

Undercurrent

A solo exhibition by Bangarang artist Peta Clancy



Undercurrent

A solo exhibition by Bangarang artist Peta Clancy

9 March – 28 April 2019

The Koorie Heritage Trust acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate and where this exhibition is being hosted, the people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present and to the Dja Dja Wurrung people whose land has been photographed by the artist in this exhibition. This land was never ceded and the ongoing connection to land, culture and place existed before invasion and continues today.

The following text has been written by Michael Bourke, Dja Dja Wurrung community member and collaborator on this project, to welcome readers of this catalogue and visitors to the exhibition to the Dja Dja Wurrung Country photographed by the artist.

WARTAKAT (WELCOME)

Dhelkuk nyawi

nyarri-ngek Michael Bourke Dja Dja Wurrung Guli, Yorta Yorta Yenbena/Wongi,

Daung Wurrung Guliyn.

Dja Dja Wurrung Djaara mang

Wartak-angalang gundi ngulambarra,

Djuwima Barring-andak,

La larr Ba Gauwa, Guyura, Lalgambuk, dharreng Gauwa, Kurong, Lianganyuk,

Wanyarra, Goliban, Yang-ang, Yaluk-ang bulitj-ang,

Wii, Gatgin, Djaandak, Mirriyn, Galka, Martinga Guli Murrup,

Djuwima Barring-andak

Bengek WARTAKAT Djaandak Larni Dja Dja Wurrung Balak/Gunditj.

WELCOME (WARTAKAT)

Good Day

My name is Michael Bourke and I'm from The Yes Yes, No No Man

Yes, Yes Speaking People are here.

We gather here at this Meeting Place to affirm our Connection to the Stoney Mountains, the Volcanic Plains to the open grassy woodlands. Across to the flowing waters of the Coliban River, Avoca River, Campaspe River and the Loddon River.

Fire, Water, Earth, Wind, Trees, and Ancestor Spirits.

We Affirm our Connection.

We Welcome you to the Home of the Dja Dja Wurrung People.

Contents

- 4 Tom Mosby
Foreword

- 14 Peta Clancy
Undercurrent

- 17 *Excerpts from the transcript of a conversation between Michael Bourke, Amos Atkinson and Peta Clancy on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Friday 9th February, 2018*

- 28 Michael Bourke
The Theft of Land by Massacre Ngarrugum/Garrugum Dja-Nyuk

- 31 Amos Atkinson

- 36 Maddee Clarke

- 42 Greg Lehman
A Thin Veil

- 50 Rachel Kent
Peta Clancy: Undercurrent

Tom Mosby Foreword

In June 1838, in one of the earliest recorded incidents of frontier violence to occur in what is now the State of Victoria, armed European settlers engaged in a pitched battle with members of the Dja Dja Wurrung nation whose territory includes the present day city of Bendigo. On that day and in further violence following, over 40 Aboriginal people were killed. These instances of frontier violence remain largely unmarked and un-memorialised, contributing to a legacy of inter-generational trauma within Victorian First Nations families, peoples and communities that characterise the unfortunate history of Australian colonisation.

Undercurrent is a solo exhibition by Bangerang (Murray Goulburn area of South Eastern Australia) artist Peta Clancy, featuring a series of photographic works created in collaboration with the Dja Dja Wurrung community in and around Bendigo. During a 12-month residency based at the Koorie Heritage Trust, Clancy collaborated with Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners to research, develop and create an exhibition that explores the frontier violence and massacre sites that occurred on Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

Using cutting and layering techniques, Clancy's work references the emotional and cultural scars left in the landscape by this frontier violence. Using techniques that include "scarring" of the photographs,

Clancy depicts the layers of time, history, memory and place, uncovering the layers of colonisation and the continuing emotional and cultural effect of these massacres on the land and the community.

The Koorie Heritage Trust is proud to present *Undercurrent* as the first exhibition from our Fostering Koorie Art and Culture Residency Program. Established in 1985, the Koorie Heritage Trust is a bold and innovative 21st century not-for-profit arts and cultural organisation. Aboriginal owned and managed, we provide opportunities for all people to learn, connect and re-connect with the rich, living cultural heritage of Aboriginal Victoria originating from a 60,000 year old history. The acceptance of First Nations Australians comes through reconciliation, and at the Koorie Heritage Trust, we have been bridging the gap between all people for over 30 years. The clasped black and white hands in our logo reflect our belief that working together, we can raise awareness and appreciation of the cultural diversity of Koorie culture and work towards the broader goal of reconciliation for all.

Our Fostering Koorie Art and Culture Residency Program that has facilitated the presentation of *Undercurrent*, would not have been possible without the generous support of the Federal Department of Communications and the Arts' Indigenous Languages and Arts Program which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander communities to revive and maintain languages, and to develop and present art. We also acknowledge the support of exhibition sponsor Gandel Philanthropy and our program partners, the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria's Organisations Investment Program, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, and the Department of Communications and the Arts' Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the City of Melbourne through their Triennial Grants Program.

This project would also not have been possible without the generous cultural support and collaboration of the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.

I also wish to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our exhibition team led by Charlotte Christie, Curatorial Manager Koorie Heritage Trust, and ably assisted by Zenzi Clark and Kate ten Buuren, Assistant Curators, Koorie Heritage Trust. Such a groundbreaking show is only made possible through the hard work of our exhibitions team.

My final acknowledgement and gratitude is of course to Peta for delivering a powerful show. I am sure it will contribute to the nationwide conversation around remembrance and acknowledgment of the impact of colonial frontier violence on our First Nations communities.

Tom Mosby is the CEO of the Koorie Heritage Trust



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
130 x 92cm



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
130 x 92cm



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
130 x 92cm



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
150 x 106cm

Peta Clancy *Undercurrent*

I'm standing on the bank of the Campaspe River. On the other side of the river is the area where the Campaspe Plains number 2 massacre occurred, as indicated on the massacre map I'm holding in my hand. I can't step onto the actual site as it's on farm land. I'd have to trespass onto the farmer's land to do so. The line of the fence and the line of the river prevent me from going any further. The land on the farm side looks so different from the land I'm standing on. The farm land has been cleared. The pasture is sunburnt, blonde hay-coloured grass is growing about 20cm from the earth. Walking tracks meander along the bank of the river close to the water's edge, carved out by the sheep walking down to the river to drink. On my side of the river are tall reeds, beautiful trees, the sound of birds and the wind in the leaves. This lush green side - the other side so parched and dry. The farm land looks like it has been reaped of all its goodness.

