. They are; *Mardayin design at Dilebang* by John Mawurndjul, *Dulkorrelorrkeng and Wakkewakken* by Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek, and *Garak (the Universe)* by Gulumbu Yunupingu. Having grown up surrounded by relatives who were expert painters, John Mawurndjul was initially taught the technique of *rarrk* by his father around 1968 while in the early 1970's his brother began encouraging him to paint on bark for the art market. Almost forty years later, while having developed a strong sense of individuality as an artist, Mawurndjul continues to paint *rarrk* on bark and now has taken on the role of encouraging and mentoring new generations of artists himself. Measuring two metres in height, Mawurndjul's *Mardayin design at Dilebang* is a work that has been purposely made this tall in order to be at scale with its spacious gallery surroundings. Showcasing Mawurndjul's present-day use of bark, this work brings together the traditional medium from Arnhem Land with a contemporary and abstract application of *rarrk*. Describing his artistic practice, the text accompanying this work states; "In this bark painting, John Mawurndjul is creating a completely abstract composition that hums with the ancestral light and energy that he is tapping into through his intricate and complex *rarrk*."<sup>149</sup>

While Mawurndjul uses bark for his non-figurative and abstract works, Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek uses the traditional medium to depict ancestral stories and beings. Despite the fact that four out of the five works by Nadjamerrek presented in *Culture Warriors* are made using bark, his use of the medium is not explicitly mentioned or described in the Education Resource. Nadjamerrek's use of bark is only mentioned in the 'activities' section following the text for his

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<sup>149</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 15.

work *Dulkorrrkelorrkeng and Wakkewakken*. Here, in the discussion section for primary school students, the kit states; “This is a bark painting. What other surfaces do Arnhem Land artists paint on?”<sup>150</sup> Unlike the discussion of Nadjamerrek’s work, artist Gulumbu Yunupingu’s use of bark for *Garak (the Universe)* is discussed in the first sentence of the accompanying text. It states; “The entire surface of this large piece of stringy bark is covered in multitudes of stars.” While *Garak (the Universe)* is made on bark, other works by Yunupingu in the exhibition are made using hollow logs. Although these works are made using a different traditional medium from Arnhem Land, like *Garak (the Universe)* they also depict Yunupingu’s intricate patterns of stars.

#### **3.8.4 Paintings on canvas**

There are many more examples of paintings on canvas in the Education Resource than there are of any other medium. With sixteen works on canvas in total, this discussion will be limited to three examples; *Yirrikapayi* by Jean Baptiste Apuatimi, *Katajika* by Jimmy Baker, and *King No Beard* by Daniel Boyd.

Having already discussed how Jean Baptiste Apuatimi draws from her Tiwi heritage and incorporates ceremonial Tiwi body designs in her work, it is interesting to note that although the designs she uses were originally painted on the human body, she has adapted these to the canvas to create textured effects and beautiful abstract compositions. In the text accompanying *Yirrikapayi* it is explained that; “This painting is called *Yirrikapayi*, which means male crocodile. The geometric pattern creates a visual texture that suggests crocodile skin... Patterns in the

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<sup>150</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 18.

painting suggest the story about the crocodile without needing to reveal it figuratively.”<sup>151</sup> Albeit that Aputimi interprets customary body designs on canvas, Jimmy Baker uses the canvas to depict Dreamings and landscapes in the ‘dot painting’ style. This style of painting originates from the early 1970’s when Geoffrey Bardon, an art teacher, encouraged artists in Papunya to depict their Dreamings on canvas.<sup>152</sup> Painting on canvas allowed for Dreamings and traditional stories to be recorded in a more permanent way and was promoted as a means of entering the art market. However since the practice encouraged the depiction of traditional stories it also entailed controversy as depictions of sacred knowledge were sold and shown to uninitiated and non-Indigenous individuals who should never have had access to secret or sacred knowledge under Aboriginal Law. Eventually, following much criticism by community members, protocols surrounding sacred and secret knowledge were heeded and spiritual symbols depicted in paintings were omitted or changed for public viewing. While dot paintings – made with acrylic paints or oil on canvas – have become a common fixture in the Australian art market, contemporary Aboriginal artists are careful to follow strict protocols when depicting traditional stories and Dreamings in their paintings. In the text accompanying *Katajika*, Jimmy Baker’s application of the dot painting style is described as follows:

The lines of coloured dots run in many directions and create shapes and patterns, swirls and circles. Coloured circles surround black circles, creating rich contrasts between light colours and dark colours. In the centre, of the painting a flood of red dots is painted over black, like a galaxy of stars or red lava from a volcano. [... As senior custodian of stories attached to sites like *Katajika*,] Jimmy Baker began painting in 2004 because in his own words he wanted to ‘put down stories for the younger generation.’<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Papunya is a remote settlement in the central Australian desert that was established in 1960 as an assimilation centre for 1,400 dispossessed Aboriginal people. In the 1970s approximately 2,500 Aboriginals were living in Papunya.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Unlike Baker who is recording traditional Western Desert stories on canvas, artist Daniel Boyd uses oil on canvas in his work *King No Beard* in order to faithfully reinterpret a historical painting of King George III that was originally painted using the same medium. As described in the text accompanying *King No Beard*, “Daniel Boyd has copied the original painting precisely, but inserted his own subtle changes.”<sup>154</sup> Painted in oil on a large canvas, *King No Beard* enjoys the same regal appearance as the original painting of King George III.

### 3.8.5 Photography

Of the thirty artists presented in the exhibition, only three artists use the medium of photography. These artists are Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser, Christian Bumbarra Thompson, and Ricky Maynard. Although Fraser and Deacon’s *Colour blinded series* is discussed in the Education Resource, it is in fact an installation that includes photography amongst other media. Despite the fact that they are shown in the exhibition, Christian Bumbarra Thompson’s colour photographs entitled *Tracey Moffatt* (2004), *Andy Warhol* (2004), and *Desert Slippers* (2006) are not included in the Education Resource. Instead, his digital media work entitled *The Sixth Mile* is described. This means that, *Coming home* by Tasmanian artist Ricky Maynard is the sole photographic work discussed in the Education Resource.

*Coming home* is one of ten black and white photographs by Maynard shown in *Culture Warriors*. As described in its companion text; “In this photograph, *Coming home*, an Aboriginal man is standing in a field of grass, carrying over his shoulder a stick of dead mutton-birds.”<sup>155</sup> In talking about the series of photographs as a whole the text states; “These photographs trace an

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>155</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 16.

ancient surviving culture that has adapted alongside the recent and at times violent interaction between Aboriginal and European cultures.”<sup>156</sup> Maynard’s photographs reaffirm the continued connection between Aboriginal people in Tasmania and their traditional culture through the maintenance of local cultural practices. Through his honest and culturally charged photographs, Maynard invites viewers to see both the good and the bad while eliciting empathy and understanding. Portraying his subjects in black and white, Maynard brings attention to their solemn albeit courageous nature. Even though the Education Resource explains the subjects portrayed in Maynard’s photographic series, it does not explicitly discuss his use of black and white photography.

### **3.8.6 Mixed media installation**

The only examples of mixed media installations in the exhibition, *Colour blinded series* by the collaborative duo Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser and *The contrivance of a vintage wonderland (A magnificent flight of curious fancy for science buffs ... a china ark of seductive whimsy ... a divinely ordered special attraction ... upheld in multifariousness)* (2007) by Danie Mellor are both featured in the Education Resource.

Mentioned in section 1, *Colour blinded* is an installation which includes two video projections, six photographs and two display cases all flooded with yellow sodium light. Shown to audiences visiting *Culture Warriors* in a separate room, this work engages with viewers in many different ways – visually, spatially, and through sound – which are described to students in the Education Resource. Describing the yellow sodium light used to illuminate the space, the text states; “The acidic light has an immediate impact on the way everything looks in the space. It

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



also affects the way the viewers appear to each other and how they see colours. In effect, the yellow light makes the viewer ‘colour blind’.”<sup>157</sup> While in its description of the looped-DVD the text states; “The split-screen video *Good golly miss dolly* shows John Harding, Destiny Deacon’s brother, writing on a whiteboard, and his daughter Sofii throwing open a parcel of golliwog dolls and asking, ‘What are you doing here?’”<sup>158</sup> After bringing attention to the questions posed to viewers through the DVD, the text describes the photographic component of the installation; “There are six large rich black-and-white photographs of dolls on the walls. Shot on orthochromatic film, the photographs make everything appear overly graphic with little tonal qualities.”<sup>159</sup> Finally, the text provides a visual description of the last component to the installation and ties together the underlying theme of dolls and golliwogs; “Sitting on plinths, the *Snow Storms* consists of perplex cubes filled with golliwogs and white beanbag balls. The golliwogs are wide-eyed and look as though they are suffocating. There is something playful, yet also threatening about the artists’ use of dolls and hand-knitted golliwogs.”<sup>160</sup> Bringing together the visual, spatial and auditory elements of the installation the text states that; “The space, the light, the questions posed to use by the video and the golliwogs squashed in their perplex cubes all challenge out expectations. Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser invite us to think about our role as the viewer in the installation space.”<sup>161</sup> In this text students are prompted to reflect upon the various elements included in the installation and how they all come together in addition to considering how they interact and participate with the work as viewers.

