University of Technology Sydney
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors

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A thesis submitted to the University of Technology Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2018

Certificate of original authorship

I, Jonathan Jones, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Mumala-dhi bunga-ny nguwan-gu.
Dedicated to my grandfather.

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Abstract

This research considers one particular element of Koori artistic practice in south-east Australia—the unique and continuing use of the line by the region's male artists. Line-work is evident in a range of imagery, in various mediums, and throughout different generations. This study reveals the cultural importance and unbroken use of the line through changing social, political and cultural climates. The recognition of a continuing south-east aesthetic is significant, as the region has experienced prolonged colonisation, leading to a fragmentation of visual expressions and lack of art-historical research. In this context, the line represents the continuation of culture and the unbroken lineage of Koori knowledge.

A key contribution to Aboriginal studies is the development of a Wiradjuri-specific research methodology, named here Yindyamarra Winhanganha, which centres on yindyamarra or cultural respect. This methodology underpins the research.

This research is titled *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The Wiradjuri word 'murruwaygu' refers to the designs carved onto trees and other cultural material unique to the south-east region: repeating lines, patterned chevrons and concentric squares, diamonds and rhomboids, with the inclusion of an occasional figure. Widely recognised as central to south-east identity, murruwaygu can be seen in artistic practices from pre-contact until today, establishing a clear cultural tradition that has endured massive change. This research charts this constant practice by investigating four distinct periods or generations. Referencing south-east kinship systems, each generation is represented by two artforms or artists. This kinship framework, named here Koori Kinship Theory, is understood as a culturally specific living archiving system and thus provides structure for the research.

Representing Mumala (grandfather) or first generation is pre-contact material—the carved and designed marga (parrying shield) and girran.girran (broad shield). The second or Babiin (father) generation features 19th-century Koori artists William Barak, a Wurundjeri man from the current Melbourne area, and Tommy McRae, from the upper Murray River near the contemporary border of NSW and Victoria. These artists documented their changing worlds with introduced materials like paper, pen and pencil, continuing line-work as a leading visual principle. The third or Wurrumany (son) generation focuses on self-taught senior Wiradjuri mission artists Uncle Roy Kennedy and the late HJ Wedge. Both use painting and printmaking that features line-work to document their life experiences of growing up on missions in NSW under segregation policies. Finally, the Warunarrung (grandson) generation is represented by professional and tertiary-educated contemporary Melbourne-based artists Reko Rennie (Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (Gunai/Monero), who both work with new mediums while continuing line traditions.

Like these Koori artists, this thesis uses the line as its organising principle, both practically and metaphorically, to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors. Focusing on continuity and change, this research provides the first art-historical account of Koori men's art from pre-contact to today.

Community Advisory Committee statement
We are happy to lend our knowledge, guidance and support to this important research, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The ongoing practice, research and development of south-east Aboriginal culture by our community is vital to ensure the strength of the future generations. We are proud to see this realised.

Production Note:
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Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM
Wiradjuri elder

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Professor Uncle Michael McDaniel
Wiradjuri elder

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Professor Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO
Wurundjeri elder

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In particular I would like to thank the Community Advisory Committee who have helped and guided me along the way. Uncle Stan, you have cleared pathways and made research like this possible. Uncle Michael, you first encouraged me to undertake this research. And Aunty Joy, your support has enabled me to look at practices beyond my own community. This research stands on all of your shoulders.

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Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge nyiwarri, Genevieve O'Callaghan.

List of abbreviations

ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACT: Australian Capital Territory
AGNSW: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
AIATSIS: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra
AM: Australian Museum, Sydney
ANU: Australian National University, Canberra
BM: British Museum, London
KHT: Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne
MV: Museum Victoria, Melbourne
NAVA: National Association for the Visual Arts
NGA: National Gallery Australia, Canberra
NGV: National Gallery Victoria, Melbourne
NLA: National Library of Australia, Canberra
NMA: National Museum of Australia, Canberra
NSW: New South Wales
PRM: Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford
SLNSW: State Library New South Wales, Sydney
SLV: State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
TAFE: Technical and Further Education
UNSW: University of New South Wales, Sydney
UTS: University of Technology Sydney

Notes to the reader

All Aboriginal language words mentioned in the following pages are spelt according to the respective community or artist's standard language orthography. It should be noted that the terms 'south-east' and 'Koori', along with 'language group' and 'nation', are interchangeable for the purposes of this research. Archaic spelling and terminology, some examples of which are considered unacceptable, remain in quoted texts drawn from historical sources.

Language groups and biographical information are included after the initial mention of the names of Indigenous artists and historical figures. Language groups are included (where known) for Indigenous writers, curators, theorists, historians and cultural leaders, present and historical.

For figure captions, measurements are in centimetres; height precedes width. Culturally sensitive images are reproduced in consultation with the relevant communities. Aligned with the style of the AGNSW, where *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* was exhibited over 2015–2016, artists' details within figure captions in this thesis locate their language group or nation within the regions set out by David R. Horton's (1996) Aboriginal Australia map.

Warning

Members of Aboriginal communities are respectfully advised that several people mentioned in writing or depicted in imagery in this thesis have passed away.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

> For Aboriginal people living outside the so-called traditional areas, the rediscovery of one's origins, country, language and customs has become a quest of absolute importance.
>
> —Lin Onus AM (1948–1996, Yorta Yorta) (1994, p. ix)

This introduction sets out the research subject, which centres on the enduring visual practices of the line in Koori, or south-east Australian Aboriginal, men's work. I first discuss the research subject, highlighting its significance, and provide a brief chapter summary that outlines the overall research arc. I then introduce the south-east region, briefly describing the country, cultural connections and communities of the region, setting the parameters of the research. This introduction charts the way south-east material culture has been historically collected and displayed. I include an analysis of how south-east Aboriginal art has been framed, and how this has led to persistent misunderstandings and the fragmentation of the region's history as a whole. This history provides a roadmap for understanding why the south-east has not been afforded a proper art history, and therefore frames the space for my research to occupy.

The introduction then highlights the ways in which the region has continued or revitalised cultural practices through four key examples. These cultural continuums and revitalisation movements are provided to frame my research within the wider south-east revival movement. The introduction then explores the concept of the line and provides a number of culturally specific understandings. These ideas are provided to show the deeper significance of line-work and to help explain its widespread use throughout the south-east. The concept of the line can be seen as a means of tracing cultural heritage and understanding generational continuums, thereby interconnecting the four distinct periods or generations that make up this research topic.

The introduction then discusses the curation of the artists and artforms and how their work fits within the research concept. Their selection is further examined in the description of the corresponding exhibition that occurred as part of the research process at the AGNSW in 2015–2016. Finally, the introduction establishes my own cultural position within the research. This introduction is followed by the chapter that describes the specific Wiradjuri methodology employed for this research.

1.1.1. Research subject

This research considers one particular element of Koori artistic practice, that of the region's unique and continuing use of the line by male artists. In both figurative and abstract imagery, and in varying mediums, a distinctive aesthetic of line-work can be traced through the generations. Analysing the constant use of the line through changing social, political and cultural climates reveals its inherent cultural importance. In this way, the artists studied in this research, titled *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, adhere to and maintain a local artistic practice in a region often accused of having 'lost' its cultural identity. Here, the line takes on a new meaning, representing the continuation of culture and unbroken lineage of Koori knowledge.

This research is titled *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The Wiradjuri word 'murruwaygu' refers to the designs carved onto trees and other cultural material that are unique to the south-east region. Rodney Carter, a Dja Dja Wurrung and Yorta Yorta man (cited in Melbourne Museum 2000), explains the importance of these line designs:

> Shields or the symbols upon the shields represent identity. You can liken them to what we use now as titles for our houses. The lines, the colour, the carvings—they tell people who you are, and, more importantly, they tell people where you come from … These are all distinct to south-eastern Australia and would have been passed from generation to generation. (p. 16)

Methodologically, this research has been broken down into four distinct periods or generations, each generation given a Wiradjuri term for family members (see Chapter 3). Spanning pre-contact to today, these generations establish a clear cultural tradition that has endured massive change. Each generation is represented by either two artforms or artists, a framework that references south-east kinship or knowledge systems. The four distinct periods are:

1. Classical Koori or pre-contact material—Mumala (grandfather)
2. 19th-century Koori artists—Babiin (father)
3. Self-taught senior Koori artists—Wurrumany (son)
4. Professional or trained contemporary Koori artists—Warunarrung (grandson)

This research provides the first art-historical account of Koori men's art from pre-contact to today, spanning two centuries, while focusing on the continuity and changes within a specific genre.

1.1.2. Research significance

From a south-east Aboriginal standpoint, this research provides a unique art history of the region by tracking a particular technique across generations and mediums. Research in the south-east has traditionally been dominated by non-Aboriginal researchers and as such *Murruwaygu* challenges the 19th- and 20th-century ideas of primitivism and evolution, which are discussed later in this introduction and within each chapter. Many of these 'theories' were designed to support specific political and social outcomes, including promoting the belief that Aboriginal people were soon to be extinct. Gaynor Macdonald (2001) has argued that all anthropological work up until the 1970s framed the south-east as something of the past (p. 182). These ideas permeate all sources, including government documents and records, leading Jeremy Beckett (1988) to comment that 'the most striking line of tension may seem to lie between what Aboriginal people say about themselves and what others say about them' (p. 191). Contributing to this issue is the lack of Aboriginal voices and primary sources, the compound effect of which continues to skew how south-east Aboriginal cultures are

understood. Lawrence Bamblett (Wiradjuri) (2013b) argues that a 'language of deficit' has been drawn against our communities (p. 173). It is therefore inherently problematic to build an accurate picture of Aboriginal life from existing available research.

The existing research that reflects community values and specifically relates to art and the south-east region often discusses either specific moments, people or areas. This includes the work of Sylvia Kleinert (1994), who studied the often-disregarded practices occurring between 'the death of William Barak and Tommy McRae at the turn of the century, to the emergence of an urban Aboriginal art in the 1970s' (p. vi); Gamilaroi researcher Donna Leslie (2008), who has focused on south-east artists Lin Onus and Les Griggs (1958–1993, Gunditjmara) within the context of assimilation era politics; and Frances Edmonds (2007), who worked closely with local Victorian artists and community members to develop a substantial overview of art practice within the colonial state boundary of Victoria, with a special focus on the health and wellbeing impacts of positive artmaking. I rely on Edmonds (2007) and her informants in this introduction, as she clearly demonstrates 'that south-east Aboriginal art has endured across time and place' (p. 338).

The key text I draw on for this research is the landmark publication *Aboriginal artists of the 19th century* by Andrew Sayers (1994). While providing much of the background information on Barak and McRae, this publication is groundbreaking for the way it treats south-east artists as subjects of art history and not ethnography. The seminal chapter 'Traditional visual culture in south-east Australia' by Carol Cooper (1994) provides an influential account of how carving practices informed artists such as Barak and McRae. Cooper (1981) first raised the concept of a continuum of techniques in the exhibition catalogue *Aboriginal Australia*, where the region is specifically listed and classical works like shields, clubs and boomerangs are purposefully positioned alongside the works of Barak and McRae.

My research continues this trend by considering the influence of carving, specifically the process of creating lines within a carving methodology, thus connecting pre-contact practices to contemporary practices. The overall drive of this research is to establish the recognition of an unbroken practice, and in doing so put in place mechanisms for understanding, acknowledging and respecting Koori culture, thus empowering the community and resisting notions of deficit. Bamblett (2013b) explains that 'continuity is central to Wiradjuri identity' (p. 40). In this way, my research actively draws on and celebrates the strength and resilience of the region; attributes that I believe have long been ignored by the wider community (Ferry 1979, p. 35).

FIGURE 1.1.
FIGURE 1.2.
Untitled, *Untitled*, 2007
HJ Wedge, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, 1957–2012
Graphite on paper; each 29.8 x 42 cm
Private collection, Sydney
Image courtesy the artist's estate

Throughout my research process, one of the key obstacles has been the passing of several elders. Since starting this research, HJ Wedge has sadly passed away. As a key artist within *Murruwaygu*, HJ's primary voice is missed. Before he passed, I discussed the research, its processes and intentions with him several times. He actively engaged with the research and responded by sending drawings (Figures 1.1–1.2). Another great loss was that of Uncle Roy Barker Snr (Muruwari) and Aunty June Barker (Yorta Yorta/ Wiradjuri). Uncle Roy was recognised as an important elder and carver with strong knowledge on timbers and carving processes, while Aunty June, Uncle Roy's wife,

was an important community elder who had a sound understanding of family lines and kinship. Uncle Roy's voice has been included as much as possible, and both his and Aunty June's knowledge is missed.

1.1.3. Chapter breakdowns

This thesis is divided into seven chapters accompanied by a foreword and conclusion. This introduction frames and sets out the research topic. Chapter 2 introduces the Wiradjuri methodology used to develop this research. Chapter 3 describes the cultural framework that has guided the construction of this research. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to each pair of artists; these are named Mumala, Babiin, Wurrumany and Warunarrung, respectively. It should be noted that through the system of pairing artists and artforms, these chapters are larger than standard thesis chapters; however, it is important that each pair be seen as such and their stories connected. These chapters are followed by a conclusion.

1.2. Understanding the south-east

For the purposes of this research I have specifically chosen the interchangeable terms 'south-east' and 'Koori' to define the region. Koori is a generally accepted self-defining term used to describe Aboriginal people from the south-east region of Australia. Onus (1988), a Yorta Yorta painter and central figure in Koori art, understood the term Koori to mean 'one of our own' and used it in 'preference to the word "Aboriginal"' (p. 29). It should be noted that in Victoria an alternative spelling, Koorie, is used, reflecting the history of Aboriginal language orthography (Edmonds 2007, p. 2). In the north, known today as northern NSW, people often call themselves Goori. It should also be noted that some groups in this region reject the term Koori (Gibson 2013, p. 119). Although the terms south-east and Koori have been used to represent the collective, when discussing an individual or group every effort has been made to acknowledge their specific nation or language group (when known). The term Koori 'became a public label in the 1960s' (Morphy 1998, p. 321), and it has often been used to promote the region,

as seen in the development of the first Aboriginal-initiated newspaper, the *National Koorier* (NMA 2014, para. 3), and the current newspaper, the *Koori Mail.*

The south-east is a culturally specific region in Aboriginal Australia defined by a major river system known today as the Murray–Darling Basin, by the coast to the east and the south, and the Great Dividing Range, an eastern mountain range (Cooper 1981, p. 29). The region takes in the states of NSW, Victoria, the ACT, and parts of southern Queensland and south-eastern South Australia within the Murray–Darling catchment. According to the Aboriginal Australia map created by David R. Horton (1996), this region has a wide demographic of communities and individuals from over 60 different language groups and nations. As Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell (Wotabaluk) (2015) note, 'the south-east of Australia is one of the most fertile and resource-rich zones on the Australian continent' (p. 8). It has been estimated that pre-contact the region supported 300,000 people (Butlin 1983, p. 5), and today it is home to more than a third of Australia's Aboriginal population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017); however, not all of this population trace their ancestry to the south-east region.

It is important to note that although Tasmania experienced similar waves of colonisation, the island is generally not considered part of the south-east; it is understood as a unique region with a distinct cultural position. This is reflected in several ways; for example, Tasmanian Aboriginal people do not refer to themselves as Koori, and Tasmanian Aboriginal people historically did not make shields. When south-east elders discuss the south-east region they are generally not referring to or including Tasmania. Additionally, in past research projects it has been made clear to me by Tasmanian Aboriginals that research into their cultural practices is to be conducted only by members of their own community. Tasmania is therefore is not part of this study.

Deeply connected to their country, the nations and groups of the south-east developed their own languages and specific cultural practices, including designs that reflect the

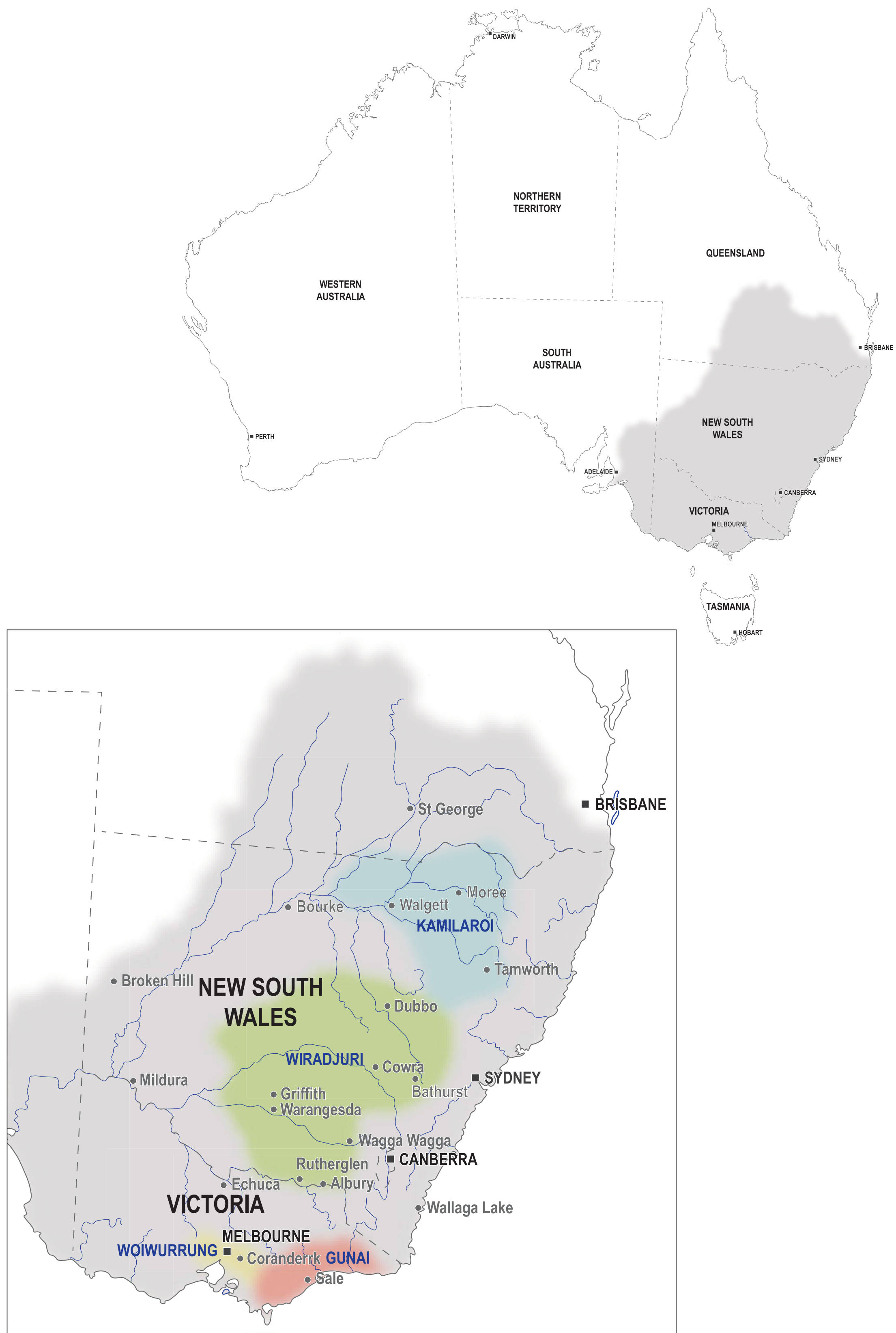


FIGURE 1.3.
Based on several sources, this map has been created to reflect the south-east region as described in this thesis. As such, this map is an approximation; it does not exactly or comprehensively locate places, areas and features.

identity of the group, clan and individual. Boucher and Russell (2015) remind us that while 'boundaries were politically and culturally important', the region should be seen as 'a complex mosaic of cultural forms related and overlapping, yet also independent and coherent' (p. 8). Uncle Tex Skuthorpe (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006), a Nhunggabarra elder from northern NSW, describes the region as a 'cultural bloc' that

> shared a fair measure of common cultural and linguistic background. Each community occupied its own country, with borders defined by the stories, but its members shared similar stories and spiritual views of life with the other communities. (p. 24)

South-east communities have some of the longest ancestral connections in the world, including the world's oldest burial site, located at Lake Mungo in the Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Site (Bowler et al. 2003); the world's oldest ceremonial object at Cuddie Springs, NSW (Gerritsen 2011, chapter 3, conclusion); at the same location the world's oldest grindstone for making bread (Pascoe 2014, p. 30); and potentially the world's oldest human-made structure in the Brewarrina fish traps (Western Catchment Management Authority 2009). The region contains countless Aboriginal sites, including camps and fire hearths, middens, stone quarries, burial sites, stone arrangements and rock art. These sites speak to the deep traditions that developed within the region and continue to define and inform local cultural practices.

The south-east was the first area of Australia to endure sustained invasion, which bound the region together in new ways. The brutal force of 'colonisation occurred on a much larger scale than elsewhere on the continent, and threatened the survival of many Aboriginal nations' (Ryan 2018, p. 124). This process has been described as attempted genocide (Dodson 2003, p. 34). Onus (1993b) commented that 'survival and family unity took precedence … yet in isolated pockets some traditions survived' (p. 290). But feelings of having culture stolen, destroyed and misrepresented are all too common within the Koori community. Despite this, and as shown by Edmonds (2007), 'art has continuously been practised within an Aboriginal paradigm' (p. 48).

1.3. Lack of art history in the south-east

The colonisation of south-east Australia can be understood as the influencing factor in the region's lack of art history and research (Cooper 1981; Edmonds 2007; Kleinert 1994). The key reason the works of Barak and McRae have long been overlooked, Sayers (1994) argued, is because 'art historians continue to rely upon a set of typologies' (p. 10). As the first region colonised, the south-east has experienced various forms of oppression to suit changing social and political agendas, from dispossession and denial to segregation then assimilation. Howard Morphy (1998) described the physical colonisation going hand-in-hand with the colonisation of cultural and artmaking practices, which get co-opted into western paradigms such as primitivism. He went on to state that this colonisation of cultural practices has misrepresented Aboriginal worldviews, and in doing so robbed artists and their communities of their cultural significance (pp. 373–374). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Porou) (2012) describes this process as 'trading the Other', which 'is a vast industry based on the positional superiority and advantages gained under imperialism'; she further argues that 'trading the Other deeply, intimately, defines western thinking and identity' (p. 93).

Edmonds (2007) argues that this tension produces '"gaps" in the historical record surrounding south-east Aboriginal art [that were created by] western "science" as demonstrated through historical and ethnographic methodological approaches' (p. 48). Indeed, Smith (2012) further explains that the disruption and fragmentation of knowledge 'is not a phenomenon of postmodernism [but] the consequence of imperialism' (p. 29). She goes on to say how 'colonialism was not just about collection. It was also about re-arrangement, re-presentation and re-distribution' (p. 65). Discussing the works of Barak and McRae, Sayers (1994) identified as a major confusion the distribution of their works between 'art museums, natural-history museums, ethnography museums, library pictorial collections [and] library manuscript collections' (p. 9). He wrote:

> A Tommy McRae drawing displayed in an art gallery will be used differently,

> ‘seen’ differently, and available to a different audience, as compared with a McRae in, say, the manuscript collection of a library. (p. 85)

According to Smith (2012),

> a critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as Indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. (p. 29)

It is within this space, the gaps left behind, that I intend to provide an art history of the south-east. Within each chapter, I will map out the social and political conditions that have driven, shaped and influenced each generation of artists or artforms. Understanding each artist’s context is integral to decolonising the world that frames it, as Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Narungga/Kaurna/Ngarrindjeri) (1997) explained:

> To arrive at a rationale for liberation epistemologies and Indigenist methodology we must first understand the colonial history of Australia and its impact on its Indigenous peoples and their struggles to be free from colonialism. (p. 110)

The following five sections briefly outline the history of exhibitions and displays of south-east material. These sections are: the first collection of Aboriginal cultural material in Kamay (Botany Bay) in 1770; the curation of the savage and construction of ethnographic exhibits including world fairs in the 1800s; the shift in displaying Aboriginal art from ethnographic museums to art galleries via primitivism; the interpretation of Central Desert acrylic painting by the contemporary art world via a minimalism lens; and the merging of Koori art with a pan-urban identity. Together these sections provide an outline of how south-east art has been colonised and ‘traded’, and how the dominant discourse for south-east art has been formed. This history of exhibitions and displays, in combination with the histories provided for each artist in their respective chapter of this thesis, attempts to knit the fractured history of the south-east together.

1.3.1. The collecting begins

A key historical event—the violent landing in the bay of Kamay, the home of Eora and Dharawal people, led by Lieutenant James Cook (1728–1779) in 1770—marks not only the commencement of colonial Australia but also the first collection by the British of Aboriginal material. The objects 'collected' in 1770 include a broad shield. Analysing this moment provides significant insight into ongoing collection policies and their continuing impact on Aboriginal communities. To discuss this event, I draw on historical first-hand accounts, along with those of contemporary academics, while importantly inserting a local Eora and Dharawal voice.

It should be noted that I live and work in Sydney, and I pay tribute to the founding role of the local Sydney Aboriginal community. This is an important part of Aboriginal protocol, and of my Indigenous research methodology (see Chapter 2).

During Cook's first voyage in 1770 he sailed along the east coast of what was to become known as Australia. He first sighted Bidawal country in present-day eastern Victoria, then sailed northward, making landfall in Dharawal country on the southern side of Kamay (Botany Bay), known today as Kurnell. Before the British had even landed they had deployed an imperial cataloguing system that attempted to name cultural material. According to Gayatri Spivak (1999), the erasure of local language and the replacement with English represents the first stage of colonisation. 'Pikes', 'swords', 'lances' and 'scymetars'—these inadequate descriptions immediately stripped Eora and Dharawal objects of their cultural relevance and meaning. I discuss this process further in an analysis of the word 'weapon' (see Chapter 4). Edmonds (2007) concludes that 'Aboriginal artwork has frequently been subjected to western definitions of good and bad art, as well as western constructs of Aboriginality, which have resonated since first European contact', and that south-east practice 'continues to contest and deny attempts at labelling and classifying' (p. 329).

As Cook's military party of some 30 to 40 armed men approached a 'village', many of the local Gweagal clan members fled, leaving two men to resist the incursion. One of these men was Cooman (or Goomun). Sydney Parkinson (c.1745–1771) (1784/1984) described Cooman and his companion's clear response: 'Their countenance bespoke displeasure; they threatened us, and discovered hostile intentions, often crying to us, "Warra warra wai"' (p. 134); which was followed by a volley of stones and spears. This directive was ignored and the party proceeded, with Cook ordering shots to be fired and the Gweagal men forced to retreat. The British party continued to wreak havoc, initiating a long tradition of pillaging in the aftermath of violence. As Joseph Banks (1743–1820) (1771/1997) recorded: 'We however thought it no improper measure to take away with us all the lances which we could find about the houses, amounting in number to 40 or 50' (28 April 1770, para. 2).

Within this plunder was a broad shield used by one of the Gweagal men to defend his country. Broad shields from the Sydney region are elliptical in shape, painted white and decorated with distinctive red lines. Like many other cultural connections, this style of shield is shared with communities to the north and south of Eora and Dharawal country. They are widely documented in Sydney rock art, in the work of Yuin artist Mickey of Ulladulla (c.1820s–1891), and the photographic work of Thomas Dick (1877–1927) taken over 1910–1920. Because of their unique cultural markings, Cook's party ironically described these shields as a 'target' (Figure 1.4).

The shield and other materials amassed during Cook's voyage were taken back to England and given away as trophies and souvenirs. Most of the Australian material has been lost or separated from its significant provenance (Attenbrow & Cartwright 2014, p. 885). All that is known to have survived is a collection of four sawn-down spears held in the collection of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge. A shield in the collection of the British Museum has sometimes been exhibited as the broad shield collected on Cook's voyage, but as Cooper (2018) states, it has an 'imperfect provenance … the record of its collection and acquisition by the

FIGURE 1.4.
Nouvelle-Hollande. Vases, armes, peche, 1807–1817
Charles Alexandre Lesueur, France, 1778–1846
Etching
From the book *Voyage of discovery to Terres Australes, executed by order of his Majesty, the Emperor and King, on the corvettes (sloops) Le Géographe, Le Naturaliste and the schooner Le Casuarina, during the years 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 and 1804*, 1807–1817
SLNSW, MRB/F18 Atlas [1807]
Image courtesy SLNSW

BM is uncertain' (p. 212). Both this shield and these four spears were shown at the exhibition *Encounters* at the NMA, Canberra, in 2015–2016, causing deep cultural harm. Aunty Julie Freeman (2016), a Gweagal descendant, tells us: 'We are still crying for that shield to be back; it belongs here' (p. 130).

While there were many previous voyages of exploration (mainly on the west coast), including those of Willem Janszoon (1606), Luís Vaez de Torres (1606), Dirk Hartog (1616), Frederik de Houtman (1619), Abel Janszoon Tasman (1644), Willem de Vlamingh (1696) and William Dampier (1699), there are no reports of the collection of cultural material, thus making the recorded 40 or 50 Gweagal spears and the one broad shield the first Aboriginal objects to be 'traded' on the imperial world stage. Maria Nugent (2005) comments:

> This event (and others like it) has become historically significant, particularly at a national level. As such, the conventional and popular lines of interpretation of it have far-reaching and enduring effects. They create meanings that stick. (p. 14)

For the Gweagal, as Aunty Julie (Freeman 2016) reminds us, these collections mean much more: 'Objects are connections to tradition. But because of objects not being here we have many gaps and we can't complete the story' (p. 130). This is reaffirmed by Bain Attwood (2009), who suggests that 'the past or representations of the past in the form of historical narratives have become not only central to politics but also commodities of immense cultural and economic value' (p. 287).

The commencement of colonial collections, marred by violence and the lack of consent, marks the beginning of an ongoing obsession with Aboriginal cultural material (see Chapter 4). Cooper (2018) notes that 'there were numerous first-encounter scenarios between Europeans and Aboriginal people that involved violence or theft' (p. 216) and argues that any trade would have been made under duress. Early colonists such as Judge-Advocate David Collins (1756–1810) (1798) described this trafficking of cultural material: 'The people of the transports … were procuring spears, shields, swords,

fishing lines, and other articles from the natives, to carry to Europe' (vol. 1, p. 17). These 'procurements' contributed greatly to Eora tensions and led Governor Arthur Phillip (1738–1814) to pass a special declaration 'strictly prohibiting every person from depriving them of their spears, fizgigs [fishing gear], gum or other articles' (Collins 1798, vol. 1, p. 16). Again, these events are fundamental to the establishment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and hold particular historical significance to the way Aboriginal cultural material has been collected. We see time and again violence and pilfering of Aboriginal material, a context that continues to cause pain for Aboriginal communities.

A key part of this research has been the close collaboration with Gadigal elder Uncle Charles 'Chicka' Madden and the creation of a Sydney-style broad shield (see Chapter 2). Remaking shields helps us to 'fill in the holes in the story' (Freeman 2016, p. 130). Importantly, by continuing to create new works we take the power out of the museums and archives and place it back in hands of community. This idea is expanded on when looking at south-east continuums later in this chapter.

1.3.2. Curating the savage

Early colonial collections are dominated by men's objects, including boomerangs, shields and clubs, which are often portrayed as 'weapons'. South-east women's and children's collections are rarely represented. This bias speaks not only to the violence at the point of collection but also to the construction of Aboriginal people as savages, a concept deeply embedded in popular scientific theories of the 19th century, such as Social Darwinism. According to Cooper (1981), these theories were often taught via 'mechanics' institutes and other voluntary scientific and philosophical societies' (p. 30), which were connected to the establishment of Australian museums and their collections established over 1820–1870. Smith (2012) points out that these scientific and philosophical organisations 'enabled local scientific interests to be organised and embedded in the colonial system', and reminds us of their amateur nature: 'Many of the earliest local researchers were not formally "trained" and were hobbyist researchers

and adventurers [who] represented the Other to a general audience back in Europe, which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas' (p. 8). Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918) (1905/2005) commented on the lack of government support for research into south-east Aboriginal cultures: 'Most of the scanty knowledge we possess has been gathered by private individuals during brief intervals of leisure' (p. iii).

Many of these 'hobbyist researchers and adventurers' in Australia amassed impressive collections, often trading objects on the ever-growing market as exotic souvenirs and scientific specimens of a dying race or exhibiting them in International Exhibitions. These imperial showcases, which dominated the second half of the 19th century, similarly displayed 'weapons and wooden items, which located Aboriginal culture in the hunter-gatherer paradigm, as the earliest examples of "primitive" culture', where 'spears were arranged in exotic fan designs to set off the superiority of European manufactured goods' (Edmonds 2007, p. 101). Cooper (1981) explained that

> a substantial amount of early ethnographica reached Europe … by way of International Exhibitions [and] at the close of an exhibition, the policy of the colonies was to distribute the Aboriginal material as presents, or to exchange it for exotic pieces from other 'primitive' cultures. (p. 31)

The colonisation of Aboriginal material in world fairs, where the objects were employed as either 'decoration or contrast' (Cooper 1981, p. 31) against symbols of the young colony's prosperity, including wool, wheat and gold, legitimises the genocide and dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands. Based on her research on Aboriginal material in colonial and world fairs, Ilaria Vanni Accarigi (2016) describes how 'Aboriginal weapons showed nomadic tribes wandering on a land with which they had little connection. In this way, dispossession was legitimised and materialised' (p. 137). These collections are important as they form the basis of the material culture archive, and the way they have been constructed impacts on how they are interpreted. According to Jacques Derrida (1996), 'archivisation produces as much as it records the event' (p. 17).

FIGURE 1.5.
The Garden Palace, Sydney, 1879–1882
Charles Bayliss, England, active Australia, 1850–1897
Photographic print
SLNSW, SPF/267
Image courtesy SLNSW

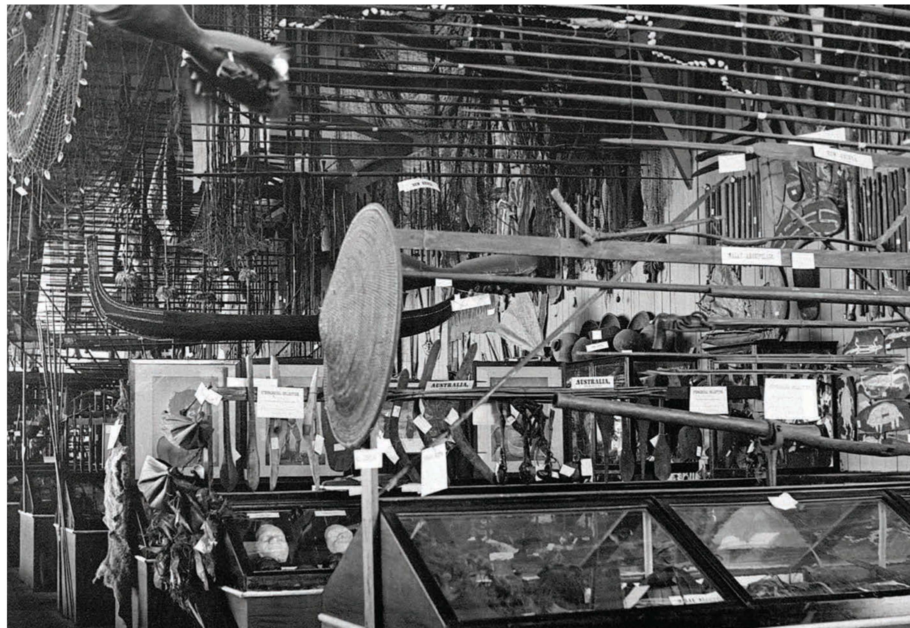


FIGURE 1.6.
The Ethnological Court at the Garden Palace, Sydney, 1879–1880
Photographic print
Australian Museum Archives, Sydney, AMS351/V11460
Image courtesy Australian Museum Archives

International Exhibitions in Australia commenced in 1879 with the Sydney International Exhibition at the Garden Palace (Figure 1.5), followed by the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. Both included large displays of Aboriginal cultural material collected from the frontier, which at this time included NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, and parts of South Australia and Western Australia. In 1883 the Garden Palace burned down, taking with it vast and precious collections of Koori material (Figure 1.6), much of which was irreplaceable due to the massive disruption and destruction caused by colonisation. Today there are limited collections of Koori material held within anthropological institutions; the Museum Victoria, for instance, effectively ceased collecting south-east objects from 1900 onwards, as contributing communities were seen to be inauthentic (Edmonds 2007, p. 137). These actions were echoed in the work of emerging amateur anthropologists who saw Aboriginal people as a dying race, an approach understood today as 'salvage anthropology'. Alfred William Howitt's (1830–1908) (1904) statement illustrates this perspective:

> The native tribes have more or less died, and in the older settlements of south-east Australia the tribal remnants have now almost lost the knowledge of the beliefs and customs of their fathers. (p. xiii)

The loss of material collections, and the shift of political and social agenda towards assimilation for communities of the south-east, saw the colonial gaze follow the frontier, with the remote areas of Arnhem Land and the desert regions becoming key areas of study (Cowlishaw 1992, p. 21).

1.3.3. Primitivism

Morphy (1998) has described the 20th-century modernist paradigm of primitivism as the 'product of an evolutionary model in which the societies of Europe were thought to represent the more evolved forms of civilisation' (p. 371). Following the promotion of the savage in the International Exhibitions, Aboriginal art was then consumed within primitivism. This idea was clearly declared in the 1929 exhibition *Primitive art* at Museum Victoria. Edmonds (2007) tells us the exhibition

> included items deemed pristine and 'traditional', such as work from the more remote areas of northern Australia. While the items from the south-east reflected the 'salvage paradigm' of the previous century. (p. 142)

McRae's drawings, which received little commentary, were included to confirm 'that Aboriginal culture in the south-east was becoming "civilised"' (p. 143).

According to Kleinert (2002), the 1929 exhibition was 'a relatively isolated event' and 'institutional interest in Aboriginal art did not re-emerge until the 1940s' (Ch5.4), with exhibitions such as *Art of Australia, 1788–1941*, which toured North America. This exhibition again included works by McRae, although the catalogue never mentions him by name (Sayers 1994, p. 86). Both Barak and McRae were included in the subsequent *Primitive art exhibition* at the MV in 1943, however both were again cast as inauthentic 'examples of Australian graphic art after the aborigines had made contact with the whites' (Leonhard Adam, cited in Sayers 1994, p. 86). They again received 'scant attention' (p. 85), which Sayers understood to be because their artworks did not fit the prescribed ideas of what Aboriginal art should be. The beginning of this ideology is claimed by Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929) (cited in PRM 2014), who said: 'In Victoria there is not a single native who really knows anything of tribal customs' (18 August 1898, para. 8). In this way, as noted by Sayers (1994), Barak and McRae are 'considered not only as hybrid works but, in many quarters, as a kind of degraded expression, neither traditionally Aboriginal nor fully European—"half-caste" art' (p. 9). Edmonds (2007) similarly sees notions of assimilation being 'influential in determining that Aborigines from the south-east remained outside the public conscience' (p. 338).

As remote-area Aboriginal art became framed within an art context, debate regarding its placement—that is, its placement within in art galleries instead of museums—gained significance in the second half of the 20th century. In Sydney the debate centred on a group of Tiwi Pukumani tutini and Yirrkala bark paintings, commissioned and exhibited at the AGNSW in 1959 (Morphy 1998, pp. 29–31) (Figure 1.7). This

represents the first time an art gallery had actively acquired Aboriginal art and exhibited it, and it is understood today as the catalyst for contemporary Aboriginal art. The proponent of this change was the then-deputy director of the gallery, Tony Tuckson (1921–1973), who was also an abstract expressionist painter. Tuckson, like his contemporaries, found the bark paintings of Arnhem Land enormously inspiring and saw in them a new way of conceptualising Australian painting. Tuckson (1972) defined primitive art as 'produced by the Indigenous inhabitants' who are '[absent] of a written language, a limited technology and socio-political organisation which prevented them from developing forms of architectural constructions and institutions' (p. 76). This can be understood as a continuum of the Australian settler-colonial primitivism described by Kleinert (2002, Ch5.5). This context excluded south-east communities, who at that time were deeply engaged in the political movement.

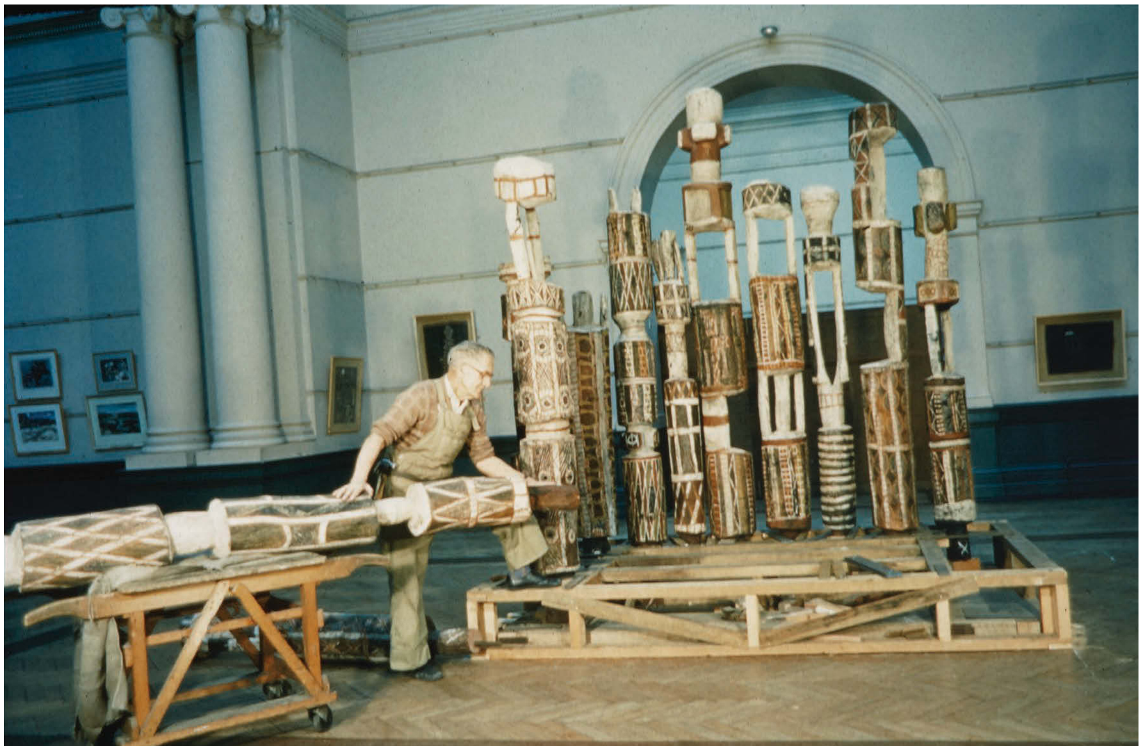


FIGURE 1.7.
Harry Turnbull installing the Melville Island Pukumani poles, AGNSW, June 1959
Harold Missingham, Australia, 1906–1994
Colour slide
Margaret Tuckson archive, ARC398.1.659

1.3.4. Modernism

The next region of Australia to be colonised and consumed was Central Australia, and by the 1970s 'the primitivism model was beginning to be viewed with disfavour' (Morphy 1998, p. 374). During the 1980s, when Australia celebrated its bicentenary and consciously considered its identity, art from the resettlement community of Papunya, established in 1971, 'would come to dominate national and international appreciation of contemporary Aboriginal art in subsequent decades' (Edwards 2007, p. 57). Working with European materials of acrylic paint on canvas, Papunya artists were seen to be 'simultaneously "primitive" and "avant-garde"' (Morphy 1998, p. 377). Curator Deborah Edwards (2007) argues that Papunya artworks 'could be read as being in dialogue with forms of late modernist abstraction' (p. 57).

A key museum-curated exhibition of this era was *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia*, which toured America over 1988–1989 and 'featured artwork from more remote areas of the country' (Edmonds 2010, chapter 7, para. 7). Edmonds (2010) critiques this curatorial rationale:

> Despite the curators acknowledging Aboriginal art from urbanised areas in the exhibition catalogue, no urban-based artwork was exhibited. The curators reinforced prevailing ideas about urban-based Aboriginals as second-rate artists when they declared, 'The number of Aboriginal artists in the cities is still small, and in quantity and quality their work, on average, does not compare with that of people from remote areas'. (chapter 7, para. 7)

Some five years later, the international touring exhibition *Aratjara: art of the First Australians* (1993–1994) made a conscious effort to correct this exclusion. Both Barak and McRae were included, along with other south-east artists, including Onus, Trevor Nickolls (1949–2012, Ngarrindjeri), Robert Campbell Jnr (1944–1993, Ngaku) and Michael Riley (1960–2004, Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi). Onus (1993b), who also wrote an essay for the catalogue, described the 'rediscovery' of Barak as paralleling the activation of 'the political and artistic situation' of the south-east (p. 289). Sayers (1994)

recognised the inclusion of Barak and McRae as critical to their 'increasing recognition' (p. 88), while Edmonds (2010) has since come to regard *Aratjara* as 'one of the first exhibitions to challenge the preconceptions that Aboriginal art belonged only in ethnographic museums, or was tourist or folk art' (chapter 7, para. 5).

Perhaps even more significant for south-east artists was the exhibition *Aboriginal Australia*, which preceded both *Dreamings* and *Aratjara*, touring Australian state galleries over 1981–1982. Cooper was responsible for the championing of the south-east in the exhibition, and she included an extraordinary collection of carved objects—boomerangs, clubs and shields—along with rarely seen weavings and the works of Barak and McRae. Cooper's accompanying catalogue essay provides one of the best introductions to the south-east, outlining the region's uniqueness and tradition of carving (1981, pp. 38–39). She concludes her essay with a prediction that future south-east artists will 'recapture the dynamic feeling for line and design at which their forefathers excelled' (p. 40). Morphy (2001), however, concedes that although 'near-prehistoric art of the early to mid-19th century gained some acceptance' during this time, 'contemporary Koori art remained unrecognised' (p. 47).