I start walking along the river bank. It's a beautiful day. It's a hot day and I'm mindful of snakes. The sun is high in the sky, there are shadows falling on the ground from the trees. The river is not that wide, and it seems to be flowing. I hear a sheep bleat, it sounds like a human cry. An aeroplane flies overhead. It's hard to believe that this area has such a violent history. I've gotten as close as I can to the site. It's not just the fact that the site is on private property that is holding me back from treading closer - out of respect to Traditional Owners I'd rather not disturb the earth on such a sacred site. One of many.

I've been told that there are many massacre sites on Dja Dja Wurrung country that aren't recorded on the map I'm holding. I feel strange being in the vicinity of such trauma and tragedy. Such a sacred site but there's no marker. Ancestors of those killed can't access the site because it's on private property. Fences demarcate and divide up the land for farming purposes. Many of these sites have been cleared, and the truth of what happened there has been fabricated, covered over and denied.

Campaspe Plains 2 details from the Dja Dja Wurrung Massacre Map:

Exact location: Known

WH Yaldwyn's superintendent, John Coppock, said in a sworn statement that on 9 June 1840, approx. 50 Aborigines, who had stolen sheep from Boman's and Yaldwyn's runs, had been tracked down by a party of 8 white men. A 'pitched battle' took place for 3/4 of an hour, in which 7 or 8 Aborigines were shot dead, after which the sheep were recovered.

Date: 9 June 1840

*Aboriginals involved: clan unknown, Dja Dja Wurrung language
Europeans involved: 8 employees from Dr W Bowman's and WH Yaldwyn's stations
Reported Aboriginal Deaths: 7-8 people
Reported European Deaths: None*

Clarke, I, 1995, Scars in the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria, 1803-1859, Aboriginal Studies Press, p.98

Note: I've been told to always add a zero to the end of the recorded number of Aboriginal deaths for a more realistic estimate.

When I first conceived the project, *Undercurrent*, my aim was to visit every single massacre site marked on the Victorian Aboriginal Massacre map (compiled for the Koorie Heritage Trust's publication KOORIE in 1991). Throughout the project's development the scope has become more focussed. I have been working exclusively on Dja Dja Wurrung country with support from the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. My research has been informed and deeply enriched through visits on country and to massacre sites with Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners. I have been given a Dja Dja Wurrung massacre map documenting many massacre sites on country known of from archival history. There are countless other sites, not featured on this map or any map, which elders and Traditional Owners are painfully aware of.

Many of the massacres on Dja Dja Wurrung country occurred at campsites close to creeks and rivers where people traditionally lived for thousands of years. Since settlement, these waterways have been dramatically altered. Rivers and creeks have been drained, water redirected and waterways flooded. *Undercurrent* includes works created while exploring a massacre

site on Dja Dja Wurrung country that is now under water. The area (a river bank) was flooded during the 19th century when a weir was constructed:

Due to the weir being placed, the water has backed up and created this big lagoon where it normally wouldn't be. The river line would be way in the middle there and now it has expanded...the grave sites are underneath that water...and now the water has backed up it is sitting on them. Which is probably a good thing anyway...because...no one can interfere... (Michael Burke and Amos Atkinson, pers. comm. 9/2/2018)

In my photographs I am interested in finding ways to visually depict and explore sites where the actual location is unknown, or the exact site cannot be accessed. For instance, it being beneath water. I believe this is a metaphor for the hidden nature, and depth, of the violence that occurred throughout Australia.

A scar is a sign of violence. It represents a cut or an incision made in the skin. It is not the actual cut, which has healed, but a reminder of the violence of the incision. I explore the symbology of the scar and the cut through the process of cutting through the print. The images are cut, yet rendered whole again, but the cut remains in the image as a visual trace of the traumatic history and events that occurred within the landscape. I also explore the notion of scarring or cutting

by photographing light cutting through the darkness of the landscape. When I present the photographs, a series of smaller scaled framed prints are installed over larger scale wallpaper prints. Overlaying the images disrupts the view of the landscape. My aim is to give a visual presence to the hidden nature of the violence and trauma that occurred in the landscape in the 19th century. For many, the truth and extent of violence Aboriginal people experienced has been buried, forgotten or falsified in Australia's history. To this day, the scale of massacres that occurred across the country have not been fully acknowledged.

I would like to thank the Koorie Heritage Trust for inviting me to undertake the Fostering Koorie Art and Culture artist residency throughout 2019. Specific thanks to Charlotte Christie and Tom Mosby for their unwavering support of the project at all stages, as well as, Zenzi Clark, Kate ten Buuren, and all the wonderful team at the Koorie Heritage Trust. Thank you to Michael Bourke, Amos Atkinson, Rodney Carter from the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Les Walkling, Andrey Walkling, Xain Milke and Klara Hansen who supported the development of the project at different stages. Maddee Clark, Rachel Kent and Greg Lehman thank you for your insightful contributions to the catalogue.

Peta Clancy is a Bangerang artist and a senior lecturer in the faculty of Art, Design & Architecture at Monash University in Melbourne.

Excerpts from the transcript of a conversation between Michael Bourke, Amos Atkinson and Peta Clancy on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Friday 9th February, 2018

Michael: A lot of the massacres, too, are underwater, especially up around near the Coliban and this place here as well. They weired it up and where it's weired the water has expanded out and created a new basin.

Peta: What's this place? Is this like a caravan park or something?

Michael: This bit in here is, yeah. They all come down here to the water, it's nice water, and, you know, you can tell, sort of, why the mob was here around this area.

Peta: And this is a massacre site?

Michael: Yeah, like, in the waterway there. So, it's not actual on the edge. Same up around Coliban and that as well. It's all up around there, actual underwater, you know what I mean? Like, underwater. So, if it wasn't for this weir the water edge'd be way over there, you know, in these areas. These are where the massacres are.

Peta: So how are they underwater?

Michael: So, it used to be a river line, a creek line, in here, and due to this weir being placed.

Peta: Ah, they've taken the water and redirected it.

Michael: And, the water has backed up and created this big lagoon.

Amos: Where it normally wouldn't be.

Michael: The river line would be way in the middle there and now it's expanded. So, normally water comes out here as well, like. It's sitting pretty low.

Amos: And that's what you're saying, how it'd cover the grave sites, hey?

Michael: Yeah, all the grave sites are

underneath that water, on the river's edge.

Amos: And now, 'cause the water's backed up, it's sitting on them. Which is probably a good thing anyway.

Michael: It is 'cause, like, no one can interfere with it, you know.

Peta: Just leaving it.

Amos: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, and the water's always flowing. So, hopefully, it has carried all the spirits and stuff.