Despite the life-size scale of Danie Mellor’s installation *The contrivance of a vintage wonderland*, this work is presented in the centre of the exhibition space and stands out against

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<sup>157</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 10.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 10.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

the more traditional works in its surroundings. Made of mixed media, kangaroo skin, ceramic, synthetic eyeballs, wood and birds, the materials used in this installation are not in any way ordinary. Centre stage to this work is a group of fantastic looking kangaroos bearing noticeably real kangaroo ears and paws. The text that accompanies this work begins by describing the various components in the installation and explains that; “Danie Mellor’s fibreglass kangaroo have real ears, and paws, but instead of fur they are covered in a mosaic of broken blue and white china. They stand within an installation of china-clad trees and stuffed birds. They are both startlingly lifelike and surreal, their soft grey fur replace by shards of broken china.”<sup>162</sup> Explaining why Mellor has created a fantastic yet natural looking environment in this installation, the text states that; “Danie Mellor is deliberately creating an installation that reminds us of old fashioned dioramas in socio-historic or ethnographic museums, where stuffed native animals were often presented in a fake, artificial and didactic environment.”<sup>163</sup>

A central theme in Mellor’s oeuvre, the kangaroo is both a symbol of Indigeneity and Australiana. Seen on the Australian coat of arms, the kangaroo has been adopted by the Australian government as national symbol in the same way that companies such as the national airline carrier Qantas and countless producers of tourist paraphernalia have used the native animal as a symbol of Australiana. This is an issue of contention for the artist that is shared in the text; “For Danie Mellor, the Kangaroo is a symbol of all the native animals and Indigenous people who lived in this land before European settlement. It is also seen as a symbol of Australiana, used by white Australians on badges ... The covering of the kangaroo with broken English/Chinese pottery refers obliquely to the domination of Indigenous society by

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<sup>162</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, (Canberra: NGA, 2007): 17.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

outsiders.”<sup>164</sup> Having discussed the artist’s intention behind the representation of kangaroos, the text explains Mellor’s deliberate use of a particular blue-and-white china to cover the bodies of his fibreglass kangaroos; “The English firm Spode manufactured blue-and-white china in the late eighteenth century, around the time of European settlement of Australia. The famous willow pattern, adapted from Chinese ceramics, became popular at this time and demonstrates another way in which English culture absorbed another, creating a fabricated history.”<sup>165</sup> In the creation of this fantastic diorama of native Australian animals, Mellor has combined a variety of materials to elicit the different meanings that they invoke such as with his use of the Spode china. Through the texts featured in Education Resource, students are introduced to and taught about two very different installations that bring together a variety of media for particular purposes and effects. Through the presence of these two installations in *Culture Warriors*, the viewer becomes more aware of him/herself in relation to the exhibition space and the works he/she engages with.

### 3.8.7 Sculpture

Although some of the fibre works included in *Culture Warriors* can be described as woven sculptures, there are altogether six works categorized as sculptures in the exhibition. These are; Arthur Koo’ekka Pambegan Jr’s *Flying Fox*, Denis Nona’s *Ubirikubiri* and *Apu Kaz* (2007), and Owen Yalandja’s three sculptures each with the identical title *Yawkyawk*. Since the Education Resource only discusses one work for each artist in the exhibition, *Ubirikubiri* and *Yawkyawk* are the only two sculptures discussed in the kit.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

Mentioned in the section on Torres Strait Islander culture, *Ubirikubiri* is a larger than life sculpture of a crocodile carrying a man on its back. Made by Nona in the non-traditional media of bronze, this sculpture brings to life a traditional legend from Papua New Guinea. A visual description of the work explains that; “The sculpture is covered in very delicate and complex patterns. The black patterns are indented and look as if they are carved into the surface; surrounding these patterns are areas of smooth shining bronze.”<sup>166</sup> Emulating the traditional wood carvings from the Torres Strait, Nona’s use of bronze for this sculpture allows for the black bas-relief pattern that seems to be carved all over the surface of the sculpture to stand out against the shine of the smoothed bronze surfaces. The text explains that; “As a boy, Dennis Nona was taught the traditional craft of woodcarving and his lino prints and sculptures reflect this skill and the intricate clan patterns he has learnt.”<sup>167</sup>

Unlike Nona who has adapted a traditional skill and form of art to a western medium, artist Owen Yalandja, a senior member of the Dangkorlo clan in Central Arnhem Land, works entirely within tradition. As explained in the text for his sculpture *Yawkyawk*, “Carved from the wood of the kurrajong tree this sculpture represents the spirit form of a *yawyawk*.”<sup>168</sup> Quoting the artist, the text explains that; “[The] *yawkyawk* is a bit the equivalent of a mermaid in *Balanda* (whitefella) culture.”<sup>169</sup> In order to represent *yawkyawk* spirit figures, Yalandja carves and paints branches from the kurrajongs tree. Further describing his artistic practice the text states that; “He chooses wood pieces that best portray the movements of the fish-like forms, sometimes making use of natural forks in the wood to create the tail. The delicate pattern, carved and painted, creates the illusion of scales.” Despite working entirely within tradition – carving wood from the

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<sup>166</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 20.

<sup>167</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 20.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*.

kurrajong tree to depict the figure of his Dreaming, the *yawkyawk* – Yalandja has developed his own individual style as an artist. Quoting the artist, the text explains to students that the artist has created his own way of depicting the spirit in his sculptures; “I love making these sculptures and I have invented a way to represent the fish scales on her body.”<sup>170</sup> The intricate detail Yalandja has painted onto the surface of the sculpture creates a variety of rich textures on the body of the *yawkyawk*, while the sinuous curve of the kurrajong branch he has carved creates the movement necessary to bring the sculpture to life. By including Denis Nona’s *Ubirikubiri* and Owen Yalandja’s *Yawkyawk* for discussion in the Education Resource, students learn that sculptures can be made in a variety of media and styles, and using different techniques, while effectively communicating traditional stories and knowledge to a contemporary audience.

### 3.8.8 Fibre works

Showcasing the continuation of the oldest living cultures and traditions, *Culture Warriors* includes the work of two contemporary fibre artists Treaahna Hamm and Anniebell Marrngamarrnga who use traditional media and techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years.

As previously mentioned, Treaahna Hamm’s work *Yabby*; “is woven in a coiled bundle technique that has been used to make fibre objects for thousands of generations in the south-eastern and southern regions of Australia.”<sup>171</sup> Describing the artist’s use of the age-old technique, the text brings attention to the particular details incorporated by Hamm to create the realistic looking river crustacean; “The bundles of fibres run around and around the yabby and give it

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 12.

shape, they become thinner coils towards his head. The claws are raised expressively and the bulging eyes are made out of gumnuts. The antennae are very long and his eight woven bundle legs project out from his body.”<sup>172</sup> By bringing attention to these details, the text prompts students to look closely at the work and see how the artist has used the coiled bundle technique to create an expressive and three dimensional yabby. Like the coiled bundle technique used by Hamm, the weaving technique used by Anniebell Marrngamarrnga has been passed down for thousands of years in Arnhem Land. As explained in the companion text, “it is the same weaving technique used to make twined bags.”<sup>173</sup> Describing the process and technique involved in creating Marrngamarrnga’s large scale fibre work, the text states that; “It is made from fibre from pandanus leaves... The leaf fibres are dyed with natural dyes... The frame, which gives the work its shape, is made from bamboo and the coloured fibres of pandanus are woven from the outside in to create the sections of contrasting patterns.”<sup>174</sup> Like artist Owen Yalandja, Anniebell Marrngamarrnga represents the *yawkyawk* spirit in her work. While she also represents this spirit in her bark paintings and timber carvings, in this work, Marrngamarrnga has adapted a weaving technique customarily used for the making of baskets, bags and fish traps to create colourful, flat, large-scale works that hang beautifully against gallery walls. Bringing attention to the originality of her work, the text quotes the artist saying; “I came with the idea to make flat *yawkyawks* from pandanus ... I use lots of different colours and I like it.”<sup>175</sup> While Treaahna Hamm and Anniebell Marrngamarrnga both employ weaving techniques to create their fibre works, the results are very different. In showcasing the processes involved in the production of these two works, the Education Resource effectively highlights the rich variety that exists in traditional weaving

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 14.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

techniques while demonstrating how artists individualize these processes to create their works of art.

### 3.8.9 Digital media

There are two examples of digital media or video work included in the exhibition *Culture Warriors*; Richard Bell's *Uz vs Them*, and Christian Bumbarra Thompson's *The Sixth Mile*. While Bell's video is passed over by the Education Resource in favour of his other work, *Psalm singing*, it is likely to do with the offensive, sexist, and explicit nature of this work which is not quite appropriate for a school-aged audience. In *Uz vs Them*, Bell is seen wearing a T-shirt that says 'I only date crack whores' and is surrounded by a group of sexy women while he is confronting another boxer to whom he is launching insults using explicit language. John Carty, an anthropologist at the Research School of Humanities of the Australian National University, describes Bell's video installation in a review for *Art Monthly Australia*; "Here, at the end of the exhibition, Bell throws a knockout left hook of charming derision, touches you up and kicks you out the door."<sup>176</sup> In another review by art critic Sebastian Smee published in the *Weekend Australian*, *Uz vs Them* is described as "a hilarious video that toys with racist clichés and fears."<sup>177</sup> While some critics like Carty and Smee looked through Bell's layered approach and understood his double-meanings and use of irony, others like Christine Nicholls a writer for *Asian Art News* felt rather differently about the work. In her review of the exhibition, Nicholls wrote that:

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<sup>176</sup> John Carty, "Culture Warriors, the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial in Canberra," *Art Monthly Australia*, (Dec. 2007 – Feb. 2008), 7.