1.3.5. Koori/urban

During the 1980s there was a growing awareness of Aboriginal artists based in urban areas, as first represented in the landmark exhibition *Koori Art '84* at Artspace in Sydney. The exhibition employed the term Koori as a catch-all to cover any Indigenous Australian either living in the city or practising 'non-traditional' art. Of the 23 artists and two art centres or collectives involved in the exhibition, eight were not Koori. Curator Tim Johnson (Johnson & Johnson 1984) explained this decision:

> Since most of the artists in this show are currently working in Sydney and their art has the characteristics of a new style, a word with local significance makes an apt title for this exhibition. (p. 21)

Johnson rationalised the inclusion of 'traditional artists' from remote-area communities based on notions of 'exchanging and interchanging styles' (p. 21). Understood as 'the beginnings of visibility' and recognised as having 'opened a new chapter in Australian art history' (Neale 2000, p. 267), the exhibition can also be understood as the start of the misinterpretation of Koori or south-east art. Indeed, Lorraine Gibson (2008) has questioned how non-Koori artists such as 'Bunduk Marika, Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula, Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula and Wenten Rubuntja might have experienced having their work exhibited and represented under the title of "Koori" art' (p. 309).

A number of urban artists involved in *Koori Art '84* came together and formed Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in 1987. Emerging from a collective frustration of exclusion from the contemporary Sydney gallery scene, they sought 'to achieve self-management and representation in the visual arts' (Perkins 1994/2003, p. 100). Of the ten founding members, half were from the south-east. Founding member Brenda L. Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara) (1999) stated that Boomalli 'proved so successful that other artists, individually and collectively, immediately approached the organisation' (p. 110) and in a short space of time to cooperative brought about massive change both at home and overseas. Boomalli successfully championed urban artists; included within that group were Koori and south-east artists, and since then the two terms have often been interchangeable and linked. Gibson (2013), working with Barkindji artists on the Darling River in western NSW, explains how Koori 'appears to cover all those who are not from specific and geographically differentiated and "remote" places'. But this naming also has its failings: 'Culturally homogenising people from Wilcannia, Sydney, Adelaide, and so on as "urban" … excludes what are important differences to the artists concerned' (p. 119). Furthermore, Gibson (2008) explains that Aboriginal people in Wilcannia, NSW, reject the term Koori (p. 296).

Now under the 'urban' umbrella, south-east culture became branded as solely an urban experience. This is evident in a number of ways, including at peak Australian

institutions such as the NGA in Canberra, the heart of south-east country. At the NGA the 13 dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander galleries, launched in 2010, are each categorised by 'geographic region or aspect of Indigenous art' and designed to highlight 'the diversity, richness and excellence of the collection' (NGA 2018b). The galleries include 19th Century Objects; Early Western Desert Paintings 1971–1974; Urban; and Bark Paintings Post-1980. A selection of south-east art is found in the 19th Century Objects, Prints and Drawings, and Photo Media galleries, but mainly within the Urban gallery. This disregard for the south-east as a distinct cultural bloc is also reflected in the NGA collection handbook (Cubillo & Caruana 2010) and website, where urban is defined as 'self-taught or professionally trained, city-based artists' who experiment in 'various media' (NGA 2018a).

Most publications on Aboriginal art are often structured with similar subcategories; the three primary categories being art from the north (such as bark painting), desert art, and urban art, with a fourth sometimes appearing as art from the Kimberley region (Caruana 1993; Kleinert & Neale 2000; Perkins & West 2007; Taylor 1999). The sequence of these categories is also revealing, often starting with art from Arnhem Land, then Central Australia, then urban, demonstrating the way the western lens understands, constructs and consumes Aboriginal art. For south-east artists this sequence infers that urban art was the last movement to arise in Australia, which distorts the region's history. These examples can be seen as both symptomatic of the problem and perpetuating the problem.

In many ways it is understandable why Koori art was swept up with the success of the urban movement. There were benefits politically, socially and culturally. Boomalli established the practices of key south-east artists such as Riley and HJ. It also importantly fostered Aboriginal curatorship, the epitome of self-determination within the visual arts, which only came into practice in the late 1980s with figures including Brenda L. Croft and Hetti Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon). Although several

Melbourne-based artists have been part of Boomalli, Melbourne followed a different path and 'despite Boomalli's achievements, no equivalent in Victoria was forthcoming' (Edmonds 2007, p. 218). In response to dealing with the repatriation of ancestral remains, Gunditjmara elder Jim Berg established the Koorie Heritage Trust in 1985 (Edmonds 2007, p. 216). The KHT developed around Victorian heritage and was the first to seriously collect material from the region (Keeler & Couzens 2010b, p. 5). Today the KHT has a unique collection and corpus of knowledge. Lyn Thorpe (Yorta Yorta) (cited in Edmonds 2007) states that the KHT, in a way similar to Boomalli, promoted 'respect for Victorian Aboriginal artists' work … as being legitimate Aboriginal art' (p. 309).

Through this brief history it can be seen how Aboriginal art of the south-east has been constructed, colonised and consumed; how it was used to promote the notion of the savage, then wilfully forgotten in the quest for authentic Aboriginal art, and misrepresented. Labels continue to fail south-east artists and audiences. As Perkins (2007) states, Aboriginal art 'resists interpretation outside of its historicity and continues to elude definition in terms relevant to western art theory' (p. 11). Edmonds (2007) sees these 'essentialisms imposed by the West [as restricting] artwork to tropes consistent with notions of Aborigines as the Other' (p. 339). And although Marcia Langton (Yiman/Bidjara) (2003) has pointed out that all 'Aboriginal art is an artefact of the colonial encounter' (p. 86), in this research I intend to reveal the complex works and practices that are the reality for south-east artists. The critique of history via contemporary Indigenous analysis is an essential part of decolonisation. Smith (2012) has written of this process:

> A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect of Indigenous cultural politics and forms the basis of an Indigenous language of critique. (p. 25)

1.4. South-east cultural continuums

Across the region many south-east cultural practices are being 'woken up'. By

highlighting the ongoing cultural continuums of Koori practices, my research and its accompanying exhibition and programs are intended to sit within and support the wider south-east cultural revival movement, which I have described elsewhere as a 'cultural renaissance' (Jones 2014, p. 35). The importance of south-east traditions, and their link to cultural identity, was commented on by Richard Mulvaney (1983) over three decades ago:

> Contrary to popular opinion or prediction the people have survived and the interpretation of their cultural expressions since is every bit as important as the understanding of what preceded contact. (p. 17)

More recently Garry Jones (Ngemba/Kamilaroi) (2013) has described the benefits of this 'reclaiming and reconstructing [movement] as a means of validating their own lives and experiences post-colonisation' (p. 237).

This movement has occurred in myriad ways. In some communities, practices have built up around key leaders and elders who had continued to maintain the practices, while at the same time other practices that had been forgotten are being relearnt after a hundred years of paused production. For instance, the Barker family have inherited a tradition of carving that has been handed down the generations, while other emerging carvers, such as Simon Penrose (b.1986, Yorta Yorta/Wurundjeri), have commenced their practice by researching objects and experimenting. Collectively they are reinstating our south-east living traditions, bringing our past into today and rebuilding our knowledges. Smith (2012) describes the effect of these projects as restoring 'a spirit' to a fragmented world (pp. 29–30). Uncle Sandy Atkinson (Bangerang) (cited in Edmonds 2007) believes that even if we don't 'have the full knowledge' in the south-east, we have enough to 'take it on a bit further' (p. 343).

Many south-east artistic cultural continuums have developed around kitchen tables and campfires, independent of institutional support. Many are by nature intimate and remain largely undocumented. As described by Smith (2012): 'The sense of history

conveyed by these approaches is not the same thing as the discipline of history' (p. 30). Key issues facing communities in the south-east are the time and ability needed to access and collect materials. As noted by Onus (1993b), over the years south-east communities have struggled to stay alive and cultural practices have often fallen by the wayside (p. 290).

1.4.1. Case studies

The following four case studies provide an outline of this cultural revival movement in the south-east. It should be noted that although other regions in Australia, including Tasmania, have undertaken similar cultural revival programs, this research looks exclusively at the south-east to provide a greater understanding of both the region and the cultural specificity these revival programs reflect in relation to my research and my own cultural standpoint. The reasons for this choice are explained earlier in this chapter.

1.4.1.1. *Case study: canoes*

In a region dominated by both salt water on the coast and fresh water inland, canoes were essential part of life. The many styles of canoe defined communities and signified their cultural difference. For example, in the Sydney region, canoes, known as nowey, were made from bark that had been treated over fire, with the ends bundled together, while the Wiradjuri and other inland communities used bark from the river red gum and accentuated the natural curve of the wood with the aid of fire to form the canoe. Although there has been sustained interest in canoes over the years (see Chapter 7), in more recent times there has been a resurgence across the south-east region in canoe-making. Pioneers include Uncle Wally Cooper (1949–2015, Yorta Yorta/Moidaban) from Cummeragunja (Keeler & Couzens 2010a) and Uncle Roy Barker Snr (South 2009, pp. 2–4).

Some recent canoe revival projects in the south-east include the work of Steven Russell (b.1957), from the Timbery clan of La Perouse in the Sydney/Illawarra region.

Steve Brereton (b.1960), a Worimi man from the North Coast of NSW, has also been instrumental in the canoe revival movement. In the Coorong in Ngarrindjeri country, Uncle Moogy (known as Major Sumner) has led the creation of yukis (canoes) from red gum. Each community has re-awoken the knowledge of making canoes in different ways: some have elders who recall parts of the process, others have been guided by historical information collected by anthropologists or artists, and many have worked with trial and error. This process reflects the bowerbird school of art, as theorised by Onus, who described collecting information from here and there (see Chapter 2).

1.4.1.2. *Case study: south-east weaving*

Weaving practices in the south-east saw the creation of countless objects, including bags, nets, traps, mats, clothing and jewellery from local fibres. For several reasons, including the construction of Aboriginal people as savages, as described above, woven objects were often not collected by museums during the 19th century (Edmonds 2007, p. 137). In 1878, Robert Brough Smyth noted: 'It is not easy now to get baskets of the pattern which prevailed before the introduction of European arts' (vol. 1, p. 346). Today there are only a handful of historical woven objects in museums. The knowledge required to collect and process the material, along with the weaving techniques, has remained, even though the form of these 'mission' baskets has changed.

Missions like La Perouse in Sydney, and Coranderrk Aboriginal Station (see Chapter 5) and Lake Tyers in Victoria created and sold weavings to supplement their incomes. However, with changing policy and perceptions, and due to the lack of available material as land was cleared and fenced, the sale of weavings slowly diminished, and with it the knowledge, leading many people to claim that south-east weaving had died out. This claim was made to Aunty Yvonne Koolmatrie (b.1944, Ngarrindjeri) in the early 1980s and became one of the driving factors in the commencement of her weaving practice. Learning the basic Ngarrindjeri coil-bundle stitch from Ngarrindjeri elder Aunty Dorothy Kartinyeri, Aunty Yvonne developed a weaving practice through a process of

trial and error, and through museum research. Drawing on museum collections and honouring the work of her ancestors are important acts of decolonisation and hallmarks of the south-east revival movement. In a defining moment for the south-east Aunty Yvonne represented Australia at the Venice Biennale in 1997.

The late senior weaver Aunty Connie Hart (1917–1993, Gunditjmara) (cited in Jackomos & Fowell 1991) learnt to weave by watching her elders:

> No-one taught me to make my baskets. I used to watch my mother do it and when she put her basket down and went outside, I'd pick it up and do some stitches. (p. 74)

Her elders were reluctant to teach her: 'My mum told me we were coming into the white people's way of living. So she wouldn't teach us' (p. 74). Edmonds (2007) describes Aunty Connie's process as 'indirect learning [which] reveals how Aboriginality is transformed across time and place' (p. 135).

Taking their cue from these senior weavers, weaving groups are now developing across the region. The Hands On Weavers group in Wagga Wagga, NSW, is made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal weavers, and many of the Aboriginal members, such as Aunty Sandy Warren (b.1942, Wiradjuri) and Aunty Lorraine Tye (b.1950, Wiradjuri), have reinterpreted the region's coil-bundle technique. Because of the difficulty in collecting material (Thelma Carter cited in Jackomos & Fowell 1991 p. 72), contemporary groups like this often work with introduced materials such as raffia. Smyth (1878) commented on the communal nature of weaving:

> It is a very amusing sight to see a group of native women employed in basket-making … They chatter and sing continually as the business goes on, and they seem to enjoy the labour. (vol. 1, p. lii)

Working and exhibiting together, these collectives often create a common ground, developing a stronger sense of social cohesion in communities where Aboriginal people have been ostracised. In this way, community weaving groups are returning not only to age-old practices but also to Aboriginal epistemologies.

1.4.1.3. *Case study: shell-work*

In the community of La Perouse in Sydney the practice of using shells has remained a constant for many women. Shells have long been used to create jewellery, fishhooks and tools (Attenbrow 2010, pp. 85–119). With the establishment of the mission at La Perouse and the implementation of government policies, many cultural practices were restricted. But through shell-work, women were able to maintain their connection to country and to develop an income. La Perouse women are first recorded as selling shell work in the 1880s with Nugent (2005) noting that objects were 'mainly sold to white suburban women' (p. 81). La Perouse became a local tourist destination, aided by the tramline, and the local community further developed their practices. While the men continued to carve boomerangs and the like, women created new forms out of waste cardboard trimmed with fabric, which they then adorned in shell-work, including ornamental booties, jewellery boxes, wall hangings, and from the 1930s onwards iconic models of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The shell-work from La Perouse represents one of the earliest south-east art movements in Australia.

Through this continuing practice families maintain their connection to country, collecting their shells at coveted locations. Today one of the biggest obstacles for shell-workers like Aunty Esme Timbery (b.1931, Bidjigal/Dharawal) is the prohibition of collecting shells on beaches. Aunty Esme's great-grandmother, Queen Emma Timbery (c.1842–1916, Bidjigal/Dharawal), was a renowned community leader and shell-worker. Her works were noted as causing a sensation at the Australian manufacturing fair in 1910 in England (Vanni 2000, p. 401). Aunty Esme's work, along with that of her contemporary Lola Ryan (1925–2003, Eora/Dharawal), has been collected by institutions. Under the stewardship of Peter Yanada McKenzie (Eora/Anaiwan), La Perouse shell-work was first collected in earnest for the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney, in the 1980s (McKenzie & Stephen 1987), and today features in the Sydney collections of the AGNSW and Museum of Contemporary Art.

1.4.1.4. *Case study: possum-skin cloaks*

Perhaps the most significant revival practice in recent years has been that of possum skin cloak–making. Pre-contact cloaks, with their incised designs, were an important part of south-east cultural life, with every individual owning one. Many nations, including Wiradjuri, prescribe cloaks being made for you when you are born, with pelts added as you age. Eventually, when you have the skills to make a cloak, you maintain the cloak by yourself, until finally you are wrapped in it and buried. Only three full historical cloaks have survived from the 19th century; these are in museum collections in Melbourne and Chicago. Possum-skin cloaks had almost left the cultural memory of south-east communities, for reasons ranging from a lack of access to possums, now a protected species, to the accessibility of blankets and the significant time involved in making a cloak.

During the 1980s and 1990s a handful of practitioners were making cloaks, including Kelly Koumalatsos (b.1961, Wergaia/Wamba Wamba), Aunty Gayle Maddigan (b.1957, Wamba Wamba/Wertigkia/Dhudhuroa/Nyeri Nyeri) and Uncle Wally Cooper (Keeler & Couzens 2010a, pp. 76–79). The movement gained significant ground when in 1999 Lee Darroch (b.1957, Yorta Yorta/Mutti Mutti/Trawlwoolway) and Vicki Couzens (b.1960, Gunditjmara/Keerray Woorroong) visited Museum Victoria to see the rare possum-skin cloaks from their respective countries. Both recall this day as highly emotional:

> They pulled the Lake Condah cloak out of its box … and then the whole room just burst out crying … It was a really strong emotion from the cloak itself that the Old Ones were right there and everyone felt it. (cited in Reynolds et al. 2005, p. 2)

Together with Treahna Hamm (b.1965, Yorta Yorta) and Debra Couzens (b.1966, Gunditjmara/Keerray Woorroong), they re-created these two museum-held possum-skin cloaks and went on to create their own cloaks. This group of dedicated women have run workshops on cloak production, with many of these workshops contributing to the 35 cloaks created for the Commonwealth Games in 2006, each representing

the 35 language groups of Victoria (Keeler & Couzens 2010b, p. 5). Vicki Couzens (Keeler & Couzens 2010a) believes the cloaks are 'symbolic of the warmth and the safety of belonging and of knowing who you are' (p. 67).

Revival projects like the case studies outlined above are important. They 'provide incentives for future generations to feel proud of their identity, reinforcing wellbeing in their Aboriginality' (Edmonds 2007, p. 335), and by asserting an action that was once denied, we actively resist colonisation. The cultural revival movement, however, is reliant on access to knowledge, via elders, museum collections and the development of art and cultural histories. Edmonds (2007) states that they depend

> on the accessibility of programs such as art courses and workshops, which allow for the rediscovery of culture, either through researching the history of designs on artefacts, or by knowledge exchange within and between communities. (pp. 314–315)

Speaking on the importance of education in the south-east, Ray Thomas (b.1960, Brabrawooloong/Gunnai) (cited in Edmonds 2007) states: 'You've got to educate people about who we are … about history in this state, or in this region' (p. 319). Edmonds concludes that the maintenance of cultural practices

> provides a source of pride in and connection with Aboriginality and remains significant within a community that has suffered from the overwhelming denial of their cultural existence within the dominant society. (p. 341)

1.4.2. Traditions continuing in new forms

Along with the revival practices described above, other practices have transformed into new activities while still retaining traditional outcomes. Peter Yanada McKenzie best illustrates this concept with his research into the role of rugby football in his home community of La Perouse. Uncle Peter (cited in Perkins & Jones 2008) sees rugby and its major events like the annual NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout as the 'the new religion' for Aboriginal communities:

> If you look at corroboree as a celebration of or a gathering to celebrate something, then the NSW Knockout is there with that content of people coming together to celebrate one thing. (p. 99)

Rugby's influence on the community is so great that Uncle Peter (McKenzie 1993) has identified 'the team's fortunes [as a] barometer of the community's social wellbeing' (p. 24). Bamblett (2013b) similarly describes the continuation of cultural elements through sports.

This concept of cultural transformation is important as it enables the maintenance of traditions in new modes of expression. This is most evident in Aboriginal artmaking practices across the country and is the foundation for my research. Perkins (2004b) states that visual art, with its creative interpretations of traditions, offers the Aboriginal community a culturally appropriate 'way of living in 21st-century Australia' (p. 17). Bamblett (2013b) sees recognising the continuity of culture as a vitally important 'part of an alternative to the idea of discontinuity … therefore a part of the battle for control of identity' (p. 171). Through my research and the accompanying exhibition, I hope to demonstrate the south-east cultural continuum of using the 'line', which I will describe in the next section. It is intended that this research will create a greater cultural memory for the wider Koori community, validate the region's style and support future generations of artists. This attitude is reflected in the community. According to Bamblett (2013b),

> for the senior men and women at Erambie there is no question that Wiradjuri ways of being continue. They make connections to the past when explaining much of what they see on the mission every day. (p. 174)

1.5. Concept of the line

The term 'line' is a recognised component of art production, along with shape, form, space, colour and texture. Line was described by artist and theorist Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) (1947) as the identifiable path of a point moving in space with varying widths, directions and lengths. Tim Ingold (2007) connects the creation of the line to a deep network of meanings:

> Every line is the trace of a delicate gesture of the hand that holds the brush, a gesture inspired by the calligrapher's close observations of movements in the world around him. (p. 131)

Within the context of this study, the line is recognised as a dominant artistic element, a cultural continuum used by Aboriginal male artists from the south-east, as well as a cultural understanding that encompasses deeper meanings as denoted by the title of this thesis: *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. The Wiradjuri word 'murruwaygu' refers to the designs carved onto trees and weapons unique to the Australian south-east region. Murruwaygu is a compound word, with 'murru' used in isolation meaning 'nose'. As a stem-word, murru indicates something in front or ahead of you (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 420). 'Murruway' means 'path or track' (p. 422), and the addition of 'gu', a suffix used to indicate ideas of entwinement, creates the compound word murruwaygu. The construction of this word and its meanings impart a sense of following the tracks of those who have gone before us, and within a visual/ cultural context best captures the research subject. Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM (Wiradjuri) (cited in AGNSW 2015d) has encouragingly stated: 'Follow your nose boy. If you ever get lost follow your nose, it will get you out of it. That's the way we do it in *Murruwaygu*' (3:12). Thanks to the inspirational support of Uncle Stan, who has laid down murruwaygu for many Wiradjuri to follow, Wiradjuri language and concepts have guided and directed this research.

Several significant moments have framed this research, moments where I have 'followed my nose'. Three key occurrences were listening to Uncle Roy Kennedy talk about his work (see Chapter 6); observing HJ at work (see Chapter 6); and recognising in the line-work of Barak an unknown shield, thereby attributing it to his hand (see Chapter 4). Together these watershed moments have led me to reflect on the importance of the line in Koori men's art practices.

Through deep analysis, the line can be seen as a foundational and dominant element in south-east men's art. From La Perouse to Broken Hill, Moree to Melbourne, from rock engravings to photography, prints to possum-skin cloaks—men's art practices can be understood as working with the line. We see line-work and linear designs on carved

trees, in rock engravings and the Victorian bark etchings, and in the artworks of the pioneering Koori artists Mickey of Ulladulla, Robert Campbell Jnr and Kevin Gilbert (1933–1993, Wiradjuri). New generations of artists have continued to employ the line and emphasise its use.

In Wiradjuri the word for artist is 'bundadhaany' (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 316), which as a compound work can be broken down into 'bunda', an action word relating to holding up or supporting something, and 'dhaany', a suffix that implies action. Bundadhaany translates as the action of holding something up, and it can be understood as artists holding up these designs and techniques as they represent knowledge. In this context, the continuation of line-work by south-east male artists throughout the changing social, political and cultural climates reveals the inherent cultural significance of the line. This is reflected in how Uncle Sandy Atkinson (cited in Edmonds 2007) sees the role of artists in Aboriginal society: 'They were the guardians of stories, and so no wonder that was a powerful position in that tribe' (p. 342). My research shows that artists are clearly bundadhaany, or holding up, the use of the line in their practices in order to pass it on to future generations.

The importance of line-work is witnessed in an account given by the 19th-century anthropologist Robert Brough Smyth, who reflected on the significance of south-east line designs. Smyth (1878) learned from Victorian Aboriginal artists that the design on a

> lyl-lil [type of club] represents a lagoon, and probably an anabranch of the Broken River, and the space enclosed by the lines shows the country which the tribe of the owner of the weapon occupied. (vol. 1, p. 284)

Smyth also described how the 'natives of the Upper Darling represented on their shields figures in imitation of the totems of their tribes' (vol. 1, p. 284). Another important historical cultural reading of the line was given to W.S. Parkes (cited in Tindale 1974) by a Wiradjuri elder living at Brungle Mission in 1948; this elder

described Wiradjuri country as a '"line" rather than as an enclosed area' (vol. 1, p. 129). Parkes recalled how the line passes through Brungle, Gobarlong, Jugiong, Harden, Cowra, Orange, Dubbo, Condobolin, Hillston, Hay, Darling (Darlington) Point, Wagga Wagga, Tarcutta, Adelong and returns to Brungle. Peter Kabaila (2011) supports this conceptualisation of country: '[Aboriginal] people viewed the landscape in a linear way rather than the spatial way Tindale (and subsequent researchers) envisaged' (p. 3). The cultural significance of the line is similarly affirmed by Ingold (2007): 'Line-making of one sort or another is as old as speech. For as long as people have been talking to one another … these gestures … will have left traces on surfaces of various kinds' (p. 149).

Lines crisscrossing country can also be described as songlines or creation narratives. Uncle Tex Skuthorpe (cited in Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006) tells how

> stories link together to form travel routes, which we have given the name 'learning tracks'. Combined, the learning tracks became a tightly knit, geographically based 'narrative map', which defined for every Nhunggabarra person what 'Nhunggal country' was. One's 'country' then, was the physical manifestation of the underlying stories. (p. 19)

Kabaila (2011) similarly explains that 'storylines weave through the landscape, travelling across former language areas. Stories can be found wherever family networks have descendants' (p. 3). His research has shown that many of these ancestral tracks have been maintained:

> The ancient travelling way of life thus became grafted onto new patterns of Aboriginal employment and settlement, as generations of people moved between the new Aboriginal settlements, followed seasonal fruit-picking and casual station employment. (p. 19)

Along with these routes, tracks and highways, physical lines demarcated sacred ceremonial spaces in the form of engraved lines on the ground, and on trees and objects. According to Cooper (1994), various witnesses attested that ceremonial grounds 'consisted of a clearing in which long trails of bark cord were suspended between stumps and

saplings, some of which were also bandaged with the cord' (p. 96). In complex and varied ways, the line can be understood as underpinning culture within the south-east, particularly in the work of male artists. It is from this understanding that my research is formed.

1.6. Curation of artists

The south-east region's dominant kinship system, or cultural connectivity, has informed the curatorial framework and structure of my research. This kinship worldview can be understood as a south-east cultural understanding of the line, which both makes sense of the region's prolific line-work and frames my research within a meaningful cultural paradigm. In the south-east everyone and everything is divided into two moieties (see Chapter 3), often recognised or represented as the Eaglehawk and Crow. These moieties, or two lines, are then further divided into four subclasses, each with relationships and responsibilities to each other. This structure has become the framework for this research, where each the four subclasses or lines represents four distinct periods or generations within south-east history. Each period is then represented by a pair of artists or artforms to symbolise the Eaglehawk and Crow. This concept is best explained as a south-east archiving system.

Within this model, I have curated pairs of artforms or artists who are highly respected within their community, and who best exemplify artistic practices from the region, reflecting each period and its social conditions. Together they represent varied cultural backgrounds and artforms, including carving, drawing, etching, painting and installation work, while demonstrating the region's predominant and inherited use of line-work. In addition to the key pair of artists or artforms for each generation, a number of related artists and additional artforms are cited in order to understand the wider creative activities of these periods. Through these four pairs, outlined in the next section, I will show the use of the line across four generational timeframes—from pre-contact, to the frontier, to the mission era, to today. Bamblett (2013b) explains how 'Wiradjuri history can be divided according to contact to Europeans. This includes the

pre-invasion and settlement periods through to the mission era and beyond' (p. 166). Each generation has its own chapter within this thesis.

This kinship system model sees our south-east school of art as framed within a cyclical line of descent that best reflects the interrelated workings of a community. In a similar way, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* is intended to be a self-perpetuating and self-reflective study. This concept encapsulates the idea of continuing history, cultural traditions and practices, and speaks to the importance of maintaining culture. The *Murruwaygu* exhibition that accompanies this study (described in the next section) represents the first time Koori art has been historically contextualised within ongoing contemporary practices and constructed within a Koori framework. I will now briefly describe how this framework relates to the four subclasses.

1.6.1. Mumala (grandfather): girran.girran and marga

The two predominant types of south-east shields, marga (parrying shields) and girran. girran (broad shields), represent classical or pre-contact Koori art. South-east shields are one of the region's most unique cultural productions and form the foundation of this research. Shields are relatively numerous in comparison with other historical south-east material that has been collected. Because of their portability, they are widely recognised as public (that is, not sacred). They feature geometric and figurative line-work engraved into their surfaces with bone and stone tools, along with introduced steel tools. These designs speak to the maker's identity and region. It should be noted that the terms 'girran.girran' and 'marga' are Wiradjuri, reflecting my cultural position.

A significant part of this research involves decolonising the colonial archive, essentially taking objects that have been collected from a 'dying race' and classified with poor provenance, such as 'Victoria' or 'NSW', and locating them to a specific artist. This process shows that shields should be understood as artworks, and it has involved a large comparative study of shield designs, acquisition records, accurate historical

photographs, colonial observations and notes, along with a strong community engagement (see Chapter 4).

1.6.2. Babiin (father): William Barak and Tommy McRae

The 19th-century period is represented by Koori master artists Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901) and William Barak (c.1824–1903, Wurundjeri). Both translated their shield-making practices to the new mediums of paper and pen, ink and washes, making complex works constructed as line-composite images. As such, this research builds on existing understandings regarding the use of line, as established by Cooper. The transition of materials reflects the enormous cultural shift that both Barak and McRae experienced when witnessing first-hand the colonisation of their country. These conditions drove their practices, and despite the hardships they endured, each produced a large corpus of work. Often working with brushes and pens, McRae's and Barak's lines are constructed in similar ways to carving; their work continues the practice of the line.

1.6.3. Wurrumany (son): Roy Kennedy and HJ Wedge

Growing up in the devastating era of government segregation and assimilation policies, Roy Kennedy (b.1934, Wiradjuri) and HJ Wedge (1957–2012, Wiradjuri) represent the generation of self-taught artists. Both started their artmaking practice later in life through the Aboriginal TAFE system after growing up in harsh conditions on NSW missions. These artists represent a time in Australia's history when Koori and urban artists were first recognised. I will show that while their work, like Barak's and McRae's, encompasses new mediums and subjects, it continues to rely on the line and evokes the carving practices established by their ancestors. As an etcher Uncle Roy literally carves into a metal plate to create his images, while HJ developed a personal technique that saw him score his painted canvases to construct bold linear compositions.

1.6.4. Warunarrung (grandson): Reko Rennie and Steaphan Paton

Representing the fourth period are professional or trained contemporary Koori artists

Reko Rennie (b.1974, Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero). Both artists come from strong families and carry with them an awareness of south-east cultural practices, which they have incorporated into their installation and multidisciplinary practices while continuing figurative line traditions. Reko uses stencils and spray-paint to create contemporary symbols of an urban landscape that call on the designs from shields and other carved objects, while Steaphan makes sculptural objects, works on paper and installations that celebrate Gunai designs and his contemporary experience.

These four generations of artists interconnect in multiple ways and collectively contribute to a greater understanding of the line, referred to in this research as intergenerational observations (see Chapter 7). For example, Reko's linear designs, filled with meaning, can help us to understand the designs on the shields, which were recorded without any recognition of the individual artist or their intention. Similarly, when comparing the works of McRae and Uncle Roy, a shared technique is revealed, one that involves the building up of small strokes to create an image of positive and negative space. In this way, the generations speak to and equally inform each other. As Onus (1988) explained: 'Koori people simply see a long and unbroken line of "Great" artists' (p. 29). Furthermore, the line should not only be understood as a singular straight line but as engaging with community and country, as crossing, intersecting and looping, as located in stories and objects; the line creates its own design, as described by the Wiradjuri elder from Brungle (cited in Tindale 1974, vol. 1, p. 129). This concept comes back to the lead word in the title of my thesis, *Murruwaygu*, the notion of walking along a path or track as laid down by your ancestors. These are not straight roads or highways; tracks respond to their environment and to the individual on them. Indeed, the term murruwaygu in the context of this study is interchangeable with the line. Placing the artists within this trajectory importantly celebrates the strengths of the region and establishes a south-east school of art.

1.6.5. Murruwaygu exhibition description

An essential part of my study has been the corresponding exhibition (Figures 1.8–1.11),

which brought together work from the four generations in one physical space, creating a visual representation of the research. Exhibited at the AGNSW, Sydney, over 2015–2016, *Murruwaygu* followed the model set by other groundbreaking exhibitions presented at the gallery, including *Papunya Tula: genesis and genius* (2000) and *Crossing country: the alchemy of western Arnhem Land art* (2004), both of which tracked the artistic movement of a region through families, clans and kinship groups (Perkins & Fink 2000; Perkins 2004a).

The *Murruwaygu* exhibition featured over 130 works, bringing together significant loans from the National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Museum Victoria, Australian Museum and the Koorie Heritage Trust for the first time. *Murruwaygu* also drew on key works in the AGNSW collection, including individual works and series by McRae, Uncle Roy, HJ and Reko. In particular, the rare coming together of 66 south-east shields from eight collections is regarded as an achievement for a new exhibition (Jones 2015b); while a similar collection of works by both Barak and McRae was only last seen in the Andrews Sayers exhibition and book *Aboriginal artists of the 19th century* (1994).

To accompany the exhibition, five short films were made: a general introduction to the exhibition and one for each generation. Further, the AGNSW hosted accompanying programs, including a symposium to mark the opening, where speakers included Rodney Carter and Uncle Michael McDaniel (Wiradjuri); an Art After Hours series, including celebrity talks by Uncle Jack Charles (Bunurong/Wiradjuri), Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO (Wurundjeri) and Stan Grant Jnr (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi); artists' talks featuring Uncle Roy, Reko, Steaphan and HJ Wedge's son, Harry Matheson (Wiradjuri); and carving demonstrations by south-east practitioners Andrew Snelgar (b.1982, Ngemba) and Simon Penrose. These major public outcomes were an essential part of the research process and ensured this study is not only relevant to the community but also gives back to it (see Chapter 2).

FIGURE 1.8.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

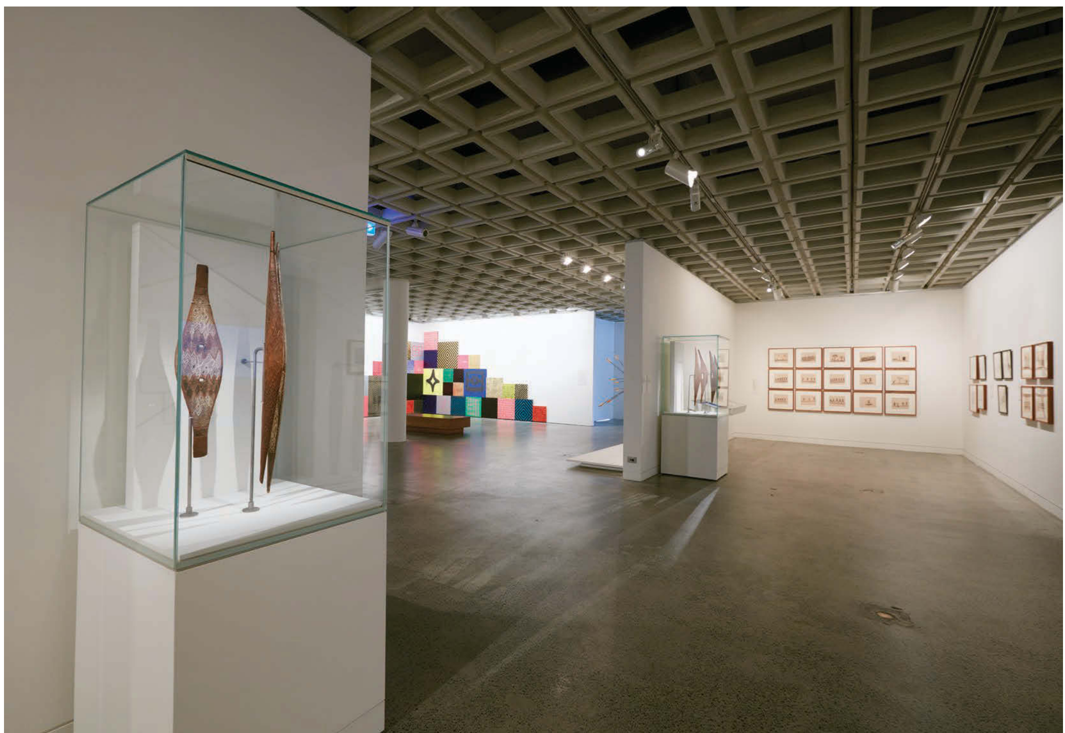


FIGURE 1.9.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors,* 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

FIGURE 1.10.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors,* 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

FIGURE 1.11.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors,* 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

1.7. My cultural position within this research

My position within this research is based on my own cultural background as a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi practising artist and curator. I belong to both Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi nations through my mother's and grandfather's line. My grandfather's mother was Wiradjuri and connected to the Bathurst region, and his father was Kamilaroi and connected to the Tingha region. But like many Koori families, our connection to country, along with cultural practices including language, was disrupted. As stated by Onus (1994), the 'rediscovery of one's origins, country, language and customs has become a quest of absolute importance' (p. ix).

The artists in this research are my ancestors, my Uncles and my contemporaries. I have cultural responsibilities to these artists, their families and the wider south-east community. These responsibilities run parallel with institutional and scholarly responsibilities and are the keystone to my Indigenous research methodology and the intentions of this research (see Chapter 2).

My research has culminated in this thesis, along with the presentation of a public exhibition and associated programs. As my research is focused on south-east Aboriginal communities, the ideas and concepts raised within the study have been developed in consultation with south-east elders, community members and artists. This research has worked towards bringing together academia and community to reflect this process. A key issue while developing *Murruwaygu* has been the disruption of knowledge. Within an Aboriginal context knowledge is passed down from elders, yet as a researcher, I am often bringing ideas into the community to be rejected, gradually accepted, reformatted or converted into a local context. In this way, this research could have only been conducted by someone from within the community.

My specific cultural position is evident in a number of ways throughout my research processes and outcomes. With the division of men's and women's knowledges an

important part of Aboriginal culture, it is culturally appropriate for me to look specifically at men's work. It would be inappropriate for me, as a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man, to research Aboriginal women's stories, knowledge and culture. It is for this reason that my research is anchored within male practices, reinforcing the principles of Aboriginal cultural protocol.

During my own secondary and tertiary education, I gained a limited understanding of Aboriginal art, and even less about what constituted south-east art. While studying my Higher School Certificate at TAFE, I was fortunate to connect with Aunty Christine Evans (Wiradjuri), who helped me significantly with my art practice. At university I connected with Peter Yanada McKenzie and Ilaria Vanni Accarigi. Both Aunty Chris and Uncle Peter provided me with my foundational education in Aboriginal art. The publication *Aboriginal artists of the 19th century* by Sayers and Cooper (1994) became an important text in my understanding of the south-east region's cultural practices. Uncle Peter introduced me to Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, where I worked for two years as curator and worked closely with the late Michael Riley, who was enormously influential. Following this I worked at the AGNSW for ten years with curators Hetti Perkins and Cara Pinchbeck (Kamilaroi) as the coordinator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, where I was able to gain experience through several south-east exhibitions and programs.

As a freelance curator I have worked with museums, galleries and cultural institutions and have developed key relationships with leading researchers, elders and artists, including the late HJ and Uncle Roy. I have also developed my own artistic practice. Through these processes I have strengthened existing relationships and developed others with peers, including Reko and Steaphan. In both my artistic and curatorial practices, the work centres on the promotion and development of south-east arts and cultural practices. This thesis will help tell the story of who we are as Aboriginal people from the south-east.

1.8. Conclusion

In this introduction I have outlined the research subject—the enduring visual practices of line-work in Koori or south-east Australian Aboriginal men's work. I also briefly described how I structured the research methodology into four 'generations', each represented by a pair of artists or artforms. These generations have been used to demonstrate an unbroken use of the line from pre-contact to today. The overall structural roadmap of the thesis was outlined through the chapter breakdown. An important part of this introduction is the provision of a general framework for the south-east region. This was provided as a way of understanding the region and how I identified it within the research. A critical analysis of the way the artwork of the region has been collected, curated and consumed was also provided in order to understand how western understandings of art have failed the south-east. In contrast to these understandings, this research sits within a wider cultural continuum and revival movement, as described using four case studies. This introduction also explained the concept of the line and provided a number of culturally specific understandings, further developing the cultural understanding of the region as it relates to this research. The curation of the artists, and how their practices inform this research, was provided when discussing the corresponding exhibition that occurred as part of the research process at the AGNSW in 2015–2016. Finally, the introduction established my own cultural position within the research. The following chapter describes the specific Wiradjuri methodology that has been used for this research.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

> Aboriginal cultures throughout the World have been infested by plagues of anthropologists down the ages. Never more so than during the last three decades here in Australia. We have been the most studied creatures on earth. They *KNOW* more about us than we know about ourselves. Should you ask an Aboriginal how they're feeling, the most appropriate answer would be 'Wait 'til I ask my Anthropologist'.
>
> —Richard Bell (b.1953, Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman) (2004, p. 26; emphasis in original)

In order to introduce Indigenous research methodologies, this chapter briefly outlines the history of research within Aboriginal Australia, investigating the relationship of knowledge and power within colonial Australia, the impact of research and its ongoing effects, and the importance of decolonisation. This chapter sets out the use of Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies within key Indigenous theories and models. As many of these Indigenous methodologies are new and developing within an academic space, time is given to explaining them. Juanita Sherwood (Wiradjuri) (2010) reminds us that using 'Indigenous ways of knowing develops a strong sense of respect and ensures that the praxis and language used is safe to Indigenous peoples' (p. 147). A Wiradjuri methodology is then established in this chapter, called Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking) and developed in collaboration with senior Wiradjuri elder and language-holder Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM. This methodology creates a culturally safe and appropriate way to frame this research in order to reclaim south-east Aboriginal culture and knowledge. A number of case studies are provided to define and expand the understanding and practice of Yindyamarra Winhanganha; these discuss the importance of community ownership and outcomes, the forming of a Community Advisory Committee and the promotion of self-determination. Within this chapter I have chosen to privilege Australian and

Aboriginal voices to discuss these issues, in particular those from a south-east context. This chapter follows the research introduction and precedes the chapter discussing Koori Kinship Theory.

2.2. Research histories and conflict

Echoing the sentiment of senior artist and agitator Richard Bell, Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1997), a Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri man from South Australia and a leading Aboriginal voice on Indigenous research methodology, stated: 'The research enterprise as a vehicle for investigation has poked, prodded, measured, tested and compared data toward understanding Indigenous cultures and human nature' (p. 109). Research, he explained, has 'been responsible for the extraction, storage and control over Indigenous knowledges' (p. 109). Karen Martin (2003), a Noonuccal (Quandamooka) and Bidjara academic based in Queensland, positions the acquisition of Indigenous knowledges as on par with the exploitation of natural resources:

> Natural scientists such as biologists, geologists, botanists, have conducted research on Aboriginal lands to identify resource potential and, thus, economic value. Similarly, social scientists such as anthropologists, archaeologists, educators, psychologists, have conducted research on Aboriginal people to establish our antiquity and humanity. (p. 1)

Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) casts 'research' as 'probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary' (p. 1). She writes:

> Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realised. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realised in the myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and 'popular' works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualise those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula. (p. 8)

As these perspectives show, Aboriginal culture, knowledges and people have been and continue to be described, deconstructed and defined by non-Aboriginal anthropologists, academics and researchers in the pursuit of western knowledge and, ultimately, western power. Research has been a tool for the colonisation of Aboriginal bodies and minds, as force and violence have been the mechanisms for the colonisation of our lands. Indeed, one of the first recordings of an Eora ceremony in Sydney by Judge-Advocate David Collins (1756–1810) involved him betraying the community. After promising not to disclose certain sacred elements of the ceremony, Collins later published these details in his two-volume account of the colony (1798, vol. 1, p. 581). To overcome the conflicts between Aboriginal and research communities, 'the colonial history of Australia and its impact on its Indigenous peoples and their struggles to be free from colonialism' must first be understood (Rigney 1997, p. 110). Smith (2012) similarly warns against presenting alternative Indigenous models of knowledge 'without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices' (p. 2). With this in mind I discuss research histories and conflict in the following section.

In order to unpack the uneasy relationship between Aboriginal and research communities, Martin (2008) divides Australian research into five stages. In the first stage, Martin (2003) explains that research, like invasion, has occurred without the permission or involvement of, and without benefit to, Aboriginal people, leading her to coin the term 'terra nullius research':

> In this research, we are present only as objects of curiosity and subjects of research. To be seen but not asked, heard nor respected. So the research has been undertaken in the same way Captain James Cook falsely claimed the eastern coast of the land to become known as Australia as terra nullius. (p. 1)

Michael 'Mick' Dodson (Yawuru) (2003) affirms this position, referencing invasion as the origin of knowledge conflict:

> Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling Aborigines and Aboriginality. Under that gaze, Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to 'a problem to be solved'. (p. 27)

Margaret Kovach (2009), a Canadian Nêhiýaw (Plains Cree) and Saulteaux academic, also connects research to the vilification of Indigenous people: 'Western science in particular has worked to first subjugate and then discredit Indigenous knowledge systems and the people themselves' (p. 77).

The production and control of knowledge, as generated via the imperial gaze, are principles discussed within Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003). As referenced by Kovach (2009), Said describes the formulation of the Other through the creation of knowledge as a key tool for domination; and in an imperial/colonial context such as Australia, knowledge and domination are symbiotic. Bain Attwood (1992), understanding Orientalism within the specificity of the Australian context, proposed the term 'Aboriginialism' to consider 'truths' constructed about Aboriginality by non-Indigenous Australians (p. i). Attwood explained that 'power, knowledge and Aborigines are mutually constitutive … they produce and maintain one another through discursive practices which can be known as Aboriginalism' (p. ii). I employ Attwood's Aboriginalism in this research as a tool for understanding Orientalism within an Australian context, and how knowledge within an imperial/colonial context continues to affect Aboriginal communities.

Following Said, Attwood (1992) interrogated the very basis of knowledge creation, from who produces it to its purpose, form and effects (p. iii). Importantly for my research, Attwood called into question the role of imperial institutions such as museums, which 'have been key sites for the production of knowledge, of representations of Aborigines' (p. iii). In this way Attwood directly links the construction of the 'Aboriginal Other' to the oppression of Aboriginal people.

