

INSITE | Nov - Dec 2019

Decolonising Collections

DISCLAIMER

The information provided here was accurate as of the publication date. It is advisable to verify any alterations in practices or sector opinions. Additionally, some links provided may no longer be accessible.

SUMMARY

This edition of INSITE is the last in a 37 year program of delivering news and articles about the sector in Victoria. The publication started out in 1981 as Museum News and was renamed INSITE in 1996.

The final issue of INSITE is on the theme Decolonising Collections with articles from: Kirsten Thorpe; Archivist and Senior Researcher, Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research, UTS; Deanne Fitzgerald, Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisor, WA Museum; and Ella Hughes, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre. These articles look at the ways that collections can respectfully reposition First Nations voices and perspectives in GLAM organisations and reframe our colonial stories. The issue's cover image is a watercolour by artist Ryan Presley from his Blood Money series.

The edition includes a roundup of the Victorian Museums and Galleries Forum, Victorian Collections Day, the latest re-accreditations and a tribute to Martin Hallett by Forbes Hawkin's, Museums Victoria.

Our cover image is by artist, [Dr Ryan Presley](#), from the series Blood Money. The Blood Money series portrays leaders, social advocates, warriors and writers from Aboriginal history, such as Fanny Balbuk Yooreel, Dundalli and Pemulwuy. Ryan Presley's artist's statement about the series says, "A primary aim of the series is to broadcast and promote important Aboriginal people within the context of Australian history and experience, testifying to their intelligence, perseverance and maneuverability. Their actions and legacies are not only respectable in terms of their general achievements in Australian society, but they also dispel many of the myths circulated via colonial occupation: particularly that Aboriginal people were passive and lacked the will to resist colonial encroachment. Read the full artist statement at the end of this document.

Image caption: Dr Ryan Presley, "Blood Money–Infinite Dollar Note–Fanny Balbuk Yooreel Commemorative", 2018, (detail) watercolour on Arches paper, documented by Carl Warner. Image courtesy the artist.

CONTENTS

Speaking Back to Colonial Collections: Building living Aboriginal archives

Pages | 2-4

In this article Kirsten Thorpe, Archivist and Senior Researcher at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research, University of Technology Sydney, discusses ways to reconnect colonial collections with Indigenous communities and respectfully reposition Aboriginal voice and perspectives into these historical collections and reframe our colonial stories. This essay was first published in Artlink (39:2) Indigenous Storytelling in Digital World, June, 2019.

Visit the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education & Research at:

<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/jumbunna-institute-indigenous-education-and-research>

Reflect and Innovate: The Western Australian Museum's Reconciliation Action Plan

Page | 5

In this article Deanne Fitzgerald, Western Australian Museum, shares how the WA Museum's Reconciliation Action Plans have been frameworks for implementing meaningful change that embed Indigenous values into museum and gallery practice.

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/about/reconciliation-action-plan>

Reconciliation Action Plans: www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans

Download a copy of the Indigenous Roadmap: www.amaga-indigenous.org.au

Re-Visioning History at Bundoora Homestead Art Centre

Page | 7

Bundoora Homestead Art Centre is located in a Queen Anne style Federation mansion certified by the National Trust. In this article Ella Hughes, Director, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, takes us through how staff have developed a curatorial framework over the past five years, to support exhibitions and programs that acknowledge the sites colonial history.

Visit Bundoora Homestead at: www.bundoorahomestead.com

The Victorian Museums and Galleries Forum

Pages | 8-9

The Healthy Museum theme of this year's Forum is at the forefront of discourse within the sector. As the definition of the museum continues to be contested on an international stage we can't help but question "What constitutes a healthy museum?" Speakers covering topics including wellbeing, diversity, accessibility, engagement, and sustainability, explored ways that our sector can become 'healthier' through responsive actions and directions.

CONTENTS CONT.

An excerpt of Tony Butler's presentation is available on Arts Hub:

<https://bit.ly/2JwsS0x>

The #diversifyourarts project has ten tips for cultural organisations to use to demonstrate and implement support for diversity and a commitment to anti-racism:

www.multiculturalarts.com.au

Vale Martin Hallett

Page | 10

Forbes Hawkins, Senior Digital Systems Developer at Museums Victoria and lead technical developer of Victorian Collections, has written a tribute to Martin Hallett, former deputy chief executive of Museums Victoria, curator emeritus and visionary leader within Victoria's museum establishment.

Latest Re-Accreditations

Page | 10

Museums and galleries in the Museum Accreditation Program review their Accreditation standards at intervals of about five years. The latest re-accreditations have been achieved by Stawell Historical Society and Buda Historic Home and Garden.