<sup>177</sup> Sebastian Smee, "Beyond the Frame: The Inaugural Indigenous Triennial in Canberra raises some uncomfortable questions," *Weekend Australian*, (3 – 4 Nov. 2007), 19.

Richard Bell's *Uz vs Them*, exemplifying his outmoded black-and-white politics and 1960's style agit-prop, I simply thought boring. Bell is a heavy-weight contender for the title of world's oldest angry young man. Plus – somebody needs to take him aside to inform him that sexism can be equally pernicious, toxic and disabling as racism. The apparently gratuitous inclusion of a bevy of young women in this video and his self-casting as an Indigenous version of Hugh Hefner simply did not work for this reviewer.<sup>178</sup>

As a work that is geared towards mature audiences, it is logical that this work is not included for discussion in the Education Resource.

Unlike Bell's *Uz vs Them*, Christian Bumbarra Thompson's six minute long video *The Sixth Mile* is appropriate for all ages. The DVD presents a customary Bidjara greeting ceremony between the artist, his father, his niece, and his nephew that is described in the companion text as a "private ceremony made public [...] which reveals the contemporary nature of Indigenous ceremony."<sup>179</sup> Describing the ceremony itself, the text explains what is happening in the video; "Speaking their own language, Bidjara, with their bodies turned towards each other, they are making the same gestures repetitively."<sup>180</sup> On the screen, the viewer sees two family members at a time where one member is seated and the other is standing behind (or in the case of the scenes with the two young children - is seated on the adult's lap) while patting and combing the other person's hair.

Whilst the viewer is invited into this private space, the Education Resource states that Bumbarra Thompson "consciously refrains from revealing the meanings of words exchanged between himself and his father."<sup>181</sup> Bumbarra Thompson's reason for keeping certain parts of the ceremony private is then explained to students; "The artist is aware that in the past,

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<sup>178</sup> Christine Nicholls, "Culture Warriors at the National Gallery," *Art Asian News* (Jan. – Feb. 2008), 159.

<sup>179</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 25.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



Indigenous people were forced to disclose aspects of their culture for the purpose of study, and in this work, he consciously refrains from revealing the meanings.”<sup>182</sup> Christian Bumbarra Thompson is a Bidjara man of mixed heritage, his father is of the Kunja Nation from south-west Queensland, while his mother is of German Jewish heritage. While exploring his Indigenous heritage through his work, Bumbarra Thompson brings attention to elements that transcend cultural boundaries such as in *The Sixth Mile* where he emphasizes “the commonality of family rituals in all cultures.”<sup>183</sup>

Although he works a lot with photography, the text explains that for *The Sixth Mile* Christian Bumbarra Thompson chose to work with video “because of its potential for direct and intense audience engagement.”<sup>184</sup> Although audiences could have been shown the private family ritual through a series of still shots, the language barrier created by the speaking of Bidjara could not have been communicated in any other way than through the sound provided by the video.

### 3.8.10 Drawing

Queensland artist Vernon Ah Kee’s *mythread* is the only drawing featured in the exhibition. This is likely the reason why it is discussed in the Education Resource instead of Ah Kee’s other work, *not and animal or a plant* (2006) – a text based work made with large vinyl lettering, which was also shown in the travelling portion of the exhibition. Presented as a triptych, *mythread* consists of three large portrait drawings shown side by side. The companion text describes the drawings; “two are self-portraits of the artist and the third portrait is a close-up of his grandfather’s face.” The three drawings are based on photographs and are made by the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 25.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

artist as a comment on how anthropologists used to record images of Aboriginal people. As explained in the text; “The profile and front view suggest the ‘mugshot’ photographs of Aboriginal people – often only identified by number – which are lodged in museums like artefacts.”<sup>185</sup> While conveying political and personal messages, Vernon Ah Kee’s drawings are described as “meticulous, cool and detached, but like the text works, carry beneath the surface a mixture of fury, poignancy, and bleak black humour.”<sup>186</sup> Through this text, students are prompted to notice the sensitive and precise nature of Ah Kee’s charcoal drawings. By reproducing subjects from black and white photographs in such large scale drawings, Ah Kee is able to captivate the gaze of viewers in a spacious gallery setting while prompting them to think about the particular grouping of these three portraits. The text accompanying *mythread* in the Education Resource effectively prompts students to think about why the artist has inserted himself and his grandfather in the triptych and why he has based his drawings on ‘mugshot’ photographs. Additionally, by describing his drawings using terms such as realist, precise, meticulous, cool and detached, the Education Resource provides students with the vocabulary to characterize and further talk about *mythread*.

### 3.8.11 Printmaking

Among the many works shown in *Culture Warriors*, there are two works employing the medium of printmaking; Judy Watson’s *Under the act* and Dennis Nona’s *Yarwarr*. Despite the fact that neither of these works are chosen for discussion in the Education Resource, Dennis Nona’s practice of making lino prints is mentioned in the text for his sculpture *Ubirikubiri*, while in the text accompanying Judy Watson’s *palm cluster*, her use of the technique is not at all

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>186</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, 1.

mentioned. Because these two examples of printmaking are not at all discussed in the Education Resource, students not are made aware of the inclusion of prints in the exhibition.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

In the above section we have seen that through the Education Resource developed by the NGA for *Culture Warriors*, students learn about many important subjects in ATSI culture, history and art in relation to thirty works presented in the travelling portion of the National Indigenous Art Triennial: *Culture Warriors*. Whilst the thirty texts do not cover all cultures, histories, or mediums presented in the exhibition, they do however cover elements from ATSI culture such as; the Dreaming, Ancestral Creations Stories, ceremony, custodianship, moieties and kinship, symbols, traditional styles, and the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices. The texts also address important ATSI history such as; Aboriginal resistance fighters, the alleged extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the introduction of Christianity, Palm Island, mission life, the documentation and display of Aboriginals by Ethnographic museums, government assimilation policies, the concept of eugenics, stolen generations, Aboriginal deaths in police custody, land claims and recent political and judicial developments such as the Native Title Act. While finally, the texts teach students about different mediums and artistic concepts, in turn providing them with the vocabulary to discuss the works in an artistic context (for a complete list of works discussed in section 3 see Appendix C).

In its discussion of merely thirty out of the 143 works presented in the exhibition, the kit is naturally unable to discuss all of the subjects addressed by artists in the exhibition. Important subjects such as the destruction of the Burrup Peninsula rock art in the Pilbara region – depicted by Julie Dowling in *Burrup* (2007), and the existence of 300 different Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander language groups – depicted by Daniel Boyd in *Treasure Island* (2005), are not at all mentioned in the kit. Nevertheless, by weaving together bits of information that address the cultural, historical and artistic contexts of each work and by providing basic biographical information about each artist, the kit is able to communicate that: The works of art shown in the exhibition are fine art, deserve merit on an artistic basis, and should rightfully be presented in a space such as the National Gallery; The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are general terms used to refer to the many different people of Indigenous heritage living in modern-day Australia; There are many different voices and paradigms of knowledge presented in the exhibition; There are ‘histories’ not ‘one history’; And, although they are among the oldest living cultures, ATSI cultures continue to be innovative while important cultural knowledge is revived and passed on to future generations.

By using a multi-faceted approach that discusses works of arts in terms of their cultural, historical and artistic contexts and expresses the artist’s voice, the NGA also demonstrates that institutional representations of Indigeneity can incorporate alternate paradigms of knowledge and be rooted in the expression of individual identities. Nancy Mithlo, Assistant Professor of Art History and American Indian Studies at the University of Wisconsin, states in “‘Red Man’s Burden’: The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings”:

While well intended, proponents of inclusion often neglected to incorporate alternative paradigms of knowledge, resulting in unrealistic assumptions about reconciling colonist legacies. Incorporation of Native bodies does not necessarily indicate incorporation of Native thought. Reductionist approaches therefore contradict the necessary interrogation of multiple knowledge systems, organizational values, and individual identities in cultural heritage debates.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Nancy Mithlo, “‘Red Man’s Burden’: The Politics of Inclusion in Museum Settings,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28.3/4(2004), 744.

In an exhibition that brings together multiple knowledge systems, a variety of values, and thirty individual identities while inviting discussion and debate amongst audiences, *Culture Warriors* clearly embodies Mithlo's ideas for inclusion when it comes to presenting Indigenous art in an institutional space. In this light, *Culture Warriors* can be seen as an example as to how Indigenous art can be successfully disseminated in an institutional environment such as the NGA or the NGC.

#### **4.1 Canadian Applications**

Having discussed the Inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial: *Culture Warriors* and analyzed the contents of the companion Education Resource in an Australian context I am now going to discuss the possibility and feasibility of developing a similar education resource in a Canadian context. As seen in section 3 the development of educational tools specifically for Indigenous Art exhibitions can effectively help increase the public's knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous art. With a mandate that seeks to increase knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous art and aims to communicate that Indigenous art takes pride and place at the Gallery, it would only be logical for the NGC to increase its development of educational tools specific to Indigenous art exhibitions in order to reach these goals. Additionally, at the heels of the NGC's announcement to organize and host an international quintennial of Indigenous art beginning in 2013 it is definitely an appropriate time to begin looking at how a successful education resource such as the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource* could be applied in a Canadian context and help the NGC meet its mandate.

As demonstrated by the Education Resource accompanying *Culture Warriors*, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous art comes from developing an understanding of the variety of voices, mediums, subjects, histories, traditions and cultures being expressed through

contemporary indigenous art today. In order to communicate such variety in a Canadian context, educational materials should first and foremost create awareness of the many different Indigenous communities that exist in Canada. There are over 630 First Nation communities and thirty language groups in Canada alone. Similar to Australia, Indigenous people in Canada adhere to a variety of beliefs, customs, and traditions. Falling under the umbrella terms of First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal, Amerindian, Native and Métis, are many different people.