Anthropologist Barry Morris (1992) described Aboriginalism or the representation of the Other in Australia as 'a constitutive form of violence, and violence is itself mediated and constituted by representation' (p. 72). Attwood (1992) affirmed this view, pointing to the manifestation of Aboriginalism in south-east Australia in the 1860s, a period following frontier violence and dispossession, when the colonies 'developed sizable bureaucracies to administer Aborigines' lives' (p. v).

Historian and reformist of Aboriginal archaeology Rupert Gerritsen (2011) notes the global popularity of Aboriginalism, stating that Aboriginal people have often been 'characterised as quintessential "Stone Age" hunter-gatherers, frequently providing archetypes for extensive anthropological theorising' (p. 5). Victor Hart and Sue Whatman (1998) argue that the upholding of this notion has seen Aboriginal communities 'subject to undisciplined research and analysis'. They explain:

> The premise of most research and analysis has been locked into the belief that Indigenous Australians are anachronisms and, in defiance of the laws of evolution, remain a curiosity of nature, and are 'fair game' for research. (p. 3)

Vine Deloria Jnr (1969), a Standing Rock Sioux academic, has captured the Indigenous stance on anthropology, offering an explanation for the inherent view of the superiority as being connected to ideas of evolution and Social Darwinism. He explains: 'The fundamental thesis of the anthropologist is that people are objects for observation, people are then considered objects for experimentation, for manipulation and for eventual extinction' (p. 81). Yiman/Bidjara academic Marcia Langton (1993) also sharply reminds us of the processes that perpetuate Aboriginalism: 'Increasingly, non-Aboriginal people want to make personal rehabilitative statements about the Aboriginal "problem" and to consume and reconsume the "primitive"' (p. 10).

The power and privilege of western knowledge was highlighted in the historic 2002 High Court of Australia judgement on *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. Victoria* native title case, in which the Yorta Yorta nation lost. This outcome rested

mainly on the conclusion that the Yorta Yorta nation had not 'demonstrated that the traditional connexion with the land of the ancestors … has been substantially maintained since the time sovereignty was asserted' (High Court of Australia 2002, point 122). Henry Atkinson (2004), a Wolithiga elder and spokesperson for the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation Council of Elders, reflects on the court's decision:

> The very soul of our being was slowly but surely being dragged from us … where a judge sits and declares to one and all words to the effect that the tides of history have wiped out our continuity with our land and ancestors, and as such we no longer existed as a people. (p. 23)

The High Court of Australia based much of its understanding of Yorta Yorta 'traditions' on the memoirs of Edward M. Curr (1820–1889), *Recollections of squatting in Victoria, then called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)* (1883). Ironically, Curr's anecdotal observations of Yorta Yorta, or 'the Bangerang Tribe' as he called them, were made as he was one of the first pastoralists on stolen Yorta Yorta lands. In his assessment of Curr's imperial/colonial lens, Samuel Furphy (2013) found that Curr's 'account of past events unsurprisingly affirms the righteousness of the colonial project and his own involvement in it'. He continued:

> Curr's ethnographic account of the Yorta Yorta ancestors is deeply problematic because of his role as an invader of their lands … He adhered to a Lockean view of private property, which immediately dismissed the legitimacy of Aboriginal landownership. (p. 203)

The use of Curr's memoirs in the Yorta Yorta native title case reveals the relationship of knowledge and power still at play in contemporary Australia. According to Tim Rowse (1988),

> controlling the definition of what was essentially characteristic of the subjugated culture, the colonisers reserve the power to distinguish authentic and inauthentic aspects of the living traditions of the colonised. If the colonised argue political

> demands by reference to their culture, the colonisers are quick to adjudicate what is genuine in such claims. (p. 174)

As the processes of research and the relationship of knowledge and power continue to impact Aboriginal communities, decolonising research is essential. Smith (2012), interrogating the undeniable links between imperial power and research, best captures the Indigenous position on research histories and conflict:

> It galls us that western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us … It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of Indigenous peoples' claim to exist, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments. (p. 1)

As the notion of Aboriginalism still prevails, resisting Aboriginalism is a key process of Indigenous research. As Hart and Whatman (1998) have urged, teachers, students and researchers should

> remind themselves that much of the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can be ideologically traced back to the emergence of 'knowledge' about native peoples in the context of European imperialism and expansion from the 15th century. (p. 2)

This connects to Rigney's and Smith's calls for understanding colonial histories and analysing imperialism to overcome conflicts between Aboriginal and research communities.

2.3. Eaglehawk and Crow

This acquisition of knowledge and power has not gone unchallenged by the Aboriginal community. In March 1974, frustrations towards anthropological research of Aboriginal

culture and its ongoing failings, felt particularly in the south-east, were made public in an open letter of protest to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS) in Canberra, which was dominated by non-Indigenous male anthropologists. AIATSIS had been established some 11 years earlier under the 'salvage ethnography' paradigm (Clifford 1989, p. 73) in an act of parliament in June 1964, with its official functions including:

> a. To sponsor and to foster research of a scientific nature on the Australian Aborigines;
> b. To treat as a matter of urgency those studies for which the source materials are disappearing. (AIATSIS 2014a, chapter 4, para. 3)

This now historic letter (Widders et al. 1974) was written under the pseudonym 'Eaglehawk and Crow' by an Aboriginal-majority collective that included Terry Widders, Peter Thompson, Garry Williams, Lyn Thompson, Bob Bellear and Len Watson. The letter openly criticised AIATSIS for a raft of issues regarding research in Australia and, in particular, the institute's handling of a conference to be held that year. The writers questioned the research process and intentions, and the positing of Indigenous communities as 'passive subject matter' (p. 4), calling for increased participation of Aboriginal people in the research process:

> Academics should cease collecting more and more esoteric information and interpreting it for the consumption of fewer and fewer people … They should not pretend that their studies are objective when the overwhelming factor in the lives of Aborigines is our oppression by the society of which the anthropologist is, to a greater or lesser extent, part of. (p. 4)

The Eaglehawk and Crow writers further argued that researchers should

> see their primary obligations as being to those from whom they gain knowledge and whose existence they are dependent on in what might be called (to borrow a phrase) 'intelligent parasitism'. (p. 4)

Importantly, the Eaglehawk and Crow letter pointed out that even with the plethora of research being conducted on Aboriginal people, most research subjects were not of particular interest to Aboriginal communities:

> The conference will, at best, provide opportunity for academics to come together, socialise, exchange esoteric facts and abstract theories about their 'fascinating subject matter', and perhaps even arrive at some new abstractions about human societies in general … The conference is unlikely to help any of the participants come to any terms of human relationship with the people from whom they learn (usually called 'informants') and their groups. It is unlikely to help them understand the facts of Aboriginal life, and death, in Australia today. (p. 1)

From more than 300 papers presented at the conference, only two were by Aboriginal people and one from a Torres Strait Islander. The conference also raised the ire of the late high-profile public servant Charles Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon) (cited in AIATSIS 2014b), who declared:

> It's a scandal when they have invited the intellectual elite of the country and people from overseas to attend the conference but they won't have any Aborigines there … In future they will have to get their information on the Aboriginal culture from someone else because we are not going to give it to them. (chapter 7, para. 3)

The Eaglehawk and Crow letter, highlighting the conflict between Indigenous and research communities, can be understood as a critical moment in establishing the foundations for Indigenous research methodologies in Australia. Central to the writers' argument was the power and abuse of research within a colonial construct. The writers (Widders et al. 1974) proposed:

> The anthropologist's written intellectual tradition, with its assumed knowledge and insight, has power because of the importance placed on the written medium in this society. Assumed knowledge in books, then, becomes 'the reference' to

> Aboriginality. Anthropologists therefore exert power both on Aboriginal thinking and government policy as regards needs and feelings of Aborigines. (p. 1)

Nicolas Peterson (1990) explains that 'the letter was strong for its time and helped precipitate changes', although he sees the shift at AIATSIS as only gradual (p. 24). The Eaglehawk and Crow writers (Widders et al. 1974) proposed major long-term reform to create equality and deliver self-determination. For Aboriginal communities to 'take control of their affairs, and control visits by outsiders, including anthropologists', the writers argued for 'a satisfactory land base with full land rights' (p. 5). They continued:

> They could protect their own sacred sites and other religious and cultural freedoms. Aboriginal communities having commissioning rights and control of funding over studies made on them and their cultural property is, we believe, the only way of ultimately altering the present unsatisfactory relationship between anthropologists and Aborigines. (p. 5)

Dodson (2003) reminds us that even though many of these issues are out of reach for most communities the 'right to control one's own identity is part of the broader right to self-determination' (p. 31). The Eaglehawk and Crow letter can be understood as foundational within the establishment of Indigenous-driven research and Indigenous research methodologies within an Australian context. It clearly sets out the conflict between Aboriginal and research communities and describes a path for Indigenous-led research with outcomes to benefit Aboriginal communities. In this way it has been used to help frame the research methodology for *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* and confront research histories and conflicts.

2.4. Decolonisation

Botswanan academic Bagele Chilisa (2012) cites decolonisation as the key 'process of centring the concerns and worldviews of the colonised Other so that they understand themselves through their own assumptions and perspectives' (p. 13). Chilisa defines this process through two key principles:

> To liberate the 'captive mind' from oppressive conditions that continue to silence and marginalise the voices of subordinated, colonised, non-western societies that encountered European colonisation … [and] the restoration and development of cultural practices, thinking patterns, beliefs and values that were suppressed but are still relevant and necessary to the survival and birth of new ideas, thinking, techniques and lifestyles that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of the historically oppressed and former colonised non-western societies. (p. 14)

Following this definition, the Eaglehawk and Crow letter (Widders et al. 1974), which clearly sets Indigenous research methodologies as an integral part of Indigenous land rights, self-determination and sovereignty, can be seen as a road map for decolonisation within Aboriginal research.

Decolonisation differs from postcolonialism; the latter can be seen as framing colonialism as a process that has ended (Chilisa 2012, p. 12). Smith (2012) proposes:

> Our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism [are divided into] a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonisation [and of] how we were colonised, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The two strands intersect but what is particularly significant in Indigenous discourses is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, *colonised time*, and the time before that, *pre-colonised time*. (p. 25; emphasis in original)

'Decolonisation encapsulates both sets of ideas', Smith argues (2012, p. 25). I have incorporated this definition of decolonisation into my research concept.

Summarised by Chilisa (2012, pp. 17–19), Smith includes the following strategies for decolonisation: deconstruction and reconstruction; self-determination and social justice; ethics; language; internationalisation of Indigenous experiences; history; and critique. Understanding the processes and practices of decolonisation is central to my research. Having experienced the most protracted forms of colonisation, south-east Australia is

a heavily colonised space. The majority of our Indigenous cultural material, in particular historical material, is held by museums that were founded on imperial values, which they continue to maintain. Historical accounts and resources relating to our people are dominated by non-Aboriginal voices that still determine the way we are understood, framed and discussed, as demonstrated with the aforementioned *Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. Victoria* native title case (2002).

Nhunggabarra elder Uncle Tex Skuthorpe and academic Karl-Erik Sveiby (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006) remind us that south-east sources have 'been largely filtered through the minds of the early white explorers, colonists, ministers and priests, and inexperienced anthropologists' (p. 27). In addition, it is important to remember that Aboriginal informants withheld or gave false information, for various reasons. Carl Strehlow (1871–1922), the Lutheran missionary who undertook work with the Aranda people at Ntaria (Hermannsburg, Northern Territory), stated: 'Frequently we became aware that the native deliberately lied to us. However, we realised that the fault was not always of the natives but perhaps the nature of our questions' (cited in *The dream and the Dreaming* 2003, 11:46). Similarly, when a ceremony on Wailwan country in central NSW was documented in 1898 by photographer Charles Henry Kerry (1857–1928), elements of the ceremony had been adapted and Kerry was denied completed access. Furthermore, Kerry (cited in Miller 1999) was unsatisfied with the information he was given: 'The final impression I gathered was that I was being wilfully misled, or else the ceremony itself was almost meaningless' (p. 12). In the same vein, Australian anthropologist Adolphus Peter Elkin (1891–1979) (1962) stated:

> When a native says he is engraving a shield to make it 'pretty', he may be merely endeavouring to satisfy the white inquirer without revealing the mythological and magical purposes which he has in view. (p. 9)

In these accounts we can see how Aboriginal informants actively resisted research and, due to the persistence of questions and untrustworthy relationship to the interviewer, sometimes provided wrong information.

In order to use such historical sources, a decolonising framework must be established within the research methodology. Rigney (1997) explained:

> Indigenous peoples must look to new anti-colonial epistemologies and methodologies to construct, rediscover and/or reaffirm their knowledges and cultures. Such epistemologies must represent the aspirations of Indigenous Australians and carry within it the potential to strengthen the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression. (p. 115)

Chilisa (2012) similarly calls for a 'resistance to dominant literature [by] applying Indigenous research methodologies to research with and about the colonised Other' (p. 60). She describes this as involving

> going back and forth to retrieve marginalised and suppressed literatures to review, analyse and challenge colonising and deficit theorising and interpretation, to create counter-narratives that see the past differently, and to envision a transformative agenda with the researched. It also involves defining what literature and theorising in the context of former colonised societies is. (p. 60)

As my research relies heavily on both collections in museums and historical accounts it is imperative that these sources are decolonised so that their colonial intent is not perpetuated.

2.5. Indigenous research methodologies

Indigenous research methodologies are not only frameworks for decolonising historical research and current paradigms, they also create culturally appropriate platforms for Indigenous knowledge. Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Apa and Ngāti Kahungunu academic Graham Hingangaroa Smith (cited in Kovach 2009) describes the importance of Indigenous researchers developing their own culturally specific methodologies:

> We needed to put some Indigenous theory tools or, in a New Zealand sense, Māori tools on the wall of the university alongside of all the other theoretical tools and

> all the other research methodologies, so that we would have a more effective and wider choice of options. What I am arguing for is that there needs to be a space for our knowledge and our tools as well inside the academy. More often than not, we are using western ideas, lenses and tools to help us engage with our own culturally shaped issues. We also now have the added value and option of being able to use our own tools and our own ways of doing things. (pp. 88–89)

Rigney and other Indigenous Australian academics have joined a growing international movement engaged in the development and sharing of Indigenous decolonising research methodologies. They remind us that the development of our Indigenous research methodologies is our right and responsibility. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) encourages this international dialogue:

> What is more important than what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer the world is what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer each other. The strategies that work well for one community may well work for another. The gains made in one context may well be applied usefully in another. (p. 109)

In order to operate within different contexts these international models of Indigenous research methodologies share several common threads. Rigney (1997) has concisely summarised Indigenous research methodology as involving 'three fundamental and interrelated principles':

1. resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research
2. political integrity in Indigenous research
3. privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research. (p. 118)

Chilisa (2012) defines Indigenous research as having 'four dimensions':

1. It targets a local phenomenon instead of using extant theory from the West to identify and define a research issue.
2. It is context-sensitive and creates locally relevant constructs, methods and theories derived from local experiences and Indigenous knowledge.

3. It can be integrative, that is, combining western and Indigenous theories.
4. In its most advanced form, its assumptions about what counts as reality, knowledge and values in research are informed by an Indigenous research paradigm. The assumptions in an Indigenous paradigm guide the research process. (p. 13)

2.5.1. Kaupapa Māori

More culturally specific research methodologies are found throughout the world and develop more localised dialogues. Māori researchers in Aotearoa (New Zealand) define much of their research within the Māori philosophy of Kaupapa Māori. In 1992 Graham Hingangaroa Smith (cited in Mahuika 2015) defined Kaupapa Māori as characterised by six key principles:

1. Tino Rangatiratanga: the relative autonomy principle
2. Taonga tuku iho: the cultural aspirations principle
3. Ako Māori: culturally preferred pedagogy
4. Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga: the mediation of socio-economic factors
5. Whānau: the extended family management principle
6. Kaupapa: the collective vision principle. (p. 39)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) explains: 'Kaupapa Māori is concerned with sites and terrains. Each of these is a site of struggle'. She defines Kaupapa Māori as a complex 'social project' that

> weaves in and out of Māori cultural beliefs and values, western ways of knowing, Māori histories and experiences under colonialism, western forms of education, Māori aspirations and socio-economic needs, and western economics and global politics. (p. 193)

Research set within a Kaupapa Māori context challenges western ways of knowing that are intrinsically linked to imperialism and colonialism, and is therefore decolonising.

2.5.2. Medicine Wheel Methodology

Other culturally specific methodologies include the First Nations or Native American Indian Medicine Wheel Methodology, as explained by Queensland-based Cherokee academic Polly Walker (2001):

> In the Medicine Wheel Methodology, the East represents the Spiritual aspects of experience. In the East, researchers acknowledge their interconnectedness with the research participants and the wider community … The South represents the Natural World. In the South, researchers honour and utilise emotional experience, speaking from the heart, with authenticity. The West represents the bodily aspects of knowing … The North represents the mental processes of balancing intellect with wisdom. (p. 19)

2.5.3. Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin Methodology

In what can be understood as a further refinement of Indigenous research methodologies, many Indigenous academics have created more localised methodologies responding to nation- or clan-based worldviews and needs. After considering the work of Indigenous academics from around the world, Margaret Kovach, a Nêhiýaw and Saulteaux Canadian, developed her own Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin Methodology. Kovach (2009) puts Nêhiýaw epistemology at the centre, stating that 'one's epistemological positioning shows the interpretative lens through which researchers will be conducting and making meaning of their research' (p. 46). The development of this methodology 'involved bridging Plains Cree knowledges and their methods in a manner translatable to western research [to create] a workable conceptual framework or model' (p. 40). Kovach outlines a number of key qualities of Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin Methodology, which help to develop other tribal-centred Indigenous methodologies. These include:

a. tribal epistemology
b. decolonising and ethical aim
c. researcher preparations involving cultural protocols

c. research preparation involving standard research design
d. making meaning of knowledges gathered
e. giving back. (p. 45)

2.5.4. Quandamooka Ontology

Within an Australian Aboriginal context Karen Martin (2003) has developed her own framework for Indigenist research—Quandamooka Ontology. Martin leans heavily on core Indigenous research models, including Rigney's, as well as the work of celebrated Quandamooka poet, artist and educator Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker). This reliance on Noonuccal helps inform my research and the practice of looking towards senior artists for leadership. Martin (2003) shifts her position from Rigney's notion of resistance, stating that she does not position herself 'in a reactive stance of resisting or opposing western research frameworks and ideologies' (p. 4). Rather, she proposes: 'I research from the strength and position of being Aboriginal and viewing anything western as "another", alongside and amongst western worldviews and realities' (p. 4). Martin's revised version of principles is as follows:

1. recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival
2. honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people
3. emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures
4. privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands. (p. 5)

In order to establish this ontology model, Martin (2003) describes how she draws on

> the knowledges, beliefs, behaviours, experiences and realities from my own Quandamooka worldview and show how these become the framework for Indigenist

> research … I am articulating what many Quandamooka people, for centuries, have already expressed in words, technology, writing, dance, art and life. (p. 6)

Having outlined her Quandamooka Ontology, Martin (2003) goes on to say this worldview informs her 'theoretical framework for Indigenous research' and explains how 'Indigenist research occurs through centring Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing in alignment with aspects of western qualitative research frameworks' (p. 12).

2.5.5. Wangan ngootyoong (listen good)

Within the south-east cultural practices context, a key methodology has been developed by renowned possum skin cloak–maker Vicki Couzens. A Gunditjmara and Keerray Woorroong woman, Couzens (2009) situates her research within 'maarngat tyamanyoongako ba yakeenako (Aboriginal knowing and learning)' (p. 11) and titles her own methodology 'Wangan ngootyoong (listen good)' (p. 13). This concept is based on her experiences, centring on cultural revival practices, and 'dadirri (deep listening)' (p. 12), borrowed from the Ngangikurungkurr community in the Northern Territory.

These examples of Indigenous research methodologies from around the world answer Graham Hingangaroa Smith's call to 'put some tools on the wall'. Working with both Rigney's and Kovach's methodologies, Aunty Christine Evans (Wiradjuri) (2014) notes:

> It is Indigenous academics internationally who, in showing respect for their own cultural affiliations, are increasingly choosing to customise research methodologies to represent the customary paradigms of their own clans, bands or tribes in the methodological approaches that they advocate. (p. 51)

The Eaglehawk and Crow letter (Widders et al. 1974) reminds us that decolonising methods have a history within our south-east communities and that local solutions still exist within our elders and communities.

2.6. Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking)

Like Martin and others, I have elected to construct my own research methodology, titled Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking). This methodology is founded on principles based on my own epistemology, ethics, worldview and experiences as a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi man. This personal approach follows Wiradjuri academic Juanita Sherwood's (2010) experience of methodology being 'informed through an Indigenous philosophy and lived experience [and] guided by Aboriginal elders' (p. 147). Yindyamarra Winhanganha is based on culturally appropriate processes of research and provides a decolonising framework for my research. This is essential, as western forms of research by anthropologists and academics have failed by not creating a space for the recognition and development of south-east practices. Therefore, the prevailing methodologies on which this western research was created need to be challenged and, as Smith (cited in Kovach 2009, pp. 88–89) suggests, new 'tools' are needed to create new knowledge. As a response to these issues, Yindyamarra Winhanganha can be understood as rich in ethics and moral responsibility to knowledge, its key concepts embedded within all Indigenous research methodological principles.

This methodology draws strongly on the 'formal instructions and teaching' of the late Wongamar (Pastor Cec Grant OAM), a senior Wiradjuri elder who lived and worked in Albury on the southern Wiradjuri border. Wongamar was deeply knowledgeable about Wiradjuri culture and was also a Christian leader. Along with his brother Uncle Stan Grant Snr, Wongamar was brought up under the guidance of their grandfather, who, importantly, taught them the Wiradjuri language. Their 'formal instructions and teaching' were published in *Learning Wiradjuri book three* (Grant & Rudder 2006, p. 31) as part of a suite of resources designed to teach the Wiradjuri language. These instructions have been further developed in collaboration with Uncle Stan, who is familiar with western research institutions such as universities and museums. As will be seen in the following sections, the Yindyamarra Winhanganha methodological

principles are provided at the beginning in Wiradjuri, as translated by Uncle Stan, and then in English, and in no particular order of hierarchy. Placing the principle at the start of each section is a decolonising strategy that grounds the methodology in an Indigenous epistemology.

Shawn Wilson (2008), an Opaskwayak Cree living in Australia, reminds us that it is 'only in the past few years that the research discourse has allowed for the expression or acceptance of this paradigm in mainstream academia' (p. 43). However, it is important to remember that our people have always been researchers. Mohawk researcher Marlene Brant Castellano (2004) affirms this: 'Aboriginal knowledge has always been informed by research, the purposeful gathering of information and the thoughtful distillation of meaning' (p. 98).

In order to locate Yindyamarra Winhanganha within a broader field of understanding, I have framed it within existing Indigenous research models, such as Kaupapa Māori, as set out by Smith (cited in Mahuika 2015), Kovach's Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin Methodology (2009) and Martin's Quandamooka Ontology (2003), as mentioned above. The Eaglehawk and Crow letter (Widders et al. 1974), with its powerful localised message of decolonisation, has also deeply influenced my Yindyamarra Winhanganha methodology. Central to Yindyamarra Winhanganha are the 'principles and rationale' for Indigenous research methodologies, as set out within Rigney's (1997) paradigm, which seeks to resist colonial frameworks, maintain political integrity and privilege Indigenous voices (p. 118).

Within the seven principles of Yindyamarra Winhanganha that I will explain, I also provide case studies that relate, inform and illustrate the way the methodology has developed and affected my research and practice. This concept of leading by example is part of a Wiradjuri epistemology. Texturing the methodology with case studies also takes its lead from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's publication *Decolonising methodologies:*

research and Indigenous peoples, in which she provides 25 examples of Indigenous research programs that Māori researchers have engaged in. Smith (2012) explains that 'methods become the means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed' (p. 144). Kovach (2009) affirms that, in an Indigenous context, 'story is methodologically congruent with tribal knowledges'. She determines that 'a product resulting from research using a tribal-centred Indigenous methodology ought to have a strong narrative component as part of its method and presentation of findings' (p. 35). These processes ensure that this methodology is a practice and not simply a theory. The case studies are just a few key examples of my Wiradjuri methodology in action. These have been chosen to help represent Yindyamarra Winhanganha.

It should be noted that Yindyamarra Winhanganha has been developed for this research and is based on my own specific local research requirements and background, which is located within a practice-based knowledge perspective that has been greatly informed by working with elders and communities. Yindyamarra Winhanganha does not speak for or represent all Wiradjuri. It is hoped, however, that it can contribute to a communal Wiradjuri methodology, or at least inspire other Wiradjuri and south-east methodologies to grow and develop. The seven principles of Yindyamarra Winhanganha are outlined in the following sections.

2.6.1. Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu (talk straight, listen deeply and act respectably)

Dhulu-ya-li muwugama-li, nganha marambang. Yindyama-li midhang mayiny-bu mayiny-galang-bu, dhuluyali birandhi nginha gulba-la-bu. Wudha-ng-garrang-duray ngurang, miilgany-ba-dhi garraywa-li maldha-li-bu ngulumung-gu. Ngindi-dyu ngindhu-gu-bu mayiny-guwal. Wudhagar-binya-gu-bu yindyama-la. Wudha-ng-garrang-garra-bu ngayiny-galang, marani-l-dhuray-bu winhanga-yi-dhuray-bu. Wiray waangangi yindya-mal-dhuray. Wudha-ng-garang-gal-dhuray-gu mayiny-guwal-ga. Dugu-winy-birra yindyamala-bu. Winhanga-duri-nya winhanga-yi-galang. Durrur-

buwulin, yindyamal-dhuray-bu. Winhanga-duri-nya mayiny-bu minya-lu. Maldhan-nhu-dhuray-dhaany-dya-bu mayiny-galang.

Communicate in clear and truthful ways. Conduct research in a respectful way that's best suited to the respective individual or community involved. Speak honestly and from your own position and knowledge base. Be open about the research process and outcomes intended for both you and the respective individual or community. Listen to others and respect their knowledge, position and opinion. Be constructive and mindful, not disrespectful, about the knowledge, position and opinion of others. Always act with respect and be mindful of people and the impact of research on both the individual and community.

The acts of speaking the truth, listening carefully and acting with respect to create a safe, trusting and productive mode of researching form the basis for Indigenous knowledges. The key guide to health research ethics published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2006) states:

> Respect for each other's dignity and individual ways of living is the basis of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live. Within our cultures, respect strengthens dignity, and dignity strengthens respect. A respectful relationship encourages trust and cooperation. Strong culture is built on respect and trust, and a strong culture encourages dignity and recognition, and provides a caring and sharing environment. (p. 9)

Sherwood (2010) identifies Aboriginal concepts of respect as 'the defining distinction between Indigenous research methodologies and that of traditional western research focused on Aboriginal communities' (p. 216). This idea of respect as the cornerstone of Indigenous research methodologies is witnessed throughout many global frameworks and over generations.

There is a long history of research abuse in the south-east and much has to be done

to remedy the injustices of the past. Even though I work within my own community, I have inherited many of the problems associated with western research. I often have to build bridges between concepts of research and community. I have to work particularly hard to overcome the many historical issues, and central to this is Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu (talking straight, listening deeply and acting respectably). This often involves a layered communicative approach, with relationships built up over a long period of time and working in culturally safe ways.

When researching, the most effective way of communicating with community is face to face. This way, people can see you are Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu. People know that you are showing them yindyamarra (an idea discussed in the following case study) simply by committing to seeing them, often driving more than eight hours from Sydney for a cup of tea and a yarn, showing them tangible outcomes and by following through with requests. I have learnt the lesson of Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu by attending community meetings, such as the Wiradjuri Council of Elders meetings, where as a younger Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi person I do not have the right to speak unless asked, which rarely occurs in the context of the meeting. As a younger person you are expected to sit quietly and observe, to get cups of tea for the elders, while a variety of complicated subjects are dealt with. Such an environment has enormous benefits for a young person. Observing elders working through issues, communicating with each other and leading by example has set me on my research path and helped me to understand the role of knowledge in research, including learning how to sit back and not have (or think you have) all the answers, and how to hand power and authority over to others (in some cases to people who you have only just met). This is sometimes a difficult position to accept, especially when working from the paradigm of western academia, which is founded on concepts of centralised and individualised knowledge. Smith (2012) believes that insider research has to be 'as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical' as outsider research:

> It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position. (p. 140)

2.6.1.1. *Case study: Yindyamarra*

Like many Wiradjuri and other Aboriginal people in the south-east, I didn't grow up with an abundance of language being spoken; however, at community events, in particular Wiradjuri Council of Elders meetings, I began to learn important words and sayings. These words and sayings are central to the decision-making and thinking of the elders. One of the first and most important words I learnt was 'yindyamarra', which directly translates as 'respect, be gentle, polite, honour, do slowly' (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 485). Aunty Flo Grant (Wiradjuri) (cited in NMA 2015) states that yindyamarra is vital and that 'our people never acted impulsively' (p. 62). From my own community in Bathurst, Uncle Bill Allen Jnr Dinawan Dyirribang (Wiradyuri) (Dyirribang, Simpson & Rush 2016) takes the concept further:

> What we do in Bathurst, we go by a term called yindyamarra, which means respect, but also means to go slow and think about what you're doing. Also to be polite [with] what you do, show a bit of honour about yourself, and then look back at what you've achieved and be proud of what you've done. (0:46)

Yindyamarra is central to all Wiradjuri knowledge and governs Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu.

Uncle Michael McDaniel (Wiradjuri) (cited in *Speaking out with Larissa Behrendt* 2017) also learnt this word at a Wiradjuri Council of Elders meeting. He describes his process of learning from a group of elders that included Uncle Stan:

> [One elder said,] 'it means honour and respect and it means to be respectful'. And then another elder said, 'it means more than that. It means doing things in a thoughtful, human way, in a kind way, doing things slowly and taking everyone with you'. Then another said, 'oh no, it means more than that. It means gently

> living in the world and understanding that all of your actions and all of your words have impact beyond the immediate and even your own life'. (31:01)

Uncle Michael reflects on this collaborative definition:

> This word and this philosophy … that essentially summarised every major faith system you could imagine, Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness. It wasn't contained in a book. It had just gently been passed on by mouth to ear from generation to generation. (31:40)

In this way yindyamarra can be understood as Smith's 'Ako Māori: culturally preferred pedagogy' (cited in Mahuika 2015, p. 39) or Kovach's 'tribal epistemology' (2009, p. 44). There are numerous examples of both the use and influence of yindyamarra in the Wiradjuri community that demonstrate its importance (Sullivan, Grant & Grant 2016).

Yindyamarra is a key principle driving *Murruwaygu*. It has most directly informed how I approached the research of shields in museums. Historically these shields have been given little yindyamarra. Most curators, institutions and academics, the brokers of these collections, see south-east material such as shields as a research subject with no outcomes. They believe these objects were collected so long ago and with such little contextual material, that it is impossible for them to be retrieved from the archive, to be attributed to artists and regions, and reframed within a living art practice.

Uncle Stan (cited in NMA 2015), speaking about cultural material housed in museums, states that 'yindyamarra is our word for respect. And that's what we have to pay, respect to those shields and all the artefacts in the museum' (p. 62). This approach of showing yindyamarra to south-east shields has encouraged me to produced detailed drawings documenting their designs, profile and size (Figure 2.1). This process meant that I was spending up to six hours drawing each shield, often sitting with the objects in cold collection storage environments for days on end, in some cases being the first person to see and handle the objects in many years, carefully studying their shape and designs, recording as much information as I could, and then cataloguing the objects in relation to

other shields. The resulting drawings often provide much more detail than a photograph, with much of the fine line-work difficult to digitally capture. In her detailed research of south-east material in the Reynell Eveleigh Johns (1834–1910) collection, Carol Cooper (1975) created 'accurate pencil drawings and cross-sections of each artefact', stating:

> This does in fact provide more information about the shape of the artefact than would half-tone illustrations, and the discipline of drawing proved invaluable in gaining familiarity with the morphological range of the different artefact groups studied. (p. 21)

FIGURE 2.1.
Jonathan Jones researching south-east collections at the British Museum in London, 2012
Image courtesy Rachael Murphy and BM

The process of drawing to gain a deeper appreciation of an artwork was also demonstrated by Australian art historian and curator Betty Churcher AO (1931–2015) (2014):

> The act of drawing puts me in direct contact with what I'm seeing. And there's a difference between 'looking' and 'seeing'—with a pencil in my hand I really see, and frequently discern something new about a well-known work of art. Often I'm astonished that I didn't see this before, so there's an element of revelation. (p. 1)

Churcher describes this process—physically engaging with a work, understanding its relation to the body—as being in the mind of the artist and experiencing their creativity.

Drawing the shields, studying them and, importantly, seeing them as works of art gives the objects yindyamarra; in return they have revealed information to me. Through this process the individual artist and their ways of working are recognisable, and for the first time a comparative study of these significant objects has been possible. Understanding shields and other objects from historical collections as the works of great artists who had individual identities and unique artistic visions is something that the Aboriginal community has always recognised, so this research within a community context is not new. Yet this concept and the supporting research to affirm this position has never occurred in western contexts. Showing objects yindyamarra has meant that many shields lost to the imperial/colonial archive are now being reunited with their ancestors (Jones 2015a, p. 78).

2.6.2. Buram-ba-bi-rra ngayi-ny (share thought)

Nganha-dhuradhu-nhu-ganham-ba-la-bu ngaami-dhuray mulgabi-li gulbanha-bu barram-ayi-li-nya Wiradjuri gulbanha. Yindya-ma-ngidyal maldhan-nhu gudyiin murun-gi-ali-nya Wiradjuri gulbanha maldhan-dhuray-bu dugu-winy-birra gulbanha, ngum-buwu-wa-nha-gu Wiradjuri mayiny-gu giyira mayiny yal-bi-li-gi-dhuray. Yal-biyanha, dhadhi gulbanha buwagayi, gariya-ndhu yali gulbanha, ngindhu-gu ngunha birra mayiny-gu-bu ngindhu yamayama li mayiny-guwal-bu bala-dhu. Yal-dhaany-gu gulaynan ganha-mal-dhaany. Ngindhu gulbali gulbanha wiray mayiny-galang-gu, ngay, ngungi-la-gi giyiragu mayiny.

Use your research process and outcomes to actively contribute to the cycle of knowledge. Retrieve Wiradjuri knowledge by honouring the work of your ancestors; revive Wiradjuri knowledge by being an active participant; and contribute knowledge back to the Wiradjuri community for future generations through education. Always

acknowledge where knowledge comes from and never use knowledge without permission or without returning it back to community and individuals. Support and assist other researchers and community members and become an active advocate for younger researchers. Understand that knowledge is not owned by an individual or an institution but by the community, to be handed on to future generations.

Within Indigenous systems, knowledge is not owned by one person; knowledge is distributed with responsibility. Similarly, within a decolonising research model we also need to ensure that knowledge is given back to community and that we do not re-enact historical colonial processes and notions of ownership. Kovach (2009) positions 'giving back' as a core principle of Indigenous methodology. Wilson (2008) describes the concept of Buram-ba-bi-rra ngayi-ny (sharing thought) as 'relational accountability', a core element of his Indigenous research methodology. In his relational accountability Wilson proposes that 'methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)' (p. 99). He believes that as Indigenous researchers we are effectively 'growing a relationship between the community and whatever it is that is being researched' (p. 106). Smith (2012) reminds us that although sharing presents difficulties, as an Indigenous researcher it is essential:

> Sharing is a responsibility of research. The technical term for this is the dissemination of results, usually very boring to non-researchers, very technical and very cold. For Indigenous researchers, sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community … It is a very skilled speaker who can share openly at this level within the rules of the community. (p. 162)

Similarly, in Hawaiian academic Kū Kahakalau's Indigenous Heuristic Action Research Methodology 'the findings of the research are presented both in a format that is understood and preferred by the Indigenous community involved and as a format accepted by academia' (2004, p. 31). Kovach (2009) reminds us that 'giving back does not only mean dissemination of findings; it means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of the research' (p. 149).

As an artist, sharing is deeply embedded in my practice, from showing a work within an exhibition, to an artist's talk or program, to supporting material such as printed notes, films and catalogues. Throughout my practice, collaboration with community and elders has played a key role, bringing with it a number of responsibilities in relation to sharing.

2.6.2.1. *Case study: exhibition and films*

A key part of this research has been mounting a major public exhibition and developing a range of public programs with the AGNSW (Figures 2.2–2.3). Within a community context this element has been an essential part of the research, allowing me to give knowledge back to both the Aboriginal and wider communities in an accessible way. Sherwood (2010) explains that to adhere to 'an Indigenous framework for research … information collated through the research must be presented back to the community in a manner that makes sense to them and is useful' (p. 147). The exhibition took the same title as my research, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, and was held in the Yiribana Gallery at the AGNSW from 28 November 2015 to 21 February 2016, making it the gallery's major Aboriginal exhibition for that period. Although the AGNSW does not collect attendance data on each gallery space, during the months of December, January and February the gallery received over 360,000 visitors who would have had the opportunity to see the exhibition (AGNSW 2016a, p. 42). It is important to note that the exhibition and events were free and open to all.

Murruwaygu filled the Yiribana Gallery with over 130 works from 28 collections, including significant loans from the National Gallery of Australia, National Museum of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Museum Victoria, Australian Museum and Koorie Heritage Trust. It was the first major group show the gallery had held focusing on south-east culture. A suite of free programs supported the exhibition; these included a one-day public symposium, demonstrations and talks, artists-in-residence programs with Uncle Roy Kennedy (b.1934, Wiradjuri) and Andrew Snelgar (b.1982, Ngemba), and talks by Aboriginal cultural figures, including journalist Stan

FIGURE 2.2.
Uncle Roy Kennedy giving an artist's talk during the *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* public program, 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

FIGURE 2.3.
Jonathan Jones giving a curator's talk during the *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* public program, 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy AGNSW

Grant Jnr (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi), actor Uncle Jack Charles (Bunurong/Wiradjuri) and Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO (Wurundjeri). These programs not only offered the general public an opportunity to engage with the exhibition, but also the artists, families and associates to participate in the exhibition. In addition, a series of five short films featuring artists, historians, curators and other specialists were produced to support and interpret the exhibition content and to ensure a high-quality digital legacy (AGNSW 2016a, p. 61). Collectively the five films have been watched over 4000 times on one platform alone (AGNSW 2015a–e).

These films, which were available on the AGNSW YouTube site, have become a valuable tool for the Aboriginal community to gain access to the show. Making knowledge available in appropriate formats is essential within the Aboriginal community. Henrietta Marrie (née Fourmile) (Yidinji) (1989), a long-time community advocate within museum spaces, has touched on the power of distributed information:

> Much of Aboriginal people's own sense of powerlessness stems from ignorance because of this lack of access to information about matters which control our lives. An informed Aboriginal population will have a much greater feeling of power over its own destiny. (p. 3)

2.6.3. Marraga-la-dha (care for community)

Winhanga-duri-nya maldhan-gu muyulung-gu, guwiinyguliya-ba dhirr-ngal mayiny-bu wudha-ng-garang-garra. Nga-ngaa-nha muyulung-bu nginhu maymy yandu-ndhu marramarra-maldhan-nhu bunmali-ndhu-gu marang maldhan bala. Bamir-gal wayadan-bu ngunha-gan nganha yamayama-la-ndhu. Maldhan muyulung-dhuray yamayamali-nhu maldhan-bu yalbili-gi.

Acknowledge the role of elders, who are archivists, researchers and important knowledge-holders. Look after elders and community members throughout the research process by causing no harm. Create meaningful research based on enduring

relationships and connections that inform your approach and outcomes. Establish and work with an elders' advisory committee to strengthen your research position and provide an appropriate learning structure.

Henrietta Marrie (Fourmile 1989) has stated: 'Our old people are our most valuable sources of our history and culture' (p. 2). Respect for elders and their knowledge is central to Indigenous communities and is a mainstay of the south-east, where elders 'are respected and selected for their knowledge, wisdom and integrity' (Sherwood 2010, p. 143). Uncle Bruce Pascoe (Bunurong/Yuin/Tasmanian) (2007) reminds us that even though the south-east has been 'seared by disadvantage', respect for 'the authority of elders is an enduring characteristic' (p. 121). Both their knowledge and ways of working are essential to developing research that is meaningful for community and based on the principle of Marraga-la-dha (caring for community). Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009) identifies his grandfather's teaching as fundamental in his upbringing:

> My grandfather would sit and tell me and my brother about things which he had to do to be a man among the elders and so on. But he moved us on until another day and [would] keep telling a little every time we would sneak down to the hollow log he was living in. (p. 20)

In Uncle Roy's grandfather's gradual teaching we can see part of the elders' methodology of establishing a meaningful relationship and learning through stages. This concept of elevating elders and acknowledging their knowledge aligns with Martin's (2003) principle of 'privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands' (p. 5).

A healthy community places elders at its centre. Chilisa (2012) points out the importance of working for the benefit of the whole community:

> Every segment of the community has a place and a value in the community, and the omission of the voices of any one of these segments in the research process is not in the interest of the values of the community from which the story comes; it has potential to harm the welfare of that community. (p. 113)

Sveiby and Skuthorpe (2006) also remind us that the community is rich with knowledge: 'What we do have … is a wealth of stories kept alive by a few Nhunggabarra people into the present day' (p. 28).

Throughout my life I have been surrounded and supported by leaders who, through their actions, have demonstrated appropriate and culturally sound models for working in culturally safe and creative ways. These models have deeply informed my methodology. Central to this thinking is also my family, in particular my grandfather. As I have become older, I have started to encourage the next generation and to give back the knowledge I have been given.

2.6.3.1. *Case study: Community Advisory Committee*

A Community Advisory Committee of Aboriginal elders and important leaders who are both connected to the research area and to me has supervised both this research and the community outcomes of the exhibition. The committee consists of two men and one woman whose ancestry is connected to the south-east region, reflecting the context of the research; this structure builds on Smith's principle of 'Whānau: the extended family management principle' (cited in Mahuika 2015, p. 39). Each member of the Community Advisory Committee brings to the research a broad range of skills and their own particular experiences and expertise, ranging from working with cultural knowledge and pedagogies within universities, to cultural leadership and the protocol and development of cultural revival. This collective knowledge will ensure that the research outcomes are of the highest standards within an institutional and community context and, importantly, that I am held accountable for impact and outcomes.

This group provides cultural support to the community and has been invaluable to me. When discussing the research with community, I have made people aware of the Community Advisory Committee and their support for the research. This has

significantly assisted in the advancement of the research project and also meant that if members of the community have a problem with the research, they are able to approach one of the Community Advisory Committee members.

The Community Advisory Committee's main role has been to act as cultural overseers to the research. While collectively the committee is able to speak for the majority of artists within the research, having both family and cultural connections to them, it was impossible for the committee to speak for the entire south-east region (some 60 different language groups). As it was impractical to have representatives of each nation involved, when issues arose the Community Advisory Committee was able to point me in the most appropriate direction through their collective community network.

The Community Advisory Committee consists of three leader-mentors. A brief introduction to each member follows.

Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM, having been brought up around native speakers of his grandfather's generation, has been crucial to the reconstruction of the Wiradjuri language. Uncle Stan was the key researcher and coeditor (with Dr John Rudder) of *A first Wiradjuri dictionary* (2005) and has been acknowledged both locally and nationally for instating Wiradjuri language in schools, universities and across government-departments. He received his Doctor of Letters from Charles Sturt University, where he currently teaches, and has vast community networks. I have known Uncle Stan for more than ten years and we have worked together on a range of art projects within that time. As he is a senior Wiradjuri man, I am deeply connected to him.

Professor Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO is a senior Wurundjeri elder. Aunty Joy is the great-great-niece of Wurundjeri artist and leader William Barak (c.1824–1903). She holds several positions on boards and has produced a number of cultural works, from performances to publications. Aunty Joy has a strong relationship with community

across Victoria and a wealth of experience when dealing with the archive and cultural institutions. I have known Aunty Joy for more than ten years and together we have worked on artworks and projects within that time.

Professor Uncle Michael McDaniel is a recognised community leader working in education. Uncle Michael holds a number of positions on boards, including with Bangarra Dance Theatre, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Sydney Living Museums. Uncle Michael has been instrumental in the revival of possum skin cloak–making in NSW and one of his cloaks is held in the NGA collection (accession number 2009.93). I have known Uncle Michael for more than 20 years and he has been an enormous support of my education, both within the Wiradjuri and western systems. As Uncle Michael is a senior Wiradjuri man, I am deeply connected to him.

2.6.4. Gulba-ngi-dyili-nya (know yourself and your position)

Gulba-ngi-dyili-nya-bu gari-ga-rra nginhu maldhan-gu-bu mayiny-ndhu. Maldhan-gu, gulbala-nhu maldhan-bu gulbarra walanmala-nhu-bu wala-gagag. Ngaa-bi nya galbaa maldhan-nhu-bu gulbarra dhaga-nhu maldhan nginha-gu. Winhanga-duri-nya ngindhu-bu maldhan-nhu bandalang. Girra-girra-bang-dhuray-maldhan-nhu yabang ngindhu maldhan nganha marambir-gu yamayama li-nhu maldhan-dhuray. Winhanganha nganha-ndhu-bu maldhan-nhu yamayamal-dhuray Wiradjuri winhanga-garar-garra.

Know yourself and be true to your research and your community or the people you represent. Know your research position and understand your strengths and weaknesses. Appreciate the limitations of your research and understand where your research is located. Be mindful of how both you and your research are connected. Be comfortable with your research path; you can only do research that is relevant, connected and meaningful to you. Know that you and your research can and will contribute to a network of ever-growing Wiradjuri and Indigenous knowledge.