Find out more about the Stawell Historical Society at:

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~shsinc/index.html>

and Buda Historic Home and Garden at: <https://budacastlemaine.org>

Victorian Collections Day

Page | 11

The 2019 Victorian Collections Day included presentations on digitisation, catalogue photography, exhibitions and sustainability. Find out more about VC Day participant organisations on Victorian Collections at: <https://victoriancollections.net.au>

APPS & ONLINE

Ara Irititja

Ara Irititja makes historical and cultural items available to Anangu (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people), and Keeping Places under license, through the Keeping Culture KMS software. Materials include photographs, films, sound recordings and documents.

www.irititja.com

Mukurtu

Mukurtu is an open source platform built with indigenous communities to manage and share digital cultural heritage. SL NSW has adopted the program so communities can view collections and apply their own cultural protocols.

<https://mukurtu.org>

www.sl.nsw.gov.au/about-library/services/indigenous-engagement/reconnecting-collections-communities

MuseoPunks

The MuseoPunks Episode 38: Decolon-ization and its Discontents probes the “many ways decolonization seems to still center the colonizer.” MuseoPunks is presented by Suse Anderson and Ed Rodley and supported by the American Alliance of Museums.

www.aam-us.org/2019/09/12/museopunks-episode-38-decolonization-and-its-discontents

Let's Talk Race

The Australian Human Rights Commission has launched the Let's talk race: a guide on how to conduct a conversation about racism. The Guide is a complementary resource to cultural competence training and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).

<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/documentary/let-s-talk-race-guide>

Common Ground

A website for the sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and lived experiences.

www.commonground.org.au

Smiling Mind App

Women from Central Australia's NPY Women's Council have recorded meditations in Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra languages with the producers behind mindfulness app Smiling Mind. NPY lands span the central desert region of SA, WA and NT.

<https://info.smilingmind.com.au/npyresource>

Bow Down

Jennifer Higgin is an Australian writer, editor-at-large of Frieze magazine and presenter of Bow Down, the new frieze podcast about women in art history.

<https://frieze.com/article/bow-down-podcast-women-art-history>

Artist Statement | Ryan Presley

My “Blood Money” series is an ongoing project which consists of a newly designed suite of Australian banknotes created as watercolour paintings on paper. These works of art explore contemporary Australian history through the lens of important and notable Aboriginal people. These key figures can teach us valuable historical lessons in regards to their experiences of dispossession, oppression and the suppression of contrary legacies. From them we can learn valuable insights that tell us much about cross-cultural histories and Aboriginal relationships with “white” or non-Aboriginal Australia.

A primary aim of the series is to broadcast and promote important Aboriginal people within the context of Australian history and experience, testifying to their intelligence, perseverance and maneuverability. Their actions and legacies are not only respectable in terms of their general achievements in Australian society, but they also dispel many of the myths circulated via colonial occupation: particularly that Aboriginal people were passive and lacked the will to resist colonial encroachment.

The facts pertaining to the decision-making and consequent actions of these Aboriginal figures are an important testament to their strength and, crucially, their humanity. Such education is a key element of this project because for the past two centuries the derision and denial of our humanity has been a key tool used to excuse our lands’ occupation and the attempted extermination of our people. These issues are important to address in our current time because the treatment of Aboriginal people that was so prevalent in past generations is also arguably reflected in contemporary realities experienced in our communities. These include, for example, a high and rising level of incarceration and suicide within some of our communities.

Today the systematic selection and canonisation of heroes is made and evident, aided by monetary imagery. European concepts of “pioneering heroes” and their ingenuity (with their portraiture circulated on items of value) stand in direct contrast to many examples of Aboriginal heroes that are purposefully silenced by the Australian majority. Malcolm X taught us that Black people as leaders of culture and civilisation, who stood their ground, have shrewdly been written out of the history books in order to be forgotten. White heroes are often canonised so that European people can easily teach their children these accomplishments to achieve themselves. However, for disenfranchised Black people, especially in the Australian situation, there are no visible ‘heroes’. No creators and protectors of civilisation and culture are promoted in the same respectful manner, or often in any manner. Malcolm X stated that, “if you can be convinced that you never did anything, you can be convinced you can never do anything”.¹ This current series of work is a contribution to the respectful promotion of notable Aboriginal people that continually fought to protect and retain their complex society and law.

“Blood Money” seeks to contribute to a stance against the historical and contemporary exploitation of our lands, culture and people. This exploitation is reflected in the title of the series. It is a reference to European traditions of wergeld (or “blood money”) where a payment for conciliation – as a result of responsibility for death or murder – was agreed on and made.² Through this title there is also the implication of Aboriginal blood (and/or death) for European money (and/or material gain). By overt and systematic brutality, transferral of Aboriginal possession and prosperity has been converted into European “ownership” and capital, physically “embodied” in banknotes and coinage. This ownership is seen as a personal possession yet, paradoxically, is depersonalised and foreign to the owner, especially in a monetary form with a value enforced by British-developed law, institutions of power (for instance, courts, police and military) and corresponding customary transactions.

1 | Malcolm X, “Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements”, Secker & Warburg, London, 1966, p. 169.

2 | See “Money: from cowrie shells to credit cards”, British Museum Publications, London, 1986.