Amos: Good energy.

Michael: But, as you can see, you know, it's a high prized area here. You've got different ochres and stuff on the rocks there.

Peta: It's amazing. Where people go now is where people have always gone.

Michael: Yeah, and that's right.

Peta: But it's not acknowledged.

Michael: That's sort of why them people actual went there is because them old fellas had a good place there.

Amos: They already had the spot.

Michael: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, so you can see how big it has gotten compared to just the normal little creek.

Amos: It would have been just that old lagoon there, or what?

Michael: And now it is expanded out and you can see out over this way. This is where they, sort of, you know, the big areas was out here.

Peta: Where people...

Michael: Lived and everything, you know, yeah.

Peta: Well, it's beautiful.

Amos: One historian said, when he'd seen us on the rivers, it was like a picnic lifestyle. He said we weren't like the central desert people because they had to wander a lot of places to get water. Whereas, we basically lived with fresh water.

Michael: We actual lived on water. Some of the beds was actual on canoes in the reeds so they could be safe. You know, they'd sleep in the reeds on the canoe bed.

Amos: So, they always say, like, around Victoria, they were always bigger men, muscular, like 6-foot-tall and muscular. So, we didn't need food before they come but once they took our hunting ground we sort of needed the food then.

Michael: So, all out over there, we're going to drive up over there in a minute, but that's all big sand edges way over and a lot of them was due to the big floods back in the day. And creating them big sand dunes and that's why they thought this area would be perfect for them to weir up, and it was a big burial spot for the mob as well.

Peta: So, this is a pretty sacred site.

Michael: Yeah, but you've got places like this here, you know what I mean? It goes all the way up. We'll drive up, cross over it up here a bit further, but, you know, it's like you're looking at the Murray River at Barmah.

Peta: It's beautiful.

Michael: Big supermarket there.

Peta: It's beautiful. No wonder there's all these holiday places.

Michael: You can see why they want to take up these places. But, you know, if they acknowledged the mob that's spread out around through here, you know, it could create a bit of education for them - tourism even.

Amos: You don't really want too much tourism but, you know, you want it heard of too though.

Peta: Or the people that come here to know.

Amos: Yeah, and respect it. Like, you get a lot of people, get up along edgeways of rivers, and that. Digging and making steps and things but they could be impeding on burial grounds or anything.

Peta: Yeah, so the river ways were really important.

Amos: They were our life.

Michael: I reckon, yeah, for sure, 'cause, you know, if you've got no water you pretty much...

Amos: You can't survive.

Michael: Yeah, you can't survive.

Peta: And that's how you get food and...

Michael: Yeah.

Amos: You see, we lived mostly on the fish and then when we'd want a changeup, we'd go to the land and get a kangaroo or a possum or a koala or a goanna.

Michael: Judging from some of the midden sites, the majority of the feeds were, like, fish and, you know, all healthy protein stuff.

Peta: It looks like there's some long termers here.

Amos: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, they'd all be, like, from Melbourne. Holiday homes and things like that. Same with around Lake Eppalock, they've got some massacres around there. They've got the same set up as this. Big weir, you know, the water's backed up and then you've got all these caravans around.

Michael: So, here is the rest of that area that I was talking about. You can sort of see it in here. We've got all different bits of ochre. So, all that white stuff here, that's all types of ochre. It's a bit of a crappy version but further around the lake more you've got bigger pockets and you just go and chunk it up and you've got yellow, red, white and that's how you do your ceremonies and things. Right through here too. We was on the other side. We was looking over to these bits.

So this would have been a tiny little creek, nowhere near as big as this.

Peta: When would they have built the weir? I wonder.

Michael: Should have read that sign back there. It would have had it on there.

Michael: 1890s was the Goulburn River.

Amos: There was a bit of a rush out here for gold.

Peta: It says that there's harmful algae in the water.

Michael: Well, a lot of them happened now due to these fellas building these weirs and

backing up the water and making still water.

Peta: Not flowing.

Michael: And you can sort of see it here, just sitting. Creating still water.

Peta: Yeah, and there's dead trees in there. So, where the dead trees are that's...

Michael: That's the old bank lines and stuff. So, like, 1000 years ago, you can see the edges up here, the river would have come up to these in big floods. But other than that, you can see the size of them stumps out there. Them trees are 2, 3, 4 hundred years old.

Peta: So, it would have run around.

Michael: Yeah, it would have only come up every 10 to 15 years in big floods.

Peta: So, it's really quite changed, the landscape, hasn't it?

Michael: It's changed heaps. So, it's a good thing in a way but, as that water's sitting there, it could be doing damage to the midden sites, the burials.

Peta: Yeah, you don't know what's under there.

Michael: Yeah, but it could be doing good things like the boomerang that got found up in Lakes Entrance that dated back 2000 years old. It lasted that long in the water because of all the mud and if you take it out and dry it out now it will probably just disintegrate into thin air. So, it's sitting up in the museum in a tub of water so it stays in situ.

Peta: So, that's the museum storage in the water.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. Down below. So, that's even amazing going down there, having a look at some of the stuff they've got down

there like chest plates and things. Pretty crazy.

Michael: And, see out here, it's still going. This whole area was just rich. Very, very rich.

Peta: So, it would have all been like that.

Amos: Yeah, the weir was 1800s.

Michael: 1800s. And, you look at the landscape where you get the bigger mounds, that's where you would normally get a normal burial. And then, when you find your remains that don't suit them areas, that's how you can sort of tell they're massacres as well.

This river goes right along and joins with the creek and that's how they, sort of, branched their way around country. So, you can see at flood times, they would have come up around here, the water would have come up around here. They would have had an island there. That's a potential burial there. Potential, yeah. Potential. Only due to the sand and the way that the landscape's worn. They'd never bury people where the water would overflow. It would wash them out.

Amos: Out of the flood plains.

Michael: That's how you, sort of, narrow out the massacre compared to a burial.

Peta: Knowing that they wouldn't have buried people there.

Michael: In the massacres they, sort of, just leave them anywhere or pile them there. They don't actually go out of their way to make them in a restful spot.

Peta: And then, like you were saying, how they were buried as well.



Undercurrent 2018-19
photomural
1028x297cm



Undercurrent: 2018-19
photomural
682x297cm



Michael Bourke

The Theft of Land by Massacre

Ngarrugum/Garrugum Dja-Nyuk

The Dja Dja Wurrung are the original people of West Central Victoria, Australia. This djaandak, or Country, was part of the world's first organic super farm, because of the way NGARRUGUM djaara (people) used wi (fire) and waanyarra (flowing water) to manage djaandak. With the landscape modified for over 60,000 thousand years, djaandak was like the Garden of Eden and some early invaders said exactly this in their journals.