Placing yourself, your identity and your epistemology within the research framework is an essential part of Indigenous research. Wilson (2008) invites us to think of research as a way of 'improving your relationship with an idea' (p. 110):

> Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationship with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land. Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationships with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of. (p. 80; emphasis in original)

Kovach (2009) simply sees the researcher's relationship with the research process as 'clarifying one's perspective on the world. This is about being congruent with a knowledge system that tells us that we can only interpret the world from the place of our experience' (p. 110).

Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata, in the introduction to *Disciplining the savages: savaging the disciplines* (2007), where he both critiques anthropology and establishes an Islander Standpoint Theory, states: 'My family's history and my own experiences provide a sharp edge to my perceptions of the outside world and our position in it' (p. 7). Nakata takes Gulba-ngi-dyili-nya (knowing yourself and your position) further:

> My task was not simply to know my position but to know first how I was positioned in and by western disciplines and knowledge practices. My task then was to know how such a knowledge system created a position for Islanders through which we have all come to view Islanders and their problems. Only then could I, a Torres Strait Islander, understand why my viewpoint was never understood and how I could go about changing this situation. (p. 11)

By describing his journey from understanding his position within a western framework to changing the situation, Nakata reveals the potential of this research principle.

Smith (2012) sees the relationship of the insider to the research as having greater

responsibilities than that of the outsider, which encapsulates the concept of Gulba-ngi-dyili-nya:

> At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis forevermore, and so do their families and communities. (p. 138)

2.6.4.1. *Case study: male research*

As a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi male artist and curator my interests are in exploring knowledges relating to this specific area. Not only are these knowledges of interest, but within an Aboriginal community context it is considered culturally appropriate for me to engage with them. Within an Aboriginal context people are only allowed to speak to knowledge that they have the rights and responsibilities for. Historian Peter Read (1988), who has worked extensively with Wiradjuri people and is well respected by the community, wrote that Wiradjuri knowledge is 'ordered and controlled according to age and seniority by strict, though unspoken, rules about who is entitled to know what' (p. xiii). As a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi person from the south-east it is culturally appropriate for me to research cultural knowledge from within my region.

My specific cultural position within the cultural framework will be evident in a number of ways throughout my research, research process and research outcomes. However, it should be noted that within this research I have elected to exclude my own visual art practice. Although the issues raised within this research affect me deeply as a male south-east artist engaging with the line in my work, I believe that when establishing the lens to recognise a movement it would be inappropriate to place myself within that history.

In the same vein, as a male researcher it would be culturally inappropriate for me to look at women's issues. These cultural protocols are widely recognised and are important

as they ensure that I have the rights to research within my area. Within a western context this is maybe interpreted as privileging male knowledge; however, within an Aboriginal context, if my research was to include women's work I would be judged for researching knowledge that is not my business. In his approach to men's health research, Mick Adams (Yadhiagana) (2002) believes 'it is important that the researcher is an Aboriginal man who possesses cultural and family links and associations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, groups and communities' (p. 20).

Recognising women's and men's business is an important step in Indigenising and decolonising research. It needs to be remembered that colonisation 'had a destructive effect on Indigenous gender relations that reached out across all spheres of Indigenous society' because it positioned women within a colonial frame as the 'property of men, with primarily domestic roles' (Smith 2012, pp. 152–153). Smith goes on to state that 'gender separations … were complementary in order to maintain harmony and stability' (p. 153). It needs to be emphasised that in no way does this research attempt to deny or assert primacy over south-east women's art practices. Just as this research is structured on a culturally appropriate framework, it is hoped that it will inspire a female researcher from the south-east to look at women's art practices.

2.6.5. Walan-ma-ya Wiradjuri mayiny-galang (Wiradjuri self-determination)

Maldhan-gu wambi-gu-bu yamayamali Wiradjuri wirimbirra guyulgang yamayamali Wiradjuri widya-nha-bu wirimbirra murun-gi-nya. Maldhan marang buram-ba-birra-ba mayiny-gu. Nginha maldhan-gu nga-ngaa-nha mayiny widyanha, murradambirra mayiny-gu yandul-bu mayiny-gu buwa-ga-na-li. Dyiramadilinya-dhu mayiny-dya-nhu, maldhan-bu gulba-ngi-dyi-li-nya-bu.

Research in order to support and promote Wiradjuri self-determination, in order to reinforce Wiradjuri culture, aspirations and identity. Research should be relevant to and shared for the improvement of community. This involves conducting research for

the maintenance of cultural practices, and the improvement of community now and for generations to come. Take pride in your community, research and knowledge, and celebrate Wiradjuri heritage and culture.

While self-determination was becoming a key political reform in Australia in the 1970s, Read (1983) described how the process on a local level of the Wiradjuri was much more piecemeal:

> [The] history of the Wiradjuri is not the story of inevitable decline to extinction, nor yet the triumphal march, through tribulations, to self-determination. It is the story of a struggle carried out on a day-to-day basis, at one level, to stay alive, and at another, to retain as far as it was possible, the perceived values of Aboriginal society. (p. xvi)

Research plays a key role in delivering long-term self-determination, which Dodson (2003) describes as the 'right of a people to determine its political status and to pursue its own economic, social and cultural development' (p. 31). Indigenous research set within Indigenous methodologies ensures we can continue our cultures, languages and relationships to country.

Walan-ma-ya Wiradjuri mayiny-galang (Wiradjuri self-determination) is captured in a number of Indigenous research methodological principles, including those of Smith, Kovach (2009), Martin (2003) and Rigney (1997). When employed in a research agenda, Smith (2012) argues, self-determination becomes 'something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains' (p. 120) She stresses: 'When Indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched … Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms' (p. 196).

At the core of our self-determination is 'our control over our identity, and the symbols

through which we make and remake our cultures and ourselves' (Dodson 2003, p. 31). Within the arts, Langton (1993) has described how during the 1970s and 1980s 'the Aboriginal response to racist representation, especially in the large urban centres, was to demand control of representation' (p. 9). For Langton, 'one of the important interventions is the act of self-representation itself and the power of aesthetic and intellectual statements' (p. 10). She sees artists, filmmakers, musicians and playwrights at the forefront of this change.

2.6.5.1. *Case study: south-east art history*

My research has been conceptualised from within south-east community practices and with community endorsement. Importantly, I seek to assert a south-east self-determination by retrieving our cultural practices and establishing them within the framework of an art-historical model or a cultural continuum. The privilege of enjoying our cultural practices as an unbroken part of our identity is integral to the wellbeing of the community. Akin to the benefits of language revival, this process reconnects us with our history, creates a cultural narrative for the community, and guides us into the future. Brabrawooloong/Gunnai artist Ray Thomas (b.1960) (cited in Edmonds & Clarke 2009) talks about this process of connecting to his cultural practices: 'Once I started to incorporate the patterning and design work from my area, well, that made me feel whole as a Gunnai person, as a Gippsland person' (p. 1). As Uncle Stan (NMA 2015) reiterates, 'through the language and through the artwork, that's a tremendous way of reconnecting you to your culture, to your land' (p. 62).

Artists and communities from the south-east often feel disenfranchised from their culture; they often feel their culture has been taken away from them and experience pain and sorrow when talking about the past. The processes of cultural retrieval, revival and contribution are powerful postcolonial acts that correct past injustices. Through this research lens, positive platforms for community are created that provide Aboriginal perspectives. My research builds on local NSW Aboriginal histories and studies,

FIGURE 2.4.
Spotted bowerbird (*Chlamydera maculata*), 2013
Image courtesy Pamela Chapman

and provides a platform for future research. It aims to benefit Koori artists based in the region by locating their practices within an art-historical movement. The wider Aboriginal community also stands to benefit through the promotion and acknowledgement of this cultural heritage. The general public has benefitted through visiting the exhibition and through gaining an understanding of a specific Aboriginal cultural group and the visual language that makes up their unique identity. This research project aims to establish a cultural framework and to put in place mechanisms for understanding, acknowledging and respecting south-east culture and empowering the community. The process of working with a 'strength-based' approach to combat Aboriginalism and assert self-determination is highlighted by Cressida Fforde et al. (2013). In particular the writers reference the literacy programs in Lawrence Bamblett's Wiradjuri community of Erambie that have 'asserted equality by engaging with a strength-based approach to dealing with issues of concern' (Bamblett 2013a, pp. 108–109).

To establish a strength-based approach to research in the south-east, a region that has endured lasting cultural disruption, I look to nguram-bula or the spotted bowerbird (Figure 2.4). Nguram-bula (*Chlamydera maculata*) is a small bird found in central NSW and Queensland, and like many bowerbirds it creates a bower on the ground as part of its complex mating behaviour. The creation of this beautiful bower gives rise to the Wiradjuri name 'nguram-bula', which translates as 'two homes', referring to both the bower and the nest. The male nguram-bula creates the main bower structure with a collection of sticks and commonly decorates it with an array of green and white found objects, including green berries and bleached bones. Research in Queensland has shown that the nguram-bula goes beyond simple collection and actively 'cultivates' the green berries of bush tomato, not for food but for use in the bower. In contemporary colonial circumstances, nguram-bula has taken to incorporating new paraphernalia reflecting its adaptability, including shards of green glass bottles and aluminium foil.

Senior Yorta Yorta artist Lin Onus (1948–1996) (cited in AGNSW 1994) said he was from the bowerbird school, 'picking up bits and pieces, here and there' (p. 116). As Onus was a groundbreaking south-east practitioner who worked hard to promote the culture of the region, this concept of collecting fragments, of creatively working across disciplines and combining disparate sources of information, seems appropriate. This concept is echoed by Brenda L. Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara) in her essay for the first National Indigenous Art Triennial, *Culture warriors*, in which she describes artists as bowerbirds (2007, p. xxi). Brad Steadman, a Ngiyampaa man from Brewarrina (cited in Rose, James & Watson 2003), talks about the way different knowledge sources can complement each other and fill in the 'holes':

> Memories have holes in it, and ethnographers' notes have holes in it, and that all goes along and makes up a history for me now. I can read all that stuff, and I can still talk to my nan. I can look at the history from both sides, the ethnographic information, and what my nan has to say—what she knows and what she doesn't know. (pp. 15–16)

The collation of information from multiple sources to reconstruct knowledge is also highlighted by Uncle Bruce Pascoe (2007):

> Languages once thought dead are being revived from the memory of elders, lifted from the pages of arcane records, church pamphlets, squatter diaries, signposts, property names and sound recordings. (pp. 180–181)

This approach is integral to Indigenist research, Chilisa (2012) argues: 'Indigenous research methodologies perceive literature as language, cultural artefacts, legends, stories, practices, songs, rituals, poems, dances, tattoos, lived experiences' (p. 60). Smith (2012) describes a similar concept, 'mixed methodology':

> Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices. The mix reflects the training of Indigenous researchers, which continues to be within the academy, and the parameters and common-sense understandings of research which govern how Indigenous communities and researchers define their activities. (p. 144)

In an Australian context, Attwood (1989) noted that Aboriginal people 'interweave history, legend and myth … showing that these can offer unique insights and different perspectives from those provided by the written record' (p. 140).

Working like a bowerbird, collecting and threading fragments of knowledge together in order to create something greater, is a process that south-east practitioners have mastered. We are compelled to look at country. We are compelled to talk to elders. We are compelled to go to the archives. We are compelled to read antiquated anthropological books. We are compelled to wade through government records. We are compelled to hold in our hands objects in collections. We are compelled to create objects. We amass these things to reconstruct our past. In this way, we can see the bower as our research methodology, where different strands of knowledge collected from multiple sources are brought together to create something beautiful that ensures we move forward. This style of working can be understood as Nguram-bula Decolonising Methodology.

2.6.6. Wama-rra Wiradjuri gulbanha (build Wiradjuri knowledge systems)

Wama-la-bu walan-marra-bu Wiradjuri gudyiin gulbanha, yamayama-li Wiradjuri. Mayiny, nginha dhagu-ndhu maldhan-dhuray muyulung-bu Wiradjuri mayiny-bu. Gulama-la-ba Wiradjuri-gu ngayiny. Ngindhu-gu yindyama-la Wiradjuri maldhan-bu. Winhanga-duri-nya widyunggalung-ndhu yamayamal-girri, muwugama-li gulamarra ngayiny-nhu yingiyan muyulung-nhu.

Build on and strengthen Wiradjuri ancestral and living knowledge systems to reinforce Wiradjuri epistemologies. This includes working within elder and community networks and being open to Wiradjuri spirituality and cultural contexts. Respect Wiradjuri research process, think creatively, be flexible and keep an open mind like your ancestors.

Uncle Stan (cited in *Speaking out with Larissa Behrendt* 2017) states that language 'underpins our culture, our thoughts, our ability to communicate, develop and implement our plans and gives us a deep and firm sense of pride in who we are' (11:10). He also reminds us that 'what makes one language different from another is not just the words, but the ways of thinking that are used. That is the core of the difference' (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 7). This concept was echoed by Onus (1990/2003):

> Language encodes meanings and perceptions of the universe; bi- and multilingual readers of this piece will know that each language brings with it a unique set of perceptions and understandings of the individual's relationship within the greater society. (p. 94)

Wiradjuri, like many south-east nations, has been disrupted by colonisation, and central to cultural revival is the focus on language. Wiradjuri language teacher Aunty Di McNaboe from Dubbo (McNaboe & Poetsch 2010) describes her uncle's experience:

> [He] could speak Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa. He told me that when he was a little fella and got comfortable with the teachers at school he would drop into speaking

> in language. He said that he was punished for using 'bad' language. (p. 217)

Aunty Di explains how this situation continued in her time: 'My family protected us by not using language, to keep us safe from the gandyibuls (constables) or the gandyiwas (government men)' (p. 217). Aunty Di reminds us that 'languages were almost lost within one or two generations due to the strict laws of the time with Aboriginal people not being allowed to speak their languages' (p. 217). Similarly, Uncle Stan watched a police officer arrest his grandfather in the streets of Griffith for speaking Wiradjuri to him. From then on, his grandfather only spoke to him when they were alone in the bush and Uncle Stan was taught to hide his language. Other Wiradjuri weren't so lucky, and their grandparents and parents, in an effort to protect them, never spoke language in their presence. Wiradjuri elder Val Simpson (cited in Read 1988) told how 'you weren't allowed to sit down and listen to them talk. Wouldn't talk it in front of you … they'd just close up like a clam' (p. 50).

By working towards Wama-rra Wiradjuri gulbanha (building Wiradjuri knowledge systems) and reasserting our knowledge, we are engaging in major cultural and political acts. Leonie Pihama (Te Ātiawa/Ngati Mahanga/Ngā Māhanga ā Tairi) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (cited in Rautaki Ltd & Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga n.d.) see embedding cultural knowledge into research as

> advancing the agenda of reclaiming, reconstructing and reformulating Indigenous cultures and languages … [the projects] are driven by an agenda of social justice that advances issues such as cultural survival and restoration, self-determination and healing. (para. 1)

Smith (2008) identifies 'celebrating survival' as a particular approach:

> While non-Indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of Indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which Indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity. (p. 145)

2.6.6.1. *Case study: Wiradjuri language and concepts*

Wiradjuri language and concepts have been central to the development of this research. Uncle Stan was instrumental in initiating this core research component, which seeks to reinstate knowledge by supporting its development. The research title, the use of key Wiradjuri words such as girran.girran (broad shield) and marga (parrying shield), and the development and translation of these Wiradjuri methodologies has been made possible through Uncle Stan's encouragement and support, and demonstrate my commitment to Wama-rra Wiradjuri gulbanha. The process of working on Wiradjuri language and concepts with Uncle Stan has involved in-depth consultation. He is deeply committed to developing the next generation of language-workers.

Murruwaygu takes its title from the Wiradjuri word for the designs carved onto trees and weapons that are unique to the Australian south-east region. 'Murruwaygu' is a compound word with 'murru'—which when used in isolation means 'nose'—here used as a stem-word that indicates something in front or ahead of you (Grant & Rudder 2010, p. 420). 'Murru', used as a stem with 'way', creates the word 'murruway', meaning 'path or track' (p. 422). The addition of 'gu', a suffix used to indicate ideas of entwinement, creates the compound word murruwaygu. The construction of this word and its meanings impart a sense of following the myriad tracks or paths of those who have gone before us within a visual/cultural context. On the similar use of the Māori language, Smith (2012) tells how 'these concepts, which are embedded in the Māori language and worldview, provided a way of coming together on Māori terms' (p. 113).

In her research, titled 'Meerta peeneeyt, yana peeneeyt, tanam peeneeyt' (stand strong, walk strong, proud flesh strong)', Couzens (2009) sees her use of Gunditjmara language as

> an opportunity to employ, in part, the Aboriginal methodology of deep listening through discernment, intuitiveness and tracking or reading signposts, using all of the senses not just what is seen with the eye. (p. 5)

It should be noted that the incorporation of Wiradjuri language and embedding knowledge within research has been firmly established by a number of Wiradjuri scholars including Anita Heiss's publication *Dhuuluu-yala = to talk straight* (2003).

This research demonstrates that the responsibility for language revival sits with the community. The language revival movement is central to the wider cultural resurgence in the south-east that sees an array of cultural activities taking place (see Chapter 1). Used in this variety of disciplines, language can be explored and extended to affirm Indigenous epistemology.

2.6.7. Nganga-dha nguram-bang (look after country)

Ngurambang, nganha-guliya-gu Wiradjuri-gu mayiny, ngandhi nga-ngaa-nha yambuwan. Yindyamali-ba, maldhan marra-mayi-gu-ba nganha nga-ngaa-nha ngurambang, yandy-ndha ngurambang-ga. Winya-nha-bu maldhan wiray ngurambang-ga maldhaany bala yindyama-ngidyal-bu yindyamala mayinyguwal ngandhi widya-nha guwiiny-guliya-la-gu ngurambang-ga.

Country, including its traditional owners, resource management and local ecosystems, needs to be respected. Research needs to be conducted in a way that acknowledges, respects and enriches country. If living and researching off country, researchers need to be responsible caretakers by respecting and acknowledging the local traditional owners.

Aboriginal communities, like most Indigenous communities, are united in the concept of caring for country. Nganga-dha nguram-bang (looking after country) embodies the Aboriginal worldview of country. This is a holistic view, including the people and animals. This principle is embedded within Martin's (2003) methodological framework:

> Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people. (p. 5)

Couzens (2009) proposes that we relate to country through language, stories, songs, dance, artefacts, cultural knowledge and practices. She explains that 'culture is the framework through which we connect to our country, our Belonging. It defines and makes us who we are' (p. 6). Ngiyampaa man Phil Sullivan (cited in Rose, James & Watson 2003) stresses this connection to country as enduring beyond anything else:

> We may forget our meat, we may lose our language, even the rock art may fade, but we will never lose what's inside our hearts—our spiritual connection to country. The outward things may pass but the respect, the thing inside, will last. We respect our animals and our land. (p. 64)

Fellow Ngiyampaa man Brad Steadman further highlights the deep connection between people and country, stating that we carry similar characteristics depending on where we are from. Steadman (cited in Rose, James & Watson 2003) describes these characteristics:

> Around Cobar the soil is red and the people are heavier in the tongue. These are stone people 'Karulkiyalu'—the northern group. Moving through country you can notice subtle differences in terrain, trees, vegetation, animals—these are like the changes in the people and their languages. (p. 66)

Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison (2009), a Yuin elder from the South Coast of NSW, explains this by picturing country and sacred sites as a library that stores cultural memory:

> It is the text of the land. The library is open, it has its own dictionary to explain the language spoken there. It has all those wonderful gifts for us to borrow, so we can pass them on. (p. 39)

Country, seen as a library, can teach us and support research. Uncle Stan often reminds me that if I listen to the birds they will teach me my language, as in Wiradjuri most birds are named after the sound they make; for example, waagan or crow, gugubarra or kookaburra, burridyburridy or noisy miner, bulan-bulan or rosella, dyirridyirri or willy

wagtail. Since time immemorial elders have used animals, birds and plants to teach more than language. Watching country can teach you ways of living, how to act and behave. This practice is continued in the conception of Nguram-bula Decolonising Methodology.

In a similar way, country also informs artistic practices. Carvers Andrew Snelgar and Simon Penrose (b.1986, Yorta Yorta/Wurundjeri) talk about watching trees and how their shape informs what object is made. Penrose, a self-taught carver, describes starting his practice by

> going out to the bush. And just trial and error really … Well, if this tree grows like that, that will make a boomerang or that will make a nulla nulla … it's really about just being self-taught, and just being patient about who I am, and be proud of it, and working and not stopping. (Jones, Penrose & Snelgar 2016, artists' talk, 17 February)

Snelgar (cited in Jones 2014) is similarly informed by country: 'A tree may sing out to me and say, hey, here is a burrigal (boomerang)' (p. 38). He describes it as a lifelong relationship, stating that he went

> back to a spot where I took some carved shields, I'm not sure how many years maybe ten years or something, and saw the scars there again, so it was like seeing something that was connected to me, that part of culture that's still living, still alive … we can connect with that … the tree is a part of you as much as the item … The tree remains alive. (Jones, Penrose & Snelgar 2016, artists' talk, 17 February)

In this way, respecting country can help inform your research practices and grow your knowledge.

2.6.7.1. *Case study: Sydney shield*

The principle of Nganga-dha nguram-bang places special attention on the traditional owners of the country where you are researching and where you are based. With the south-east Aboriginal population experiencing vast diaspora, both forced and elected, as established in studies by J.H. Bell (1961), Julian D. Maxey (1991) and Diane Barwick

(1963), this methodological principle becomes very important. I have lived and worked much of my life on Gadigal country in the city of Sydney. I have been lucky enough to enjoy the benefits of being on Gadigal country and it is therefore essential that my research give something back to Gadigal country and people.

FIGURE 2.5.
Uncle Charles 'Chicka' Madden with his broad shield, now in the collection of the Australian Museum, 2017
Wood, ochre, acrylic; 85 x 24.7 x 7 cm
Australian Museum, Sydney, E096381
Image courtesy Uncle Chicka Madden

Through attending community events and working on projects over the years, I've come to work with and know Uncle Charles 'Chicka' Madden, a respected elder from Gadigal country. Over the course of this research I have collaborated with Uncle Chicka in the

creation of a Sydney broad shield (Figure 2.5). Sydney shields are highly significant; they are unique and feature throughout the Eora/Sydney Basin region in detailed sandstone rock engravings (McDonald 1999). A shield collected from Kamay (Botany Bay) in 1770 represents an important moment in Australia's history as one of the first Aboriginal objects to be collected (see Chapter 1). The creation of a shield with a senior Gadigal man such as Uncle Chicka is a significant re-emergence of a cultural practice within the Eora nation and contributes to the importance of shields within the region.

The process involved first consulting with Uncle Chicka, explaining my research and gaining his interest in and approval of the project. After collecting a piece of stringybark on country, the shield was then prepared and shaped. This involved peeling off the outer layers of bark to reveal the inner layer, carving out the shape and fitting a vine/cane handle. At each stage the shield was brought to Uncle Chicka for approval and feedback. Together we looked through the limited historical documentation of Sydney shields, along with documentation of rock art designs. Uncle Chicka then painted the surface of the shield with a combination of ochre and acrylic paint. The result is a beautiful shield that has reawakened Gadigal practices of shield-making for the first time in generations. This shield was acquired by the Australian Museum and displayed in the *Gadi* exhibition (2018). In collaboration, Uncle Chicka is developing the practice further to continue creating broad shields. My responsibility to Gadigal country and its people has been to apply the knowledge I had learnt through this research and to show yindyamarra to the Gadigal people with this significant outcome.

2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced Indigenous research methodologies in order to frame my own Wiradjuri methodology, Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking). This methodology has been developed in collaboration with senior Wiradjuri elder and language-holder Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr. By first outlining the historical issues relating to research and Indigenous people, and showing how research can maintain

imperialism and colonialism, this chapter established the importance of inserting Indigenous methodologies into the academy. Rigney (1997) explained that Indigenous methodologies 'represent the aspirations of Indigenous Australians and carry within [them] the potential to strengthen the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression' (p. 115). These ideas of emancipation and liberation are captured in the Eaglehawk and Crow letter, which I position as a foundation for the establishment of Aboriginal research methodologies. In addition to this key example, several other Indigenous methodologies were provided to contextualise my own approach.

Central to my Wiradjuri methodology is the concept of yindyamarra, which Wiradjuri elders tell us means to act with respect and 'to go slow and think about what you're doing' (Dyirribang, Simpson & Rush 2016, 0:46). This notion of respect has guided this research and underpins the seven principles that make up Yindyamarra Winhanganha. These principles were explored in this chapter through seven related case studies; they show Yindyamarra Winhanganha to be a culturally safe and appropriate way to frame this research in order to reclaim south-east Aboriginal culture and knowledge, therefore contributing to the emancipation and liberation of the south-east. This chapter sets up the chapter discussing Koori Kinship Theory, in which a culturally specific way of understanding the world is applied to this research and its construction.

3. KOORI KINSHIP THEORY

3.1. Introduction

> One of the tasks of culture is to organise the relations of human beings to one another. This is done by means of the social structure and the moral, ritual and economic customs by and in which that structure functions. But another task of culture is to organise the relation of man to his environment.
>
> —Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) (1931, p. 32)

This chapter establishes the concept of Koori Kinship Theory. This concept is based on the south-east kinship system and understood as a localised relational ontology. The south-east kinship system unites the region through shared worldviews, relationships and epistemologies, and as such has been used a framework for this research. In this way, Koori Kinship Theory has been applied to this research as a culturally specific living archiving system, aligning with Indigenous research methodologies (see Chapter 2). I first outline Aboriginal kinship, drawing on the clan or moiety systems to understand its role within south-east communities. As kinship is a complex social system unique to each community, I provide five case studies to explain its influences and importance. These case studies help frame Koori Kinship Theory and how it has been used to contribute to the continuation of south-east relationships and knowledges. Acknowledging the help of Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM (Wiradjuri), I describe how I have used Koori Kinship Theory to construct this research. I then explain the research benefits of Koori Kinship Theory.

It is important to remember that within the south-east, knowledge of kinship has been deeply affected by colonisation and, historically, research in this area has been conducted by anthropologists. As such, I work mainly with kinship as described by non-Indigenous researchers and observers; however, throughout my research I have processed these sources through the Community Advisory Committee (see Chapter 2)

and added Indigenous voices to contextualise the findings. Koori Kinship Theory and its importance are examined in regard to cultural practices through historical documentation and case studies, both underpinned by community commentary. I established Koori Kinship Theory to sit alongside other Indigenous research knowledge systems, theories and models, and it is employed here to explain the research framework, including how the research has been conceived, structured and presented. This chapter follows on from Methodology and leads into Mumala, the first generation of artists, represented by girran.girran (broad shields) and marga (parrying shields).

3.2. Kinship and moiety system

Kinship is an integral part of Aboriginal worldviews, methodologies and epistemologies. Kinship not only establishes and maintains community, but determines wider relationships to country, including to plants and animals, sites and stories, ancestors and actions, to the past and future. Although kinship systems operate differently throughout Australia, all communities are connected by these systems. Acknowledged for his work on kinship and establishing social anthropology in Australia (Cowlishaw 1988, p. 65), anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1931) found Aboriginal kinship to be 'an integral and essential part of the social organisation' (p. 95). He described its effect on country:

> The strong local solidarity, which is the most important thing in the social life of the Australians, is correlated with a very strong bond between the local group and its territory. There is an equally strong and permanent association between the territory and the animals and plants that are found on it. It is this intimate association of a group of persons with a certain stretch of country, with its rocks and waterholes and other natural features, and with the natural species that are abundant in it, that provides the basis of that totemism … that is so widespread and so important in the Australian culture. (p. 32)

One of the first levels of kinship is the moiety system. The term 'moiety', originating from the Latin word for 'half', became a western anthropological term in 1938 when

it was defined by Australian anthropologist Adolphus Peter Elkin (1891–1979) (1945), who used it to describe a tribe that is divided into two groups, each identified by a totem (pp. 82–86). Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908) (1904) noted the prevalence of the moiety system across Australia: 'It may be laid down as a general rule that all Australian tribes are divided into two moieties' (p. 88). Within the moiety system, the world is perfectly divided into two. People, plants, animals, elements and all that exists within the known and unknown worlds are bound by and belong to a dual classification system. The moiety system plays a major role in relations, determining families and their place within communities and country. Elkin (1945) described moieties, and their connection to both community and country, as amounting to

> a division and classification of man and all natural phenomena which are of any interest to man, under one system. In this scheme, human beings are not separated from natural species and objects, but grouped with them. Thus the moiety, clan or other group includes not only a certain number of men and women, but also certain natural species and objects. (p. 184)

Rirratjingu academic and cultural leader Raymattja Marika (cited in The Living Knowledge Project 2008) similarly stresses the importance of the moiety system in terms of Yolŋu connections to country and culture in north-east Arnhem Land:

> In the Yolŋu worldview there are two moieties, one is Yirritja and the other is Dhuwa. They are two halves of one whole. Our view of the world is holistic. All knowledge is interconnected. Art is connected to songs and songs are connected to people. People are also connected through songlines and stories. Stories are connected to art and art is connected to country and land through clans and totems. Everything in our world is linked to all these things. Our Yolŋu worldview consists of all these things. (para. 1)

After compiling 50 kinship systems from across Australia (excluding Tasmania), Radcliffe-Brown (1931) summarised that 12 of these occupied the south-east region

(p. 34). Although relying on other peoples' fieldwork, his research is widely recognised (Rose, James, & Watson 2003, p. 18) and his typology 'or rather, a simplification of it, has been the standard for some 80 years' (Keen 2013, p. 1). Radcliffe-Brown's (1931) study is employed in this research as a useful way of considering multiple kinship systems across the region and their interrelatedness.

Radcliffe-Brown (1931) determined that the Murray–Darling Basin nations maintained a mutual two-class moiety system. He grouped these nations into five types: the Tjapwurong Type, the Wati-wati Type, the Bakandji Type, the Ngarigo Type, and the Woeworung Type. 'Tjapwurong Type … includes the western part of Victoria and a small part of South Australia east of the Murray River' (p. 52). Today we would recognise this region as including the Djab wurrung, Jardwadjali and Bindjali nations. Radcliffe-Brown noted:

> The whole area would seem to have possessed the same type of social organisation, of which the different accounts are unsatisfactory and somewhat confused. There were two matrilineal moieties with the names Krokidj and Kamadj, or phonetic variants of these. (p. 52)

The Wati-wati Type

> includes a number of small tribes on the Murray River and extending some way up the Murrumbidgee River … The best known tribes are the Karin or Kerinma, the Laitju-laitju, Tatati or Tati-tati, Waka-waka, Mati-mati, Wati-wati, Wamba-wamba and Baraba-baraba. (p. 53)

He found that in this region 'some of these tribes, and possibly all of them, had matrilineal moieties, with the same names, Makwara and Kilpara, as in the next area to be described' (p. 53). This next area was the Bakandji Type, which

> includes the country on both sides of the Darling River from its junction with the Murray to about Bourke. It is characterised by the matrilineal dual division with the moiety names Kilpara and Makwara, and matrilineal totemic clans. (p. 54)

The far south-east, where Murray–Darling tableland country meets the Great Dividing Range, was described by Radcliffe-Brown as the Ngarigo Type, which is made up of 'three tribes, the Ngarigo, the Wolgal and the Yaitmathang' (p. 54). These tribes 'were divided into matrilineal moieties named after the eaglehawk and the crow, the moieties being subdivided into matrilineal totemic clans' (p. 55). The Kulin nation he classified as the Woeworung Type:

> This area of Victoria, from Port Phillip to the Murray River seems to have contained seven tribes, the Woeworung, Bunwurung or Bunurong, Wudjawurung, Djadjawurung, Tagunwurung and Bangerang … These tribes had patrilineal moieties named after the eaglehawk and the crow. (p. 55)

Kinship remains an integral part of Aboriginal worldviews. Wiradjuri academic Lynette Riley (cited in NCCC 2014) explains that within a Wiradjuri worldview the two moieties are known as Dilbi and Kupathin, describing the first level of kinship, where

> people and the environment are split into these two halves. Each half is a mirror image of the other, representing land, air, water and geographical features. To understand the whole universe these two mirror images must come together. (0:21)

Radcliffe-Brown (1931) similarly found that 'in parts of the Kamilaroi tribe the first is Kupatin, and the second is Dilbai' (p. 57), which correlates with Riley's neighbouring Wiradjuri moiety system. In this way, the dual moiety system is understood as a prevailing concept in the south-east region.

3.2.1. Eaglehawk and Crow

As highlighted by Radcliffe-Brown (1931), south-east moieties are often represented by the Eaglehawk, or the wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*), and the Crow, which, considering habitation, we can assume is the Australian raven (*Corvus coronoides*). Connecting the sky and the land, these two birds are deeply embedded in countless creation narratives and have significant influence across the region. Lorimer Fison (1832–1907) and Howitt (1880/1991) commented:

> [South-east nations] were bound together by the great class divisions of Eaglehawk and Crow. It mattered not from how distant localities two men might be, their speech might be unintelligible to each other, their status of family and their customs might have marked variance, yet the common bond of class and 'totem' was a brotherhood which they would not fail to acknowledge. (p. 233)

Referencing a Mr Bulmer from northern Victoria, Robert Brough Smyth (1830–1889) (1878) documented the unequivocal supremacy of the Eaglehawk and Crow moiety system and its influence on personal relationships:

> The blacks of the Murray are divided into two classes, the Mak-quarra or Eagle, and the Kil-parra or Crow. If the man be Mak-quarra, the woman must be Kil-parra. A Mak-quarra could not marry a Mak-quarra nor a Kil-parra a Kil-parra. The children take their caste from the mother, and not from the father. The Murray blacks never deviate from this rule. A man would as soon marry his sister as a woman of the caste to which he belongs. He calls a woman of the same caste Wurtoa (sister). (vol. 1, p. 86)

It should be noted that not all south-east nations feature the dual moiety of Eaglehawk and Crow. In some instances, as noted by Radcliffe-Brown and others, there was insufficient information recorded on the specifics of the kinship system, while other nations operated under a different kinship system. Two key groups in the south-east that are relevant to Radcliffe-Brown's research are the Ngarrindjeri of the Lower Murray in South Australia and the Gunai of the Gippsland region in eastern Victoria. Both these groups work with a 'four lines of descent' system, which is discussed later in this chapter.

3.2.2. Complementary not oppositional

The relationship between the Eaglehawk and Crow has often been recorded through a western lens as one of difference and conflict, a dichotomy of positive and negative. Western ideological and hierarchical tropes stereotype the eaglehawk as 'noble' and

the crow as 'villainous'. This seemingly simple framework needs to be understood for its complexity. Smyth (1878) found that in the creative yet tempestuous relationship between the two, 'the Crow took every possible advantage of his nobler foe, the Eagle; but the latter generally had ample revenge for injuries and insults'. However, 'out of their enmities and final agreement arose the two classes, and thence a law governing marriages amongst these classes' (vol. 1, p. 424). This dynamic relationship, the bond between moiety ancestors and their descendants, is reaffirmed by Nhunggabarra elder Uncle Tex Skuthorpe (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006):

> The only difference between a person of the Crow totem and the bird … is that the crow (animal) was one of those who broke the law at the time of creation. Therefore it was punished and had to remain in animal form. The Crow (person) was, on the other hand, rewarded for having obeyed the law. (p. 44)

Ngiyampaa cultural leader Brad Steadman (cited in Rose, James & Watson 2003), from Brewarrina in western NSW, is critical of the concept that moiety and kin relationships are oppositional. He argues:

> Scholars working with Ngiyampaa people simply did not have this level of knowledge; they did not understand the system of differentiation, and nor were they looking for a system that could both differentiate and connect, depending on context. (p. 16)

By combining existing texts with zoological data, Mieke Blows (1975) interpreted Radcliffe-Brown's understanding of a more holistic connection, positing 'the relationship between eaglehawk and crow as one of contrast'. The relationship between moieties, Blows argued, emerges as one of 'antagonism mixed with friendship' (p. 25).

Steadman (cited in Rose, James & Watson, 2003) explains the Eaglehawk and Crow's relationship as dependent, as evidenced in country:

> The way to understand anything is in its relationships. Relationships are connective. An example is the web of connections within which the Manara Hills are situated.

> 'Totem' connections are Eaglehawk (wedge-tailed eagle) and Crow, with Eaglehawk being situated at the north-east end of the hills and Crow at the south-west end of the hills. A story of their interactions connects the Hills with other sites across Ngiyampaa and Barkandji country … Ngiyampaa and Paakantji (Barkandji) people come together in these hills, with Ngiyampaa coming in from the east and Paakantji coming in from the west. Members of both groups have rights and responsibilities here, and experience a sense of connection when being there. (p.61)

Steadman advocates for an epistemology founded in the contrast between sameness and difference, a concept he terms 'parallel tracking', or a 'system of relations' of 'sameness' and 'difference' (p. 16) running in parallel, where one cannot be understood without the other but 'movement between the two brings greater understanding, like dialogue between people' (p. 67).

This worldview confirms the concepts of kinship as described by both Marika (cited in The Living Knowledge Project 2008) and Riley (cited in NCCC 2014), who describe a coming-together of two halves. The two moieties can likewise be understood as two parallel tracks to follow. Marika sees Indigenous knowledge as interconnected:

> Everything is integrated, science, language, culture, law, they're all integrated, whereas in the non-Aboriginal worldview all these things are taught separately. Science is taught differently, language is taught differently, art is too, they are all taught in their own components. For Yolŋu, in the Yolŋu worldview everything is interconnected and interrelated in a holistic way. (para. 5)

Western anthropologists have failed to understand the complexity of kinship systems, as evidenced in the simplistic interpretation of conflict between the Eaglehawk and Crow. Botswanan academic Bagele Chilisa (2012) encourages the critique of these 'stereotyped findings', which 'also reflect resistance from the colonised because the researcher is unable to access the realities of the communities' experiences' (p. 115).

3.3. Subclasses

The subsequent level of kinship has been termed by anthropologists as the 'subclass system'. The subclasses both complement the moiety system and, like the moiety system, are balanced within a dual male/female system. The subclass system can also stand alone in nations without the moiety system. Howitt (1904) explained:

> The progressive alteration of the two-class organisation has been in two divergent directions. In one the classes have been again segmented, producing four subclasses in certain parts of Australia, and eight in other parts by still further segmentation. (p. 90)

For Warlpiri people in Central Australia, an eight-part classification system exists, as explained by anthropologist Howard Morphy (2000):

> The importance of subsections in religious and artistic life varies across Australia. In much of Central Australia subsections are associated with particular dreaming tracks and hence the body of ancestral law associated with them. (p. 65)

A four-class system is prevalent within many south-east nations, including Wiradjuri, Wongaibon, Kurnu, Muruwari, Baranbinya, Wayilwan, Yuwaalaraay and Kamilaroi. In these nations, Radcliffe-Brown (1931) found that 'there are four sections with the names Ipai, Kambu, Mari and Kabi, with feminine forms Ipatha, Butha, Matha and Kabitlia [but] the articulation of the sections with the kinship system is not the same in some parts of this area', although is mutually understandable (p. 57). In other south-east nations, subclass systems were in operation under the dual moiety system, although in some instances, Radcliffe-Brown pointed out, there was limited research. Working in the northern Murray–Darling Basin, Howitt (1904) cited with 'certainty' the 'two-class [moiety] systems with those having four subclasses' (p. 104).

The four-class system provides the mechanisms for groups such as Ngarrindjeri and Kurnai to operate without a moiety system, and to relate to and engage with groups who have the moiety and/or class systems, enabling trade, ceremonial links and cultural dialogues.

3.4. Enduring kinship

Although the social and cultural fabric of the south-east was severely disrupted by colonisation, elements of kinship continue. Within the region the presence and influence of the Eaglehawk and Crow and the subclasses remain in different communities to varying degrees. Contemporary kinship systems are still central to Aboriginal communities. According to Morphy (2000),

> the web of kinship which spreads across huge areas of south-east Australia forms a space mapped by the relationships between people, creating places where people can feel welcome and be part of a network of reciprocity. (p. 60)

In her research on the persistence of kinship relationships in Melbourne, Diane Barwick (1963) found that kinship systems had continued and had significantly shaped the urban community. She found that they were in operation on a daily basis, as witnessed in marriages, relationships, leadership issues and where people chose to live.

Speaking about the Aboriginal community in Sydney, Larissa Behrendt (Eualeyai/ Kamilaroi) (2006) describes the 'tight-knit kinship and family networks that exist there, reinforcing traditional ties'. She tells how Sydney now 'consists of clusters of Aboriginal communities in La Perouse, Redfern, Marrickville, Mount Druitt, Penrith and Cabramatta' and how 'family and kinship networks help tie these separated enclaves together' (p. 7).

Riley (cited in NCCC 2014) reflects on this kinship continuum:

> If I arrive in town today and I don't know a person, once I find out who has the correct kinship alignment to me, it means that I am automatically granted accommodation and food. But once I take that offer, I am now obligated to pay them back. So it starts to set up a system of responsibilities and obligations to other people that you're expected you will pay back. That obligation may not come back to you from me, it may actually come back from someone in my family. But the obligation has now been set. (1:55)

Brabrawooloong/Gunnai artist and elder Ray Thomas (b.1960) (cited in Edmonds 2007) provides another key example:

> Even with, I guess, the young people, they don't realise that they live a 'semi-traditional' lifestyle in the sense of the family structure, the extended family, who they knock around with. It's mainly all your cousins, the first cousins, and that, and you've got the extended family, and you meet at the grandmother's house or the grandparents' house. That's the matriarchal or patriarchal meeting place and there's a close kinship, family kinship thing and a lot of them don't realise that they are still living a 'traditional' type of lifestyle. (p. 300)

3.4.1. Case studies

These enduring kinship relationships are demonstrated across the south-east region. The following case studies will demonstrate how these concepts have remained active within communities, providing guidance and a foothold for cultural knowledge to continue. These examples contribute to and activate Koori Kinship Theory.

3.4.1.1. *Case study: Woollarawarre Bennelong*

One of the first cross-cultural engagements in Australia was constructed within a kinship system by the Wongal leader Woollarawarre Bennelong (c.1764–1813). After being kidnapped in 1789 by the British on the north shore of Sydney Harbour and held hostage, Bennelong became a mediator between the Eora and the colonists. In an attempt to either win favour or to maintains his own worldview, Bennelong called Governor Arthur Phillip (1738–1814) 'biyanga' (father), and Judge-Advocate David Collins (1756–1810) and other senior British officers 'babunna' (brother). Lieutenant Watkin Tench (1758–1833) (1793/1998) reported that not only did Bennelong called Phillip biyanga but also gave or shared his name of Woollarawarre, stating that as 'a mark of affection and respect to the governor, he conferred on him the name of Wolarawaree, and sometimes called him Been-èn-a (father), adopting to himself the name of governor'. Tench wrote that 'this interchange [was] a constant symbol

of friendship among' the Eora (chapter 5, p. 35). Although we will never completely understand Bennelong's motivation, this action demonstrates his worldview and highlights the importance and adaptability of Koori kinship systems.

3.4.1.2. *Case study: Kamilaroi names*

In some parts of NSW, families took on the names of the four-class system. Howitt (1904) argued that in Kamilaroi country 'the pastoral settlers … must from early times have known of the existence of the four subclass names [as it was] common for an Aboriginal to be addressed by the name proper to him or herself' (p. 103).

Kamilaroi names such as Hippi and Cubby, spelt Ipai and Kubbi by Howitt (1904, p. 266) and Ipai and Kabi by Radcliffe-Brown (1931, p. 57), continue today as surnames. In the Boggabilla and Toomelah community, the local arts cooperative, Euraba Artists and Papermakers, includes artists and workers such as Paul Hippi and Donald Cubby. Similarly, within the Wiradjuri community, Murray is understood to be a derivation of Murri/Mari, as recorded by Howitt (p. 266) and Radcliffe-Brown (p. 57).

Within these families there is awareness that their surnames are 'old' Aboriginal names, but many are often unaware, unable or unwilling to provide the meaning or origin. Although the currency of these names has altered, usage has remained within the community, reminding many that they come from an 'old' lineage with rich and complex ties to each other and to place. Elkin (1954) commented on this adaptation, describing how many Aboriginal people had 'woven station activity and certain European goods into their social and economic organisation and into their psychology without upsetting the fundamentals of their social behaviour or belief' (p. 324).

3.4.1.3. *Case study: Eaglehawk and Crow*

The use of the pseudonym 'Eaglehawk and Crow' for the 1974 protest letter (Widders et al.) as both a symbol of cultural authority and tool of political leverage demonstrates

the currency of the moiety system. This powerful open letter, written on behalf of the wider Indigenous community, challenged AIATSIS and its anthropologist members to become more respectful and responsive to research (see Chapter 2). The cultural importance of the Eaglehawk and Crow pseudonym enabled the writers to reject 'the role of passive subject matter' (p. 4).

3.4.1.4. *Case study: Wirad'journi*

In her 2006 work *Wirad'journi*, Wiradjuri dancer and choreographer Vicki Van Hout (b.1968) provides a key example of employing the kinship system in a creative work. *Wirad'journi* is Van Hout's first full-length work, inspired by the Wiradjuri four-class kinship system, and within it dancers use their bodies, linking arms, to create a physical network representing kinship in motion. Van Hout (2012) describes the work as 'a complex mathematical equation through spatial floor patterns and with the use of a series of rhythmic structures' (para. 3). Van Hout (cited in Sydney Stage 2006) explains her motivation:

> *Wirad'journi* is both a journey of discovery for myself, being a Wiradjuri descendant, and a more general look at the way we currently identify ourselves as Australians. In this work I have attempted to bring the idea of Indigenous kinship laws of the past and apply them to relationships of the present.