In the case of *Culture Warriors*, Brenda L Croft's curatorial premise was founded on the goal to represent the diversity among Indigenous people and tell stories from all regions of Australia. As Croft herself stated; "I like to use Indigenous art as an educational tool – and that means representing visual stories from all regions of Australia, not just Arnhem Land and central Australia – but regions such as Tasmania, Victoria, urban areas in Queensland, Northern Territory and Southern Australia."<sup>188</sup> Here, Croft makes the important point that pan-Indigenous exhibitions such as *Culture Warriors* should educate and place emphasis on representing all regions far and wide and be careful not to showcase just one region or style as was sometimes done in the past. In Australia the regions most represented in Indigenous art exhibitions have been Arnhem Land and the Central Desert known for their popular bark paintings and dot paintings. In Canada, these two regions could be compared to the Pacific Northwest Coast and the Arctic, popularly known for their totem poles, wood carvings, prints, and soapstone carvings. In Canada, Northwest Coast art and Inuit art have traditionally enjoyed more exposure in institutional spaces which has rendered them more familiar to non-Indigenous audiences. Thus, in a Canadian context, pan-Indigenous exhibitions such as *Culture Warriors* need to be careful not to perpetuate the disproportionate exposure enjoyed by these two regions, but rather ensure

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<sup>188</sup> NGA, *Agenda/Minutes NGA Board Meeting – 11 Dec. 2002*, (Canberra: NGA, 2002).

that all regions are represented equally. In showcasing Indigenous art from across Canada, audiences will become more aware of the diversity that exists and become more educated about Indigenous art in general. In addition to representing many different regions in Australia, the artists that Croft chose for *Culture Warriors*; “All consider themselves Indigenous first and foremost, their heritage being the framework and foundation, which underpins their creativity.”<sup>189</sup> Thus, in one way or another all works included in the exhibition deal with issues relating to Indigeneity. It seems that this will be a similar situation at the occasion of the NGC forthcoming exhibition “How we are all related”<sup>190</sup> – where artworks will supposedly investigate and question what Indigeneity means. In doing so, it would be wise for the NGC to emphasize diversity in Indigenous art, such as was done by the NGA for *Culture Warriors*.

In her aim to educate audiences about Indigenous art, Croft made sure to present works within their cultural and historic contexts. As she explains in her curatorial essay “Cannot Buy My Soul” featured in the exhibition catalogue; “Too often, however, Indigenous people are taken out of their cultural context and placed in colonial curiosities cabinets, viewed as separate from their communities and the events that shaped their lives.”<sup>191</sup> Instead, in *Culture Warriors*, Croft uses a multi-faceted approach that has allowed her to represent contemporary Indigenous artists and disseminate their work in their own contexts. As mentioned in section three, this approach consists of describing each work of art in a cultural, historic and artistic context while providing biographical information about the artist and, when possible, quotes that express the artist’s voice. Croft curated *Culture Warriors* as such to represent diversity amongst contemporary Indigenous Australian artists. This diversity included; geographic and cultural diversity as the

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<sup>189</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, XI.

<sup>190</sup> “How we are all related” is the title given to the exhibition by Greg Hill during his speech “Indigenous Art at the NGC: Looking Forward” on Friday Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009 at the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective’s curator camp held at the National Gallery of Canada.

<sup>191</sup> NGA, *Culture Warriors*, catalogue, XVIII.

thirty artists included in the exhibition come from all regions in Australia; diversity in arts practices ranging from traditional woven fibres to digital media, and also diversity in language and peoples, as demonstrated by works such as Daniel Boyd's *Treasure Island* – a map of the 300 different Indigenous language groups that reside in Australia. The diversity that is showcased in the exhibition is also seen in the Education Resource. However, due to the fact that the kit concentrates solely on a selection of thirty works it is limited and cannot showcase diversity to the same extent as the exhibition. This means that while the kit does go to great lengths to “demonstrate the wide range of contemporary Indigenous art practice taking place today,”<sup>192</sup> it does not go into depth and mention the existence of 300 different Indigenous language groups in Australia. Instead, the kit mentions the languages spoken by some of the artists such as in the text accompanying Philip Gudthaykudthay's *Wagilag Sisters, with child* where it states that he “is the last conversant speaker from the Liyagalawumirr people in Central Arnhem Land.”<sup>193</sup>

In its discussion of a selection of thirty works from *Culture Warriors*, the NGA's Education Resource addresses the following subjects pertaining to ATSI culture; The Dreaming, Ancestral Creations Stories, ceremony, custodianship, moieties and kinship, symbols, traditional styles, and the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices. In a Canadian context, a discussion of subjects pertaining to Indigenous cultures could in effect be quite similar and consist of; Indigenous cosmologies, Creation stories, spiritual beliefs, ceremony, kinship, symbolism, and the maintenance and revival of customary arts practices. The same can be said for the historical information addressed in *Culture Warriors*.

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<sup>192</sup> NGA. *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*, i.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 11.



In its communication of ATSI historical information, *Culture Warriors* brings attention to important people, policies, and events that have shaped the course of Australian history such as; Aboriginal resistance fighters, the alleged extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the introduction of Christianity, Palm Island, mission life, the documentation and display of Aboriginals by Ethnographic museums, government assimilation policies, eugenics, stolen generations, Aboriginal deaths in police custody, land claims and recent political and judicial developments such as the Native Title Act. As seen in section 3.7.4, while the kit may address many different historical subjects it does not mention one of the principal factors to shape the course of Australian history since colonization, the myth of Terra Nullius.

Canada and Australia share many historical similarities as both are settler nations originally colonized by Great Britain. When the historical subjects addressed in *Culture Warriors* are translated into a Canadian context they in fact remain very much the same; Indigenous people in Canada were not passive victims of colonization, they fought back like the Aboriginal resistance fighters in Australia. Just as in Australia, widely-held beliefs that Indigenous people were destined to become extinct led to the documentation of Indians by anthropologists and were used as excuses to justify the mass murder of Indigenous people on North American soil during settlement. Just as in Australia, Eurocentric and eugenicist ideas have shaped government policies and public opinions with regards to Indigenous people in the past. These policies led to the tragic removal of children from their families and communities. In Australia these policies created the stolen generations, while in Canada the residential school system and policies that adopted Indigenous children out to white families are responsible for several generations of victims. Since colonization, the dispossession inflicted upon Indigenous people by the settler societies of Canada and Australia has been very much the same. Today, as

both Nations are coming to grips with their pasts and begin apologizing to their Indigenous populations, there is hope for reconciliation. As mentioned in section 3.7.1, on 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave a formal apology to the Indigenous people of Australia on behalf of the Australian Parliament and declared that it was time to start “righting the wrongs of the past.”<sup>194</sup> In his speech, Rudd made direct reference to the Assimilation Policy and the Stolen Generations:

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.<sup>195</sup>

In Canada, a similar speech was given by Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008. While asking the forgiveness of Aboriginal people in Canada, Harper apologized for the residential school system stating:

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian residential schools system. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail. [...]

The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. We are sorry.

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian residential schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the settlement agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools system.<sup>196</sup>

As Australia and Canada have reached a similar junction in their relationship with their Indigenous populations, it would make sense that the dissemination of historical information

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<sup>194</sup> Department of Education and Training, “Formal Apology to Indigenous Australians,” *Racism No Way: Fact Sheets*, <http://racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/70.html>

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> “Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Statement of Apology,” *CBC News* (11 Jun. 2008), <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/06/11/pm-statement.html>

relating to Indigenous people be conducted in a similar fashion in both nations. In its dissemination of historical information relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, *Culture Warriors* demonstrates the importance of addressing the darker chapters of history using an open and informational approach. Now that the Canadian government has set up the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the aims of uncovering the experiences of the victims of the residential school system and educating all Canadians about it, the dissemination of historical information pertaining Indigenous people by national institutions such as the NGC should also be aimed at educating viewers. By providing the historical contexts for artworks by Indigenous artists such as was done in *Culture Warriors*, visitors to the NGC will not only reach a greater understanding of the works of art but of Canadian history in general.

Having discussed how the cultural and historical information disseminated in *Culture Warriors* could be translated into a Canadian context and help the NGC meet its aforementioned mandate, it is important not to forget that despite providing the cultural and historical contexts for thirty works of art, the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource* also discusses the works of art as works of art. In the section dedicated to the communication of ATSI art as ‘Art’ it has been discussed how the Education Resource describes artworks using formal artistic terms such as colour, line, medium, composition, and technique and provides examples of the wide range of contemporary Indigenous arts practices showcased in *Culture Warriors* such as; paintings on bark and canvas, photography, mixed-media installation, sculpture, fibre work, drawing, printmaking, and new media. In a Canadian context this discussion would for obvious reasons be very much the same. While art galleries have traditionally showcased and communicated the artistic aspects of artworks to their audiences, this has not always been the case for the presentation of Indigenous art at the NGC. Before 1985, Indigenous art was not even

collected by the NGC. At that time, the collection of Indigenous art was seen as the responsibility of the Museum of Civilization. National institutions treated Indigenous art as cultural artefacts rather than works of fine art. In the *Report on Indian and Inuit Art at the National Gallery of Canada* published in 1983, Jean Blodgett stated with regards to the NGC's collection policy that; "[It] excluded a major group of Canadian artists from the National Gallery while relegating them to the ethnographic milieu of the Museum."<sup>197</sup> In 1986, the NGC finally acquired its first work of contemporary Indigenous art – a work by Ojibwa artist Carl Beam entitled *The North American Iceberg* (1985). While twenty five years have passed since this acquisition, the presentation of Indigenous art as works of art continues to be important for the NGC. Thus, if the NGC were to successfully adopt the multifaceted approach used by the NGA in the dissemination artworks shown in *Culture Warriors*, it would be necessary for the NGC to continue to emphasize the artistic qualities of works in addition to discussing their cultural and historical contexts.