NGARRUGUM djaandak was a wealthy open grassy woodland with animals in abundance on the ancient volcanic plains and fresh springs of fresh waanyarra. Much of this was gone with a puff of boort (smoke). In the 1830s, Central Victoria was invaded by a foreign nation, changing the landscape dramatically with the hunting and massacring of Dja Dja Wurrung and displacing them onto missions. Before this home invasion, NGARRUGUM clan numbered in the hundreds. By the late 1860s, there was only one remaining: Henry Harmony Nelson. I think this is also the major reason why Victoria had one of its biggest ever bushfires in 1851, known as Black Thursday, when roughly five million hectares burnt from overgrown parks. At that stage, cultural fire management of the land had been interrupted for 15 or 16 years. Saying this, you can see how part of global warming is caused by these colonial massacres. As the Djaara declined, so did the Djaandak: genocide of the first peoples in places like

Australia, North and South America and Africa meant removing the people that had managed them for tens, hundreds or thousands of generations. Mass massacres and invasion in these places is what is one of the major reasons for global warming and climate change. Massacring people and rounding up those that remained, like cattle, and placing them on missions and reserves - that led to the first people not being able to manage country with fire. It's a global story. In 2019, the NGARRUGUM djaara survived by Henry Harmony Nelson's family would be roughly in the hundreds. This is my job: to tell this story and heal NGARRUGUM djaandak and djaara, as his djaara still walk these stolen bloody lands. We have massacre sites that have never been cleansed; sites where there has never been any sort of acknowledgement of the djaara murdered in cold blood for the theft of their djaandak.

Waterloo Plains Massacre June 1838

On January 17, 1840 G.A Robinson referred to a report he had received that the aborigines had been killed in this area, now known as Waterloo Plains. The following day they crossed the Coliban River near Munro's station and came to an old deserted hut and found the site at the back of the hut on a small hill. he wrote:

It is said that when the men came up with the blacks the blacks called to them to come they would fight them there were I believe

sixteen white men all armed and for the most part mounted. They fired from their horses the blacks were down in a hole they the white men were out of distance of the spears one old man kept supplying them with spears and was soon shot great many were shot some other blacks held up pieces of bark to keep off the balls but is was no use some were shot with their bark in their hand.

The white men who carried out this massacre included John Coppock, Superintendent of Yaldwyn's Run, Samuel Fuller, a sheppard at Yaldwyn's, and other stockmen from Ebden and Bowman's runs. According to sworn statement by Coppock, there were 8 stockmen in the party, and a pitched battle took place in which seven or eight Aborigines were shot dead, the sheep being recovered the next day. On January 25, 1840, Robinson was at Munros station and asked one of his employees if he was present at the Waterloo Plains Massacre. The man replied, "What if I was, do you think I should be such a fool to tell you, to be hung?"

My name is Michael Bourke, I am the decedent of NGARRUGUM djaandak. Due to massacres of my people, like the one I just described, I have grown up on my nan Kitty Wulleeduban Country where she was the first to see the invaders to her country and witnessed mass massacres of her peoples. The Mologa and Cummergunja missions

were on Nan Kitty's country and Kitty and Ngarrugums grandkids married and had kids of their own whilst on the mission. But, after bad treatment at the mission at the hands of the mission manager, the mob walked off to Mooroopna on the Goulburn river in 1939 for better living conditions and freedom. I have been researching my family history for 15 years by looking through invader journals, going to museums and listening to Elders in my family, people in neighbouring clans, and their Elders about some stories of their own. These stories tell of the theft of djaandak by massacre from the victim's side. So many of the history books are told from the victor's side and contain little information about the massacres. This is partly because most people disposed of evidence of massacres, especially after the whitefellas responsible for the Myall Creek Massacre were found guilty in court and hung in 1838. From that day onwards, the invaders would destroy any new or old evidence, as most had at that stage massacred the original people of the lands and set up fences, stations, and runs. Evidence of brutality to the original people was hidden. When there are records of massacres, I find, they are dulled down to make the murderers sound as if they were protecting their livestock, and the invader police or protectorate in charge of the investigations did little work when it came to the death of any Djaara for they knew this would enable them to take up more land for their king and queen of England.

Amos Atkinson

Through my work bringing back wi (fire) to heal djaandak (country), I have been lucky to look over country and show people the real story. Once, out on country with a researcher looking at massacres in my grandfather's country, we came across a massacre site that my family was involved in and when we arrived in that place I had a bad feeling in my stomach and could feel a lot of bad energy in the area. As we walked, it was like someone trying to tell me something. We kept going over the written records of the massacre and walking it out, as the record spoke of a little rock house, owned by the invading thieves, next to a hill and close to a water way. We were in the exact spot of the massacre when something drew my cousin and I to the little rock house. Then, when we began walking away, we came across a greenstone axe, most likely made by NGARRUGUM djaara. Rather than leave it there in harm's way, we noted the location on GPS, took the axe to Dja Dja Wurrung Corporation and registered it with the Cultural Heritage Unit.

Over the next few weeks we spoke to our Elders about some of these cold cases and from these conversations there are other stories out there like Aunty Matilda from up on the Murray on Yorta Yorta country. We came up with a way to cleanse this massacre site of NGARRUGUM Djaara, acknowledging and remembering our ancestors. One of the methods we chose is to use wi (fire) and gatgin (water) to cleanse the area and then

to come in afterwards, followed by a big ceremony for all living descendants, friends and supporters of the Dja Dja Wurrung community to help heal djaandak and djaara.

What the invaders say on the record from the Waterloo Plains Massacre is that 7-8 djaara were murdered. I find this very depressing, as I know that the djaara they are talking about is my own family, robbed of their lands by massacre. The land is now the site of multi-billion-dollar industries from gold mining and agriculture, while NGARRUGUM djaara are struggling, with no land of their own to cultivate and practice a culture that dates back over 60,000 years.

NGARRUGUM DJAARA AND DJAANDAK
nyakiynanangu

'I will see you all later'.

Michael Bourke is a Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung Warrior from what is now known as Central Victoria.

Barramulyaluk
(Jim Crow Creek)

(Genocide)

Bengek Womin-dji-ka Bengan anu Djandak Lami Yung Balug Clan Dja Dja Wurrung Guntidja
(We welcome you to the home of Yung Balug Clan Dja Dja Wurrung people.)