3.4.1.5. *Case study: contemporary south-east terms*

Kinship terms continue to define Aboriginal communities. When first meeting someone within a community context, establishing a relationship is paramount, whether through family or acquaintances. Titles such as 'Aunty' and 'Uncle' are constantly used, along with 'brother', 'sister' and 'cousin', out of respect and in order to re-create, define and strengthen social networks. These new ways of keeping old connections strong conforms to the descriptions provided by anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown (1931), who explained:

> So far as Australian tribes are concerned it can be laid down as definitely proved that the kinship terminology of a tribe is an integral and essential part of the social organisation. At every moment of the life of a member of an Australian tribe his dealings with other individuals are regulated by the relationship in which he stands to them. (p. 95)

For Opaskwayak Cree researcher Shawn Wilson (2008), such terminology 'demonstrates an epistemology where the relationship with something (a person, object or idea) is more important that the thing itself' (p. 73). Wilson goes on to suggest that through these relationships we become closer:

> By reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share. And this bringing things together so that they share the same space is what ceremony is about. (p. 87)

These five case studies show how kinship has not only endured but has grown to accommodate contemporary situations. These examples collectively create a sense of how kinship systems—their framework, symbology and embedded epistemology—can be used to inform and construct new realities, creative works and knowledges while continuing age-old practices.

3.5. Koori Kinship Theory and Murruwaygu

South-east kinship systems as an Indigenous research theory is best understood as a model of relational ontology. Chilisa (2012) explains that 'in a relational ontology, the social reality that is investigated can be understood in relation to the connections that human beings have with the living and the nonliving' (p. 20). She draws on her own Southern African understanding, known as ubuntu, which proposes the principle 'nthu, nthu ne banwe' or 'I am we; I am because we are; we are because I am' (p. 109). Chilisa argues that within Indigenous worldviews 'people are beings with many relations and many connections. They have connections with the living and the nonliving, with land,

with the earth, with animals, and with other beings' (pp. 20–21), defining the shift in worldviews as 'an emphasis on an I/We relationship as opposed to the western I/You relationship with its emphasis on the individual' (p. 21). In this process Chilisa advocates for relational knowledge to build on and privilege community knowledge and not simply the individual researcher.

In her study of changing relatedness in the Wiradjuri community of Peak Hill in NSW, Belinda Burbidge (2015) found Wiradjuri relational ontology present in 'contemporary Wiradjuri totemic beliefs' (p. 426); this 'Wiradjuri intersubjectivity … includes both human and non-human relatedness' (p. 424). Burbidge references Katie Glaskin's (2012) research with Bardi and Jawi nations from Western Australia, who characterise personhood 'as an ontology of embodied relatedness' (p. 298). Glaskin explains:

> This embodied relationality encompasses not just people, but places, species and ancestral beings; it is a *relationship* between persons and places regarded as consubstantial, and that has consequences for how people, and people and country, are linked through space and time. (p. 298; emphasis in original)

Wilson (2008) similarly proposes that a 'shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality)' (p. 7; emphasis in original). He explains the importance of 'accountability to relationships [which] can be put into practice through choice of research topic, methods of data collection, form of analysis and presentation of information' (p. 7). Chilisa (2012) also encourages Indigenous researchers to 'make use of social networks in designing studies' (p. 111).

Following Wilson's and Chilisa's definitions of relational ontology, and building on the principles of Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking), I employ Koori kinship in this research as a specific south-east relational ontology theory that I call Koori Kinship Theory. Under a Koori Kinship Theory model, the research is organised

within the region's social structure of both the dual moiety system, referencing the Eaglehawk and Crow, and the related four-class subsystem. Within my research I have elected to work with two pairs of artists or artforms over four distinct generations or periods. Represented by the Eaglehawk and Crow, the pairs of artists or artforms are related and a synergy exists between their works; the four generations represent the four subclasses, collectively bringing together a variety of art mediums and bridging periods from pre-contact to today to tell a unique Koori story of inherited practice.

Within a Wiradjuri worldview the Eaglehawk is known as maliyan and the Crow is waagan, while unfortunately the Wiradjuri terms for the subclasses have been difficult to recover. Uncle Stan was unable to provide me with terms for the four subclasses; however, he suggested the masculine family terms of 'mumala' (grandfather), 'babiin' (father), 'wurrumany' (son) and 'warunarrung' (grandson) as appropriate alternatives. These terms reassert the cultural lineage between men, as highlighted by the research, and support the interconnectedness of the four pairs. The process of working with new terms to understand old systems, as demonstrated with the above case studies, is part of the worldview we adopt in order to continue our relationships. In this way mumala, babiin, wurrumany and warunarrung are like the terms 'Aunty' and 'Uncle'. This process is significant. It creates a layered way of understanding history and culture, while for the Koori community it is important to generate a living cultural memory for the past, our ancestors and our traditions. Based on the cyclical pattern of kinship systems, these terms are interchangeable and regenerative and will continue to cycle, as they always have, with one generation of artists building on the one before while nurturing future generations.

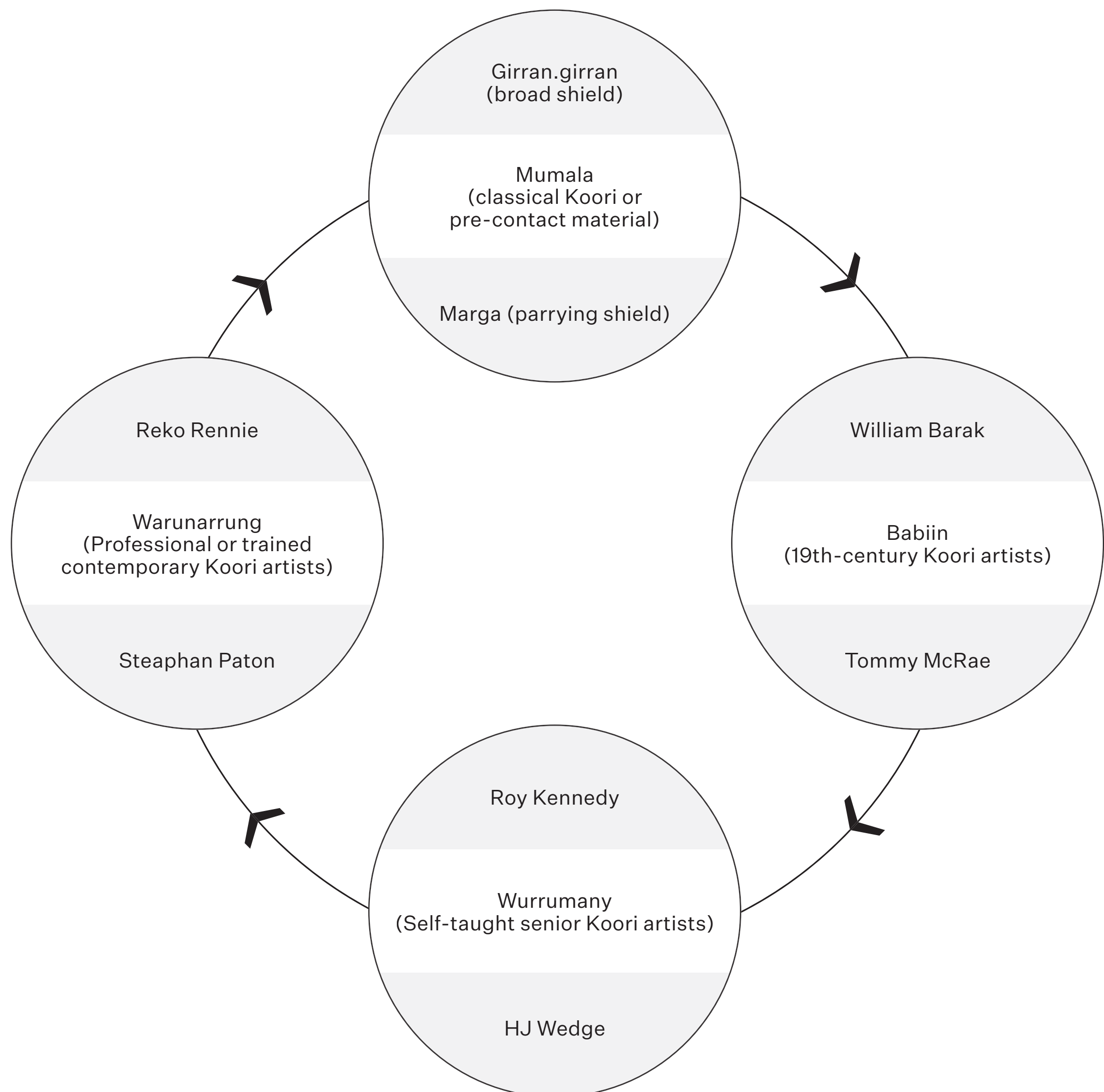
Uncle Stan's revised conceptualisation of the kinship system sits comfortably with the framework that Marika (cited in The Living Knowledge Project 2008) describes as:

> Yirritja and Dhuwa are a bit like ying and yang. They fit together perfectly. Everything in Yirritja and Dhuwa is connected. For example, Yirritja and Dhuwa

> intermarry into each other and vice versa. Everything in the land is Yirritja and Dhuwa. Yothu-yindi and märi-gutharra are the two main relationships for Yirritj and Dhuwa. Märi and gutharra means grandmother and grandchild relationship. Yothu and yindi means mother and child relationship. (para. 3)

Within this research the four subclasses represent distinct generations:

1. Mumala (grandfather)—Classical Koori or pre-contact material
2. Babiin (father)—19th-century Koori artists
3. Wurrumany (son)—Self-taught senior Koori artists
4. Warunarrung (grandson)—Professional or trained contemporary Koori artists



These four pairs have been selected as they best represent the four distinct periods within south-east history. They are representatives of their generations. In *A hundred years war* Peter Read (1988) outlined four cycles of Wiradjuri history, starting with a brief introduction to Wiradjuri pre-contact history, through to a period he called 'Recovery'. Read's way of understanding regional history has been influential in designing this research. The four pairs provide a means to visually compare and contrast, thereby helping to identify a clear cultural tradition and allowing appreciation for the massive change the south-east has endured.

Using the Wiradjuri terms mumala, babiin, wurrumany and warunarrung, the Koori Kinship Theory model is built on the concept of inheritance. However, it is important to understand kinship within an Aboriginal relational system of 'we' and not within the western system of 'I'. Instead of being a family tree–like structure where the system is based on the individual, Koori Kinship Theory is cyclical, perpetually rotating through the four subclasses. Through this process the system simultaneously grows with each generation while re-informing itself time and again. This is not to suggest that one generation can only be informed/influenced by the generation that preceded it. As within any family structure, influences come from all generations: parents, grandparents and great-grandparents play a role. These intergenerational influences are highlighted within each chapter of this thesis and discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. It is important to note that the four generations are also a framework for understanding the development of the south-east region, and that between each generation there are bridges and go-betweens. For instance, we know that 19th-century Koori master artists William Barak (c.1824–1903, Wurundjeri) and Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901) made both shields and other classic forms alongside their contemporary art practice. Similarly, we know that trained contemporary artists Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero) and Reko Rennie (b.1974, Kamilaroi) have knowledge of carving practices.

Kinship systems also relate to the art object itself. Shields, for example, were understood as part of kinship by virtue of their material. Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918) (1905/2005) described how 'spears, boomerangs, clubs, spear-levers, shields, etc., may belong to either phratry, according to the kind of tree from which they have been cut' (p. 93). He went on to state that an object's kinship 'is also sometimes determined through the owner of the weapon in question' (p. 93). Morphy (2000) also identified the link between kinship and art:

> Principles of kinship are pervasively reflected in the practice and symbolism of Aboriginal art. They may focus society on groups of people linked together by descent—clans whose members hold rights in paintings in common … In Aboriginal Australia art maps onto kinship: it follows the contours of relationships among people just as it traces the relationships of the ancestral being to land. (pp. 66–67)

Therefore, not only does Koori Kinship Theory provide an organisational structure for *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, but the prevalence of kinship systems in artmaking practices justifies the use of this model in this research.

3.6. Koori Kinship Theory research benefits

The Koori Kinship Theory framework supports a number of research outcomes specific to the rationalisation of an Aboriginal art history. These include a solid structure for the research, a decolonising culturally specific worldview, and the ability to generate dialogues between artists and artforms that represent a minimum of 250 years of practice. The notion of a direct and enduring relationship to everything, between the living and nonliving, has become the central framework for establishing *Murruwaygu*. A key example is witnessed in the inclusion of shields to represent one of the periods. Understanding shields as equal to known individual artists is an essential way of bridging the gap between Koori practices. Wilson (2008) describes this process of relationship-building as ceremony:

> The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. (p. 11)

Uncle Sandy Atkinson (Bangerang) (cited in Edmonds 2007) also understands the importance of objects:

> These artefacts and this artwork, that's what we've got to learn from, from the past where art was an important way of life, where art was … a recording of history, it was a responsibility that the community gave to a person to record its stories. Our stories, everybody's stories. (p. 1)

This process also draws 'from Indigenous knowledge systems to create methodological frameworks that capture the voices of community who value and practice an ontology of connectedness' (Chilisa 2012, p. 110). The importance of speaking as one voice is essential when highlighting the distinctions of an artistic movement or school.

Koori Kinship Theory presents the community or cultural group as a whole, building on the moiety concept that both Riley (cited in NCCC 2014) and Marika (cited in The Living Knowledge Project 2008) define as bringing the 'two halves of our holistic worldview' together. This not only refers to the two pairs within each generation in *Murruwaygu* but also to the relationship between the four subclass groups or generations, which in light of the impact of colonisation creates a positive system of loan and transference of both knowledge and cultural agency. That is, if any section of any group feels a deficit towards their cultural identity for whatever reason—a common feeling among many south-east communities—this knowledge will locate them within the group. This model is an accessible theory for community. Noonuccal (Quandamooka) and Bidjara academic Karen Martin (2003) identifies the democratic effect of Indigenous ontology: 'No one person or Entity knows all, but each has sets of knowledges to fulfil particular roles' (p. 9). In this way, this research theory can assist in the self-determination of south-east communities.

Conceptualising the group within the framework of Koori Kinship Theory also creates a harmony between the generations and places them within a trajectory or cycle of cultural knowledge, thus empowering them as individual artists and the community as a whole. Within this group of artists there is a real and strong affirmation of connectedness, through professional practice and peer support, family or kin ties, and an influence on practice or admiration of practice. Uncle Roy Kennedy (b.1934, Wiradjuri) cites McRae as an artist he identifies with, while Reko acknowledges the designs on shields from his region as a key influence on his practice. Chilisa (2012) proposes that the main outcome of relational ontology is 'communality, collectivity, social justice, human unity and pluralism' (p. 21). The conceptualisation of a specific south-east Aboriginal art practice as a body of communal knowledge in many ways sits in opposition to the western art world, which promotes the individual; this again returns to Chilisa's fundamental tension between 'we' versus 'I'. This is demonstrated in Chapter 7, where some intergenerational observations discovered during this research are highlighted. Yet this is not to say that individuals sacrifice their unique practice. Glaskin (2012) finds that 'one way of characterising personhood is as an ontology of embodied relatedness' (p. 298).

The process of developing a cultural curatorial framework for this research creates a logic that justifies the selection of artists and artforms. As with any selective research project, there is a risk that people or communities may feel overlooked, unrepresented or misrepresented, which may cause community concern or harm. Although the moiety and subclass framework does not enable every voice in the community to be heard, it does create a culturally based logic that attempts to address the key elements of south-east men's art practice in an effort to minimise potential harm.

It should be remembered, however, that operating within a community movement does not diminish the individual role and creativity of an artist. A key example of this can be seen with Tiwi artists from Melville Island off the coast of Arnhem Land. The Tiwi art

movement is known for using only four colours—red, yellow, black and white—applied as dots, stripes or blocks of colour and structured within a geometric framework. These principles define the movement without restricting it. Artists are celebrated for finding their own voice while working within these principles. Leading Tiwi artist Pedro Wonaeamirri (b.1974) exemplifies this with his individual practice that is both unique and conforms to the movement's principles (Jones & Peacock 2009). This concept is also evident in south-east shields. The designs inscribed on the shields adhere to a very specific cultural language of lines used to create chevrons, diamonds and squares, but the way these designs are executed reveals the individual artist's hand. Carol Cooper (2004b) describes the designs on the shields as 'infinitely variable … no two are exactly the same' (p. 81).

3.7. Generations of artists to establish a south-east school of art

Working within the kinship model sets up a specific curatorial structure that highlights the hallmarks of a school or praxis. This curatorial rational has been championed by Arrernte and Kalkadoon curator Hetti Perkins. Two major exhibitions curated by Perkins and presented by the AGNSW are *Papunya Tula: genesis and genius* (2000) and *Crossing country: the alchemy of western Arnhem Land art* (2004). Each of these landmark exhibitions looked at a regional style or school of art, often following families and/or masters, their apprentices and artistic relationships, while adhering to the notion that 'Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based upon relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability' (Wilson 2008, p. 11).

Papunya Tula: genesis and genius charted the Western Desert art movement, in particular the work of Pintupi artists from Kintore and Kiwirrkura, taking into account some of the pre-contact practices that directly inform the movement, such as ground or sand painting, the transition from scrap material to professional materials, and the progressive generations of key artists. Similarly, *Crossing country: the alchemy of western Arnhem Land art* mapped the art movement driven by Kuninjku artists, tracking the origins of the

movement from the first works collected in the region to the development of large-scale bark paintings, and highlighting leading artists from each generation. In this way Perkins has achieved the Indigenous curatorial goal as described by Yamatji curator Stephen Gilchrist (2014), wherein we take 'symbolic and actual possession of the objects themselves and the social practices that accompany them' (p. 59).

These curatorial practices, which have shifted Australia's understanding of Aboriginal art and the way community art movements operate, have been instrumental in framing this research. Through these exhibitions Perkins has shown that although Aboriginal art is not looking towards the western cannon, artists are nonetheless developing and shaping their art movements and building their traditions. In this way, Aboriginal artists are not operating with different intentions, but working within a different framework.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter established Koori Kinship Theory as a localised relational ontology. I specifically developed this theory to provide a culturally appropriate way of constructing this research. Koori Kinship Theory is based on the continuation of knowledge through the maintenance of relationships, 'a system of responsibilities and obligations' (Riley, cited in NCCC 2014, 1:55). To contextualise this theory, I first introduced south-east kinship systems, detailing what they are and what they mean. By providing an overview of the way kinship systems work, western interpretations are also challenged and the moiety system is positioned within a south-east construct as a system of relations where one half cannot be understood without the other, but 'movement between the two brings greater understanding, like dialogue between people' (Rose, James & Watson 2003, p. 67). These dialogues were explored through five case studies that demonstrate how kinship continues in contemporary life. Importantly, these case studies provide frameworks for applying kinship to the structure of this research: the four generations of artists /artforms represent the four subclasses of the kinship system, while the pair of artists/ artforms within each generation represents the two moieties, the Eaglehawk and Crow.

This framework organises the next four chapters of the research, with Wiradjuri language terms provided by Uncle Stan categorising each period within a family structure: Mumala (grandfather), the first generation, represented by classical Koori or pre-contact material of girran.girran (broad shields) and marga (parrying shields); Babiin (father), the second generation, represented by 19th-century Koori artists William Barak and Tommy McRae; Wurrumany (son), the third generation, represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Roy Kennedy and HJ Wedge; and Warunarrung (grandson), the fourth generation, represented by professional or trained contemporary Koori artists Reko Rennie and Steaphan Paton.

Rather than trying to place south-east artists and their practices into the western canon, this research creates a dialogue through Koori Kinship Theory from a position within the culture, thereby better reflecting the complex worlds of these artists, the times they were and are living in, and the positions they have established through their practices.

This chapter follows on from Koori Kinship Theory, which established the framework of this research, and precedes Babiin, the second generation of artists, represented by 19th-century Koori artists Tommy McRae and William Barak.

4. MUMALA: GIRRAN.GIRRAN AND MARGA

4.1. Introduction

> For me, the shields or the symbols upon the shields represent identity. You can liken them to what we use now as titles for our houses. The lines, the colours, the carvings—they tell people who you are, and, more importantly, they tell people where you come from … These are all distinct to south-eastern Australia and would have been passed from generation to generation.
>
> —Rodney Carter (Dja Dja Wurrung/Yorta Yorta) (cited in MV 2000, p. 16)

This chapter profiles two types of south-east shields, the girran.girran, or broad shield, and the marga, or parrying shield, highlighting the importance of their engraved line designs. Shields are the foundation of this research; they form the first generation of artists, or Mumala (grandfather), within the *Murruwaygu* research kinship model (see Chapter 3). The key aims of this chapter are to provide an Aboriginal worldview of south-east shields and to demonstrate that individual shield-makers are artists. Within this framework, cultural material such as shields can be clearly understood as central to the maintenance of knowledge. In order to reframe our understanding of shields this chapter starts by introducing a rare creation narrative.

To understand the context of shield, it is useful to consider what museum collections mean to Aboriginal people—how we understand collections and, importantly, how we engage with them in order to honour the work of our ancestors. An outline is provided on the approach I have taken to researching shields, including a unique survey and visual analysis of south-east shields in national and international institutions, detailed descriptions of both broad and parrying shields, and an explanation of how I identified them.

Four significant case studies are included to demonstrate how shields can be traced, via their individual designs and mark-makings, to determine provenance and attribution. I then illustrate the variety of roles shields occupied historically, including within ceremony and performance as a way of challenging the concept of warfare in Aboriginal communities and the role of girran.girran and marga.

While prioritising both historical and contemporary Indigenous informants, and the objects themselves, this chapter relies on the limited secondary material dating from the 19th century, such as historical drawings and photographs. While challenging longstanding anthropological assumptions, this chapter demonstrates that south-east shields have important meanings within community and perform functions beyond their utilitarian purpose. For this chapter I rely heavily on Carol Cooper's leading research into south-east cultural material. This chapter follows on from Koori Kinship Theory, which established the framework of this research, and precedes Babiin, the second generation of artists, represented by 19th-century Koori artists Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901) and William Barak (c.1824–1903, Wurundjeri), whose practices emerged from the frontier.

4.2. South-east shields

Physically and conceptually, shields embody protection and are an important part of south-east culture. They are among a handful of objects that define and distinguish the region. Aldo Massola (1971) commented on the distinctiveness of south-east material culture, describing it as 'different to the extent that an ethnologist can immediately recognise any given object originating in this area' (p. ix). Generally, south-east shields are divided into two types—broad shields and parrying shields (Berndt, Berndt & Stanton 1993; Cooper 2018; Elkin 1962; Hemming 1990, p. 125; Howitt 1904; Massola 1963).

Both broad and parrying shields were often inscribed with highly ornate and intricately engraved designs that were periodically painted over in ochres for special occasions

such as ceremonies and performances (Beveridge 1889, p. 66). The technology, skill and time required to create shields highlight the special place they occupy within Koori artistic practices and theory, while their elegant designs demonstrate their cultural significance. William Scott (1844–n.d.) (1929), who along with his father had a close relationship with Worimi people, hinted at the way some objects were important:

> There was a distinct proprietary interest by individuals in certain things, particularly weapons. Each owned his favourite spears; clubs (cooterah); shield (cooreel); throwing-stick (purrahmirre); and boomerangs. These were sacred to the owner. (p. 14)

Museum curator and historian Carol Cooper (2015) affirms this prominence, describing south-east shields with their 'marks of fine tooling, incised linear designs or painted patterns of ochre and clay [as] among the great masterpieces of Aboriginal art' (p. 16). In this way, shields form the foundation of *Murruwaygu*, representing Mumala, or the grandfather generation.

The knowledge used to create both broad and parrying shields has been handed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. Throughout Australia all Aboriginal communities acknowledge that the foundations of culture were conceived with the instruction and/or actions of ancestors (Morphy 2000, p. 62). Although much knowledge has been damaged in the south-east through colonisation, one rare example of a creation narrative relating to material culture from NSW was collected and published by entomologist and amateur anthropologist Keith McKeown (1892–1952). McKeown was brought up in Wagga Wagga and worked in the irrigation industry in the surrounding Riverine district, meaning that 'most of the legends' published in his book *The land of Byamee* (1938) 'come from the Wiradjurie … and their allies' (p. xii). According to McKeown (1938), ancestral women who lived in the west 'where Yhi, the sun, goes down [were] highly skilled in the manufacture of weapons, which were so true and perfectly constructed' that in order to possess these 'perfect' objects men traded possum-skin cloaks with them (pp. 133–134). Based on the smattering of language

words within this narrative, it can be assumed that this creation narrative belongs to either Kamilaroi or Euahlayi, Wiradjuri's northern neighbours. (This position has been verified by Bernadette Duncan of Ban.gii, the Kamilaroi language development working group in Boggabilla.) Although recorded via a western lens, it is an important reminder of Aboriginal worldviews and helps to reframe Aboriginal cultural material within a complex web of knowledge relationships.

The role of cultural material in the south-east is acknowledged by Yorta Yorta elder Wayne Atkinson (cited in Keeler & Couzens 2010a), who tells us how 'all forms of knowledge, religious and philosophical beliefs of the community were handed down to the next generation' (p. 51) through objects, songs and all artforms, including significant items such as shields. Howard Morphy (2000) similarly notes the role of art as central to knowledge maintenance:

> Art is one of the ways in which relationships between people, place and the ancestral past are established and maintained. Art was created by ancestral beings as part of the process of the creation of landscape; paintings are both records of the creative acts of the ancestral beings and a manifestation of them. (p. 62)

The late Muruwari statesman Uncle Roy Barker Snr talked about the importance of the cultural knowledge he inherited from his father, Jimmie Barker (Muruwari), and his uncles at Brewarrina Mission in NSW. When describing his carved clubs, shields and boomerangs, Uncle Roy (cited in Campbelltown Arts Centre 2007) recalled how his uncles taught him 'to make these particular weapons and explained how they were used to survive in the vast open country of the rivers and plains' (p. 13). Although many creation narratives regarding the origin of cultural material remain largely unknown, the knowledge of how to create them, along with the ancestral connections they generate, has continued in the south-east thanks to extraordinary leaders such as Uncle Roy Barker.

Despite the impact of colonisation, people on Aboriginal missions in the south-east continued to make artefacts throughout the late 19th century. While these objects were created mainly for sale, they helped maintain 'a strong continuity in knowledge', meaning that 'information was handed down through the generations … with traditions persisting to the current day' (Cooper 2018, p. 208). Understanding the continuation of Aboriginal knowledges is central to this research.

4.3. Disarming the nations

Today, the majority of south-east cultural material is housed in museums, often not on display but in storage. Although it is unclear how many shields exist in museums, most collections were compiled as part of a 'salvage anthropology' operation; not for the benefit of Aboriginal people but for non-Aboriginal people to lament or legitimise the notion of the 'dying race'. For Aboriginal communities, institutions and collections continue to be problematic spaces. Cooper (2018) describes how objects in collections 'might be viewed with sadness, especially in the loss of their original owners' names and identities' (p. 220). The removal of cultural material echoes the removal of Aboriginal people from their country. In many ways, objects are colonial hostages.

Following the violent theft of the Gweagal shield in Kamay (Botany Bay) in 1770 (see Chapter 1), there are numerous early examples of cultural objects being stolen and trafficked: 'Even when objects were traded, Aboriginal people were being forced to give away cultural materials to survive' (Cooper 2018, p. 216). Cooper (1975) identifies 'grave robbery' as 'one likely method by which artefacts were obtained' (p. 8).

As in Sydney, the first collection of cultural material in Port Phillip (present-day Victoria) by the British involved violence and theft. Cooper (2018) tells how the British were dissatisfied with the Aboriginal unwillingness to exchange material, causing spears to be 'thrown and guns fired' (p. 213). The British later found and stole 'a number of spears, dresses, baskets etc.' (Murray & Cole 2001, p. 70). Cooper (cited

in NMA 2011) reveals that a significant Port Phillip collection now in the National Museum of Northern Ireland includes material stolen by the Von Stieglitz brothers after they had murdered Aboriginal people who had attacked settlers (Von Stieglitz n.d.). In the Orange district of NSW it was recorded that after a fight objects were scavenged and retained by a local settler family (Orange City Council 2012, p. 43). A shield held in the Museum Victoria collection (Figure 4.1) is recorded as having been 'taken in a fight between the Native Police and the Avoca Tribe at Creswick's Waterhole, July 1847' (Cooper 2004b, p. 81). Presumably the 'Avoca tribe' is the Dja Dja Wurrung, the traditional owners of the Avoca River and surrounding region in western Victoria.

FIGURE 4.1.
Parrying shield, early–mid 19th century, detail
Artist unknown, Dja Dja Wurrung, Southern Riverine, Australia
Wood; 11 x 89 x 8 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X001852
Image courtesy MV

Tom Griffiths (1996) described collecting as 'a form of hunting' (p. 19), and it is important to remember that for south-east communities, collections of cultural material are significant reminders of our frightening colonial reality. The 19th century amassing of south-east 'weapons' by anthropologists and enthusiasts is a potent symbol of the colonial project. Collecting objects in the midst of frontier violence had a dual effect: it both disarmed Aboriginal communities and portrayed Aboriginal culture as violent. Stripped of material culture, including shields, Aboriginal people were left without protection. These acts further weakened south-east communities and disabled resistance. In the Upper Murray region, the Protector, Edward Stone Parker (1802–1865)

(cited in Wrench & Lakic 1994), confirmed that when squatters were unable to 'indiscriminate[ly] slaughter' the evasive Aboriginals, they instead destroyed the camps, including 'spears and other weapons, opossum cloaks, blankets, baskets etc.' (p. 72). In Ngarrindjeri country, colonial authorities would often seize and destroy shields (Hemming 1990, p. 127), with mounted police using their horses to trample over shields, a scene that is captured by William Anderson Cawthorne (1824–1897) (Figure 4.2).

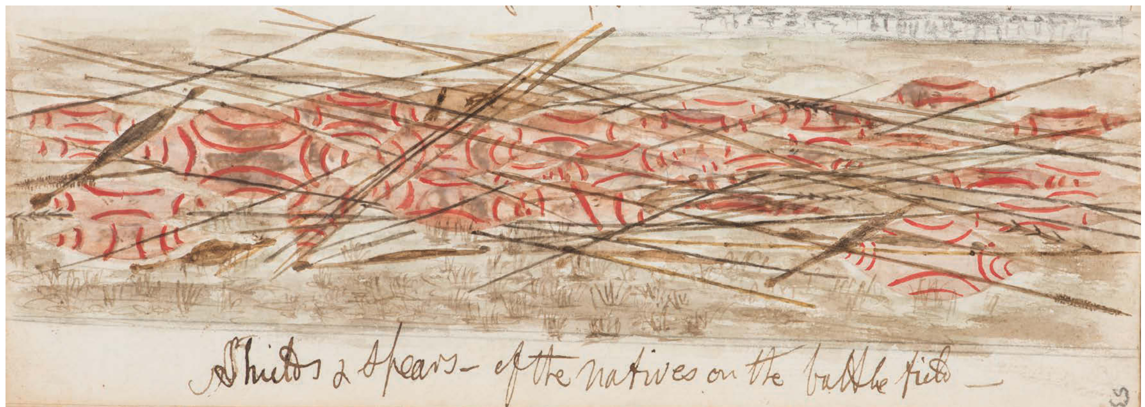


FIGURE 4.2.
Shields and spears of the natives on the battlefield, c.1844–1846
William Anderson Cawthorne, England, active Australia, 1824–1897
Watercolour on paper; 8.5 x 23 cm
Manuscript from William Anderson Cawthorne papers
SLNSW, A105/item 17, p. 53
Image courtesy SLNSW

This colonial tactic is understood by Uncle Bruce Pascoe (Bunurong/Yuin/Tasmanian) (2007) to be 'a significant and underrated aspect in this war' (p. 172), and he describes raids and the subsequent destruction of people's resources, including stone homes, food and important objects such as possum-skin cloaks. This indirect killing through the direct removal of objects is inextricably linked to museology. Countless south-east objects have been amassed with limited provenance and without any record of their maker, country or cultural origin. The silencing of objects and wilful suppression of individuals needs to be remembered when working with these objects. As a contemporary Koori researcher and artist, I am responsible to collections in order to reconstruct our past, connect with our ancestors and claim back what is ours—to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors.

4.4. Disarming the texts

Historical information describing how south-east shields were made, used and valued, and what they represent, is extremely rare. The available research, which 'did not begin in Australia until the second half of the 19th century' (Cooper 1981, p. 30), was recorded by non-Aboriginal explorers, missionaries, pastoralists, government officials and ethnographers, and is therefore dominated by western concepts that often framed Aboriginality within scientific theories of human evolution, race and migration—frameworks that contradict and dismiss Aboriginal worldviews. Isabel McBryde (1974) described the available ethnohistory as varying 'greatly in both quantity and quality, with tantalising omissions', written by authors lacking 'both the interest and expertise' (p. 6). Richard Mulvaney (1983) similarly characterised 'observers [as] biased by the opinions of the day, the individual and the intention of the documentation' (p. 17). One such example is Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929), who John Mulvaney (1989) described as

> a convinced Darwinian evolutionary biologist, who transferred what are now recognised to be simplistic and Eurocentric notions to the explanation of Aboriginal society [and whose] opinions added academic respectability to those racial dogmatists who assumed that all Aborigines would soon die out. (p. 119)

Such ignorance sits in direct contradiction to the popularity of collecting and displaying material culture, a process whereby objects were selected primarily for their aesthetic qualities. For a start, shields have been interpreted as an introduced technology. Thomas Worsnop (1821–1898) (1897), when attempting to explain the beauty and accuracy of Aboriginal weapons, implied that Aboriginal people had gained the knowledge from other supposedly more evolved cultures, such as 'Malay trepang fishers' (p. 138). Other cultural material studies from the south-east fall into this western ideology, including those of Barry Cundy (1989), K.H. Bennett (1887), Robert Etheridge (1893, 1894), Daniel Davidson (1936), and to a lesser extent Massola (1962). Even the authoritative text on the south-east (Smyth 1878) included craniometric research. But a key fault within these studies is their underlining argument of evolutionary theory determined

by migration and environment. According to Gillian Cowlishaw (1988), researchers operating 'within the framework of evolutionary theory' are working in a narrative where 'the major facts on the matter of race had already been decided' (p. 62). Migration theories are constantly reviewed based on updated Aboriginal occupation dates. Theories fluctuate between 40,000 years (Mulvaney 1981, p. 15) and 120,000 years (Pascoe 2014, p. 115). During these times Australia's environment has changed dramatically, including through ice ages and the extinction of megafauna (Gerritsen 2011).

Another failing is disregarding, or not acknowledging, the cultural importance of shields, seeing them as having existed only as utilitarian objects. In *A world that was: the Yaraldi of the Murray River and the Lakes, South Australia* (1993), by Ronald and Catherine Berndt and John Stanton, there are more than 600 pages detailing Ngarrindjeri culture, but only five sentences dedicated to Ngarrindjeri shields (pp. 88–89). Their study focused on the utilitarian role of the shield, despite the fact that Ngarrindjeri have a continuous history of making shields, which remain a key marker for Ngarrindjeri to express their identity. Limited research like this, contradictory to the collections themselves, is repeated throughout the south-east and speaks to a deep misunderstanding of our material culture.

Further, shields have been co-opted for other purposes. Collections are physical manifestations of western notions, as typified by the Pitt Rivers Museum collection in Oxford, UK. This stereotypical 19th-century collection attempts to illustrate human evolution through the development of cultural material. Its founder, Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers (1827–1900) (1927), believed that 'the evolution of culture-forms must be correlated to the history and evolution of race' (p. 4). Founded on western notions of evolution and migration, these theories actively deny Aboriginal beliefs, knowledge systems and sovereignty. They also fail to take into account why different nations have inherited and maintained their own unique styles, techniques and materials regardless of their neighbours' customs.

Jeremy Beckett (1988) described the 'construction of Aboriginality in Australia' as having been

> achieved through a variety of processes, in various places and at various levels of society, giving rise to a complex interaction between the loci of construction … The most striking line of tension may seem to lie between what Aboriginal people say about themselves and what others say about them. (p. 191)

As such, the works of both amateur and professional anthropologists, such as Pitt Rivers, Spencer, Cundy, Worsnop and their counterparts need to be interpreted with caution. My research aims to challenge and reinterpret their findings when discussing the line-work characteristics of south-east shields.

4.5. Shield research methodology

Uncle Sandy Atkinson (Bangerang) (cited in Edmonds & Clarke 2009) states: 'These artefacts and this artwork, that's what we've got to learn from, from the past where art was an important way of life' (p. 7). He describes art as 'a recording of history, it was a responsibility that the community gave to a person to record its stories. Our stories, everybody's stories' (p. 7). Following Uncle Sandy Atkinson's advice, and seeing shields as the foundation for south-east men's line-work, I have looked at the shields themselves in order to provide a more culturally aware understanding through an Aboriginal worldview. Mulvaney (1983) stated: 'The instructive potential of the collection is that the direct visual expression provides a more lasting and realistic record, than the interpretation through drawing and literary sources' (p. 45). Furthermore, conducting visual analysis can 'show that certain types of artefacts decorated by particular motifs were made and used in specific geographic areas', thus identifying a south-eastern style 'and within this total area further related, regional styles can be discerned' (Cooper 1991, p. 2). However, as no catalogue of south-east shields exists, the first stages of my research involved a major illustrated survey of south-east shields held within 19 major institutional collections at state, national and international levels, as well as community organisations. This process was aimed at rebuilding knowledge

of south-east shields and, in turn, of entire south-east practices. This research was self-funded or coupled with other projects, and so the scope of the survey was governed by opportunities and financial constraints.

To date, this process has encompassed over 400 south-east shields, the largest number ever surveyed and recorded. It should be noted that while the exact number of south-east shields in collections throughout the world is unknown, this survey represents the vast majority of south-east shields held in Australian state and national public collections. I have also considered some south-east shields in overseas collections via online images; however, as these objects were unable to be handled and therefore studied in detail, they have not been included in this research unless specifically mentioned.

The only comparable study of shields was conducted by Massola (1963), who included objects from five institutions: the Australian Museum and Macleay Museum in Sydney; South Australian Museum, Adelaide; Queensland Museum, Brisbane; and Museum Victoria, Melbourne. Massola importantly attempted to both categorise different styles of parrying shields and locate them on a map, acknowledging the issue of provenance: 'The provenance of the specimens in collections is correctly known in only a comparatively small number of cases' (p. 227). However, Massola did not look beyond the registration books and existing published information, and he included no visual analysis in order to group the shields based on defining characteristics. Massola also failed to comment on the exact number of shields surveyed; based on the distribution map he provides (p. 231), his research seems limited to 34 shields.

Another significant document is the internal report *The Murray-Darling Basin Aboriginal artefact collection of the NMA* by Cooper (1991), which detailed the relatively recent collections of south-east material at the NMA. Cooper provided the first analysis of the south-east region, including major language groups and townships, and importantly discussed regionally specific artforms, including styles, techniques and

designs—which have always been known within community. Like Massola, Cooper (1991) identified key obstacles:

> Precisely provenancing 19th and early-20th-century south-east Australian Aboriginal artefacts is not a simple task. No comprehensive collections like those made by Spencer or Thomson for Central and North Australia exist for this area. (p. 1)

My survey has been informed by Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking) and the principle of Dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuary-bu (talk straight, listen deeply and act respectably), and as a result has included the creation of detailed drawings of each shield surveyed. This process captures more detail than a photograph can and enables greater analysis, therefore allowing a deeper appreciation of the artist's hand (see Chapter 2). The survey has provided much knowledge, including the ability to recognise line-work as a key characteristic of Koori men's work, thus justifying shields as the foundation for this research. Presented here is the knowledge from this survey as it relates to line-work.

4.6. Research caveats

It should be noted that a number of factors disrupted my provenancing of shields to specific south-east artists and regions. These include trade, both within Aboriginal communities and by collectors and institutions, the ongoing lack of research of south-east cultural material, and the inevitability that some shields and objects do not fit neatly within the methodology.

South-east Aboriginal communities are known to have traded objects within the region and beyond (Cooper 1975, p. 9; McBryde 1984; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003, p. 90). Cooper (2018) sees '"the chain of connection" that overlaid the lives of Aboriginal people and their possessions through long-established trading routes [as an] essential ingredient' (pp. 205–206) to life in the south-east. Uncle Roy Barker Snr brought this to my attention early in the research when he stipulated how objects would have

only been traded or gifted between groups with relationships, extended families and/or ceremonial links. This means that if a shield is provenanced to a certain region, although the design may have not originated in that location, it would still relate deeply to the bearer, who may or may not be the maker of the object.

The south-east's strict trading relationships are evidenced in the movement of greenstone axe-heads from the renowned Woiwurrung Wil-im-ee Moor-ring (Mount William) quarry (Smyth 1878, vol. 1, p. 181). McBryde (1978b) has shown that Woiwurrung Wil-im-ee Moor-ring greenstone was used in specific parts of Victoria and NSW, and that although these communities had access to similar stone locally, they chose to trade objects for Woiwurrung Wil-im-ee Moor-ring greenstone. Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908) (1904) recorded a shield that was 'greatly valued because, as my informant said, it had "won many fights"' as being traded 'from the upper waters of the Murrumbidgee River' (pp. 719–720). Cooper (2004b) points out that this process illustrates how objects such as shields or greenstone could be 'viewed as having innate power' (p. 81).

Once collected, south-east material was again traded on a much larger scale between enthusiasts and institutions. This saw the dispersal of localised knowledge that today presents researchers with an enormous challenge (Cooper 1975, p. 13). As cultural objects such as shields were not viewed as individual works of art, many felt free to trade objects that appeared similar, as evidenced in early collections and associated publications that talk of 'rigidly' excluding 'duplicates' as they would 'serve no adequate purpose' (Spencer 1922, pp. 7–8). The survey component of this research aims to bring these disconnected collections back together.

Ongoing research into the south-east region, both within institutions and the academy, continues to be limited, with south-east material seemingly under-valued, under-studied and under-collected (Cooper 1981, p. 29). Ngemba/Kamilaroi artist

and academic Garry Jones (2013) describes current research opportunities 'as largely unknowable' (p. 237). McBryde (1978a) noted that in the south-east 'our anthropological records and ethnographic collections of items of material culture are least satisfactory' (p. 137), while Cowlishaw (1992) interpreted this issue as one of cultural authenticity, where communities in

> settled Australia [are] considered unworthy of serious anthropological consideration [because] they lacked the prestige attached to the classic fieldwork enterprise [and] the actual social lives of these groups was judged uninteresting. (p. 24)

This characterisation of the south-east region has long prevailed within Australian anthropology, as can be seen in this statement by Spencer (1922):

> Most unfortunately the opportunity was not taken in the early days, before the iron tomahawk had replaced the native stone axe, of bringing together a collection illustrative of implements in daily use amongst the Victorian tribes, and now, owing to the practical complete extinction of the tribes, it is, of course, impossible to secure them. (p. 7)

The continued lack of research into the south-east region generally has also hindered my research. Often my enquiry to an institution regarding its south-east collections was the only one it had ever received. A range of curatorial issues at such institutions also slowed down the process: incomplete files; lack of basic registration information, including dimensions and photographic documentation; and simple misunderstandings of what constitutes south-east materials. If a visit to an institution could be made, my research involved recording primary documentation, including photographs and dimensions. When requested by the institution, I have returned these records for its archives.

Massola (1963) described three 'recognisable' types of parrying shield: 'The crudest of these three types was the Mulka, and it appears to have been the original from which the other two evolved' (p. 231). However, there is still no descriptive catalogue

to identify south-east material, including shields. It was therefore necessary to develop standard terms of reference and a categorisation system relating to types of shields. Outlined below are basic descriptions of the two types of shields, broad and parrying, and their subgroups. These descriptions have developed as part of this research through surveying shields in collections.

It should be noted that although the majority of south-east shields can be categorised within these two main types and subsequent subgroups, there are exceptions that either sit between these categories or merge with another regional shield-type to the north or the west. In addition to the broad and parrying shields, a third type of shield exists, made from a lightweight timber. It is of a smaller oval format, with a curved face and inbuilt recessed handle, and was usually 'all painted in coloured designs' (Parker 1905, p. 124). This type of shield is common on the northern coast of NSW and becomes the dominant shield type in south Queensland, sometimes referred to as a gulmari shield. Variants extend into the desert regions of Central and South Australia and appear in many contemporary examples, such as the work of Joe Timbery (1912–1978, Bidjigal/Dharawal) from La Perouse Mission in Sydney. Because this shield is found in communities surrounding the south-east region, it is not part of this research.

4.7. Girran.girran (broad shields)

The term 'broad shield' describes a shield with a flat and broad face. Sometimes called 'spear shields' (Howitt 1904; Smyth 1878), they are commonly understood to have been used in the deflection of spears:

> Used skilfully, it protects all of the body from spears. Unless the point of a s pear happens to strike the centre, which a skilful warrior by his movements makes almost impossible, it is impenetrable. (Smyth 1878, vol. 1, p. 332)

This description, like Cawthorne's illustration (Figure 4.3), captures the effectiveness of a south-east broad shield and the skilled dexterity of the user.

Within the south-east there are different types of broad shields with a range of distinguishing features. Primarily they are distinguished by engraved or painted surfaces, as described below, and by their handle type and varying tip design. Many of these features can be understood as reflecting regional distinctions but as they are not directly related to line-work they are not included here.

FIGURE 4.3.
Aborigine defending himself against an attack by spears, c.1844–1864
William Anderson Cawthorne, England, active Australia, 1824–1897
Watercolour on paper; approx. 35.6 x 48.4 cm
From *Drawings of Australian Aborigines and objects of material culture*, c.1844–1864
SLNSW, PX*D 70
Image courtesy SLNSW

4.7.1. Engraved broad shields

The first category of broad shields features engraved designs on the shield's face. The engraved designs were over-painted and infilled with red or yellow ochre, white pipeclay or gypsum, or black charcoal, which in varying degrees remain on some shields today. Broad shields with engraved designs are the most common shields found in collections. They originate mainly from the Murray–Darling Basin and the Victorian coastline (Smyth 1878).