In order to help meet its present day mandate, the NGC would be wise to develop educational materials for all of its Indigenous art exhibitions and adopt the multifaceted approach discussed above in its dissemination of Indigenous art. Not only would these actions help raise awareness and appreciation of Indigenous art amongst audiences, they would provide the substance necessary to truly show that Indigenous art takes pride and place at the NGC.

Recruited as the director of the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 1999, Dawn Casey was the first Indigenous woman to be the director of a national cultural institution in Australia. Casey first began her career in the Commonwealth Public Service and throughout her career has widely contributed to Indigenous policies and programs and Australia's cultural

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<sup>197</sup> Jean Blodgett, *Report on Indian and Inuit art at the National Gallery of Canada*. (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1983), 40.

heritage nationally. In 2001, coinciding with the opening of the newly built NMA for which Casey was responsible, the museum hosted the conference *National Museums: Negotiating Histories*. In her foreword to the conference proceedings, Casey directly addresses the important role of the national museum today:

Museums can no longer be seen as storehouses for objects and as venues for passive exhibitions. Increasingly both the museum sector and the public view of the role of the museums as a fulcrum for debate and interpretation of a whole range of social and political issues in which objects become just one part of the story of a people, a culture, an event or a symbol... We each face a set of challenges in how we tell stories of our nation and most importantly, in how we negotiate how and what we tell.<sup>198</sup>

As seen in sections two and three, in the presentation of *Culture Warriors* and its accompanying Education Resource the NGA is embodying the concept of ‘histories’, be they oppositional or pluralist. In a clear departure from the ideas and beliefs of former Australian Prime Minister John Howard – who believed in *one* history for *one* Australia – *Culture Warriors* demonstrates a true commitment to multivocality. Instead of telling a grand, national narrative, through the telling of multiple, coexisting, individual, and local histories, the NGA is helping visitors understand that “stories about Indigenous Australians are not just Indigenous histories but histories in which all Australians have a part.”<sup>199</sup>

Through the telling of multiple histories, while consciously avoiding generalities that lead to the false assumption that there is *one* truth and *one* history – the NGA is able to effectively surmount the issue of a ‘black-archival view of history’ and address the realities of Australia’s past in an informative and constructive way for all Australians. As Dawn Casey succinctly puts

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<sup>198</sup> Dawn Casey, “Foreword,” in *National Museums, Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings*, (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2001), 3.

<sup>199</sup> Gaye Sculthorpe, “Exhibiting Indigenous Histories in Australian museums,” in *National Museums, Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings*, 81.

it; “Museums have an obligation as custodians of the past, but an equal obligation as storytellers – to make the past accessible to those who actually own it.”<sup>200</sup> In *Culture Warriors*, the National Gallery has effectively used its role as storyteller to: Represent many voices; Challenge Eurocentric and essentialist narratives of national history; Provide a forum for discussion and engage social and political debate; Address both national successes and mistakes; Showcase that Indigenous art takes pride and place at the NGA; Educate the public about contemporary Indigenous art and relate important cultural and historical information pertaining to Indigenous people.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the NGA’s Inaugural Indigenous Art Triennial: *Culture Warriors* and analyze of how the exhibition frames and disseminates contemporary Indigenous Australian art. Focusing on the Education Resource developed for the exhibition, this thesis also provides an analysis of the material’s cultural, historical and artistic content. Finally, this thesis discusses the potential adaptation of the NGA’s multifaceted approach as shown in the *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Education Resource* to a Canadian context. The aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate the current educational approach taken by the NGA in the dissemination of contemporary Indigenous art and provide useful examples as to how the development of educational materials for Indigenous art exhibitions can help the NGC meet its mandate to increase the appreciation and awareness of Indigenous art at the Gallery.

It is my sincere hope that upcoming major exhibitions of Indigenous art at the NGC take into account the NGA’s approach to disseminating Indigenous art and invest in education. While the NGC seems to be perpetually caught at a junction where it is unsure of its role as storyteller, it is my firm belief that it can learn many lessons from the strengths and gaps in the educational

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<sup>200</sup> Dawn Casey, “Foreword,” in *National Museums, Negotiating Histories: Conference Proceedings*, 4.

materials created by the NGA for *Culture Warriors*.

## 5. Figures

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### **Figure 1**

Treahna Hamm

*Yabby*

2006

Grass, gumnuts

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.194)



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**Figure 2**  
Dennis Nona  
*Ubirikubiri*  
2007  
Pearlshell on bronze  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.438)

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**Figure 3**

Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr

*Face Painting*

2006

Natural earth pigments and hibiscus charcoal with synthetic polymer binder on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.175.A-B)

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**Figure 4**

Julie Dowling

*Walyer*

2006

Synthetic polymer paint and red ochre on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.9)

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**Figure 5**

Trevor 'Turbo' Brown

*Koala and babies*

2005

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.184)

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**Figure 6**

John Mawurndjul

*Mardayin design at Dilebang*

2006

Natural earth pigments on stringybark

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.196)

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**Figure 7**

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga

*Yawkyawk mother and babies*

2006

Natural earth pigments and natural dyes on pandanus

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.166)

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**Figure 8**

Treahna Hamm

*Barmah nurrtja biganga (Barmah Forest possum skin cloak)*

2005

Common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) skin pelts, thread and natural earth pigments  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.193)

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**Figure 9**  
Daniel Boyd  
*King No Beard*  
2007  
Oil on canvas  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.191)



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**Figure 10**

Elaine Russell

*Inspecting our houses*

2004

Synthetic polymer paint on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2004.316)

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**Figure 11**

Richard Bell

*Psalm Singing*

2007

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.190.A-B)

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**Figure 12**

Judy Watson

*palm cluster*

2007

Pigment, pastel, synthetic polymer paint and carbon ink on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2007.201)

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## 7. Appendix A

|   | ARTIST                | TITLE              | SUBJECT MATTER ADDRESSED IN EDUCATION RESOURCE <sup>201</sup>   |  |   |  |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|---|--|---|--|
|   |                       |                    | ATSI cultural and historical information  | Biographical info about artist/ connection to work   | Artistic concepts   | Other works in travelling exhibition but not in edu. kit                                 |
| 1 | Vernon Ah Kee         | <i>Mythread</i>    | how anthropologists recorded Aboriginal images - displayed photos like artefacts in museums (often only identified by number) - Eugenics - Palm Island  | portrait of artist's grandfather (from Palm Island) from original photographs in the collection of the South Australian Museum   | triptych format; realist drawings that are meticulous, cool, detached   | <i>not an animal or a plant</i> , 2006   |
| 2 | Jean Baptiste Aputimi | <i>Yirrikapayi</i> | Customary Tiwi body design; triangles, rectangles and squares - Tiwi body designs disguise them from evil spirits of the dead - Work relates to local story of a man who became crocodile - Yirrikapayi means male crocodile; artist uses traditional natural earth pigments 'ochres' from local rocks  | Artist comes from a family of Tiwi painters, printmakers, ceremonial singers and dancers.  | hatched and cross-hatched lines/ geometric pattern texture of croc's skin; dark background colour makes light foreground stand out; 3D effect of pattern recalls traditional designs carved into wood | <i>Jikapayinga</i> , 2007<br><i>Yirrikamini</i> , 2007                                   |
| 3 | Jimmy Baker           | <i>Katatjika</i>   | Artist is senior custodian of the stories attached to the site Katatjika, which gives him the authority to paint it. The artist paints landscapes that invoke ancestral beings and their stories; their presence is part of the physical, spiritual and ceremonial character of the land and his people | Katatjika is a place of special significance to the artist; Baker is one of the most senior and respected men in the Pitjantjatjara lands; Baker is also a ngangkari (a healer); he depicts stories for a younger generation and to teach others | Colour theory; contrast between light and dark colours. Brilliant colours enliven the painting  | <i>Pilati</i> , 2007<br><i>Wanampi Kutjara (Two Serpent Men's Creation Story)</i> , 2006 |

<sup>201</sup> NGA, *National Indigenous Art Triennial: Culture Warriors Education Resource*.