Dhelkunyawi Djuwima Barring andak Martinga Guli Murrup
(Good day, we affirm our connection to Ancestor Spirits.)

My name is Amos Nathaniel Laurence Atkinson and my Tribal name is Banjaara Warri.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Cumeragunja walk off that happened on the 4th February 1939 – 80 years ago.

I'm a proud Bangarang, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri, Waywurru man, who was raised on my own Djandak (country) in Victoria Mooroopna for most of my life. It was an honour to grow up with such a rich cultural history. I always felt at home here with all the stories of our people and my great great grandmother Minnie Nora Nicholls (1898-1988) who was the local Aboriginal Midwife for the Dhungulla (Murray River) Kaiela (Goulburn River) area. Great Nan Nora's Father, Herbert Nicholls (1875-1947 born in St Arnaud), was a Dja Dja Wurrung man, his wife was Florence (Florry) Atkinson from

Maloga, a Bangarang woman. Florence's father was Aaron Atkinson (1853-1913) born Moira Lakes and buried in Moama, a Bangarang Man and her mother was Louisa Frost, a Barrapa Barrapa woman, this was a tribal marriage that was blessed by the old people. Her grandmother was Kitty Atkinson/Cooper (1820-1900), the matriarch of the Dhungulla and Kaiela people from the Wallithica Clan. Herbert Nicholls' parents were Walpanumin, John Jacky Logan and his mother was Augusta Jessie Robinson, from Jupagalk/Wergia Tribe in the Western District. Walpanumin, son of Lerimburneen (also known as King Billy), was the son of King Girribong (1790-1860) who regarded the Boort, Charlton and the Donald districts as the heart land of the connection to Djandak (country).

Taking this journey into the history of Australia and the Genocide of my people, I start by quoting from Ernest Scott's *A Short History of Australia* revised 1947: "The worst features of the fading out of the native race arose from sheer brutality and treacherous murders by white settlers and their convict servants."

I grew up Aboriginal, in an Aboriginal community being told that we had been massacred out. It wasn't disease that killed us. For the last 15 years I have been studying my own genealogy, Australian History and English Empire history, squatters and pastoralists records in Victoria, as well as the so-called "founding" of the Australian

Federation. I've always listened to the stories from my Elders who told me that my people only ever attacked after the squatters, settlers and convicts had fenced off their hunting grounds and killed all their animals. They let their cattle and sheep eat native old man weed, murrnong, kangaroo grass, chocolate lily's, this was all our eating material and our medicinal plants meaning without which we couldn't heal ourselves. We couldn't drink our fresh gatjin (water) as they let their animals in our water ways, making them undrinkable. Then they would interfere with Aboriginal women. The last thing we actually had that was ours was our family. They had taken the djandak and gatjin and killed all the animals. Every Aboriginal has an inherited right to that djandak and gatjin from both sides of his or her parents – if we care for djaandak, the djandak will care for us.

When the Invasion started, my people would have thought it's just another trader from a faraway djandak, not knowing that the First Fleet was about to arrive with more convicts to help take the djandak and gatjin from us. We had been here for more than 60,000 years (making us the longest living continued civilised people in the world). The Egyptian pyramids had only been built some 6,000-9,000 years ago. We had been through so many climate changes over the course of the time that we lived here. We'd watched the glaciers come and go, stars being born and mega fauna die. As the most resilient, caring, sharing culture on earth we lived peacefully with nature,

which was the focus of our cultural rituals on this continent. To have someone come and destroy our peaceful, generous, giving culture and our way of living on this land was devastating for my people. To have to work for the very same white families that had massacred our ancestors, stole our land and almost wiped out the whole of Australia would have been so painful to endure. Words cannot describe the pain and suffering we have had to undergo at the hands of the British Empire. Someone needs to be held accountable. Just like the Jewish people in the holocaust, German Generals are still getting tried today for their actions, so why isn't this happening here, to right the wrongs that have been done to my people?

If the people of Australia are ever to reconcile with the First Nations Peoples, they must acknowledge what has happened in the past, to move forward. Like my great uncle Doug Nicholls said "You can play a tune on black keys, you can play a tune on white keys, but both are needed for perfect harmony. We want to walk with you, we don't want to walk alone". With the systemic racism that I have endured just in my own life, I can only imagine what it would have been like for my Ancestors to try and enter this new Western world that was invading our country. The South Coast took the brunt of the invasion, with their cattle and sheep runs the size of some European countries - all our Tribal land had been fenced off. They brought their LAW with them when we already had our own

LORE, but they imposed their LAW to stop us practicing culture and had our women and daughters taken away as sex slaves. This is the information that you won't read in books. It has been passed down orally from generation to generation. Systemic trauma has been passed down from generation to generation. They say "get over it, it didn't happen to you and they said sorry". No it didn't happen to me, but there were still atrocities being committed against Aboriginal people and communities in the late 1960's, if that's not in your lifetime it's in your parents' lifetime. It's not that long ago and is still raw for those families living from the stolen generation.

We have always been told by our Elders that once squatters and invaders have used all the minerals and got what they want, that our people will still be here. Caring for our country that has been destroyed by them. We will get our country and our people healthy again for future generations, just like our Ancestors did for us now. We have inherited this sacred djandak from our Ancestors who have lived on it for millennia, peacefully, looking after the djandak with Wii (fire) and the cleanest Gatjin (water) you could ever drink in the world. Before the massacres and the invasion my people were living the most peaceful life, connected to djaandak without a care in the world. Major Mitchell wrote that my people in Victoria were living a picnic lifestyle without a care in the world. He said the babies were fat little babies, very healthy and that the men were stronger, smarter and more

muscular than the white man. Australia was built on the backs of my people who were rounded up like cattle and slaughtered for their djandak and gatjin. Our people would get a ration each week, sometimes they would pay with alcohol and tobacco which is the start of the Government giving handouts to my people to survive. All we want is our Sovereignty recognised and that we are not part of England and we have many Nations all over Australia speaking multiple languages. We are the only first world country to not have a Treaty with its First People. Let's make peace, start the conversation, recognise our Sovereignty, that we have never ceded our Sovereignty. Be a voice in parliament, start to give the djandak and gatjin back to the rightful owners, the Aboriginal people.