Engraved broad shields are made from either inner bark or hardwood, and this material determines the type of handle. Shields made from inner bark have a joined handle—a solid vine or flexible green wood that is rigid when dried. Hardwood shields feature an inbuilt handle; carved from a solid piece of wood, these shields lack holes for the inserted handle, leaving the designs on the face uninterrupted. The technology of working with the inner bark occurs throughout the Murray–Darling Basin region and is employed for the creation of canoes, coolamons, ceremonial figures and housing. For the purposes of this research I have specifically focused on the engraved broad shield for their use of line-work and proliferation across the south-east region.

4.7.2. Painted broad shields

The second category of broad shields refer to those not engraved and carrying a painted design only. Within this category there are two types of broad shields, both made from bark and featuring fitted handles. The first type comes from the Lower Murray region, in particular from Ngarrindjeri people, and their western Kaurna neighbours who occupy country just outside the Murray–Darling catchment and are not considered part of the south-east (see Chapter 1). These shields have elongated tips and are painted white background with red lines. Steve Hemming (1990) has described these shields as used to deflect spears and more ephemeral, as opposed to the more culturally significant engraved bark shields (p. 127).

The second type comes from coastal NSW, including the Sydney region (see Chapter 1). These bark broad shields are shaped into a vesica piscis (a pointed oval), and are mainly painted white with red, and sometimes black, stripes. Notably, coastal NSW shields of this type can have a painted design also on the back of the shield. These shields are best depicted in the works of Mickey of Ulladulla (c.1820s–1891, Yuin), where men can be seen holding white shields with red stripes.

4.8. Marga (parrying shields)

Parrying shields refer to a type that would be used to parry or ward off blows from clubs. As such, all are narrow and constructed from hardwood as a solid piece. Their use is best seen in the work of McRae (Figure 4.4), which captures the unmistakable forms of parrying shields involved in various stages of close combat. It can be imagined that a right-handed man would hold the shield in his left hand, leaving his right free to use the club. Their effectiveness is evidenced in historical accounts (Parker 1905, p. 124; Stokes 1846, vol. 2, p. 480).

FIGURE 4.4.
Two men with shields and clubs, c.1885
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; sheet 24.7 x 31.5 cm
From the album *Drawings depicting Aboriginal life*, c.1885
SLNSW, PXA 2129
Image courtesy SLNSW

Within the category of parrying shields there are two main types—three-sided parrying shields and four-sided parrying shields—best understood by studying the cross-section of the shield. In addition, parrying shields can be distinguished by their varying profiles, but as they are not directly related to line-work they are not included here.

4.8.1. Three-sided

The first group of parrying shields have a triangular cross-section, making them three-sided. Consistently, the frontward-facing sides of the shield are engraved with designs, while the remaining two backward-facing sides support the inbuilt carved handle. These shields are predominately from the southern parts of Victoria and South Australia, and proliferate along the coast of these regions. Massola (1963) also noted that this type of shield is broken down into flat-faced parrying shields and convex-faced, decorated parrying shields (p. 229).

4.8.2. Four-sided

The second type of parrying shield has a diamond-shaped cross-section, making them four-sided. The two frontward-facing sides are often engraved with designs, and the remaining two backward-facing sides are unadorned but support the inbuilt handle. For the purposes of this research I have specifically focused on the four-sided parrying shield and its variants because of their proliferation across the south-east region.

4.9. Naming of shields

It should be noted that the application of specific Aboriginal language words to describe shields is the most effective way of categorising the objects. Throughout the south-east, the names for shields were sometimes the same or similar (Wafer, Lissarrague & Harkins 2008). Massola (1963) used this concept as the basis for calling three-sided parrying shields 'mulka':

> The word Murka, Mulka, Mulga, Mulgera and variants of all these, as denoting 'shield' in a number of languages, stretching from the Dawson, Fitzroy and Isaac

> [rivers] in Queensland across to the Warrego and Macquarie; thence down the Darling in NSW, across the Murray into the Western District of Victoria, and down the Hopkins and Glenelg [rivers] to Portland and Warrnambool. To the [west] it extended to Mt Gambier and the Coorong in South Australia, also to the Lower Murray and [Lake] Alexandrina, and to the [east] along the Murray as a far as Echuca and along the coast as far as the Yarra [River]. (pp. 228–229)

But Massola admits that 'a difficulty in accepting linguistic evidence for the distribution of shield types is the possibility of all variants of the word not meaning the same type of shield' (p. 229).

When working with unprovenanced objects from a cultural bloc encompassing over 60 different languages, attempting to use a single language term creates a number of issues. For example, Robert Brough Smyth (1830–1889) (1878) revealed that 'weapons of this shape are named Drunmung in the Western District' (vol. 1, p. 330), while broad shields he termed 'Gee-am or Kerreem' (vol. 1, p. 332). The process of using a language name is helpful in recognising the shield's original cultural context and ongoing cultural dialogue, but in the example of the PRM collection at the University of Oxford, the majority of objects have been cross-referenced to Smyth's work, meaning that during registration all the parrying shields were marked as 'drunmung', even though there was no provenance to the Western District of Victoria. In several cases the objects were marked with a page reference to Smyth's publication. It can be assumed that someone who did not understand the complexities of Aboriginal cultural groups took the names from Smyth's publication and applied them to all the shields in the collection. This again illustrates why historical knowledge needs to be read with caution.

Although language words are helpful in describing shields and their designs that have no comparison within a western framework, they can also create a number of problems. For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to work with Wiradjuri terms—marga for the parrying shield, which is linguistically connected to Massola's use of the term

mulka, and girran.girran for the broad shield. As I am Wiradjuri, these terms reflect my Wiradjuri worldview, but they are used only within the context of this research and in accordance with the research methodology Wama-rra Wiradjuri gulbanha (build Wiradjuri knowledge systems) (see Chapter 2).

4.10. Shields and Murruwaygu

South-east shields are uniquely carved with distinctive designs. These designs feature repeating lines, patterned chevrons and concentric squares, diamonds and rhomboids, with the inclusion of an occasional figure or figures (Smyth 1878). Cooper (1975) stated that 'despite the very limited number of the design elements, one cannot help being struck by the great individuality of overall shield designs' (p. 58). In her years of researching south-east shields, Cooper (2004) has found that 'no two are exactly the same' (p. 8).

These designs are ubiquitous throughout the region, often employed on carved wood, on skin, both living and cured, and on country in the creation of ceremonial grounds. Smyth (1878) recognised the style's wide use: 'The inner sides of the opossum rugs used by the natives were usually ornamented … The figures were the same as those on their weapons' (vol. 1, p. 288). Cooper (1981) has confirmed this, describing designs as 'taking the three main media … wooden weapons, carved trees and possum-skin cloaks' (p. 35).

Contemporary scholars such as Cooper (1991) have continued to identify a 'south-eastern style', finding within this 'total area' further 'related, regional styles' (p. 2). Hemming (1990) has similarly acknowledged regionally specific material by identifying 'highly localised designs' (p. 125). In his in-depth study of the 19th-century Alexander Morrison collection in Singleton, NSW, Mulvaney (1983) was able to identify a regional style, which he termed 'a distinct Hunter Valley expression' (p. 38). These localised designs contribute to an unmistakable south-east school or tradition and can be understood to have developed from the maintenance of ancestral knowledge.

FIGURE 4.5.
Leange-walert/engraving tool, before 1875
Simon Wonga, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, 1824–1874
Lower jaw of possum, wood, fibre string, gum; 17 x 4 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X1556
Image courtesy MV

Jones (2013) believes the region's 'distinctive Aboriginal art systems are most evident in the wooden artefacts' (p. 237). The process of engraving these designs into wood was best described by Smyth (1878) in relation to Simon Wonga (c.1824–1874), the Wurundjeri Ngurungaeta or leader at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in Victoria:

> The tool with which the natives used to ornament their wooden shields and other weapons is called leange-walert. The lower-jaw of the opossum is firmly attached to a piece of wood (which serves as a handle) by twine made of the fibre of the bark of *Eucalyptus obliqua* and gum. This tool, simple as it is, enables the Black to carve patterns in the hard, tough woods of which his weapons are made with ease and rapidity. The front tooth is like a gouge or chisel, and with it he scoops or cuts out the wood with great facility. The old weapons are easily known by the marks made by the tooth. (vol. 1, p. 349)

Cooper (1975) has supported this theory, describing the leange-walert or its variants as the preferred woodworking tool (p. 60). Wonga's leange-walert was collected by

Smyth for the MV (Figure 4.5) and based on Smyth's writing it can be assumed he witnessed Wonga not only making the tool but carving with it. Other historical references to carving tools include the use of shell and stone tools, and of bone (White c.1889/2013, chapter 25, para. 13).

As new tools became available they were readily incorporated into people's practices (Taçon, South & Hooper 2003, pp. 89–100). From the first days of the Sydney colony, steel tools, including knives and axes, were rapidly traded and made their way throughout the south-east region (Attenbrow 2010, p. 103; Willey 1979, p. 92). In 1835 Sir Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855), who made some of the first incursions into the south-east region, reported meeting two Bogan River men whom he believed had never seen a European before; they were in possession of steel axes and knives (1839/2011, vol. 1, pp. 182–183). In Queensland, Walter Roth (1861–1933) (1897/2009) commented on the ingenuity of local artists in creating steel tools 'by filing or grinding down discarded shear-blades, springs, barrel-bands, knife-blades, etc., to the suitable shape required' (p. 143). Many commentators saw the use of introduced tools as inauthentic and critiqued the contact-zone works that employed steel-tool technology (Curr 1886, vol. 1, p. 148), however, Smyth (1878) claimed cultural material 'fabricated since the introduction of knives and other European tools [was] altogether different in the surfaces which they present, though the patterns may be the same' (vol. 1, p. 349). According to Cooper (1981), in some regions the introduction of steel gave artists 'new impetus by the greater precision which the use of metal tools allowed' (p. 37). In this way we can see the more recent technology of steel tools, including axes, knives and wire for burning-in or pokerwork (which is generally associated with missions) as an unbroken continuum that demonstrates 'the ability of Aboriginal people and communities to adapt to their enforced circumstances' (Cooper 2018, p.217). According to Frances Edmonds and Maree Clarke (Mutti Mutti/Wamba Wamba/Yorta Yorta/Boonwurrung) (2009),

> the designs on boomerangs also changed. The earlier markings of abstract, geometric or linear designs, which had denoted clan and regional differences, now

> incorporated more figurative elements that included contemporary interpretations of modern Australian society. (p. 21)

Sydney elder Uncle Greg Simms (b.1949, Dharug/Gundungurra) grew up at the La Perouse Mission and inherited the pokerwork style, which involves using lengths of fencing wire heated by fire (Vanni Accarigi 2000, p. 400). Today Uncle Greg uses an electronic burning-in tool. In both cases, the use of burning-in with heated wire and of electronic tools can be a choice for efficiency that dramatically speeds up the carving of designs (Keeler & Couzens 2010a, p. 143). Both processes create indented black lines. The indented line is not sufficiently deep enough to fill with ochre, but it is charred black, creating an altogether different visual outcome.

Uncle Greg's cousin Uncle Peter Yanada McKenzie (Eora/Anaiwan) (cited in Perkins & Jones 2008) commented on these markings and their encrypted knowledge:

> If you were to show me a boomerang that you knew had been purchased at La Perouse, I could probably identify who made it, or what family, by the decorations. They were all different. When you look at this imagery, it looks like early coats of arms. (p. 100)

Uncle Peter refers here to the Simms family's custodial design motif of the burrawang, a native cycad palm tree. Similarly, the historical scene of Lieutenant James Cook (1728–1779) in Kamay (Botany Bay) is a favoured subject of the Timbery family of La Perouse (Jones 2010).

Uncle Peter's statement supports the handful of historical accounts that attempt to interpret the designs made on shields and other objects, understanding these as

> a system of private owners' marks or mombarai with which he marks his rugs, weapons and other property, and by this means all may recognise the true ownership. This was a system of heraldry perfectly intelligible to all the tribes, and is surely a primitive germ of ideographic and phonetic writing. (Squire 1896, p. 12)

FIGURE 4.6.
Broken River club, early–mid 19th century
Artist unknown, Southern Riverine, Australia
Wood; 68 x 14 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X1103
Image courtesy MV

Smyth (1878) has provided us with perhaps the only accounts of the actual meaning of south-east designs. One account considered a parallel linear configuration meandering across the head of a lil-lil club (Figure 4.6) to represent

> a lagoon, and probably an anabranch of the Broken River, and the space enclosed by the lines shows the country which the tribe of the owner of the weapon occupied. (vol. 1, p. 284)

This use of lines to represent a watercourse is present in the work of many contemporary Barkindji artists who live on the Darling River (Gibson 2013, p. 213). In another example, Smyth (1878) interpreted a broad shield from the Upper Darling River and how the community would represent 'on their shields figures in imitation of the totems of their tribes. One in my possession has engraven on it the figure of an iguana' (vol. 1, p. 284). This object (Figure 4.7), in the MV collection, features an abstracted lizard, with radiating lines that cover the entire surface of the shield.

FIGURE 4.7.
Namoi River broad shield, early 19th century
Artist unknown, Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine, Australia
Wood; 93 x 21 x 4.5 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X001048
Image courtesy MV

FIGURE 4.8.
Bungaleen memorial, 1866
Simon Wonga, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, 1824–1874
Wood and natural pigments; 130 x 33.5 x 4 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X6249
Image courtesy MV

Smyth also collected the *Bungaleen memorial* (1866) (Figure 4.8), a grave-marker attributed to Simon Wonga (Cooper 2004a, p. 83), the Ngurungaeta or leader of the Wurundjeri-balluk and wider Kulin living at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station (see Chapter 5). Smyth (1878) quoted John Green (1830–1908), the station's manager and a trusted friend of the Wurundjeri, who had asked the community to interpret the designs on the memorial after Wonga's passing:

> The men represented in the upper part of the drawing are friends who have been appointed to investigate the cause of the death of Bungeleen; the figures of the birds and animals (emus, lizard, wombat (?) and kangaroos) indicate that he did not die for lack of food; and the strange—somewhat obscure—forms below the

> hollow band are those of Mooroops, or spirits who have caused the death of the Aboriginal by their wicked enchantments. (vol. 1, p. 288)

Together, these examples recounted by Smyth are the most complete interpretations of south-east line-work. South-east communities continue to see these designs as deeply significant. Brabrawooloong/Gunnai artist Ray Thomas (b.1960) (cited in Edmonds & Clarke 2009) described being 'completely changed … as an artist' after seeing Gunnai material in the MV (p. 35).

In terms of their designs, their relatively good representation in collections, and their characterisation by community as non-sacred (Cooper 1981, p. 32), shields are best placed to represent the south-east region's visual vernacular in the pre-contact era. Cooper (1981) has concluded that designs within the south-east have a 'communicative function [and] can be interpreted as playing an essential role in the maintenance of group identity' (p. 32). In this way, south-east designs are 'thought to relate to individual and group identity' (Cooper 2004b, p. 81) and can be understood as foundational to my research.

4.11. Shield-makers as artists

Establishing that shields are the work of individual artists has become important during the development of this research. As 'most artefacts in museum collections cannot be attributed to individual makers' (Sayers 1994, p. 9), they are generally classed as artefacts in contrast to artworks, which are identified by the names of their creators. In the context of this research, shields represent the first generation of artists, or Mumala (grandfather), and so identifying previously unprovenanced shields to individuals helps to recognise their makers' knowledge and unique styles within the movement. The role of individuals, or leading practitioners, within movements or schools is widely recognised by communities today. In La Perouse, for example, the practices of key artists Joe Timbery and Bob Simms (1909–1965, Dharawal) have been inherited by Uncle Laddie Timbery (b.1941,

Eora/Bidjigal) and Uncle Greg Simms. In order to demonstrate this practice with shields in museum collections, four historical case studies are provided.

Smyth (1878) provided a key insight into the type of men involved in the manufacture of shields in the south-east. He reported that these sophisticated objects were created by elders who were free from

> hunting of the larger game to remain in comfort in their camps, where they employed their time in all those arts which they had perfected by experience. They made nets, spears, shields, and boomerangs; and taught the boys the use of weapons and implements. (vol. 1, p. xxxv)

Adolphus Peter Elkin (1891–1979) (1962) similarly saw the creation of cultural material as the role of senior knowledge-holders: 'The artistic designs not only represent mythological themes, but usually, too, must be made to the accompaniment of sacred chanting, and similar chanting frequently marks their display' (p. 9). As suggested by both Smyth and Elkin, the creation of important cultural material involved an encoded language that the senior men were in charge of and may have restricted, as is the case in many Aboriginal communities. Spencer (1914) noted similar restrictions in Central Australia (p. 39). This concept of elders handing down their knowledge through design explains why the region's technique and style is so widely recognised. The words of Uncle Albert Mullett (Gunai/Gunditjmara) (cited in Keeler & Couzens 2010a) support this hypothesis:

> Our family has skills with wood. We're craftsmen/artists, passed down over generations, very strong on the Mullett side. Uncles and great-uncles passed down the knowledge and skills. The artwork identifies the markings, symbols and lines of our family. (p. 143)

4.11.1. Case studies

The following four case studies demonstrate how shields can be identified to specific regions and individual artists. Examples of both broad and parrying shields have been

given to show the variety of information, styles and methods used to identify a shield. It is important to note that within these case studies I have looked at the individual murruwaygu as a way of identifying the hand of the artist rather than understanding the murruwaygu. The individual murruwaygu are then combined with written and pictorial sources, and crosschecked with community knowledge, including from elders and contemporary practitioners, to rebuild knowledge once thought lost. This collection of information, centred on the cultural material, is based on the nguram-bula or bowerbird approach (see Chapter 2), which sees the building of knowledge from all available fragments. Edmonds and Clarke (2009), discussing Victorian Aboriginal art, similarly identified that

> from the evidence given to us through rock art, artefacts (such as wooden weapons, stone implements and woven objects) and oral stories handed down through generations, it is possible to build a picture of the significance of art to Aboriginal culture in the south-east prior to colonisation. (p. 3)

My research is based on this methodological approach.

It should be noted that standard practice for researching cultural knowledge requires permission from the community to research. However, as this research involves shields with unknown provenance it was impossible to gain permission before attribution was determined, which was usually towards the end of the process. The Community Advisory Committee (see Chapter 2) has been integral to this process, giving me the collective permission to research unattributed south-east material. The research method has involved finding connections between shields; crosschecking that information with the research of Cooper, who, as an authority on south-east collections, can determine the reliability of the provenance information and assess my analysis; and then through my own art networks and that of the Community Advisory Committee contacting the community where the shield has possibly originated. After explaining my research process to the community and agreeing to keep them informed, I would ask for and receive the community's permission before continuing or making public the research.

4.11.1.1. *Case study: Redman Guangnurd broad shield*

In the collection of the British Museum is a unique broad shield (Figures 4.9–4.10) that features highly complex engraved designs consisting of six rows of concentric diamonds and triangles set within a chevron schema that runs from tip to tip. This design covers the shield's entire surface.

This shield is similar to one depicted in a rare photograph taken by Carl Walters (1831–1907) in 1866 at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. Walters had been commissioned to document the entire community for the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition, and the resulting anthropological taxonomy of the community consists of 104 tight portraits, with the sitter's name, age and 'tribe' included (Lydon 2005, pp. 73–85). As sitters appear to be well dressed and prepared for their portrait, it can be assumed that they had an understanding of the process, a position articulated by Jane Lydon (2005). Of the 104 sitters, 12 photographs feature objects either worn or held: two men and one woman wear a possum-skin cloak (however, the same cloak seems to be worn by two sitters); one man holds what appears to be a boomerang (its tips cropped); similarly, another holds a cropped boomerang club; a woman holds what could be a walking or digging stick; other men hold a woomera and a club, and one man, identified as Timothy Korkanoon (1830s–1875, Wurundjeri), holds a book. Significantly, three men hold three different types of shields, including one parrying and two broad shields. Lydon states that members of the Coranderrk community were keenly aware of the power of images. As the objects only feature in the photographs of these sitters and not others, it is assumed that these objects are the property of each particular sitter and important to their identity.

One of the men holding a broad shield is listed as Guangnurd, with the English name 'Redman' recorded (Figures 4.11–4.12). He is 40 years old and his 'tribe' is 'Goulbourne', referring to the Goulburn River region north of Coranderrk. Part of the Murray–Darling catchment, the Goulburn region is home to the Taungurung people and we can

therefore understand that Guangnurd is Taungurung (Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation 2018).

Although the Walters portrait is small and grainy, the shield and its key features are discernable, and it appears to share similarities with the broad shield held in the BM. The tips seem to be five-sided, the handle is fitted and the designs appear to carry the same unique features. The entire surface of Guangnurd's shield is covered with rows of concentric triangles (unfortunately it cannot be seen if the shield also has concentric diamonds) set within a chevron schema that runs from tip to tip. Again, the design is consistent and covers the entire surface of the shield. The strong resemblance between these highly unique designs suggests they are related and made by the same maker, Guangnurd.

This aspect of my research has been verified by Cooper. I have also reached out to the Taungurung community, contacting Uncle Mick Harding (b.1960), a Taungurung carver, for consultation, as he continues to carve objects today. Uncle Mick agreed that there is a strong similarity, and he is happy for the BM shield and Walters photograph of Guangnurd to be connected; Uncle Mick granted me permission to publish these findings.

Notably, another shield has also been located with a similar design (Figures 4.13–4.14). A picture of this shield is published in *The art of eastern Australia: fine Aboriginal weapons and artefacts* (Petty 2009, pp. 2–3), which illustrates a private collection of south-east material. This shield again has rows of concentric diamonds and triangles; however, they do not form bands. The design is set within a consistent chevron schema that runs from tip to tip and again covers the shield's entire surface. This shield has a fitted handle but a narrow three-edge tip, unlike the other two that carry five-sided tips. For these conflicting reasons it cannot be assumed that Guangnurd made this particular shield, although it does appear to be related.

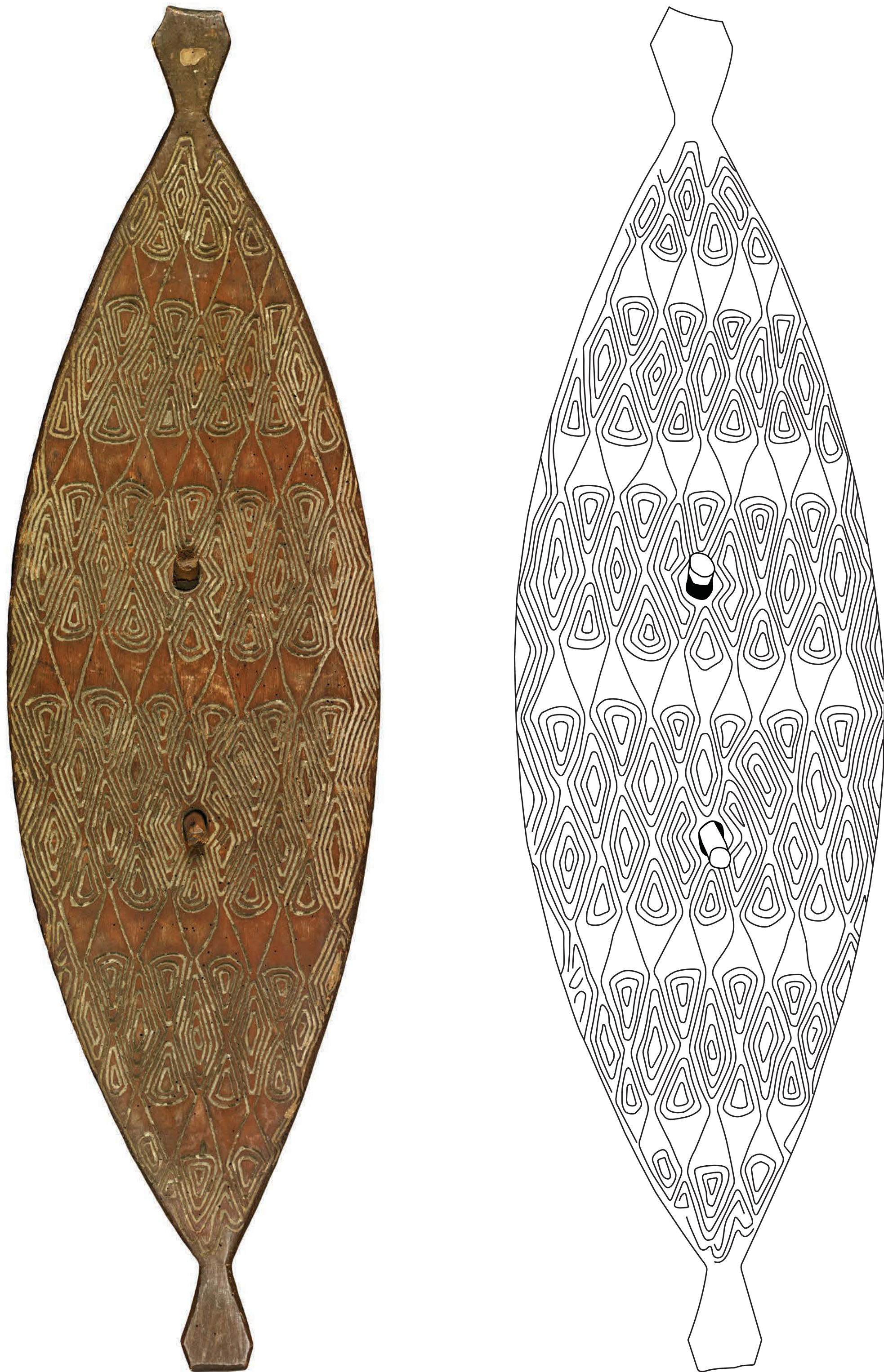
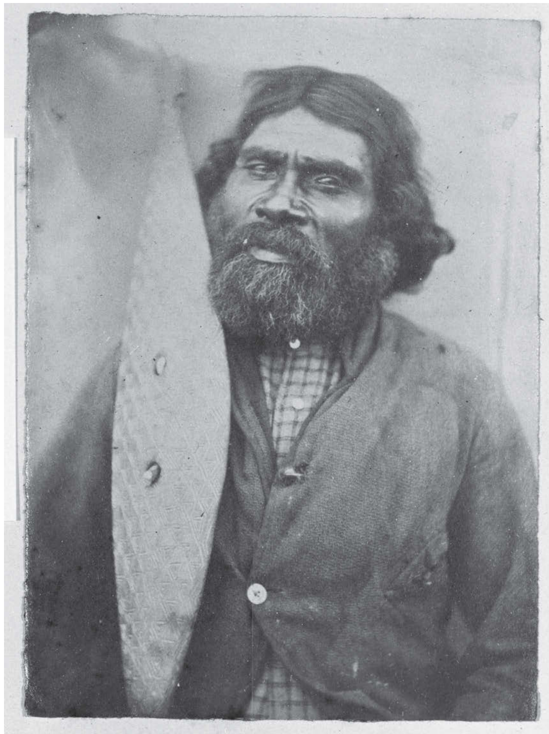


FIGURE 4.9.
FIGURE 4.10.
Broad shield, mid-19th century
Artist unknown, attributed to Goulburn River, Southern Riverine, Australia
Wood, natural pigments; 89 x 24 cm
British Museum, London, Oc1980,Q.721
Donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, ex-collection William Wareham
Image courtesy BM



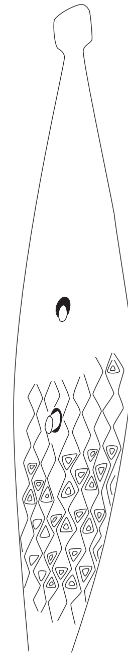


FIGURE 4.11.
FIGURE 4.12.
Redman, age 40, 'Guangnurd', Goulbourne Tribe, 1866
Carl Walter, Germany, active Australia, 1831–1907
Photographic print
From the series *Portraits of Aboriginal natives settled at Coranderrk, near Healesville; about 42 miles from Melbourne. Also views of the station and lubras basket-making*
SLV, H91.1/21
Image courtesy SLV

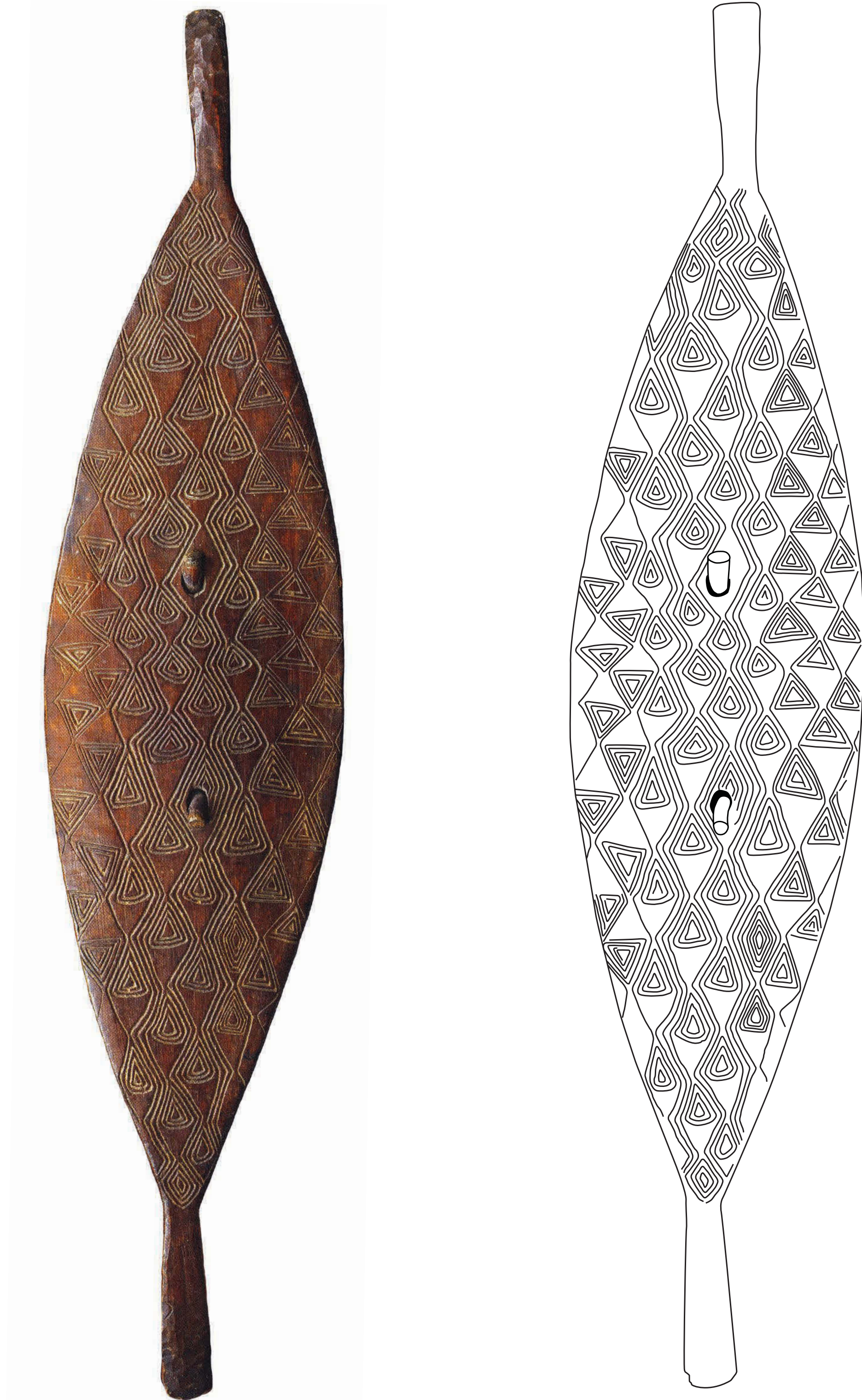


FIGURE 4.13.
FIGURE 4.14.
Broad shield, n.d.
Unknown artist, attributed to Goulburn River, Southern Riverine, Australia
Wood; 101.6 x 22.2 cm
Published in *The art of eastern Australia: fine Aboriginal weapons and artefacts*, 2009, by David Petty, pp. 2–3
Private collection, UK

4.11.1.2. *Case study: Tarra Bobby broad shield*

In 2015 the NMA acquired a unique broad shield (Figures 4.15–4.16) from the Thomas Vroom collection via Sotheby's auction house in London. The shield has a fitted handle, three-sided tips, and a unique engraved design. A distinctive border along the edge, consisting of two rows of circles, makes this a recognisable shield. This border of circles creates an aperture, within which repeating chevrons run. The shift between a strong geometric design and the circle border gives the shield a very distinctive appearance; it should be noted that circles are very rarely used in south-east design, especially on shields. I have matched this shield to a number of sources, including a historical photograph, a drawing and shields in other collections, which together create an unparalleled corpus of related works.

The first, and perhaps most important, connection is a portrait of Tarra Bobby with a shield (Figures 4.17–4.18), again taken by Walters as part of the Coranderrk community survey. Tarra Bobby is noted as being 25 years old and from the Bun Bun-wire, Gipps Land [Gippsland] 'tribe', which we can understand to mean the Brataualung clan of the Gunai/Kurnai nation in the Gippsland region of eastern Victoria. Unlike Guangnurd, we do know some of Tarra Bobby's story. Historian Bain Attwood (1987) described Tarra Bobby from the Walters photograph: 'He appears in European garb but his bearing and the shield convey a sense of purpose and dignity rooted in his own culture' (p. 43). He was initiated in the 1850s and elected by elders to become a 'messenger (lewin or pairar)' for his community. As a result, he spent much of his life moving between Melbourne, the community of Coranderrk and his county in Gippsland. He died tragically under the guardianship of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in Melbourne in 1874 (Attwood 1987).

Unlike the Guangnurd shield, Tarra Bobby's shield is vividly painted with white ochre, and the designs are more distinguishable. We can see that the shield has a fitted handle and a three-sided tip. With an uncanny similar design to the NMA shield, Tarra Bobby's

shield's edge is bordered by circles, which create an aperture, inside of which are repeating chevrons. The chevrons in this case have alternated to create a diamond grid, which has been infilled with chevrons. Although both the tips and infilled chevrons are slightly different, the similarity between these shields is unparalleled, leading me to conclude that the NMA shield was made by Tarra Bobby, a position supported by Cooper.

Another source connecting these two shields is a fragment of a bark broad shield (Figures 4.19–4.20) held in the Musée du Quai Branly (MQB), Paris. Although only half a shield, what remains is again another match. The MQB shield includes a fitted handle, three-sided tips and a border of circles with an aperture infilled with chevron lines with one visible concentric diamond. I conclude that Tarra Bobby also made this shield.

The final connecting source is an illustration of a bark broad shield (Figures 4.21–4.22) in Smyth's publication (1878, vol. 1, p. 333). This broad shield has a fitted handle, three-sided tips, a border of circles and an aperture of chevrons that create a set of diamonds. Attwood (1987) explained that Smyth, who was on the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, claimed to be 'well acquainted' (p. 51) with Tarra Bobby, and so it can be understood that Smyth made the drawing based on a shield by Tarra Bobby.

I have sent this material to a number of Gunai/Kurnai individuals and organisations, including Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero), who is a participant in this study. There has been initial approval for the research and its publication; however, further community consultation, preferably in person, would no doubt provide more community knowledge.

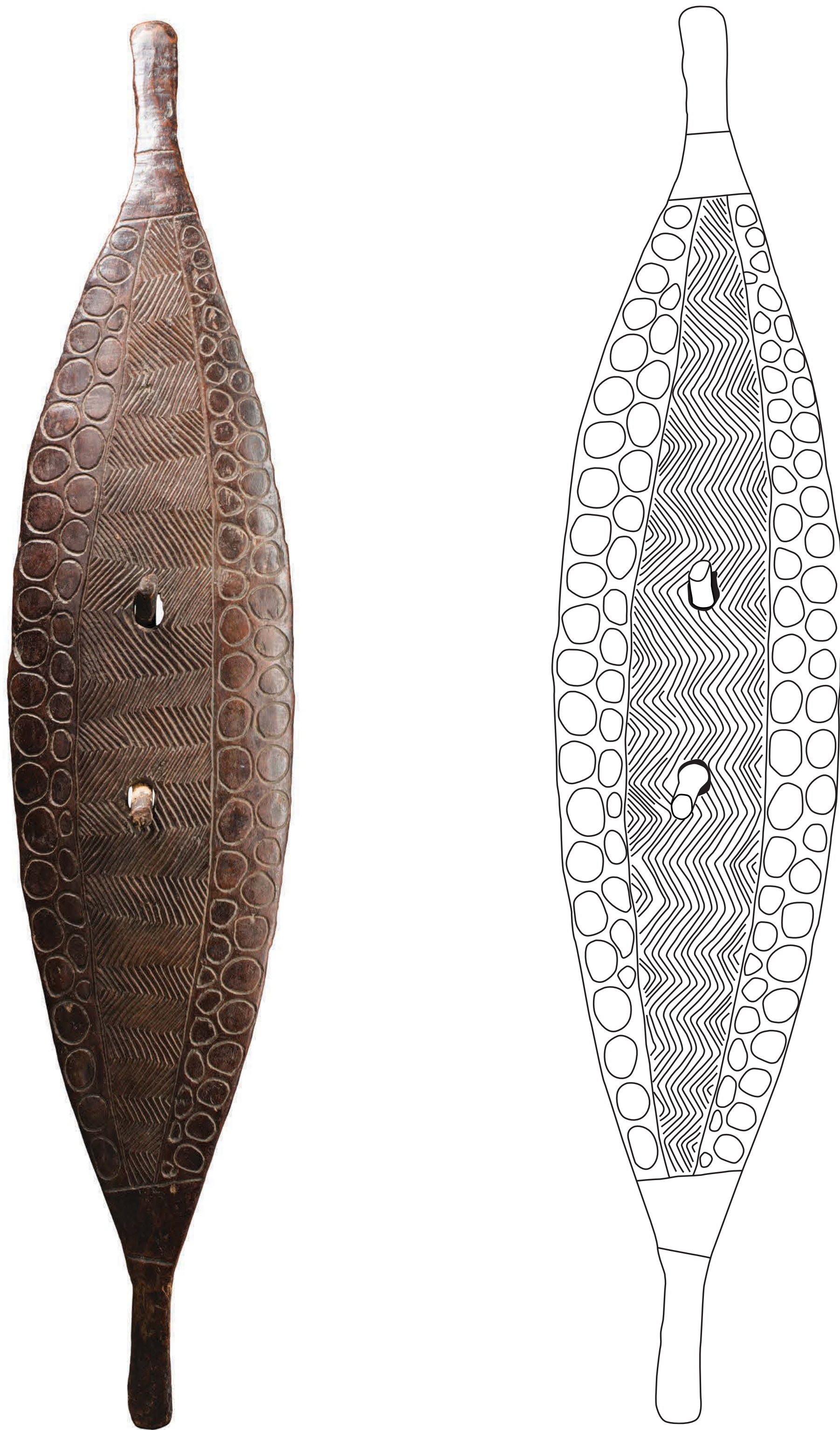
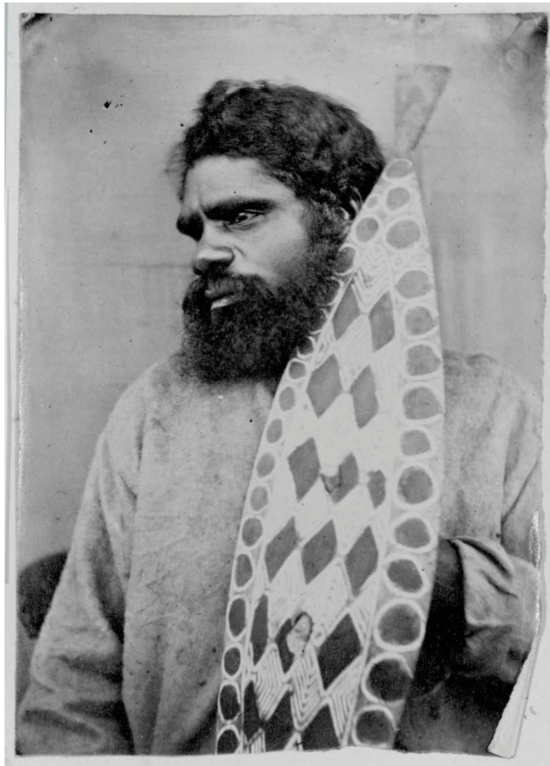


FIGURE 4.15.
FIGURE 4.16.
Broad shield, early 19th century
Attributed to Tarra Bobby, Gunai, South-east, Australia, c.1840–1874
Wood; 100.5 x 20 x 11.5 cm
NMA, IR 6617.0001
Purchased 2015
Image courtesy NMA



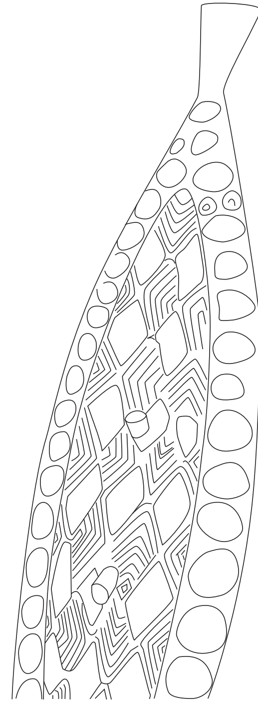


FIGURE 4.17.
FIGURE 4.18.
Tarra Bobby, age 25, 'Bun Bun-wire', Gipps Land Tribe, 1866
Carl Walter, Germany, active Australia, 1831–1907
Photographic print
From the series *Portraits of Aboriginal natives settled at Coranderrk, near Healesville; about 42 miles from Melbourne. Also views of the station and lubras basket-making*
SLV, H91.1/14
Image courtesy SLV

FIGURE 4.19.
FIGURE 4.20.
Demi-bouclier (half shield), n.d.
Attributed to Tarra Bobby, Gunai, South-east, Australia, c.1840–1874
Wood; 85 x 11 x 1.5 cm
Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, 71.1943.0.323X
Image courtesy MQB

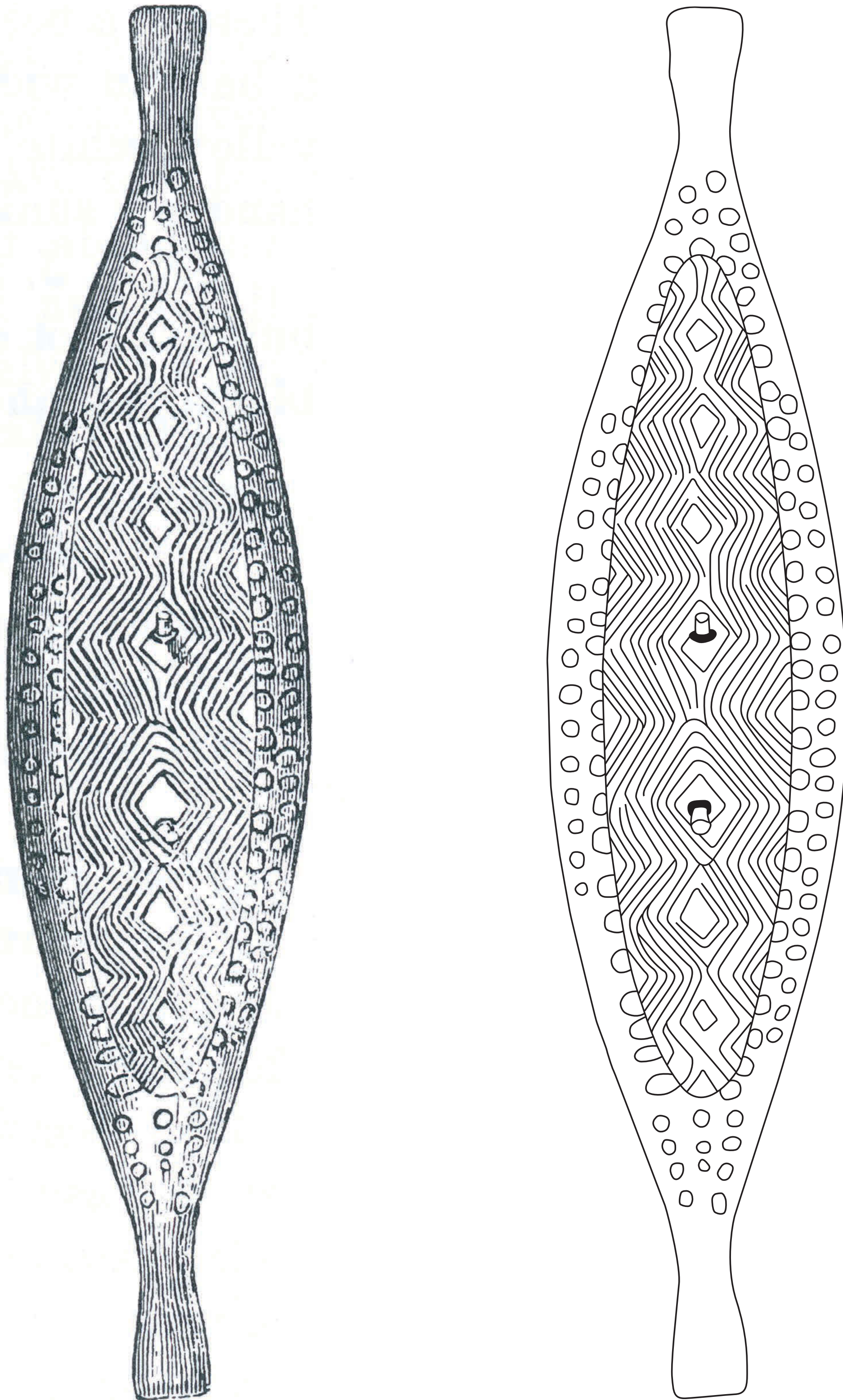


FIGURE 4.21.
FIGURE 4.22.
Drawing of broad shield, n.d., by an unknown artist
Published in *The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania*, 1878, by Robert Brough Smyth, vol. 1, p. 333

4.11.1.3. *Case study: William Barak parrying shield*

The Koori Heritage Trust in Melbourne holds a unique parrying shield from 1897 (Figures 4.23–4.24), one of the few on record that has the artist's name recorded, written directly onto the shield in cursive black script: 'Made by King Barak Last of the Yarra Tribe 18/12/97' (Keeler & Couzens 2010a, p. 164). The shield was acquired by the trust in 1991 from an antique dealer, along with a matching club also attributed to 'King Barak'. Barak was the Ngurungaeta (leader) at the community of Coranderrk on the Yarra River, a role often described as King. Along with being a highly identifiable shield, the artist is well known. In fact, Cooper (2018) describes Barak as 'the best known and most highly regarded Aboriginal person in Victoria in the 19th century' (p. 207) and believes that it was Barak's status that perhaps promoted the rare recording of the shield's maker. It is important to note that Barak's living descendants are known. Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO, Barak's great-great-niece and a key elder for the Wurundjeri community, is a member of the Community Advisory Committee for my research.