|   |                              |                      |   |   |   |   |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Maringka Baker               | <i>Kuru Ala</i>      | Kuru Ala is in the central desert where water is scarce. Painting depicts waterholes that are essential for survival but more importantly are the sites where Ancestral Beings were born, rested, fought or played. Knowledge of these sacred sites and the authority to relate these stories rests with the Indigenous custodians of the land. This painting is of the Seven Sisters Creating story. | Baker is a senior Pitjantjatjara artist and was born at an important ceremonial rock.   | Coloured dots surrounding dark circles, make them stand out against patterns of lines   | <i>Anmangunga</i> , 2006<br><i>Ngura Mankurpa</i> , 2006                          |
| 5 | Richard Bell                 | <i>Psalm Singing</i> | Bell is using a phrase from the 25th Psalm to refer to a recent Aboriginal death in police custody on Palm Island, which resulted in major protest and despair. This biblical reference evokes the way religion was forced upon Aboriginal people. The central black circle is like a watering hole.  | Bell is from New South Wales and Queensland. He lives in the city of Brisbane and his art makes powerful statements about the troubled intersections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories and the present. | Complex composition to depict many layers of meaning; Colourful arrangement used like mosaic, patchwork, or quilt; white and black sides of composition used to signify racial difference | <i>Australian Art it's an Aboriginal Thing</i> , 2006<br><i>Uz vs Them</i> , 2006 |
| 6 | Jan Billycan (Djan Nanundie) | <i>All the Jila</i>  | This painting is about living water which is essential for survival in the Great Sandy Desert of Northwestern Australia. Each striped shape may relate to a water source. She uses patterns inspired from ceremonial body painting and also from large sand paintings traditionally drawn into the sand with sticks.  | Billycan is a medicine/healing woman. Her landscape paintings refer to human organs as well as water and sand dunes.  | Brilliant vibrating effect is created by the stripes of contrasting colour against a black background.  | <i>All that Jila</i> , 2004<br><i>All that Jila</i> , 2005                        |

|    |                                      |  |  |   |   |   |
|----|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| 7  | Daniel Boyd                          | <i>King No Beard</i>                     | Based on 1773 portrait of King George III of England, Boyd inserted his own subtle changes to this painting; eye patch, parrot, head in a jar. Aboriginals thought Cook and his men were women due to lack of facial hair. The severed head refers to Aboriginal freedom fighters who were decapitated and whose heads were sent to England for display. The parrot and eye patch refer to piracy, and how Aboriginal land was stolen. | The artist is challenging European views of history; The decapitated head is a self-portrait of the artist gazing mournfully          | The importance of details and their meaning; cultural re-appropriation through reproduction   | <i>Treasure Island</i> , 2005<br><i>Governor No Beard</i> , 2007  |
| 8  | Trevor 'Turbo' Brown                 | <i>Koala and babies</i>                  | The koalas depicted here refer to the Dreamtime or a time before European invasion and contemporary issues of over-grazing, erosion and pollution that endanger animal habitats.   | Artist feels like he is in the Dreamtime when he paints; he sees the animals and birds that live there.                               | White outlines make the figure stand out from the background. Energetic and spontaneous brushstrokes create illusion of fur, grass, and foliage.  | <i>Dreamtime Kangaroo and bird</i> , 2006<br><i>Sugar Gliders</i> , 2006  |
| 9  | Christine Christophersen             | <i>The past, the present, the future</i> | Moieties are part of an important and complex system of family and group relationships in Aboriginal communities.  | Each shape has three colours, a white border and two other colours, denoting the various moieties (skin groups) in the artist's clan. | formal analysis of shapes/colours/composition used in painting; the never ending elliptical shape is connected to the title; the past, the present, the future  | <i>Blue Print</i> , 2006<br><i>Blue Print</i> , 2006  |
| 10 | Destiny Deacon (and Virginia Fraser) | <i>Colour Blinded Series</i>             | A golliwog is a black rag dolls for children and also an offensive racial slur. The artists are challenging the idea that Indigenous artist should have all the answers to issues relating to their national identity and Indigenous struggles past and present. Their installation prompts the viewer to think about and respond to these issues and also   | The artists address the role of the viewer in the installation space.   | Installation includes a number of works of various mediums; the acidic yellow sodium light affects the way everything looks in the space and affects how viewers see colour making them 'colour blind'. | All works by Destiny Deacon (and Virginia Fraser) shown in <i>Culture Warriors</i> are part of the <i>Colour Blinded Series</i> . |

|    |                       |                                    |  |  |  |  |
|----|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
|    |                       |                                    | think about the role of the viewer.  |  |  |  |
| 11 | Philip Gudthaykudthay | <i>Wagilag Sisters, with child</i> | Subject of painting, Wagilag Sisters and child, are key figures in an important ancestral creation story where they travel to a waterhole and are eaten by a python. This incident created the first wet and dry seasons. The finely painted lines that cross in a grid pattern are called Rarrk which invokes a connection to an ancestral presence.  | The artist is the last conversant speaker from the Liyagalawumirr people, and is the most senior artist from Ramingining. He is senior ceremonial leader for two Dhuwa moiety groups and is a custodian of the stories of his ancestral lands such as this story about the Wagilag Sisters and child | Painting is made with ochres that gives the surface of the canvas a dry, dusty appearance.   | <i>Goannas</i> , 2007<br><i>Witiji (Olive python)</i> , 2007<br><i>Gunyunmirringu</i> , 2007<br><i>Gunyunmirringa (landscape)</i> , 2007 |
| 12 | Treahna Hamm          | <i>Yabby</i>                       | The yabby is a river crustacean that resides along the Murray Plain where Ancestral Beings emerge from the river. This is a site of enormous cultural significance for the Yorta Yorta people whose stories inspired the artist. Hamm's art stands in defiance to the 1998 High Court claim that history has washed away the connection between the Yorta Yorta people and their land and that the connection was not capable of revival | Treahna Hamm's art is rooted in her connection to land, the river and her culture. She has helped revive the customary practice of making possum cloaks.   | This fibre work is woven in a coiled bundle technique that has been used to make fibre objects for thousands of generations in Australia | <i>Barmah nurrnja biganga (Barmah Forest possum-skin cloak)</i> , 2005   |

|    |                          |  |  |  |   |                           |
|----|--------------------------|--|--|--|---|---------------------------|
| 13 | Gordon Hookey            | <i>FIGHT: To Survive; To Live; To Die!</i> | This painting represents conflict existing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous society. The artist has represented a crowd of red-necks as criminals suggesting that the crowd mentality of the dominant culture masks racism. The central panel refers to the history of Aboriginal men working with boxing troupes until the 1970s. The artist represents Aboriginal men as heroes and the red necks as villains. Makes reference to Aboriginals who have died in custody and Aboriginal resistance fighters | The artist makes confrontational works with underlying messages of hope that the attitudes of dominant culture will change       |   | <i>Grog Gott'im, 2005</i> |
| 14 | Anniebell Marrngamarrnga | <i>Yawkyawk mother and babies</i>          | Using a technique that has been passed down for thousands of years in Arnhem Land, this work is made of dyed leaf fibres. Yawkyawk means 'young woman spirit being'. Ancestral stories tell how during the time of creation these spirit beings turned into animal forms. Today, the Kunijku believe that these creatures are alive and living in freshwater sites in sacred locations.  | The artist learned how to weave from her mother and to paint from her father. The yawkyawk is her favorite subject to represent. | The artist makes bark paintings, timber carvings, and weaves fibres. Colour is important to her work. | <i>Crocodile, 2007</i>    |

|    |                 |                                    |  |   |  |   |
|----|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| 15 | John Mawurndjul | <i>Mardayin design at Dilebang</i> | The rippling effect created by the use of rarrk suggests the movement of water in the billabong at Milmilngkan and the power of Ancestral Beings that live in the water.   | In 1973, Mawurndjul and his family returned to their homelands on the Mann Rier and it was there that he began to paint Ancestral Beings. Today he is involved with teaching and mentoring a younger generation of Kuninjku artists who seek his permission to paint particular subjects or to develop their own style. | This bark painting vibrates with light and movement. The artist has used rarrk (crosshatching) to create a zig of light and dark; creating a rippling effect like water. This work is an abstract composition, the artist has been focussing on increasingly refined and abstract patterns such as in this painting. | <i>Lorrkon</i> , 2006<br><i>Mardayin at Milmilngkan</i> , 2006  |
| 16 | Ricky Maynard   | <i>Coming home</i>                 | This work is about Indigenous history in Tasmania; the artist uses contemporary photos of Indigenous Tasmanians to make the viewer think about what happened there during European occupation and settlement. The artist is challenging eurocentric views of history; and directly confronts the alleged 'extermination' of Tasmanian Aboriginal people that is found in history books. By representing individuals who have maintained and upheld their local heritage, the artist is confronting this one-sided view of history. In one photograph, the artist shows us mutton-birds a customary source of nutrition on the island who were hunted by Europeans for their oil. | Ricky Maynard is a member of the Big River and Ben Lomond peoples of Tasmania and has used the medium of photography to counteract Eurocentric views of history and the idea of Indigenous eradication from Tasmania.   |  | <i>Broken Heart</i> , 2007<br><i>Custodians</i> , 2007<br><i>Death in exile</i> , 2007<br><i>Free country</i> , 2007<br><i>The healing garden</i> , 2007<br><i>Mission</i> , 2007<br><i>The Spit</i> , 2007<br><i>Traitor</i> , 2007<br><i>Vansittart Island</i> , 2007 |