Sincerely
Amos Nathaniel Laurence Atkinson
Banjaara Waari

Amos Atkinson is a Bangerang, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri, Waywurru, Greek Cypriot man who was raised on his own Woka (country) in Victoria.



left: Michael Bourke, right: Amos Atkinson, 2018



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
150 x 120cm

*Settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable... Settler horror, then, comes about as part of this management, of the anxiety, the looming but never arriving guilt, the impossibility of forgiveness, the inescapability of retribution. Haunting, by contrast, is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies.*¹

Bangerang artist Peta Clancy's photographic work *Undercurrent* engages with an underwater massacre site in Dja Dja Wurrung country. The site itself sits under a weir situated on the Loddon river, which was created between 1889-1891 after the massacre of local Aboriginal people occurred in the 1870s. The graves at the site are invisible to local residents and any of the users of the nearby caravan park, but the burial site and the events that took place here are known to the Dja Dja Wurrung. The work emerges out of a period of research and consultation on the underwater massacre site, during which Clancy spent time in close conversation with Dja Dja Wurrung community members and conducted visits to the underwater burial place.

The photographs themselves appear at first to be done with a conventional landscape style, but are manually cut and rejoined to

produce fractitious and unsettling visuals. The images cut together present layers of contrasted exposure, colour, and focus. To make the works, Clancy photographed the site, printed the images she'd taken, and then returned to the same site with the prints and a custom frame. The photographs of the site were taped to the frame, and then physically cut into to reveal the scene behind, before both the print and the site were photographed again. Each of the works are thus made up of images taken in the same place and from the same vantage points; creating a double image of the same scene in each work. This repetitious process of layering, physically cutting, obscuring, and putting back together interrupts a conventional reading of the site, and asks the viewer to consider the different qualities in the scene. The artist is also brought into an intense and physically laborious relationship with the site itself. This is a complex process for Clancy, a First Nations person, who is attempting to connect with a site of violence away from her own country, in conversation with the Traditional Owners of the site.

These split images work to illuminate what Clancy describes as two worlds, two histories, existing in the same site. They present a series of attempts to make sense of multiple, irreconcilable realities existing in the same place. Clancy describes the cutting and fragmenting process as 'revealing scars' in the landscape, and there is a powerful

tension created in the interplays between light and dark, clarity and blurred vision, and sky and water. Clancy uses the reflections made in the weir water to great effect; layering images of sky and treelines with murky and disquieting water. In some of the images, it seems the waterline is drowning the rest of the scenery. The silence of the site becomes deafening.

Clancy has made images in this way for previous works. The series *Fissures in Time* (2017) uses similar patterns of split vision to reimagine different sites of colonial warfare across Victoria. This technique of visual layering produces a unique visual defamiliarization of the traditional 'landscape' image. Writers such as Rebecca McCauley have noted how landscape photography in particular has "played an intrinsic role in the formation and imaging of national identity since the beginning of the Australian colonial project, and is central to how many modern day Australians see and define the country, and themselves."² McCauley notes that countering eurocentric and picturesque ways of seeing country is central to Clancy's photographic work in Victoria. In making *Undercurrent*, Clancy was able to focus her attention on the site of the weir for a longer period of time, making multiple visits. Unlike *Fissures in Time*, the images are all taken in the same site.

In her research notes, in an interview with Dja Dja Wurrung consultant Mick Bourke,

Clancy observes of the caravan park which looks over the site; "It's amazing where people go now is where people have always gone...but it's not acknowledged". The strange location of the massacre site underwater appears to act as a forceful attempt at symbolic erasure of the violence that occurred there. The flooding of massacre sites after the murders have occurred is not isolated to this place. It is speculated by historians of frontier violence that this has occurred in other known sites across the southeast and Tasmania.

Bundjalung writer Melissa Lucashenko wrote of the experience of Aboriginal people looking at the land; "It is like having double vision. We see the world that white people see but we are also seeing a mythic landscape at the same time and an historic landscape."³ Clancy's work reflects this reality; it is a process of visual defamiliarization, a *splitting of vision*. It presents the viewer with both a powerful form of truth telling, as well as a trauma response, a visual representation of disassociation.

For Aboriginal people, violence is carved into the landscape, it lives everywhere, normalised, but it is rarely ever acknowledged. Massacre sites, rather than being protected, become popular tourist areas, they are places where white people go to have fun. At a recent panel on memorialisation in urban landscapes,

Dharug woman Julie Bukari Jones spoke of her own work to create a memorial at the site of the former Blacktown Native Institution. She posed the idea to the crowd at MPavilion that not all sites of trauma should be made publicly accessible to non-Indigenous people. Similarly, Worimi artist and storyteller Genevieve Grieves remembers in her piece on connecting with wounded spaces that some sites are not meant to be visited, and not meant to be documented.⁴ There is a growing awareness that these sites must be protected, the violence they hold must be treated with utmost care, and that when the stories are told, it must be done in careful collaboration with the site itself as well as the communities who are connected to it.

Processes of commemoration and memorial reveal what Noongar artist Dianne Jones calls the “politicised nature of memory” in colonial states. Artists are at the forefront of movements to collectively remember frontier violence, and to do it in the right ways. Artistic responses are powerful ways that First Nations people have been able to speak to sites of trauma and violent colonialism. Works like Clancy’s contribute to emerging public discourse about histories of frontier violence in Australia. Australian art has often been enlisted as a means of constructing a national identity and presenting an idealistic view of peaceful settlement, and photography in particular has been used to

catalogue and objectify Aboriginality. Jones, in her work on the site of a series of murders in York, Western Australia, *What Lies Buried Will Rise*, notes that photography for her became a “personal form of creative memorialisation, ensuring these stories and places are not forgotten”, a means of reclaiming forms of representation for her own use. Jones sought to process through photography the execution and massacre of her own Noongar ancestors in the place she grew up, highlighting the personal effect the process had on her. As an artist, the task is to not only uncover the hidden facts of the violence, but to give the story emotional depth and humanise the narrative.⁵

Maddee Clark is a Yugambah writer, editor, and curator.

1. Eve Tuck and C.Ree, (2013) A Glossary of Haunting. In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, 639–658.
2. <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-12-1/australian-landscape-photography/>
3. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/the-interview-melissa-lucashenko-20130306-2flr6.html>
4. <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-12-1/connecting-with-wounded-spaces/>
5. Jones, Dianne. (2015) *What Lies Buried Will Rise: Exploring a Story of Violent Crime, Retribution and Colonial Memory*



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
150 x 120cm

Greg Lehman *A Thin Veil*

*Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not the all of me, whose long making
Is so much of the past.*

*But a thousand thousand camp fires
in the forest
Are in my blood.
Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
Of all the race years that have moulded me.
Oodjeroo Noonuccal, Minjerribah, 1992.*

It is a sad reality that an intrinsic part of the deep and inspiring heritage of Aboriginal people in Australia is, at the same time, an unavoidably disturbing story that challenges the foundations of our origins as a modern nation. This is often treated as an inconvenient truth for White Australia and hidden from sight. However, it is a source of continuing suffering for the descendants of Aboriginal people from hundreds of Indigenous nations across the continent who were cut down by muskets, bayonets, rifles and clubs in defence of their families, their country and, in the case of my own people – the Palawa of Tasmania – our very existence. It means that our success, our achievements, our celebrations must share the stage with a dark shadow, cast by a violent history.