In 2012–2013 the NGA acquired an Australia-wide collection of shields from collector and dealer Bill Evans. Within this collection one object (Figures 4.25–4.26) matched the shield by Barak in the KHT. Evans told me that the shield was acquired from Mossgreen auction house, Melbourne, in 2007 and the vendor was from an 'old family' in Melbourne.

There are three key design features that make these two parrying shields so similar, including an undecorated wavy central band, a diamond design set within 'windows', and the way the diamonds have been carved. The engraved design features a central band made up of wavy lines, which crosses over the front of the shield and sits adjacent to the handle. On either side of the band is a window within which is the engraved design, consisting of concentric diamonds. It appears that these diamonds have been created by first scoring a diamond grid. Once this main grid was set out, concentric

diamonds were placed within, giving an altogether different affect than if the diamonds were created one by one. Finally, the combination of clean-cut straight lines for the diamonds, presumably achieved with a steel knife, is complemented by the gouged wavy lines, conventionally understood to be made with a possum-jaw chisel. These two ways of working, with two types of tools to achieve two different line types, occur in both the KHT and NGA shields.

On identifying the resemblance between these two shields, I consulted Cooper, who came to a similar conclusion. Following this, I contacted Aunty Joy. Looking at images and drawings, Aunty Joy could see the similarities and wanted to view the NGA shield. After sharing the research with staff of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art department at the NGA, they organised for Aunty Joy to visit and view the shield. Having then seen both shields separately, Aunty Joy felt that the two shields needed to be seen together before she could give a definitive answer. The exhibition *Murruwaygu* at the AGNSW over 2015–2016 provided the opportunity for the shields to come together, and on inspecting both objects, Aunty Joy confirmed that she believed her ancestor Barak had also made the NGA shield. This attribution was a significant moment as it doubled the current number of known shields made by this important Australian artist.

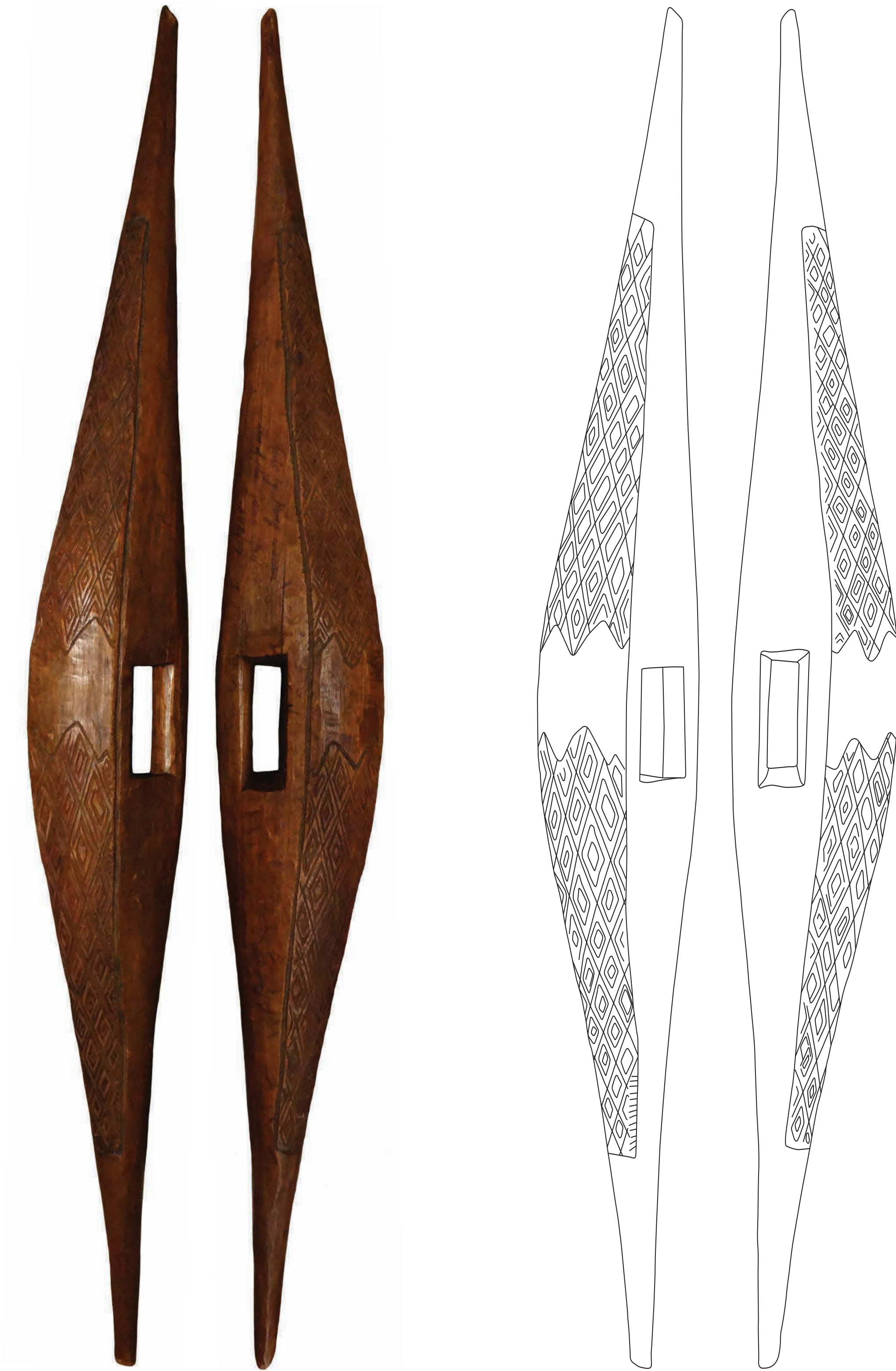


FIGURE 4.23.
FIGURE 4.24.
Parrying shield, 1897
William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east region, Australia, c.1824–1903
Wood; 94.5 x 12.5 x 5 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, AH1434
Image courtesy KHT

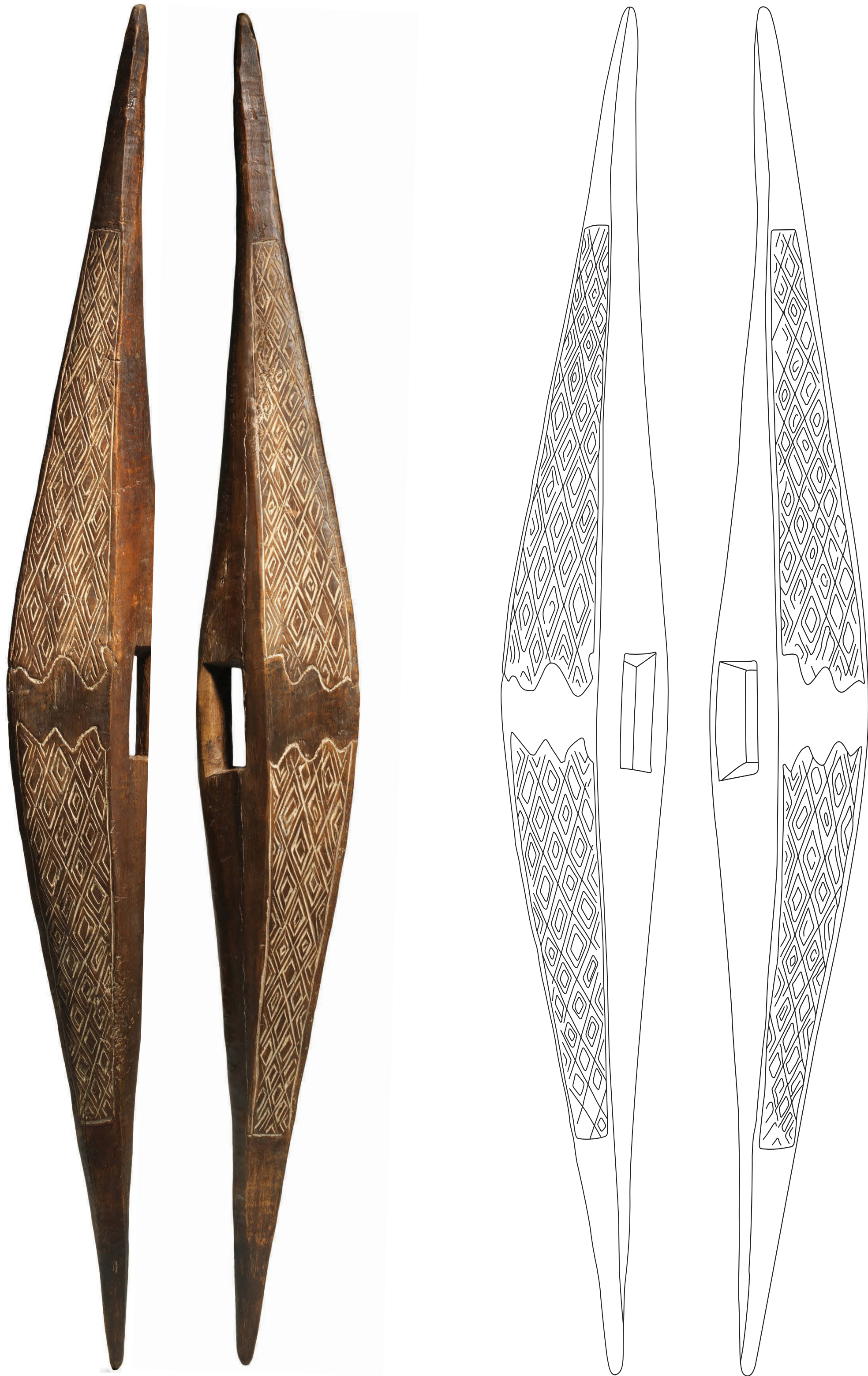


FIGURE 4.25.
FIGURE 4.26.
Parrying shield, 1800s
Attributed to William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, c.1824–1903
Wood, natural pigments; 105 x 14 x 8 cm
NGA, 2013.3588
Image courtesy NGA

4.11.1.4. *Case study: Naium parrying shield*

The NMA holds a significant collection of south-east objects amassed by amateur ethnographer Edmund Osborn Milne (1886–1963). Milne was an exceptional collector for his time who actively recorded Aboriginal people's names and other information about the objects and their sources (Kaus 2003, p. 14). One 1896 parrying shield in the Milne collection (Figures 4.27–4.28) has this inscription in black ink:

> milladoo or Shield as used by South Coast Tribes made by Naium the last Karadja or Medicine Man Wallaga Lake S.C. 1896 shortly before his death.

This shield is also distinguished by its form and engraved design and matches a shield (Figures 4.29–4.30) with no recorded provenance acquired by the NGV in 2011 from Bill Evans as part of a larger collection of 63 shields from across Australia.

The forms of these two shields, in terms of their cross-sections, are similar and within the same style. The designs on both shields feature clean-cut lines that seem to have been made with steel tools. In the centre of each shield is a plain band; however, the NGV shield has a cross in the band. Both shields have windows or defined areas for the designs that are patterned chevrons. Although a simple design, there are two signature features that the artist has included. Chevrons running across the edge of the window produce a series of triangles. At the top peak of the triangle a short upright line has been added at 90 degrees. This unusual feature is unique, yet is present in both shields. Similarly, at the start or termination of one of the chevron lines there is a 'Y', which creates an additional triangle on the edge of the window. Again, this highly unique feature is repeated on both shields, suggesting they were both made by the same artist.

These qualities were analysed with Cooper and we believe that the NGV shield is possibly related to the same maker as the NMA shield—Naium from Wallaga Lake. The research material was then sent to number of community members with connections to Wallaga Lake, including Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison (Yuin). Further conversations are required, however research permission was granted.

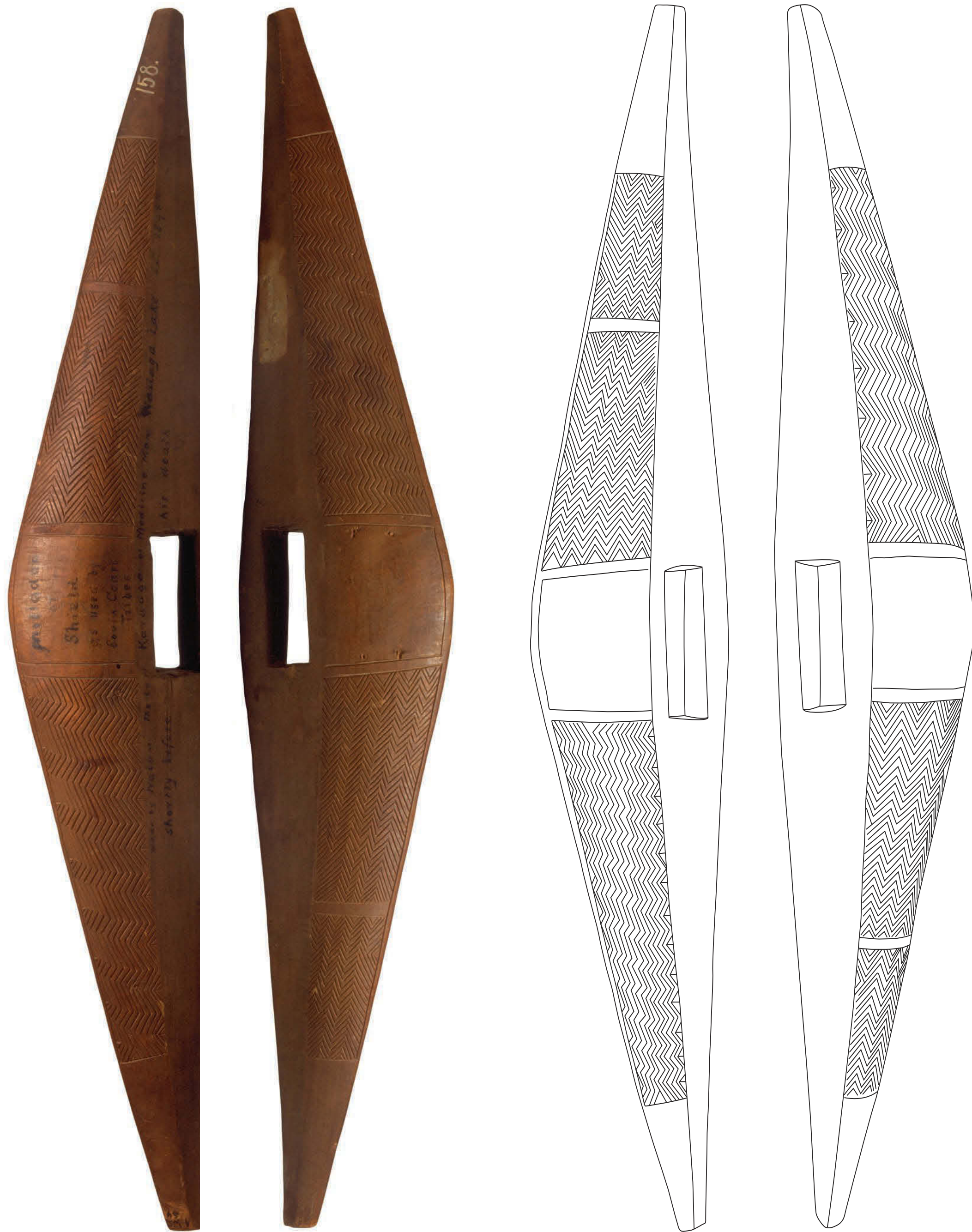


FIGURE 4.27.
FIGURE 4.28.
Parrying shield, 1896
Naium, Yuin, South-east, Australia, n.d.
Wood; 81 x 17 x 8 cm
NMA, Edmund Milne collection, 1985.0059.0299
Donated 1931
Image courtesy NMA

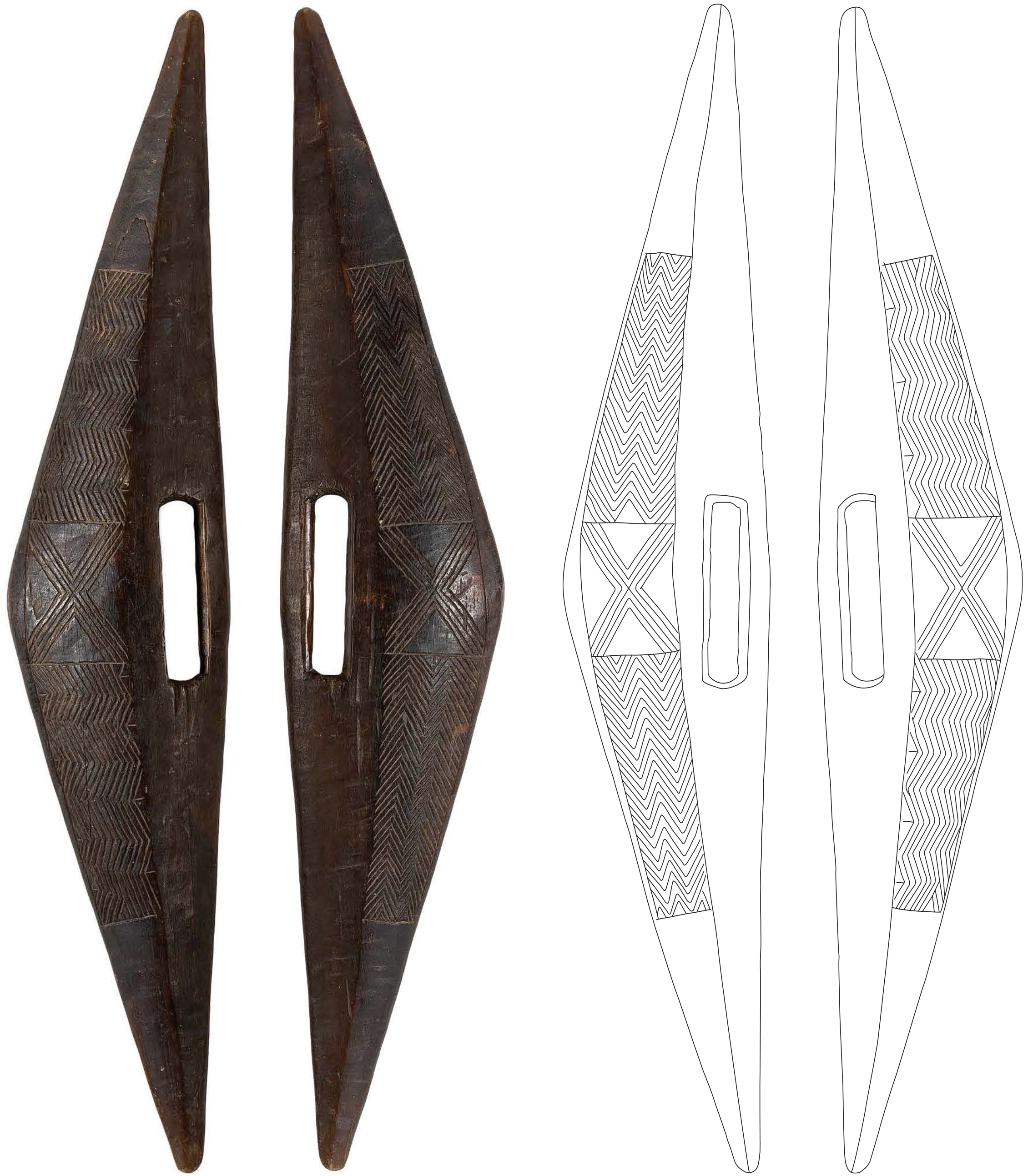


FIGURE 4.29.
FIGURE 4.30.
Parrying shield, 1896
Naium, Yuin, South-east, Australia, n.d.
Wood; 81 x 17 x 8 cm
NMA, Edmund Milne collection, 1985.0059.0299
Donated 1931
Image courtesy NMA

These four case studies confirm what communities have always stated: these historical objects were made by individual artists and need to be respected as such. Shields can therefore be seen as perfectly placed for understanding south-eastern art practices. It is hoped that these examples will encourage further research on identifying works in museums.

4.12. Challenging the notion of the shield

Through the visual analysis survey of shields in collections, and by appreciating shields as artistic creations by individual artists, I have begun to untangle the western framework that has positioned shields as objects of violence and savagery. The very word 'shield' carries specific Eurocentric concepts that may not be directly transferable to other cultures; in fact these ideas may inhibit our understanding. The *Macquarie Dictionary* (2018) defines a shield as 'a piece of defensive armour of various shapes, carried on the left arm or in the hand to protect the body in battle', the implication being that any object labelled as such will be connected with violence. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Porou) (2012) reminds us that 'colonialism was not just about collection. It was also about re-arrangement, re-representation and re-distribution' (p. 65). Through my research I have learnt to understand shields as objects with multiple roles, rather than simply as weapons. This is evidenced in the visual analysis of shields, in the analysis of historical accounts relating to shields and their roles, and in the appreciation of their culturally significant designs. Marcia Langton (Yiman/Bidjara) (1993) has commented on the 'elaborateness' of Aboriginal cultural material:

> Visual and oral expressions have been very elaborate in Aboriginal societies in the social sense. Multilingualism, linguistic devices and codes, oral, dance and musical tradition and the visual arts were more elaborate than the material culture used in daily domestic life such as for hunting, gathering and preparing food, shelter and apparel. (p. 9)

While shields were used to deflect objects such as spears and clubs in certain situations, their function was and continues to be much more complex.

Shields and other examples of cultural material need to be understood as having different functions. Boomerangs, also often framed as weapons, were used to produce music. Possum-skin cloaks, often understood as simply clothing, were used as instruments by women who 'stretched them between the knees … forming a sort of drum' (Smyth 1878, vol. 1, p. 169). Both these activities are clearly depicted in artworks by Barak, who demonstrated the plurality of south-east objects, describing to Howitt (1904) how a woomera or spear-thrower would be used as a message stick to call people to ceremonies (p. 700). Howitt wrote that in Gunai/Kurnai country messengers could also carry clubs, boomerangs or even shields (p. 515), while for the Ngarigo he described a messenger carrying a shield as denoting an 'expiatory fight' (p. 687).

A handful of other accounts provide us with insights into the complex understandings people had towards their cultural material. Peter Beveridge (1829–1885) (1889), from the Swan Hill region, noticed that people made a kind of 'immense jagged' spear that was not used in the 'pursuit of game [but] merely kept for the adornment of the fronts of their loondthals [huts]' (p. 59). Interestingly, Beveridge also described the two types of shields, broad and parrying: the parrying for 'conflicts' and the broad shield as 'ornamental' and for 'display' (pp. 65–66). Cooper (2015) acknowledges these plural roles: 'South-eastern shields were primarily defensive weapons [that could also] be danced in corroborees, played as musical instruments or be traded as valuable and powerful objects' (p. 16).

This re-reading of the 'shield' is supported by the fact that very few shields in collections show any sign of damage, making it hard to justify the western characterisation of these objects as weapons. After conducting the full survey of shields within the listed collections, I noticed that only a very small number showed signs of damage, whether from a spear or club. This demonstrates that shields may have performed other roles within community. The museum shields that are considered 'old', created with stone and bone tools, should show signs of war if we are to understand them as 'shields',

particularly the more fragile broad shields. Some shields have cracks, which are sometimes carefully repaired by their owners, as noted by Cooper (1981, p. 87), and some have lost their handles or tips, but an overwhelming number are in reasonable condition without any major impact damage. Of all the broad shields surveyed, only one was damaged by what might be a spear. This broad shield is part of the Ian Potter Museum of Art collection at the University of Melbourne (accession number 1960.0685). It has a larger front layer and smaller under layer of bark, which has come away at both the top and the bottom of the shield.

Throughout this research I have come to understand that the role shields play in ceremony is perhaps equal to or greater than their role in warfare. It is also important to appreciate the skill and time involved in creating shields: the harvesting of timber, shaping the shield and finally designing it. This involves extraordinary effort and intensive labour, and on completion the shields would undoubtedly be considered precious. This assessment, however, sits in conflict with the many historical western accounts of Aboriginal people engaged in 'fights' or 'warfare'.

4.13. Challenging the notion of warfare

It is important to understand what fighting and warfare meant within south-east Aboriginal communities. For William Stanner (1905–1981) (2011), 'one of the most striking things is that there are no great conflicts over power, no great contests for place and office' (pp. 70–71). Perhaps the most important description comes from Barak, who described, again via Howitt (1904), how a fight between two men would be conducted:

> They fought with club and shield, and when one of them had been wounded so that blood was drawn, to the satisfaction of the old men, they interfered to stop the fight, saying, as Berak put it, 'You have both got blood; it is enough; now make friends'. (pp. 254–255)

In this way a 'fight' can be understood as a controlled and organised ceremonial activity, overseen by elders. In a statement in line with this understanding, William Thomas

(1793–1867) (cited in Legislative Council 1859), a trusted friend of the Woiwurrung, stressed the restoration of order:

> When over, all are friends; and it is affecting to see parties, who, an hour before were enemies, sucking each other's wounds. There are no means of commemorating fights further than talking about them over their night fires. (p. 69)

Highlighting how different this attitude is from the western perspective, Thomas stated that although some Aboriginals possessed guns, 'they never use them in battle: they consider guns a cowardly means of defence' (p. 69). Cooper (1981) also found that 'from all available evidence it would appear that few were actually killed in these confrontations, the intention of which was ritual wounding' (p. 32). Lawrence Bamblett (Wiradjuri) (2013b), synthesising varied accounts regarding Wiradjuri, affirms this, saying that although Wiradjuri are not recorded as being warlike, 'ritualised fighting' was used to settle disputes (p. 104).

There are many accounts of trials and punishments or ritualised fights involving shields, which again occurred in a controlled manner and often overseen by elders. Smyth (1878) described how an individual 'culprit may be required to stand in front of those he has wronged … and allow them to hurl their spears or boomerangs at him' (vol. 1, p. xxiv). Three possible outcomes for the man were his skilfully dodging the barrage and being 'prove[d] victorious'; being judicially wounded; or 'when spears are thrown, or when two are fighting with club and shield, the old men may interfere, if enough has been done to satisfy justice, and declare a verdict'. Smyth concluded: 'Seldom, a general fight occurs, and one or two may be killed' (vol. 1, p. xxiv).

Group conflicts are commonly cited, but shields are mentioned only in passing, if at all. Judge-Advocate David Collins (1756–1810) (1798) recorded one of the earliest examples in Sydney, where at a prearranged time and place a senior woman walked down a line of men striking each with a club. This was followed by a spear-throwing contest, and then hand-to-hand combat between men with clubs 'until they left off by

mutual consent' (vol. 1, p. 584). In South Australia, Worsnop (1897) provided a first-hand account of witnessing group violence in 1853, with some astonishment because of its controlled manner and the subsequent return to peace:

> Between the Encounter Bay natives and some others from the Coorong. The fight ended when one of the young men had received a spear in the calf of the leg, after which all the contending parties fraternised and feasted together during half the night. (p. 138)

In yet another example, William Locke (cited in Smyth 1878) described fights as part of ceremonial gatherings in the Upper Murray River region: 'Great feastings and corrobboree—the national Aboriginal dance of Australia—and the meeting generally ends in a fight' (vol. 2, p. 292). He went on to say that no-one was ever killed and that 'a grand corrobboree was held, and the tribes seemed to have forgotten their quarrel' (vol. 2, p. 293). Richard Broome (2010) concludes that 'inter-tribal violence witnessed by settlers was often not war but law: judicial proceedings between groups carried out in a traditionally controlled fashion' (p. 75).

These controlled encounters, although involving elements of violence, are not fighting or warfare in the western sense; they can be understood as controlled judicial operations. Mulvaney (1983) explained how 'many of the [British] observers would be influenced by warfare and battle as it was an aspect of Aboriginal culture they could readily identify with' (p. 42). According to Mira Lakic and Rosemary Wrench (1994), these once-controlled encounters 'deteriorated' post-invasion. With the 'loss of reliable food supplies' Aboriginal people were then forced to flee frontier violence by moving 'into other parts of the state, consequently infringing the territorial rights of other groups' (p. 92). Keith Willey (1979) also pointed out that these controlled conflicts 'developed rapidly into gladiatorial exhibitions, their frequency and perhaps their savagery increased by the roar of the European mob which would gather to watch' (p. 151). In this way we can start to redefine these activities within a south-east Aboriginal context, understanding highly controlled and organised events through the framework of ceremony.

The extraordinary designs on shields help make sense of the roles they played in these controlled encounters. Elkin (1962) understood the designs as

> *really in themselves symbols of the mythical world—the world of spiritual power—together with the associated songs or chants, impart a 'virtue' to the weapon or other object which they adorn. A weapon so enriched is not only more pleasing, but more powerful.* It is endowed with a power which comes from the heroes of the creative past, a power which, through the medium of myth and ritual, is still available to men. (p. 9; emphasis in original)

Beveridge (1889) similarly described the bearer's sense of 'pride' in the object they carried:

> Usually these irregular lines are painted alternately red and white, which has rather a novel effect, when rapidly and artistically flourished; in which performance, the aboriginal warrior whilst playing at fighting, takes abundant pride. (p. 66)

Cooper (2004b), drawing on Beveridge, has described the shield designs as 'both visually arresting and distracting [creating] optical illusions during battle, a quality enhanced by the dexterity of the warriors' (p. 81). In this way shields imbued with ancestral designs can be seen embodying a number of roles, including protecting both people and their culture.

Beyond orchestrated ceremonial fights and warfare, other accounts show shields and cultural material playing a significant role in ceremonies. This was first recorded by Collins (1798) in 1795 at the Erah-ba-diang initiation ceremony held in Gadigal territory at Woccanmagully (Farm Cove) in Sydney, in *An account of the English colony in NSW*, which includes eight engraved images (Figures 4.31–4.32) of the ceremony that depict people engaging with their cultural material. The accompanying text describes one instance where Boo-der-ro, a key participant, conducted the ceremony:

> Striking the shield with the club, at every third stroke the whole party poised and presented their spears at him, pointing them inwards, and touching the centre of his shield. (vol. 1, p. 577)

William Scott (cited in Scott & Bennett 1929) also noticed the highly active role that objects played, describing Worimi ceremonies where

> two hundred leaping blackfellows appeared … with boomerangs, shields and spears, which they clashed together in a barbaric rhythm as they ran. They were formed in two divisions, and kept crossing and re-crossing the path, interlacing as they met. (p. 28)

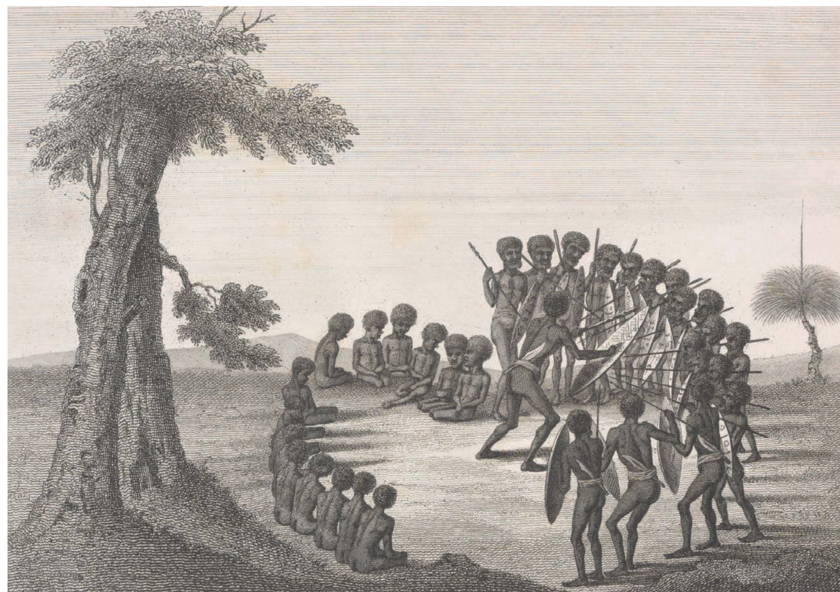


FIGURE 4.31.
FIGURE 4.32.
Yoo-long erah-ba-diang, 1798
James Neagle, England, 1769–1822
Engravings
From the book *An account of the English colony in NSW*, 1798, by David Collins
SLNSW, Q79/60
Image courtesy SLNSW

The promotion of boomerangs, shields and clubs as weapons disregards their highly significant ceremonial role and contributes to dehumanising Aboriginal people. Uncle Bruce Pascoe (2007) argues that colonial commentary on Aboriginal life was in fact propaganda used for specific outcomes. He directly links the portrayal of Aboriginal people as primitive savages to the justification of massacres, murder and removal. This has also been established by Ilaria Vanni Accarigi (2016), who has examined how Aboriginal material in colonial and world fairs promoted the concept of the savage: 'Aboriginal weapons showed nomadic tribes wandering on a land with which they had little connection. In this way, dispossession was legitimised and materialised' (p. 137).

Spears, clubs, boomerangs and shields were clearly visible and played an active role in a Wailwan and Wiradjuri ceremony near the Macquarie River and Quambone in central western NSW, as captured by photographer Charles Henry Kerry (1857–1928) in 1898. Boomerangs and spears were used to form ceremonial arches, and clubs were pushed into earthen mounds, on which senior men took stances with their shields (Miller 1999, pp. 14–30). These 'weapons' clearly functioned as ceremonial objects, and we can see how their complexity and sophistications are demeaned when simply described as, for example, shields. Perhaps one of the most important sources that illustrates the use of objects within ceremonies is the work of both Barak and McRae. Both clearly show cultural material such as boomerangs, clubs and shields as central to performances. One key example is a work by McRae (Figure 4.33) showing a row of men in a dance formation, each holding a bundle of spears that project into the sky. Wedged into the top of the spears is a broad shield held aloft, creating an impressive formation. The shield in this way becomes a banner, declaring the bearers' country and ancestors.

FIGURE 4.33.
Ceremony, c.1885
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; sheet 24.7 x 31.5 cm
From the album *Drawings depicting Aboriginal life*, c.1885
SLNSW, PXA 2129
Image courtesy SLNSW

4.14. Conclusion

In this chapter south-east broad and parrying shields were introduced as Mumala (grandfather) or the first generation of artists. Through a number of historical and contemporary accounts they were shown to best represent south-east praxis in a pre-contact era by exemplifying the region's strong and prolific use of engraved line designs. These engraved line designs are clearly demonstrated to be a shared visual language across the south-east, while also having individual expressions. In a region that has endured major cultural disruption, shields exemplify south-east knowledge and resilience. My extensive survey of shields in collections has revealed that individual

artist's hands are recognisable. Although contemporary practitioners, including Uncle Laddie Timbery, Uncle Badger Bates (b.1947, Baakantji), and younger artists such as Andrew Snelgar (b.1982, Ngemba) and Simon Penrose (b.1986, Yorta Yorta/Wurundjeri), continue to carve, four historical case studies were included to demonstrate that determining the provenance of unattributed shields to individual artists is possible. This process acknowledges the unique style and design of shields within the movement, and is an important part of decolonisation. Throughout this chapter an Aboriginal worldview has been established to help untangle the shields from the colonial construct they sit within. This worldview also enables us to understand shields as the work of individual artists and to challenge the role shields play within a western context, thereby understanding the multiple roles shields play within south-east Aboriginal communities. This chapter follows on from Koori Kinship Theory, which established the framework of this research, and precedes Babiin, the second generation of artists, represented by 19th-century Koori artists Tommy McRae and William Barak.

5. BABIIN: WILLIAM BARAK AND TOMMY MCRAE

5.1. Introduction

Ngia boon bodoom boon maen beek ki yanep wyadak mooloko twagie maga Coranderrktea. Bordop manbeek koorreen ngaboon nga koorreen toonta kiongia bambo ngo opka tongia balimta. Mange moork-moork karboon ngarringe magalo balimtalo. Magalo newlamtew hoomideet noongo weerki latrang mangi kolin ba badjewer. Quing-ke newllimjak kolin ba badjurr, mangby-en yanone balk-toe. Maga bigangatta brreni hoomoje noogal booda-do borrdoptak kroong-i-a, mal brreni noogal-looe woongerby balimta ba bolage nganga boongerrboon. Noome nearroka-dah werrk boongerby.

If any do not like Coranderrk, they can go away, and come back by and by. This place (Coranderrk) is very good. It is better to live here than to go about and drink. The Government has gathered us from the drink. Bad white men have nearly killed all our men and women. They are all very bad men and women the people who live in the bush. Before the white people came to our country we were all very happy together; but when they came they gave us grog, and it made us mad. Then we became unhealthy, and began to die off.

—Simon Wonga (1824–1874, Wurundjeri) (cited in Smyth 1878, vol. 2, p. 112)

This chapter profiles two 19th-century Koori artists, William Barak (c.1824–1903, Wurundjeri) and Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901), who during the onslaught of the colonial frontier took to pencil, pen, ink and ochres on paper to record a world that was never to be seen again. Together, McRae and Barak form the second pair or generation of artists, which within the research kinship model is Babiin (father). Both artists were born before the invasion of their countries and witnessed first-hand the colonisation of their countries and the resulting loss of culture. This chapter

establishes an understanding of how invasion in the south-east brought about contextual and cultural shifts that affected these artists' lives and works. It covers several topics in order to understand Barak's and McRae's positions within *Murruwaygu*. Because of the context in which these men lived, there is limited primary information from the artists themselves, in particular from McRae. I intend to use historical anthropological sources alongside the voices of the artists' descendants and other contemporary Indigenous voices, and observations of each artist's work. Special mention should be made of Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO (Wurundjeri), the great-great-niece of Barak and an advisor on this research project; long-time researcher, historian and champion of both Barak and McRae, Carol Cooper; and the late Andrew Sayers, who authored the seminal publication *Aboriginal artists of the 19th century* (1994), which this chapter relies on heavily. Recent work by Giordano Nanni and Andrea James (Yorta Yorta) (2013), which has been endorsed by the community, in particular by Aunty Joy, has also informed this chapter.

Focusing on the artists and their communities, in this chapter I provide some context for how the frontier moved across the south-east and brought with it a devastating impact. Attention is given to how these conditions can been understood as catalysts for the artists' practices. Further, I explore Barak's and McRae's works in relation to the research topic, discussing the use of the line not only by them, but also other artists within the research framework of south-east men's work. This research builds on the pioneering work of Cooper, who shows the connection between carving and works on paper by Koori artists. Finally, I consider a small collective of Koori male artists within this second generation. This chapter follows on from Mumala, the first generation of artists, represented by girran.girran (broad shields) and marga (parrying shields), and precedes Wurrumany, the third generation, represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Roy Kennedy (b.1934, Wiradjuri) and HJ Wedge (1957–2012, Wiradjuri).

5.1.1. Invasion

Invasion in the south-east is a complex process. Although Aboriginal nations across the continent had long experienced European and Asian incursions and engagements, in 1770 British forces invaded from the east and began colonising the continent. With a focus on the Eora nation in order to contextualise the life experiences of Barak and McRae, the British military and civilian invasion of south-east Aboriginal nations forms the basis of this introduction. This focus aligns with Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking), to show respect to the community that first faced colonisation and to acknowledge that the Eora nation has continued to resist and to inspire.

The violent landing of Lieutenant James Cook (1728–1779) at Kamay (Botany Bay) on 29 April 1770 (see Chapter 1) marks the start of British invasion (Miller et al. 2010, p. 174). The British returned in 1788 when the First Fleet, under the command of Captain (later Governor) Arthur Phillip (1738–1814), raised the Union Jack on the shores of Warrane (Port Jackson) (Miller et al. 2010, p. 176), breaching Gadigal sovereignty. The British forces soon spread into the 29 clan-group territories that make up the Eora nation (in what is known today as the Sydney region) (Madden 2016, p. 10), and in these unprecedented circumstances Gadigal were outnumbered. Phillip believed the Aboriginal population of Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay to be around 1500 (cited in Attenbrow 2010, p. 17), a number closely matched by the First Fleet's 1024 marines and convicts (Butler, Percival & Cameron 1995, p. 15). An Eora woman named Patyegarang (c.1780s–n.d.) (cited in Nathan, Rayner & Brown 2009) explained to astronomer William Dawes that the Eora were deeply afraid 'because of the guns' (p. 42). Eora also faced diseases such as galgalla (smallpox) (Nathan et al. 2009, p. 58), the death rate from which has been estimated to 90 per cent (Warren 2014, para. 2). Galgalla's introduction is understood by many as integral to the British invasion (Uncle Allen Madden, cited in *They have come to stay* 2008).

Various subjugating tactics were deployed by the British in the Sydney region, and these can be seen as templates for how colonisation would be implemented across the country: population displacement; brutal forms of violence; the deliberate and inadvertent introduction of diseases; the control of resources; construction of laws legislating against Aboriginal people; the doctrine of terra nullius (empty land); and the colonisation of our minds and bodies. Many of these acts had genocidal intentions and ultimately saw both the removal of Aboriginal people from their country and the destruction of their culture (Indigenous Law Resources 2017, para. 3).

These campaigns were constructed within a framework of racial narratives that served to justify the actions. Social Darwinism, in particular, was embraced as it showed Aboriginal people as the lowest form of humanity, promoting 'the indisputable Godliness of the British or the pretence that they actually believed what they were doing was right' (Pascoe 2007, p. 61). Aboriginal people have long been purposefully depicted as uncivilised savages (Cook 1893/2012; Cunningham 1827; Breton 1833), and these racial vilifications continue to haunt Aboriginal people today (Grant 2015). When High Court of Australia judge William Deane handed down his verdict on the historic Mabo decision in 1992 he stated that Aborigines had been treated as a 'different and lower form of life whose very existence could be ignored for the purpose of determining the legal right to occupy and use their traditional lands' (Mansell 1992, para. 19).

Not many counter claims exist. One is from French explorer Captain Nicolas Baudin (1754–1803) (cited in Toft 2002), who, in a personal letter to Governor Philip Gidley King (1817–1904) in 1802, critiqued the colonial project:

> I have never been able to conceive that there was justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their governments, a land seen for the first time, when it is inhabited by men who have not always deserved the title of savages or cannibals. (p. 202)

While in Sydney, Baudin's expedition collected what is understood to be the first works on paper created by an Aboriginal person (Figure 5.1). The Eora images mainly depict fishes and 'possess a strong visual relationship to Aboriginal rock engravings around the Sydney region' (Sayers 1994, p. 73). These works speak to an enduring Aboriginal willingness to engage with new mediums and share knowledge despite the conditions.