|    |   |  |  |   |  |  |
|----|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| 17 | Danie Mellor  | <i>The contrivance of a vintage wonderland</i> | The artist uses the Kangaroo as a symbol of all the native animals and Indigenous people who lived in this land before European settlement. It is also a symbol of Australiana that has been appropriated and used for national icons such as the Australian coat of arms. This work confronts the fabrication of history and refers to the domination of Indigenous society by outsiders through the covering of the kangaroo with English ceramic pottery. The pottery design was in fact adapted by the English from Chinese pottery; another indication of England's Empire and domination over other people and nations | The artist maintains a sense of fun and fantasy in this work creating a surreal 'natural' environments                                      | This mixed media installation deliberately reminds the viewer of old fashioned dioramas in ethnographic museums  | <i>The contrivance of a vintage wonderland</i> is the only work by Mellor included in the travelling exhibition. |
| 18 | Lofty Bardayal<br>Nadjamerrek<br>OR Wamud<br>Namok AO | <i>Dulkorrkelorrken g and Wakkewakken</i>      | The male figure is an evil spirit called Dulklorrkelorrkeng. The female figure is the honey spirit called Wakkewakken and can be identified by her lack of legs and is associated with Honey Dreaming. Evil spirits live in trees, eat poisonous snakes and can only be seen by 'clever men' like the artist who has learned to paint them.  | Lofty is the last painter of the magnificent rock art galleries of the 'stone region' of Arnhem Land. He is a senior elder of the Mok clan. | This painting with its stark figures against plain backgrounds reminds us of Lofty's rock painting tradition   | <i>Barrk – black wallaroo after fire, 2005</i><br><br><i>Kurdukadj (Emu)</i>                                     |
| 19 | Doreen Reid<br>Nakamarra                              | <i>Untitled, 2006</i>                          | This painting depicts designs associated with the rock hole site of Wirrulinga. The lines in the painting represent tali, or sandhills in the area and is known as the traditional birthing site for the women of the area.  | The artist is associated with Papunya Tula Artists Ltd.   | The dazzling optical effect in this painting is created from thousands of finely painted zigzag lines; The use of a variety of closely related tones creates waves of subtle variation across the canvas. There is no focal point. | <i>Untitled, 2005</i><br><br><i>Untitled, 2007</i>   |



|    |                                |                      |  |   |  |   |
|----|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|--|---|
| 20 | Dennis Nona                    | <i>Ubirikubiri</i>   | This sculpture refers to a traditional story and carving designs of the Torres Strait Islanders. The legend of Ubirikubiri is originally from Papua New Guinea and is about a father who buys a crocodile as a pet for his daughter. When the pet isn't fed it kills the man and takes his body away. Despite the daughter's pleas he does not return the father's body.   | Dennis Nona is from the Torres Strait Islands and was taught traditional woodcarving. He uses clan patterns in his prints and sculptures.   | This is a larger than life bronze sculpture of a crocodile and is covered in delicate and complex patterns that are indented and look like they've been carved into the surface.   | <i>Yarwarr, 2007</i>  |
| 21 | Arthur Koo'ekka<br>Pambegan Jr | <i>Face Painting</i> | This work depicts patterns and colours inspired from the designs painted on the bodies of ceremonial performers of the <i>Kalben</i> (Flying Fox Story Place) and the <i>Walkaln-aw</i> (Bonefish Story Place) which are performed by the Wik people. <i>Kalben</i> is part of the first stage of an initiation ceremony. These stories are associated with places on the western side of Cape York in Queensland. | Pambegan Jr is from Cape York in Far North Queensland and has been involved with local ceremonies since he was a child. He learnt to carve and how to perform ceremonies from his father, who was also an artist and ceremonial leader. Pambegan Jr's art come from the traditions of his ceremonial group, Winchanam of whom he is senior songman. | The painting is dominated by strong horizontal lines of red-brown, black and white. These colours come from natural earth pigments and hibiscus charcoal collected by the artist in his traditional country and bonded to the surface of the canvas. | <i>Flying fox, 2007</i><br><i>Flying fox (red back), 2007</i> |

|    |                   |  |   |   |  |  |
|----|-------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| 22 | Christopher Pease | <i>New Water Dreaming</i>                    | This painting is based on a print from 1826 by a French draughtsman Louis Auguste Sainson of St Georges Sound, the artist's traditional country. The scene depicts a friendly and positive interaction between the Minang people of Western Australia and European explorers in the 1800's. The scientific looking diagram is suggestive of the way European settlers imposed their own ideas (scientific, technological, and religious) and structure onto and unspoiled and ancient land. The painting evokes the subsequent tensions that came to exist between the new settlers and the indigenous people | As an artist focusing on Indigenous heritage and identity, Pease is particularly interested in the impact of non-indigenous culture on Nyoongar (his) culture from the early 1800's to the present day. | Based on an original black and white print this painting is richly coloured. Pease has used oil paint to enhance the impression of history.  | <i>Target</i> , 2005<br><br><i>Wrong side of the Hay</i> , 2005  |
| 23 | Shane Pickett     | <i>On the Horizon of the Dreaming Boodja</i> | This landscape painting depicts the beginning of life/ earth, which is the Dreaming Boodja. As the artists states; "Every river, every tree, every rock is important as the Dreaming runs through them connecting all things, including mankind. These are the energy paths of the Dreaming and they are never meant to be broken." The Dreaming is not just an ancient myth, but true, real and still experienced - Pickett's paintings speak to its everyday power.   | Shane Pickett's art combines his deep knowledge of Nyoongar culture and beliefs with his own personal style of gestural abstraction.  | This stark, mainly black and white painting is a physical and metaphorical landscape. Strong horizontal lines suggest distant horizons and landforms, while the vertical division in the foreground flattens the composition. Energetic brushstrokes of thick white paint stand out against a black background behind. Gestural abstraction. | <i>Bunuroo afternoon moods of a hot humid day</i> , 2006<br><br><i>Dreaming path of the Milky Way (Moorndaam)</i> , 2006 |

|    |                             |                              |   |  |  |  |
|----|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| 24 | Elaine Russell              | <i>Inspecting our houses</i> | This painting represents the regimental life on a mission, or Aboriginal reserve. The painting recalls Russell's childhood memories during the 40's and 50's on the Murrin Bridge Mission in New South Wales and portrays the unnecessary intrusion into family life caused by weekly home inspections by the mission manager's wife which has left a bitter memory for Russell.  | Elaine Russell's work deals with memory, childhood, racism, indigenous and non-indigenous relations. This work is directly drawn from her childhood experiences of life on the Murrin Bridge Mission.  | The straight dirt road creates organized boundaries between the plots of land. Bright flat colours are used to suggest the red sand, the blue water, the green trees, and the white clouds in the blue sky. The different colours of the houses suggest an expression of individuality within a system seeking uniformity. | <i>Catching yabbies</i> , 2006<br><br><i>Untitled from the Mission series</i> , 2006   |
| 25 | Christian Bumbarra Thompson | <i>The Sixth Mile</i>        | An intimate family ritual, this video captures the artist and his father in a customary greeting ceremony practiced by Bidjara people. The artist is aware that in the past, Indigenous people were forced to disclose aspects of their culture for the purpose of study and in this work, he consciously refrains from revealing the meanings of the words exchanged in their own language, Bidjara. Even though the viewer cannot understand the words that are spoken, through the direct and intense nature of video we are invited into this private space and witness the contemporary practice and continuation of culture, ceremony and ritual. | Bumbarra Thompson is a Bidjara man of the Kunja Nation in Queensland and is also German/Jewish on his mother's side. With an identity constantly in flux, the artist's work relies heavily on the relationship between objects, space and history - and includes forming responses to government policies and engaging his audience. | Bumbarra Thompson chooses video because of its potential for direct and intense audience engagement.   | <i>Tracey Moffatt</i> from the series <i>Gates of Tambo</i> , 2004<br><br><i>Andy Warhol</i> from the series <i>Gates of Tambo</i> , 2004<br><br><i>Desert Slippers</i> , 2006 |

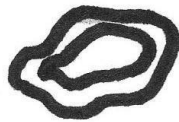
|    |             |                         |   |  |   |   |
|----|-------------|-------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| 26 | Judy Watson | <i>palm cluster</i>     | The two shapes in this large canvas represent a sting ray and Palm Island. Palm Island represented in brown is depicted by the artist as an unhappy place. The island was an Aboriginal settlement for 'troublemakers' and recalls death and incarceration for many like the artist herself. In 2004, an Aboriginal man was killed there while in police custody and is a site representing white domination over Indigenous populations. | Researching her own family history, the artist found that some of her relatives had been sent to Palm Island.  | Although the shape of the island looks like a view from an aeroplane, the dark brown colour suggests a place with an unhappy history. The white circular forms are like constellations of stars or pinpoints of light in a dark blue sea/ sky. The artist plays with spatial illusion; are we looking up or down? | <i>big blue world with three stupas</i> , 2004<br><br><i>under the act</i> , 2007               |
| 27 | H. J. Wedge | <i>No more drinking</i> | This painting is a raw and disturbing depiction of what happens when alcohol takes over. Wedge often paints confronting images dealing with the social and political issues relevant to Aboriginal people living in an urban or rural context, communities which have felt the longest effects of displacement and colonization.  | Wedge grew up on the Eramble Aboriginal Reserve where his life was controlled by the mission. Although he lacks a formal education and is limited in his ability to read or write, Wedge creates highly emotive art to communicate his own perceptions of Aboriginal life in a modern world. | The sky is a startling pink and together with the bright blue, orange and brown the artist creates an effect that is crazed a disturbing, almost hallucinatory. There is an unbridled energy about this painting. It is raw, intuitive, original and distinct.  | <i>Taking the land away</i> , 2006<br><br><i>Can't stop thinking about it I, II, III</i> , 2007 |