Aboriginal Australia is a vast expanse of rich and diverse cultural landscapes, inscribed with the songs, ceremonies and stories of two thousand generations of living in a unique environment – through ice ages that brought changes in climate beyond the imagination of most Australians today. This was transformed into a traumascap by colonisation. Forests, waterways and grasslands once nurtured by careful burning now suffer catastrophe.

The popular national story of Australia, we are told, is incomplete without respectful reminders of the deaths of thousands of innocent young men on the shores of Gallipoli, or the trenches of Western Europe. These are events within which the ‘national character’ was formed, affecting the ancestors of generations of proud young Australians who can count their sporting prowess, courage and determination as products of the steadfast will and fighting spirit of their forebears. But calls to similarly honour the ancestors of those Australians who embrace Aboriginal culture at the heart of their identity go unheeded. Instead, the ‘ultimate sacrifice’ of wartime leaders such as Pemulwuy, Yagan and Walyer is dismissed as the stuff of ‘unfortunate misunderstanding’, or ‘regrettable necessity’. Between the lines of colonial sentiment, these men and women are recorded not as gallant heroes, but as brutal savages. The most brutal truth is that the generation of Australians who fought

for their colonial masters on the battlefields of Europe, were the same generation who continued to perpetrate massacres on Aboriginal people for a decade to come at places like Bentinck Island (1918), Wave Hill (1924), and Coniston (1928).

If this story was only to be found in the pages of history books, and the failing of our war memorials was measured only in the absence of recognition, then the challenge might be simpler. History can be corrected. New memorials can be built and old ones revised to give a more enlightened truth. But the task is more profound than this. It is the rite of passage that Australia has yet to take. Or to earn. This makes talk of reconciliation premature.

To the eyes, ears and hearts of Aboriginal people, the Country itself still cries out to be heard. The blood that ran through the veins of the Aboriginal fallen was the blood of the land. And it is the blood that still flows through the bodies of every Aboriginal person today. We hear this call in the rush of wind in the trees, in the shriek of the Black Cockatoo, and the sound of running water is made up of the voices of every one of our ancestors calling us to remember our obligations to Country and culture, and to stand up for proper acknowledgement of the brutal interruption of our ancient and irreplaceable heritage.

A few years ago I worked with fellow Palawa artists to bring to Melbourne the story of

two of our kin who were hanged here in 1842. We began a search for the story of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner. We wanted, somehow, to bring the spirits of these men home.

Colonial records offered up an official record and a multitude of questions about how they came to stand for the last moments of their lives on the gallows outside what is now the Old Melbourne Gaol. But we knew that the story that had to be told was recorded elsewhere. It was etched in the Country that gave them breath and embraced their presence while they respectfully walked the land of the Kulin Nations. We knew it would be found in Kulin stories that had been told for generations before our relatives were brought to the colony of Port Phillip. How could this be? Because the Old Stories do not exist by the rules of Western time. They exist simultaneously in the past, the present and the future. They proscribe the cosmos in which all things happen and leave us with clues through which we can understand the ways of the world.

It was an Elder, appropriately, who commenced the flow of storytelling that gave us our message about these two Palawa men. She told me that I should be aware that Bunjil, the creator spirit, stopped the waters from rising. It was these rising waters that began to separate the Kulin and Palawa from each other ten millenia ago,

and it was Bunjil that stopped the waters from flooding, leaving us the Country we know today. If it was Bunjil who did this, then it would be Bunjil who could bring our stories together again through the lives of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner.

There are many tales about Bunjil. And not all are agreed. But many kept pointing us to the stars. After Bunjil the Eagle had stopped the waters from rising to flood the land he rose into the night sky with his two wives. They can be seen every night as the stars now called Altair, Deneb and Vega, near the Milky Way. Palawa too, have old stories of the night sky. The planets Venus and Jupiter represent a boat. And the Milky Way is a road. With today's online star maps, it is now possible to know what was in the sky at any time in the past. On the morning of the execution of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, just before sunrise as the men awaited their fate, Bunjil rose in the east along with Jupiter and Venus.

These two Palawa men journeyed from the place of their ancestors in the north of the island of Tasmania to become the subjects of Melbourne's first public execution. The events that led to their conviction are contested to this day, intertwining their stories with a host of key figures in early years of the colony of Port Philip, and leaving their mark on the culture of the city and its people to this day. Their stories resound in the sky that is part Kulin Country; a sky that

unites the Country of all Aboriginal nations. These days the Kulin landscape is obscured by a city. But like colonial history, it is a thin veil; a temporary one. Country came before and will come after. And our stories are as old as Country. It is an ever-present archive of remembrance and memorial.

Retelling stories of Country can be done in many ways. Representing the past in landscapes that hold the spirits of our ancestors is perhaps our greatest duty, and visions of landscape in art or stories honours the spirit of our ancestors and keeps them close. It is our duty to the present and the future. While White Australia holds its past and its dead in monuments of cold stone, and turns its back on our warriors, it will continue to struggle for a true story of its own. And reconciliation will have to wait.

Greg Lehman is a Tasmanian artist, curator, essayist, and poet, and an academic in the faculty of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne.



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
150 x 106cm



Undercurrent 2018-19
inkjet pigment print
150 x 106cm

Rachel Kent

Peta Clancy: Undercurrent

I've gotten to know the landscape more over time. It changes with the weather: from the early morning in mid-winter with the mist rising over the water, to the late afternoon light. I'm usually interested in the direction and intensity of the light.

Speaking about her new photographic landscapes, entitled *Undercurrent*, Melbourne artist Peta Clancy describes a scene of luminous nature and tranquillity. As its title suggests though, something darker and less audible ripples beneath the surface of appearances and water depicted. *Undercurrent* explores the Australian landscape – in this instance, an unnamed location in Central Victoria, near Bendigo – which is scarred by 19th and early 20th century Aboriginal massacre sites.

Undercurrent has its genesis in several earlier projects by Clancy, including the photographic series *Aurelian*. Produced between 2014-15, *Aurelian* focussed on threatened Australian moths and butterflies, and led the artist from the desolate storage bays and display cases of the natural history museum back to the land. Gathering soil samples from their original habitats, she photographed the creatures against the earth as a metaphorical gesture, returning them home to the places they had come from. Notions of recuperation and return are also significant for Clancy's *Undercurrent* works, with their representation of the landscape

as a potent, brooding space of silence and loss, and equally, memory and return. It is often said that memory haunts us, and nowhere is this more apparent than in these silent, open landscapes with their swaying trees, cleared farmlands (once forests) and bodies of water beneath which lie hidden histories of violence and suffering, from the time of white settlement into the present.

In 2016 Clancy first encountered the Victorian Aboriginal Massacre Map, a document that had been produced by the Koorie Heritage Trust for the 1988 Bicentennial year, and the exhibition *KOORIE* at Museum Victoria, 1988 – 1997, published in the accompanying catalogue in 1991. The map documented several thousand known killings along Australia's east coast over eighteen years, from 1836-53, noting that 'many more died beyond prying eyes'; while a subsequent 2017 interactive map produced by the University of Newcastle documents more than 150 known massacre sites in eastern Australia. Clancy recalls, 'I had become much more aware of the landscape through the *Aurelian* project. Concurrently, I had been researching my own heritage through my mother and maternal grandmother. My concept of the landscape was totally transformed through seeing the map and the realisation of the broad scale of the massacres. As I did more research, I sought permission from the Aboriginal custodians responsible for particular areas, to visit the sites with a Cultural Heritage Permit.'

In 2010 Clancy's maternal grandmother Dorothy Jean passed away. She had wanted, too late, to return to her father's birthplace: Cumeragunja Reserve, on Yorta Yorta country by the Murray River, where New South Wales and Victoria meet. Following Dorothy Jean's passing, Clancy began to research her life story. It was a narrative shaped by poverty and frequent movement to avoid the authorities, as a child born to an Aboriginal father and white mother; and later, one marred by mental illness. Accompanied by her aunt, Clancy travelled to Cumeragunja for the first time in 2013, meeting relatives and researching her grandmother's life in more depth. This return to the place of her ancestors was meaningful both personally and artistically, prompting a new awareness of land, connection, and the threads of history that intersect in the present.

Expanding her research, *Undercurrent* was first conceptualised during a 12-month residency with the Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne. During her residency she travelled to Central Victoria, researching frontier violence and Dja Dja Wurring massacre sites there in close consultation with Traditional Owners. The resulting body of work is physically and temporally layered. Moving back and forth between past and present, it is presented as images upon images, with one landscape layered onto another through a painstaking process of documentation and re-photography.

Clancy undertook the project in two stages, over a period of months, travelling back and forth between Melbourne and Central Victoria with a large-format camera. First, she photographed the landscape itself, creating large-scale prints that document different locations, times and weather conditions. Then, at a later date, she took the prints back out into the landscape, attaching them to customised wooden frames and re-photographing them in context. Initially, Clancy recounts, the real vista would be obscured by the photographic reproduction before it. But by cutting sections of paper away, the landscape was revealed once more in fragments, recognisable but altered.

Completing the process, the resulting body of work comprises a vast background 'wallpaper' of the landscape – over 5 meters in length – overlain with framed photographs that occupy a shared horizon or water line. The sense of doubling is enhanced by the mirror image of trees reflected upon water in the background image; and the framed photographs appear to hover above the background, luminous and haunting, as darkness and sunlight converge. This slippage between images, timeframes, light and weather conditions creates a sense of disconnection, Clancy notes. "The idea was to create a sense of familiarity, so that people recognise the landscape, but it's unfamiliar and

disorienting as well. There is also the sense of scarring, through the cut between two physical layers.” Creating a line of light, the connecting point between water and earth is potent with meaning as histories are submerged, then retrieved in the present and given voice.

The land too has undergone significant change over time. Some sites are now farmlands, or under water where reservoirs have since been created. Once dense stands of trees are replaced by sparse coverage, forests by dry plains. Some sites appear unassuming – a contemporary sheep paddock, for example, ‘barren and depressing’ in outlook – whereas others convey a palpable melancholy. ‘I wanted to have a conversation with this land through the work’, Clancy says. ‘I wanted to get to know the site and photograph it over time. I wanted to watch the light change, to feel the cold winter air on my body. But then I wanted to leave.’

Reflecting on *Undercurrent*, Clancy acknowledges that the works represent a starting point, not an end. ‘I feel like this is just the beginning of my work in this area. That there is so much more for me to learn about the land and culture... Working with the Traditional Owners, Mick and Amos, was particularly moving and profound. I now realise how widespread the violence was that was perpetrated against Aboriginal people on Dja Dja Wurrung country, and

how much the landscape has been altered. It’s like I see the land in two ways now: the way it appears in my current reality and the ways I have learnt to see it from visiting country with Mick and Amos and then spending time by myself... It’s less a matter of *where are the massacre sites?* And instead, *where aren’t the sites where violence occurred?*”

How does healing occur in a landscape so deeply etched by trauma? And what, or where is restitution? Multiple questions arise when considering Clancy’s *Undercurrent* project, with its retrieval of hidden histories and transformed lands. To document, cut, superimpose, and display are all narrative devices. They also bear traces of force in themselves, echoing the violence of the stories they tell. Scarring implies both hurt and a process of healing in its wake; there may be visible lines, some jagged and prominent, others faint. But bringing it into light and giving it a voice is a powerful gesture. It also implies a beginning, not an end.

Note: all quotes are drawn from the author’s interview and written correspondence with Peta Clancy, in December 2018 and February 2019.

Rachel Kent is the Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia



Koorie Heritage Trust
Levels 1 & 3, Yarra Building, Federation Square
Melbourne VIC 3000 AUSTRALIA

koorieheritagetrust.org
info@koorieheritagetrust.com

This publication is copyright and all rights are reserved
© Koorie Heritage Trust 2019

First published in 2019 by the Koorie Heritage Trust for
the exhibition *Undercurrent*, Koorie Heritage Trust 2019.

ISBN: 978-0-9945708-6-4

Editor: Koorie Heritage Trust
Printer: Allanby Press Pty. Ltd.

The Koorie Heritage Trust's residency program and this
exhibition has been supported by the Federal Department
of Communications and the Arts' Indigenous Languages
and Arts Program. *Undercurrent* has also been generously
supported by Gandel Philanthropy.

The project was made possible with support from Rodney
Carter, Group Chief Executive Officer, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans
Aboriginal Corporation; Michael Bourke and Amos Atkinson.

Exhibition Partners



Program Partners