|    |                   |                             |  |  |  |  |
|----|-------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| 28 | Owen Yalandja     | <i>Yawkyawk</i>             | This sculpture represents a Yawkyawk, a mermaid. This fish-like creature is the artist's dreaming and lives in the water at Barrihdjowkkeng near the artist's outstation. The Kuninjku believe that yawkyawk are young girl spirits or ancestors who live in the water and whose shadows can sometimes be seen as they run away from any humans who may come near. | Yalandja is from Central Arnhem Land and is a senior member of the Dangkorlo clan of the Kuninjku people.  | The tapered body and fish-like tail has a sinuous curve which follows the line of the original branch. He chooses wood pieces that best portray the movements of the fish-like forms. The delicate pattern, carved and painted creates the illusion of scales. | <i>Yawkyawk</i> , 2007<br><i>Yawkyawk</i> , 2007 |
| 29 | Gulumbu Yunupingu | <i>Garak (the Universe)</i> | Ancestral Beings with infinite vision would see nothing but stars covering the entire night sky. The stars are also spirits of Yolngu Ancestors, who exist within specific bodies of water in North-East Arnhem Land as well as in an astral dimension.  | Yunupingu is a respected elder from Yirrkala. This work, covered in a multitude of stars, creates a sense of perpetuity and representation. More than a representation of the Milky Way, her art is about the entire universe, about every clan, and all the people of all colours in the world. | The entire surface of this piece of bark is covered in stars. They touch points to create distinct patterned areas against a subtly shaded background.   | <i>Gan'yu (Stars)</i> , 2005                     |

|    |               |               |   |  |   |  |
|----|---------------|---------------|---|--|---|--|
| 30 | Julie Dowling | <i>Walyer</i> | <p>This portrait is of a famous Aboriginal resistance fighter known as Walyer who lived in Tasmania c. 1800 - 31. In her teens Walyer was abducted by men from another clan and traded to sealers for flour and dogs. During her time with the sealers she learned English and how to use firearms. After she escaped she joined the Lairmairrener group of Emu Bay and began to lead attacks against settlers and other Aboriginal groups. She was the first Aboriginal warrior to use firearms against the colonists. As stated by the artist: "Walyer represents to me the hundreds of women who fought for their land against the invading colonial forces ... I painted Walyer gesturing toward a group of colonial houses in the distant right ... She is gesturing to the viewer as if they are a member of the fighters she has assembled to fight the colonial encroachments upon their land and hers.</p> |  | <p>There is an intense atmosphere in this painting. The moon shining through stormy clouds creates an eerie light around the rock makes Walyer glow. She is separate from the landscape behind her and yet, at the same time, everything about her is strongly related to it. This is a portrait painting where every detail relates to the story and personality of the subject.</p> | <p><i>Burruip, 2007</i><br/><i>The meeting, 2007</i></p> |
|----|---------------|---------------|---|--|---|--|

## 8. Appendix B

Examples of Aboriginal symbols and their meanings<sup>202</sup>



Soak hole



rock hole



resting place



man



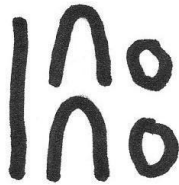
woman



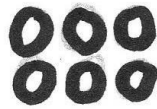
child



family



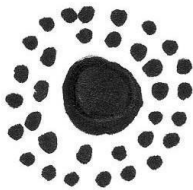
community



tribes



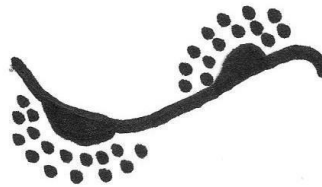
spirit ancestor



Emu  
(Earth Mother)



Sun  
(Father of Destiny)



Dreaming Track  
with Emu energy rising  
from it

<sup>202</sup> Symbol meanings are from R. Lewis' *The Beginner's Guide to Australian Aboriginal Art: Their symbols, their meaning and some Dreamtime stories*, (Marleston, South Australia: Gecko Books, 2009). The drawings are my own.

## 9. Appendix C

| #     | Section  | Work                                      | Artist                      |
|-------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| 3.1   | Aboriginal Moiety and Kinship Systems                            | <i>The past, the present, the future</i>  | Christine Christophersen    |
| 3.2   | Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs                                     | <i>Koala and Babies</i>                   | Trevor 'Turbo' Brown        |
|       |  | <i>Katatjika</i>                          | Jimmy Baker                 |
|       |  | <i>Wagilag Sisters, with child</i>        | Philip Gudthaykudthay       |
| 3.3   | Importance of Ceremony   | <i>Yirrikapayi</i>                        | Jean Baptiste Apuatimi      |
|       |  | <i>Face Painting</i>                      | Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr |
|       |  | <i>The Sixth Mile</i>                     | Christian Bumbarra Thompson |
| 3.4   | Power and Responsibility within Indigenous Communities           | <i>Katatjika</i>                          | Jimmy Baker                 |
|       |  | <i>Mardayin design at Dilebang</i>        | John Mawurndjul             |
| 3.5   | Artistic Traditions  | <i>Dulkorrrkelorrkeng and Wakkewakken</i> | Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek  |
|       |  | <i>Kurdukadj (Emu)</i>                    | Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek  |
|       |  | <i>Mardayin design at Dilebang</i>        | John Mawurndjul             |
|       |  | <i>Wagilag Sisters, with Child</i>        | Philip Gudthaykudthay       |
|       |  | <i>Katatjika</i>                          | Jimmy Baker                 |
|       |  | <i>Kuru Ala</i>                           | Maringka Baker              |
|       |  | <i>All the Jila</i>                       | Jan Billycan                |
| 3.5.1 | Maintenance and Revival of customary arts practices              | <i>Yawkyawk mother and babies</i>         | Anniebell Marrngamarrnga    |
|       |  | <i>Yabby</i>                              | Treahna Hamm                |
| 3.5.2 | Torres Strait Islander Culture                                   | <i>Ubirikubiri</i>                        | Dennis Nona                 |
|       |  | <i>Yarwarr</i>                            | Dennis Nona                 |
| 3.6.1 | Aboriginal resistance fighters and Tasmanian Aboriginal people   | <i>Walyer</i>                             | Julie Dowling               |
|       |  | <i>King No Beard</i>                      | Daniel Boyd                 |
|       |  | <i>Coming Home</i>                        | Ricky Maynard               |
| 3.6.2 | Documentation and display of Aboriginals by ethnographic museums | <i>mythread</i>                           | Vernon Ah Kee               |



|       |   |   |                             |
|-------|---|---|-----------------------------|
| 3.7.2 | Missions, Christianity, Palm Island                             | <i>Inspecting our houses</i>                | Elaine Russell              |
|       |   | <i>No more drinking</i>                     | H. G. Wedge                 |
|       |   | <i>Psalm singing</i>                        | Richard Bell                |
| 3.7.3 | Aboriginal deaths in police custody, incarceration, Palm Island | <i>Psalm singing</i>                        | Richard Bell                |
|       |   | <i>palm cluster</i>                         | Judy Watson                 |
|       |   | <i>under the act</i>                        | Judy Watson                 |
| 3.8.1 | Colour (pigments and ochres) and Line                           | <i>Katatjika</i>                            | Jimmy Baker                 |
|       |   | <i>Untitled (2006)</i>                      | Doreen Reid Nakamarra       |
|       |   | <i>palm cluster</i>                         | Judy Watson                 |
|       |   | <i>Mardayin design at Dilebang</i>          | John Mawurndjul             |
|       |   | <i>Face Painting</i>                        | Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr |
|       |   | <i>On the Horizon of the Dreaming Bodja</i> | Shane Pickett               |
|       |   | <i>Wagilag Sisters, with child</i>          | Philip Gudthaykudthay       |
|       |   | <i>Yirrikapayi</i>                          | Jean Baptiste Apuatimi      |
|       |   | <i>Yawkyawk mother and babies</i>           | Anniebell Marrngamarrnga    |
|       |   | <i>Psalm singing</i>                        | Richard Bell                |
|       |   | <i>No more drinking</i>                     | H. G. Wedge                 |
| 3.8.3 | Paintings on bark and hollow logs                               | <i>Mardayin design at Dilebang</i>          | John Mawurndjul             |
|       |   | <i>Dulkorrrkelorrkeng and Wakkewakken</i>   | Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek  |
|       |   | <i>Garak (the Universe)</i>                 | Gulumbu Yunupingu           |
| 3.8.4 | Paintings on canvas   | <i>Yirrikapayi</i>                          | Jean Baptiste Apuatimi      |
|       |   | <i>Katajika</i>                             | Jimmy Baker                 |
|       |   | <i>King No Beard</i>                        | Daniel Boyd                 |
| 3.8.5 | Photography   | <i>Coming home</i>                          | Ricky Maynard               |
|       |   |   |                             |

|        |                          |   |                                    |
|--------|--------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 3.8.6  | Mixed Media installation | <i>Colour blinded series</i>  | Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser |
|        |                          | <i>The contrivance of a vintage wonderland (A magnificent flight of curious fancy for science buffs ... a china ark of seductive whimsy ... a divinely ordered special attraction ... upheld in multifariousness)</i> | Danie Mellor                       |
| 3.8.7  | Sculpture                | <i>Ubirikubiri</i>  | Denis Nona                         |
|        |                          | <i>Yawkyawk</i>   | Owen Yalanda                       |
| 3.8.8  | Fibre works              | <i>Yabby</i>  | Treahna Hamm                       |
|        |                          | <i>Yawkyawk mother and babies</i>   | Anniebell Marrngamarrnga           |
| 3.8.9  | Digital media            | <i>Uz vs Them</i>   | Richard Bell                       |
|        |                          | <i>The Sixth Mile</i>   | Christian Bumarra Thompson         |
| 3.8.10 | Drawing                  | <i>mythread</i>   | Vernon Ah Kee                      |
| 3.8.11 | Printmaking              | <i>Under the act</i>  | Judy Watson                        |
|        |                          | <i>Yarwarr</i>  | Dennis Nona                        |