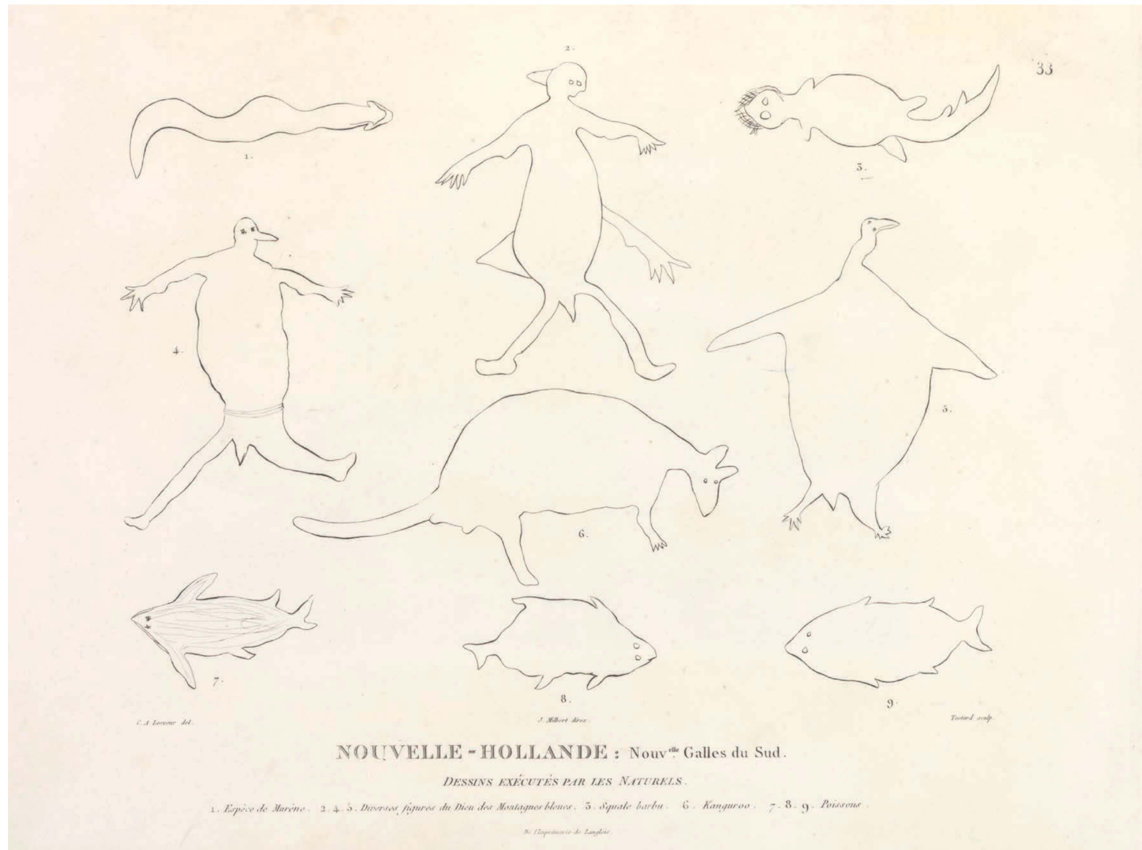


FIGURE 5.1.
Drawings, 1802
Artist/s unknown, Eora, South-east, Australia
Etching
François Péron, France, 1775–1810
Louis Claude Desaulses de Freycinet, France, 1779–1842
Charles Alexandre Lesueur, France, 1778–1846
From the book *Voyage of discovery to Terres Australes, achieved by order of the Government, on the corvettes (sloops) Le Géographe, Le Naturaliste and the schooner Le Casuarina, during the years 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803 and 1804*, 2nd edn, 1824
NLA, FRM F978 (v.1–4)
Image courtesy NLA

5.1.2. Resistance

Meeting the many strands of colonisation were the many responses of Aboriginal resistance and survival. The events in the Sydney region can again be seen as a

microcosm for rest of the country. At first Eora recedes and watches the invaders from afar, a reaction in line with the sighting of other European ships, which had come but always passed (Miller et al. 2010, p. 177). Determined to 'engage', Governor Phillip abducted and held people in captivity. Arabanoo (c.1760–1789, Eora) was captured in 1788 but died a few months after from galgalla. Woollarawarre Bennelong (c.1764–1813, Wongal) and Colbee (c.1760–1806, Gadigal) were taken in 1789. While Colbee quickly escaped, Bennelong became acquainted with the British system, seemingly interested in learning more about the invaders. Gadigal elder Uncle Allen Madden (cited in Finding Bennelong 2013) describes Bennelong as 'a double agent. He's working both sides of the fence' (para. 6).

Perhaps following Bennelong's approach of engagement, Patyegarang worked closely with Dawes to record the local language (Gibson 2012). Understandably, not all Eora people followed Bennelong's lead. Pemulwuy (c.1750–1802, Bidjigal) led a resistance campaign from 1792, carrying out targeted raids on farms in the Hawkesbury and Nepean regions, burning crops and destroying flocks. Under government orders, Pemulwuy was killed and beheaded, his head sent back to England only to be lost in the colonial archive (Gibson 2012, p.14). Today, resistance leaders such as Bennelong, Patyegarang and Pemulwuy continue to inspire and inform their descendants and communities.

Eora people actively resisted colonisation by continuing their practices despite the odds against them. Often pushed to the fringes of their country, Eora people 'continued to live in areas to which they were connected, and retained more language and cultural knowledge than outsiders were aware of' (Irish 2017, para. 3). Many families found ways of surviving independently, particularly in Sydney where work was available, while others reorganised into new social groups on sanctioned reserves and missions, such as the La Perouse Mission on Kamay. As in Sydney, across the country invasion was met with resistance, and descendants are continuing that movement today.

5.2. William Barak

By his own estimate, Barak, born as Beruk, (cited in Wiencke 1984) 'was born in the year 1813 at Brushy Creek' (p. 3) in his Wurundjeri lands near present-day Croydon, Melbourne. (Barak's generally accepted birthdate is c.1824.) Wurundjeri are part of the larger Woiwurrung group whose lands take in Narrm (Melbourne) and surrounding country to the north and east, including Birrarung (Yarra River) and its catchment in the Yarra Valley. Barak's father, Bebejern, was the Ngurungaeta or leader and his mother, Tooterrie, was from the Ngurailum-balluk people (noted by Tindale 1974 as Ngurelban people, p. 207) further to the north in the Murchison district (Murphy Wandin 2003, p. 5). Woiwurrung are part of a greater alliance of five nations that encircle Port Phillip Bay, forming the Kulin confederacy, with Boonwurrung to the south-east, Taungurong to the north, Dja Dja Wurrung to the north-east and Wathaurung to the west. Barak was brought up knowing the traditions of his people and 'was an extraordinary repository of information as to his tribe' (Howitt 1904, p. 129).

With colonies established in Sydney in 1788 and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1803, the coastline of present-day Victoria began to suffer incursions. Most notable is the 1803 failed establishment of a British outpost under Lieutenant-Governor David Collins at Sullivan Bay, on the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay. After only a few months the colony was disbanded, leaving the Boonwurrung community in trauma. An escaped convict named William Buckley (1780–1856) managed to cross the bay and was taken in by Wathaurung people, who cared for Buckley as one of their own for over three decades. During this time the coastline was frequented by marauding sealers and whalers who killed, raped and abducted Aboriginal people (Pascoe 2007). While these incursions meant that Kulin and their neighbours were able to develop an understanding of outsiders, they still were not prepared for the onslaught of British invasion.

In 1835 a group of entrepreneurs known as the Port Phillip Association led by John Batman arrived in Wurundjeri country from Van Diemen's Land seeking financial

reward. Engaging Buckley, and in the presence of eight Wurundjeri elders, a controversial agreement was put forward by the Port Phillip Association to facilitate the calculated 'possession' (Murphy Wandin 2003, p. 5) of 600,000 acres of land in return for payment and a yearly tribute of blankets, axes and handkerchiefs, among other things—known as the Batman Treaty. Barak witnessed this event and estimates his age to be 11 years old at the time (Wiencke 1984, p. 3). Although the colonial government quickly annulled this treaty, the invasion and permanent settlement of Kulin country had begun. The NSW colonial government quickly established the Port Phillip District, paving the way for squatters to take up vast tracks of land.

To protect their pastoral interests, squatters cleared and fenced off the land, causing the physical and cultural displacement of Kulin. Barak (cited in Wiencke 1984) describes how 'a lot of whitefellow come here by and by and clear the scrub all over the country' (p. 3). With the epicentre based on the banks of the Birrarung, the site of Melbourne, Wurundjeri felt the full force of colonisation. Those who had managed to survive the first wave of violence and disease were left clinging to the fringes. Barak was alive at a pivotal time in history.

5.2.1. Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate

By 1835 the Aboriginal population in the region had decreased by 80 per cent (Broome 2010, p. 76). In a vain attempt to establish the district on a humanitarian footing, the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate was established in 1839 under the direction of Colonial Office in London (Lydon 2005, p. xvii). George Augustus Robinson (1791–1866) was appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines, having come from Van Diemen's Land, where he had orchestrated the removal of Tasmanian Aboriginal people from their homelands to the 'friendly mission' of Wybalenna on Flinders Island, paving the way for the pastoral industry. Robinson saw himself as an 'expert' in Aboriginal affairs, but Tasmanian Aboriginals such as Sharon Dennis (Tasmanian Aboriginal) (2008) describe him as 'a hindrance and a man with no values or morals' (p. 182).

Frontier violence was rife across the region. John Wedge (1793–1872) (cited in Pascoe 2007), one of Batman's business associates who had taken pastoral runs in Werribee, north-west of Port Phillip, believed that 'unless some measures are adopted to protect the natives a spirit of hostility will be created against the whites which in all probability will lead to a state of warfare' (p. 38). Reported incidents included the 1833–1834 massacre of Gunditjmara by whalers at Portland Bay in the Western District, known as the Convincing Ground; Murdering Gully, which saw 35 to 40 Djargurd Wurrung murdered in 1839; the 1839 Campaspe Plains Massacre of Dja Dja Wurrung and Daung Wurrung; and the 1840 Battle of Yering in the Yarra Valley within Woiwurrung country, involving Barak's family (Ellender, Christiansen & Faithfull 2001, pp. 65–67; Woiwod 2012a, p. 125).

Violence in the region counted for 25 per cent of deaths, but disease counted for 60 per cent (Broome 2010, p. 77). In 1839 the Assistant Protector for the Melbourne and Western Port regions, William Thomas (1793–1867), counted in his census 207 Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung people, many of whom could not find enough food and were suffering badly from introduced diseases including smallpox, dysentery, syphilis and influenza (Cooper 2003, p. 17). Barak would have been among this count. Thomas noted that by 1845 there are no Woiwurrung or Boonwurrung children under the age of five (Presland 2010, p. 91). Barak was one of the lucky ones who survived to adulthood and in 1844, under the encouragement of Billibillary (c.1799–1846/ Wurundjeri), he joined the Native Police Corps, along with other young Kulin men (Broome 2010, p. 49).

5.2.2. Coranderrk Aboriginal Station

With the community in free-fall, Woiwurrung took matters into their own hands. Under the leadership of Barak's cousin and Ngurungaeta Simon Wonga, and together with Scottish Presbyterian lay preacher and trusted ally John Green (1830–1903), Woiwurrung walked to an old Wurundjeri campsite at the junction of the Birrarung

and Badger Creek, near present-day Healesville in the Yarra Valley. There they established Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in 1863. Named after the Victorian Christmas bush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*) that blooms in profusion in the region, Coranderrk was originally plotted out at 2300 acres and became a sanctuary for 40 Woiwurrung and other displaced Aboriginals.

FIGURE 5.2.
Deputation of Victorian Aborigines at the Governor's Levee, 1863
Samuel Calvert, England, active Australia, 1828–1913
Wood engraving published in the *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 25 June
SLV, IMP25/06/63/1
Image courtesy SLV

Later that year, Wonga led a deputation of 15 men to an official celebration in Narrm (Melbourne) (Figure 5.2), where they presented gifts of possum-skin cloaks and carved weapons, and Wonga spoke to the crowd in Woiwurrung, with Thomas (cited in Lydon

2005) translating: 'Blackfellow now throw away all war spears. No more fighting but live like white men, almost' (p. 41). This act of diplomacy has been interpreted as a critical step in having Coranderrk formally recognised; the following month the station was listed in *Victoria Government Gazette* (Nanni & James 2013, p. 9).

With Green's assistance, Coranderrk became self-sufficient. They cleared and fenced large tracts of land for vegetables and fruit trees and started running stock. By 1866 the station had grown to 4850 acres and was supporting a population of 300 people. A storeroom, schoolroom, dormitory and bark huts had been built, along with a bakery and brick kiln. Later, cottages were erected by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (Nanni & James 2013, pp. 12–13). People on Coranderrk made and sold baskets, possum-skin cloaks and carvings such as boomerangs, clubs and shields to supplement their income and purchase 'cloths, ammunition, and, at times, provisions' (Massola 1975, p. 67). In an era that has been described as Coranderrk's 'golden age', the station, under self-governance, had achieved more than the protectorate (Nanni & James 2013, p. 14). Uncle Bruce Pascoe (Bunurong/Yuin/Tasmanian) (cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) believes that if that success 'had been allowed to continue [it] would have changed the way history went in Victoria' (17:43).

The Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate was disbanded in 1849, but Thomas remained employed as Guardian of Aborigines for the entire Port Phillip area. Thomas had learnt much of the Kulin languages and customs (Thomas & Stephens 2014) and had become a trusted friend of the Kulin people (Ergo 2018, para. 2). Following the separation of Victoria from NSW in 1851, the newly created Victorian Colonial Government formed the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines in 1860. Soon the state annexed the lands of some 40 different nations and the Central Board, advised by Thomas, established five missions (Mulvaney 1967, para. 5) in order to corral and 'protect' Aboriginal people: Lake Tyers and Ramahyuck in Gippsland on Gunai/Kurnai country; Ebenezer near Lake Hindmarsh in the north-west of Victoria on Wergaia

country; Lake Condah on Gunditjmara country in south-west Victoria; Framlingham on Girai wurrung country in south-west Victoria; and Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. Gunditjmara elder Uncle Jim Berg (cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) has called missions 'a double-edged sword' (14:48), as the relative safety they brought was accompanied by the suppression of Aboriginal spirituality.

5.2.3. Victorian Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines

Thomas passed away in 1867 and two years later the Central Board was reformed as the Victorian Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines. This change coincided with the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869*, which extended the state's powers over Aboriginal people, including where people could live and work, who they could marry and, importantly, 'the care, custody and education of the children' (Museum of Australian Democracy 2018, p. 2). For this reason, the *Aboriginal Protection Act* is sometimes referred to as the 'half-caste act' (Pascoe 2008, p. 166), as it legitimised the removal of countless children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations, and their assimilation 'into white society' (Murphy Wandin 2013, p. vii).

The success and independence of Coranderrk became an increasing problem for the Board; with their conflicting ideology of 'protection', and under pressure from local white property owners, the Board sought to shut Coranderrk and sell off the land ('Mr Brough Smyth and the Aborigines' 1876, p. 7). The community, along with Green (cited in Nanni & James 2013), protested bitterly: 'It would be cruel on the part of the Board to move the Aborigines from Coranderrk, and that is why I refused to be a party to it' (p. 170). Barak (cited in Murphy Wandin 2003) strenuously opposed the move: 'You got to know your father's country, Yarra is my father's country. Me no leave it, Yarra, my father's country. There's no mountains for me on the Murray' (p. 4).

The year 1874 marked the start of troubled times for the Coranderrk community, and enormous responsibilities were placed on Barak. Green was relieved of his position and

was banned from Coranderrk for his refusal to comply with the Board, and Wonga tragically passed away from tuberculosis. Barak assumed the role of Ngurungaeta, heading a campaign to not only to reinstate Green as the manager but to hold on to Coranderrk and receive better conditions. This campaign, dubbed the Coranderrk Rebellion (Barwick 1998), involved deputations, partitions and protests that sharply critiqued the Board and the station managers who 'were either inept or unsympathetic' (Sayers 1994, p. 15). The government responded with a Royal Commission in 1877 and Parliamentary Enquiry in 1881, with mixed results (Barwick 1998; Broome 2010, pp. 92–93). Barak (cited in Nanni & James 2013) gave evidence to the enquiry:

> We don't want any board nor [Captain Page inspecting] over us—only one man, [and] that is Mr [John] Green, and the station to be under the Chief Secretary. And then we will show to the country that we can work it and make it pay, and I know it will. (p. 90)

Marcia Langton (Yiman/Bidjara)(cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) reflects on Barak as Ngurungaeta: 'Aristocratic in his bearing, he's highly intelligent, and he must have been charming in many ways because he persuaded so many people and he had such loyal supporters' (24:42). She goes on to say that he was 'superior to the white colonials that he was dealing with, who where offended by his subversion and the intelligence of his subversion' (25:29).

With the implementation of the 'half-caste act', slowly the younger, more able-bodied members of the community were expelled from Coranderrk, often taken to Lake Tyers Mission in Gippsland, leaving the old people unable to maintain the station. Uncle Bruce Pascoe (2008) argues that 'nothing could have been more successful in destroying family and community since the war of occupation' (p. 166). The dwindling elderly population were unable to work the land, thus legitimising the Board's breaking up of Coranderrk. But even after Barak's death in 1903, the community continued the fight, writing a desperate appeal to *The Argus* ('Coranderrk Aborigines' 1923):

> We are very much in sad distress thinking of how members of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines are breaking our homes up at Coranderrk, and trying to transfer us natives to Lake Tyers against our wish … Remember, we are no more slaves because we are coloured. We are under the British flag, too … They might just as well shoot us than shift us against our will. Will someone fight for us? (p. 15)

Amid public debate, police escorted residents off Coranderrk in 1922 and 1923, but a handful of stalwarts refused to leave their homes. Numbers vary according to different reports (Barwick 1998, p. 310; 'Coranderrk Aborigines: protest against transfer' 1924; 'Coranderrk Aborigines' 1924; Mulvaney 1989, p. 156;). Mick Woiwod (2012b) notes that by 1927 'the only Aborigines authorised to live on the Coranderrk Reserve were … Mr and Mrs Davis (Snr), Mrs Dunolly, Billy Russell and Dan Russell, his wife and family' (p. 160). But the Board did everything it could to isolate the group—when Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin's grandmother, Mrs Dunolly (née Wandin), 'wrote to the Board asking that her son, James Wandon, be permitted to stay with her a week since he had recently lost his wife … the Board refused her plea' (p. 160).

5.2.4. Barak's personal life and hardships

Barak similarly faced enormous heartbreak in his personal life. His first wife, Lizzie, a Braiakaulung woman from the Gunai nation in Gippsland, passed away c.1863 without having any children. Barak remarried in 1865 to Annie, who is listed as being from Euston in the Lower Murray region (Woiwod 2012b, p. 48). Although they had three children, two daughters did not survive pass infancy, leaving their son, David. In July 1881 Annie passed away and in August, David fell gravely ill with consumption. Unable to get any help from the manager of Coranderrk, Barak was forced to carry David into Melbourne for treatment, where he passed away. Barak was left completely bereft. Aunty Joy (cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) comments on his loss:

> Losing his son, who he, I believe, would have wanted to be the Ngurungaeta … he would [have wanted] to walk with and teach him not only Aboriginal culture but teach him how to be part of the new world. (32:48)

Although there are no accounts of how Barak felt after losing his own family and the destruction of Coranderrk, we can reflect on the words of his uncle and Ngurungaeta Billibillary (cited in Broome 2010), who had earlier lamented such losses: 'The Black lubras say now no good children, blackfella say no country now for them, very good we kill and no more come up pickaninny' (p. 77). Aunty Joy (Murphy Wandin 2003) offers a contemporary understanding:

> I also see deep buried sadness. I see scars so deep that they bring tears to my eyes and a crushing pain within my heart—a lonely, heartbroken man desperate for the return of his family, his people and his culture. (p. 6)

5.2.5. Barak the artist

In his later years, when Coranderrk was home to only a few elderly people, Barak took to painting. Uncle Bruce (cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) describes his paintings as 'the last act of a man whose soul had been devastated' (47:12), while Langton calls them 'survivors records' (46:50). Barak's creative 'acts' number around 50 known works, the majority of which are recorded as made in the 1880s and 1890s, with a handful dating from the turn of the 20th century (Ryan 2003, p. 11).

At odds with his bleak living conditions, Barak's paintings deal predominately with the festivity of ceremony. Uniquely placed 'as a recorder and preserver of tradition' (Sayers 1994, p. 13), Barak painted Aboriginal scenes exclusively. Images are overflowing with songs, ceremony and dance. Rows of men stand upright in their possum-skin cloaks, while women are often seated with their cloaks stretched over their legs to beat a rhythm (Figures 5.3–5.4). Frequently taking centrestage is a group of men dancing; legs splayed and arms outstretched with interlocking boomerangs, they form a united front under the direction of two towering song-men.

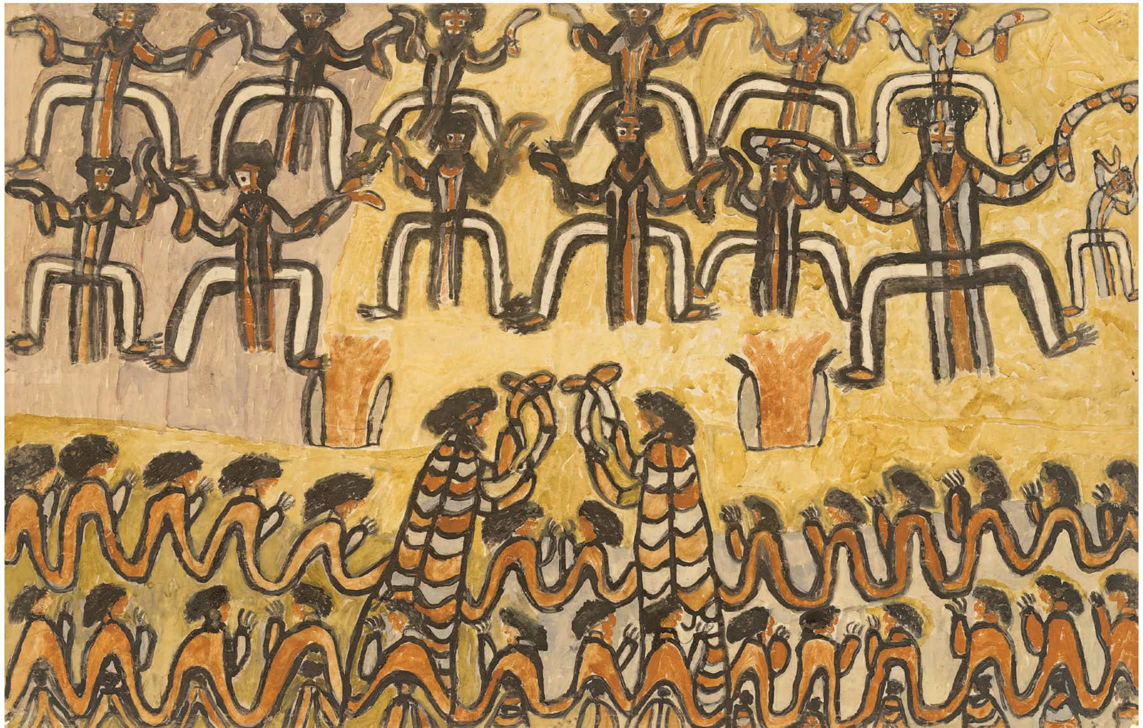


FIGURE 5.3.
Ceremony, 1898
William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, c.1824–1903
Pencil, wash, ground wash, charcoal solution, gouache and natural pigments on paper; 57 x 88.8 cm
NGV, 1215B-5
Purchased 1962
Image courtesy NGV

Despite most of his works being titled simply *Ceremony* or *Figures in cloaks*, and without direct quotations from the artist, Cooper (2003) recognises Barak's pictures as having the power to communicate deeply encoded elements of his Wurundjeri knowledge (p. 15). Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin (2003) sees them as evidence of his commitment to culture: 'Barak was able to maintain his identity through his art even through cultural upheaval' (p. 5). Sayers (1994) astutely pointed out that unlike the work of most 19th-century Aboriginal artists, there are 'no Europeans in his extant drawings' (p. 19). Instead, Barak's works are concerned with Wurundjeri life in its prime, full of cultural information and knowledge. Uncle Bruce Pascoe (2008) notes that Barak's 'bitterly nostalgic [pictures] provide crucial information about pre-colonial civilisation' (p. 162). Barak's urgency to record was commented on by his long-time friend Anne Bon (1838–1936) (1931), who said he painted whenever he 'could get a sheet of drawing paper' (p. 6).

FIGURE 5.4.
Untitled (ceremony), 1900
William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, c.1824–1903
Natural pigments, watercolour and pencil on paper; 50.5 x 63 cm
NGV, 2002.31
The Warren Clark Bequest, 2001
Image courtesy NGV

A rare c.1895 photograph of Barak at work (Figure 5.5) reveals his preferred painting technique: using the wall of his cottage as an easel, he would paint the picture upright. Barak worked with paper or cardboard and a variety of media, including pigments, charcoals and ochres, along with introduced colours, including blues, greens, pink and orange. Although it is unclear how he obtained these European materials, 'Barak took the European and made it Aboriginal' (Sayers 1994, p. 22). This can also be seen in the way he approached carving: it was documented that Barak 'first formed [the object] with an axe and a knife and then smoothed with a glass fragment' (Arthur Baessler, cited in Woiwod 2017, p. 329). The background of many of Barak's works is often left

blank, while others have a light wash applied, such as *Ceremony* (1898) (Figure 5.3), or a background of dashes, as seen in *Untitled (ceremony)* (1900) (Figure 5.4). But Barak was not the first to use introduced materials. William Thomas seems to have encouraged Kulin to create pictures on paper during the 1840s; these are now held in the SLV collection (Sayers 1994, pp. 102–104).

Testament to Barak's careful composition and thoughtfulness, pencil underdrawings can often be seen in his works (Sayers 1994, p. 20). Pencil was used to create the finer details, including animal claws and feathers. The visiting German ethnographer Arthur Baessler (1857–1907) (cited in Sayers 1994) provided the only commentary on Barak's technique, describing how when drawing men in their possum-skin cloaks, Barak 'first drew the whole body and then dressed the person by painting a suit over it' (p. 18).

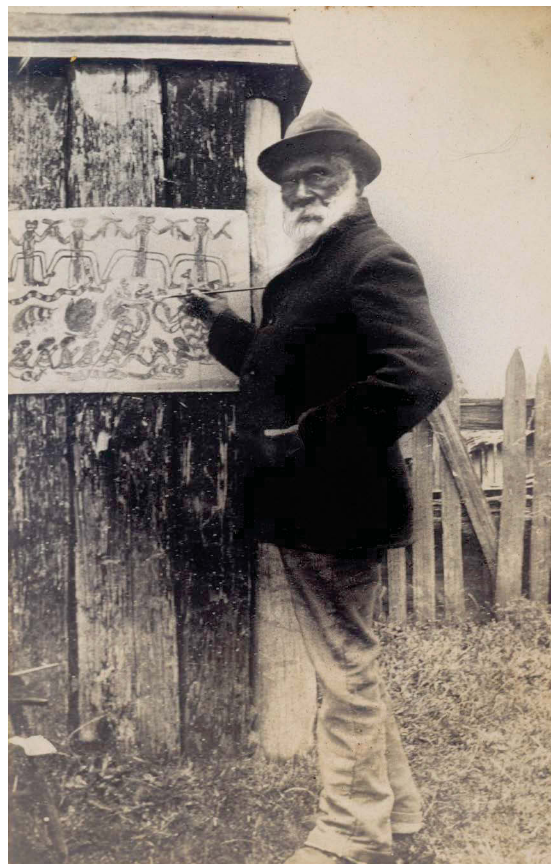


FIGURE 5.5.
Barak drawing a corroboree, c.1898
Talma & Co., Australia, 1893–1932
Photographic print
SLV, H91.258
Image courtesy SLV

5.2.6. Barak and Murruwaygu

Connecting south-east carving practices and the works of both Barak and McRae has already been established through the pioneering work of Cooper (1994). Barak's subjects, both human and animal, are largely created with a strong black outline (Figure 5.6). This technique speaks to other south-east types of figurative work, such as rock art and ground sculptures, which are often dominated by the outline. However, Barak fills his figurative outlines with varying block designs or 'banding' (Sayers 1994, p. 18), often in the form of stripes, curved lines and scallops, the blocks often filled with alternating colours. In this way, Barak's figures are covered with a layer of designs. This sense of pattern, of black lineal formations with blocks of colour, is a dominant characteristic of Barak's artworks and connects deeply, in both process and outcome, with traditional mark-making. According to Sayers, 'the sense conveyed by Barak's drawings is one of pattern, and it is pattern which embodies a sense of order' (p. 19). This artistic technique is best witnessed when Barak represents Kulin people dancing or clad in their possum-skin cloaks. The blocks can be seen as the ceremonial painting on men's chests, the individual pelts that make up a cloak, or the designs applied to cloaks. In this way, the designs can be understood to have ceremonial context. In many of his earlier works these designs were more detailed, sometimes infilled with further line markings; in his later works these give way to more uniformed blocks or stripes. Through his work, Barak draws our attention to the importance of designs for south-east Aboriginal people pre-contact.

Barak used this same technique for all figures, including animals and birds, giving the viewer the impression that everything has its own design, representing its identity (Figure 5.7). This can be understood as the concept Barak described as murup, or spirit, which all beings have (Howitt 1904, p. 435). When viewing Barak's designs as a representation of murup or spirit—also identity—the interchangeability of humans and animals can be understood through totems. Barak noted that along with the two moieties of Bunjil, the Eaglehawk (wedge-tailed eagle), and Waang, the Crow, the

Wurundjeri totems are Thara, the Swamp-hawk, and, in an estimate from Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908), Ganewara, the Black Swan (1904, pp. 126–129). But this does not account for all the animals depicted in Barak's works, which include snakes, emus, kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, turtles, dogs, lyrebirds, goannas and kookaburras. Perhaps these animals were personally significant to Barak, or they denote the subject of the performance and ceremonial connections, or perhaps they are ancestral figures. In describing performances that mimic animals, Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918) (1905/2005) told how 'some of the animals selected are the totems of those present, whilst others are connected with the myths and superstitions current among the different tribes' (p. 113). Aunty Joy (Murphy Wandin 2018) understands the depiction of animals in Barak's work to be a statement about 'the importance of their inclusion in a sustainable and harmonious lifestyle' (p. xiv).

FIGURE 5.6.
Figures in possum-skin cloaks, 1898
William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, c.1824–1903
Pencil, wash, charcoal solution, gouache and natural pigments on paper; 57 x 88.8 cm
NGV, 1215A-5
Purchased 1962
Image courtesy NGV

FIGURE 5.7.
Untitled (hunting scene), 1899
William Barak, Wurundjeri, South-east, Australia, c.1824–1903
Pencil and watercolour on paper; 51.8 x 102.7 cm
NGV, 1999.3
Purchased with the assistance of the Fraser family, 1999
Image courtesy NGV

Barak told of a song that describes how a man, when hunting a 'native bear' (koala), became linked to the koala through its murup (Howitt 1904, p. 422). In Barak's works, animals are not only present but take part in ceremonies and take on human attributes, similar to the human participants of the ceremony, as seen in an emu depicted wearing a lyrebird feather atop its head in one of his artworks. Barak's inclusion of animals, depicted with the same technique as humans, suggests a ceremonial link between animals and Kulin. Sayers (1994) argued that animals were incorporated 'not merely as a part of the bush surrounding the main players, but occupying the same space' (p. 16). As highlighted by Cooper (2003, p. 26), supporting this interpretation is Howitt's (1904) description of other dances involving mimicry, in particular a dingo dance known as Yirai-kapin:

> A man ran into the firelight on all fours, with a bush stuck in his belt behind, to represent a dingo's tail. Others followed … smelling each other, snarling and snapping, scratching the ground. (p. 547)

Barak's images of animals with human attributes can be understood to suggest this mimicry.

Appreciating Barak's ability to shift between creating abstracted designs in wood (see Chapter 4) to a figurative style on paper, Cooper (1994) has shown that within the south-east both these styles 'existed side by side' (p. 100) and were interchangeable. There are numerous accounts of the role of figurative design within pre-invasion south-east communities, and Cooper (1994) found it to be a medium of communication that was interchangeable with abstract designs. Unlike more abstracted imagery, which was 'able to carry deeper levels of meaning' for different members of the community (p. 109), figurative work could be more educational. Uncle Bruce (cited in *Freedom for our lifetime* 2008) similarly acknowledges this communicative function:

> He was trying to say: 'This is our culture … This is what we were. This is the way we were. We are intelligent cultural entities. You don't believe it but here it is, look. Here is our corroboree, here are the marks.' (46:52)

5.3. Tommy McRae

While Tommy McRae's early life is largely undocumented it has been assumed that he was born in the mid-1830s along what is known today as the Upper Murray River. As an adult, McRae established a camp with his family at Lake Moodemere near the NSW–Victoria border towns of Corowa and Wahgunyah on the backwaters of Murray. According to Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria, McRae was officially recorded as 75 years old when he passed away in 1901, making his birth year 1826. In 1886 William Henry Lang (1859–1923) (cited in Sayers 1994) recorded McRae as 'a man about 42 years of age' (p. 128), making his birth year 1844 and his age 57 when he died. Based on the detailed ceremonial knowledge recorded in McRae's drawings, as discussed later in this chapter, the latter estimate seems unlikely. (McRae's generally accepted birthdate is c.1835.)

It can be concluded that McRae would have been an active participant in the types of ceremonies he depicted. One of the last major ceremonies was recorded in 1840 near Albury by John Webster (1818–n.d.) (cited in Eagle 2005), who reported seeing 'a great number [who] were all covered with various lines of some white pigment [and] danced and clashed their weapons' (p. 373). Due to the speed of colonisation, ceremonies like this dwindled, along with the cultural knowledge they embodied. McRae faithfully recorded them in elegant detail.

McRae's nation and cultural affiliation is also hard to determine with any certainty. It has been commonly assumed that he belonged to the Kwat Kwat nation, with the earliest listing published by Cooper and James Urry (1981, p. 81). This assumption seems to rely on his residency at Lake Moodemere, which in some sources is shown as Kwat Kwat country. Cooper (2017, pers. comm., 12 December) recalls that Diane Barwick, an anthropologist and historian of Victorian Aboriginal history, first cited McRae as Kwat Kwat, as she sought to place McRae into a cultural context rather than describe him as an anonymous Aboriginal person. Although this was a logical assumption by Barwick, the enormous dispersal of Aboriginal people at that time and the lack of detailed information need to be taken into account.

5.3.1. Kwat Kwat/Wiradjuri

There is limited documentation of Kwat Kwat people. Norman Tindale (1974) stated that Kwat Kwat occupied the 'south bank of the Murray River in a strip extending from above the Goulburn River junction to Barnawartha and the King and Ovens rivers junction; south to Indigo Creek' (p. 206), which would include Lake Moodemere. Kwat Kwat does not appear on the Horton map (1996), or the more recent Victorian Aboriginal languages map (Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages 2018), or its derivatives.

The Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages list Kwat Kwat as a clan of the greater Yorta Yorta nation,

yet in their extensive study of the Yorta Yorta language, Heather Bowe and Stephen Morey (1999) compare a number of sources but are ultimately inconclusive. More convincing is the correspondence between Mathews and Thomas Shadrach James (1859–1946, known to the community as 'Grandfather James') at Cummeragunja Mission in 1897 regarding the Yorta Yorta nation and its clan boundaries: Kwat Kwat are not mentioned as part of or neighbours to Yorta Yorta (transcribed from handwritten *Papers of Robert Hamilton Mathews 1841–1918*).

Both Burnum Burnum (Harry Penrith, Yorta Yorta) (cited in Stewart 1988, p. 302) and Freddie Dowling (Pangarang) (2017, pp. 64–68) identify as descendants and relatives of McRae. Descendants also include the Morgan family (Dean 2013), who often act as McRae's estate for cultural approvals, and others who reside in and identify with Gippsland, including Dot Moffatt. Both the Morgans and Moffatt were consulted as part of this research.

More recent research, by art historian Mary Eagle, has uncovered two facts that locate McRae's ancestry as Wiradjuri. One key source is a wordlist found in the first 14 pages of a McRae notebook (1875) in the collection of the NGV, which is titled 'Aust. native words Given [illegible word] by Tommy McRae June 1891 Tribes on the Murray between Echuca + Albury' (accession number 2001.837). Eagle (2005) has found that of 'the 166-word vocabulary given by Tommy McCrae to Roderick Kilborn in June 1891 only one word was not Wiradjuri' (p. 396). Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM (Wiradjuri) has confirmed the list as containing mainly Wiradjuri words. Bowe and Morey (1999) state that Yorta Yorta share only 11 per cent of common vocabulary with Wiradjuri (p. 4). This would indicate that McRae was a Wiradjuri speaker.

In addition, Eagle (2005) references the work of anthropologist R.H. Mathews, who interviewed McRae's brother Billy. Billy said their 'father and mother were Wiradjuri from Albury and Yarrawonga' (p. 396), strongly suggesting that Tommy McRae's

cultural affiliation was Wiradjuri. Mathews worked extensively with Wiradjuri, and although researchers query Mathews's work, including Barwick (1984, p. 102) and Jeremy Beckett (2012, p. 212), others such as Tindale (1974) and Martin Thomas (2007, p. 34) see his work as credible. In this instance, Mathews quotes a direct relation of Tommy McRae and can therefore be seen as reliable.

A further indication that McRae was affiliated with Wiradjuri, which I uncovered during this research, are the unpublished notes of John Francis Huon Mitchell (1831–1923) ('J.F.H. Mitchell' 1923) relating to his publication *Aboriginal dictionary (Woradgery tongue)* (1906). Mitchell listed 'tribal names … and their significance' (appendix pp. 1–2) for the 'Woradgery' (Wiradjuri) of the Murray River/Albury region, where he grew up on the family property, Mungabareena. Although he failed to record the meaning, he did mention 'Yackendoona (Tommy)', a derivation of Yackaduna, the name that McRae is also known by (Sayers 1994).

Sifting through colonial fragments is inherently problematic (Kingsley et al. 2009), and while my research does not centre on Tommy McRae's cultural affiliation, these findings highlight the difficulties of working with this material.

5.3.2. Explorers, squatters and goldminers

The Upper Murray River region was first invaded in 1824 when Hamilton Hume (1797–1873) and William Hovell (1786–1875) followed Aboriginal pathways along the western side of the Great Dividing Range, travelling from Sydney to Port Phillip on a route that eventually became the Hume Highway. They crossed the Murray River at present-day Albury/Wodonga, describing the 'general appearance of the country' as 'rich and beautiful', and noticing evidence of Aboriginal agriculture:

> The grass, having apparently been burnt early in the season, and being now in full seed, is fresh and luxuriant, frequently as high as their heads, and seldom lower than their waists. (Hovell & Hume 1837, p. 45)

Although Aboriginal people mostly avoided Hume and Hovell, on their return trip they came across a 'considerable number of native women and children, perhaps about 30' (pp. 82–83).

Hume and Hovell were followed by Surveyor-General Major Thomas Mitchell (1792–1855) in 1836 on his third 'Australia Felix' expedition. Returning to Sydney from the south, Mitchell's party crossed the Murray River closer to Lake Moodemere at present-day Howlong. Mitchell (1838/2011) described approaching the river:

> The grass grew luxuriantly on this plain, and after crossing and passing through the forest beyond it, I recognised with satisfaction the lofty 'yarra' trees and the low verdant alluvial flats of the Murray. (vol. 2, p. 298)

Mitchell passed by without any engagement from the community. This region had already experienced the first wave of colonisation when contagions had ravaged Aboriginal populations. Charles Sturt (1795–1869) (1833/1982), like Mitchell, commented on the number of houses set within permanent villages, designed to support large populations, and the handful of survivors he encountered as being covered in pockmarks and suffering from blindness, skin infections and deformities relating to leprosy and syphilis (vol. 2, pp. 96, 148).

Following Hume and Hovell's route, in 1836 the squatters Joseph Hawdon (1813–1871) and John Hepburn (1800–1860), led by John Gardiner (1798–1878) and known as the Overlanders, drove 400 head of cattle from Sydney to Gardiner Creek in Narrm, present-day Melbourne (Wilmoth 1966, para. 2). Once established, the route provided a corridor into the fertile region for squatters who invaded from both the north and the south and established pastoral runs, many illegally and outside colonial jurisdiction (Mitchell 2017, p. 50). This rapid colonisation caused massive disruption to the local Aboriginal communities, permanently displacing them from their lands.

In 1838 the brothers George Faithfull and William Faithfull (1806–1896) moved into the Wangaratta region. With 16 men and almost 4000 head of sheep, they announced their presence by shooting at an Aboriginal party. After an incident involving the molestation of an Aboriginal woman and the repeated killing of stock, tensions escalated and resulted in the Faithfull Massacre, where eight of the Faithfull brothers' party were killed. Judith Bassett (1989) identified a contributing factor in the desecration of a ceremonial ground, suggesting that the Aboriginal attack 'bore the hallmarks of traditional and specific revenge' (p. 25). Return retribution and reprisals against the local Aboriginal communities then continued for a number of years (Cooper & Urry 1981; Presland 2010, p. 90).

In 1841 John Foord and John Crisp took up 34,476 acres, including Lake Moodemere, as part of Wahgunyah Station. By this stage the region had been carved up into pastoral blocks that seized the valuable waterways and grasslands. Uncle Bruce Pascoe (2014) reminds us that the fertile grazing pastures so attractive to squatters were the product of Aboriginal agriculture, cultivated over thousands of generations:

> Nutrition and morale plummeted as the croplands were mowed down by sheep and cattle and were prevented from protecting and unitising their crops. No better device, short of murder, could ensure the weakening of the enemy. (p. 18)

In 1851, the same year Victoria was established as a colony, gold was discovered there. The Victorian Gold Rush created an enormous economic and population boom, and Melbourne became one of the richest cities in the world. The Wahgunyah Rush started in 1860 when prospectors found gold at Indigo Creek and later in the main street of Rutherglen. Major finds, including the Great Eastern Reef, situated between Rutherglen and Wahgunyah, saw sustained mining interest in the area and generated vast wealth for individuals and the colony (McGivern 1983, pp. 70–72).

It has been estimated that by 1860, 25 years after permanent British occupation at Port Phillip, the Aboriginal community had fallen from 60,000 people to 2000, while the

white population had risen to 5.4 million, mainly as a result of the gold rush. Cooper and Urry (1981) cite a Board for the Protection of Aborigines document that estimated the Aboriginal population in the north-east region of Victoria in the 1860s and 1870s as 87 people who 'moved freely between the Tangambalanga reserve and camps at Wodonga and Wangaratta' (p. 82). In 1874 Daniel Matthews (1837–1902) established the Maloga Aboriginal Mission Station near the Murray River border townships of Moama and Echuca, providing a home for many displaced families.

The combination of diseases, massacres, displacements and the destruction of resources fractured south-east Aboriginal communities immeasurably. The languages of the Murray River region 'were the worst hit' (Hercus 2010, p. 172). Commenting on the conditions of neighbouring Dja Dja Wurrung, Ian Clark (1990) told how

> traditional socio-political structures had collapsed, and depleted family units were camped either on stations where they were receiving seasonal employment and probably being underpaid, or were encamped at the fringes of mining settlements, of the small townships, where their main support was through begging and prostitution; and they had greater access to alcohol and sexual exploitation from drunken miners. (p. 147)

But the handful of survivors resisted and found ways to exist in the new world. Many were employed on the friendlier stations, while others used the gold rush as an opportunity. Fred Cahir (2012) describes how

> Victorian Aboriginal people demonstrated a great degree of agency, exhibited entrepreneurial spirit and eagerness to participate in goldmining or related activities and, at times, figured significantly in the gold epoch. (p. 1)

Cahir also argues that with most of the population working in the goldfields, Aboriginal people were needed more than ever on stations. Edward Bell (1814–1871) (cited in Cahir 2012), Commissioner of Crown Lands in the Wimmera district to the west, stated in 1853: 'Their usefulness to the white population has been very much

increased during the present dearth of labour, produced by the attractions of the goldfields' (p. 9).

5.3.3. Employment and survival

As a young man McRae gained work on properties as a stockman (Sayers 1994, p. 28). Although there is limited information about McRae's employment and movement, the variation in his names helps to place him. On several records and artworks McRae was recorded as Yackaduna, Warra-euea and Tommy Barnes; his name also varies from McRae to McCrae and M'Crae, all of which are undoubtedly attributed to him (Cooper & Urry 1981, p. 83; Sayers 1994, pp. 113–114). In one instance, he was described 'as an Australian Aboriginal of David Reid's station on the Upper Murray' (cited in Sayers 1994, p. 113). Reid, a squatter and politician, owned a number of properties in the region, including Yackandandah and Barnawartha (Sayers 1994, p. 113). Yackandandah, located south of Albury, was originally known to local Aboriginals as Yagadoona and the name was later anglicised (Sayers 1994, p. 113). This provides a clue to the naming of McRae as Yackaduna, which is sometimes assumed to be his 'Aboriginal name'.

Seeing McRae as Wiradjuri, Eagle (2005) explains the name association, stating that he 'lived from childhood to the mid-1860s on the Yackandandah River' (p. 334). Eagle also explains Warra-euea as McRae's clan, 'better known as the Whroo, of the southernmost Wiradjuri: sometimes referred to collectively as the Waveroo' (p. 334). Similarly, Thomas Shadrach James described 'wurroo' clans as neighbouring 'tribes' of Yorta Yorta (transcribed from handwritten *Papers of Robert Hamilton Mathews 1841–1918*).

Sayers (1994) hypothesised that the name Barnes may have been adopted by McRae during an employment relationship, describing name exchanges between pastoral employers and Aboriginal employees as not uncommon. Although it is undocumented, 'the most likely employer would have been David Barnes, a Wodonga pastoralist'

(p. 113). Eagle (2005), however, sees the attribution of Barnes to McRae simply as a mistaken identity with another local Aboriginal known as Tommy Barnes, who is documented with his family at Maloga Aboriginal Mission Station in the early 1880s (p. 402). Eagle understands the name McRae and its variations as inherited from his father, who may have been known as Old McRae or Berinmberinm (p. 334). Its origin, Eagle argues, was a name exchange with the McCrae pastoral run and its proprietor.

This inconclusive information speaks to the itinerant employment opportunities offered to Aboriginal people in the 19th century, the little regard for Aboriginal lives on the frontier, and the way Aboriginal people were treated as the 'property' of station owners.

5.3.4. McRae and Walker

Based on the known archive of McRae's work, Theresa Walker (1807–1876) was the first to collect and distribute his drawings. It is understood that they met at Barnawartha Vineyard, owned by Walker's brother, Philip Chauncy (Design & Art Australia Online 2014, para. 1). Walker had come to the region in 1861 with her husband, George Herbert Poole, hoping to make their fortune with the gold rush. Unsuccessful with gold, Poole became the manager of Barnawartha Vineyard. But they did not stay long, leaving in 1864 when the vineyard closed down. Walker was an exhibiting artist, known for her wax medallion portraits (National Portrait Gallery 2018), and she 'must have been interested in Aborigines', as many of her medallions depict Aboriginal people (Sayers 1994, p. 47).

McRae's work is marked by highly animated silhouettes. Figures float on plain backgrounds, stripped bare of peripheral information. His artworks capture action and drama, displaying a great deal of humour, and McRae takes our eye directly to the subject and the pertinent details. A collection of four exquisite McRae drawings, seemingly the earliest works in the archive, can be provenanced to Walker.

All are executed in commercial black ink on light blue/grey paper, approximately 22 x 34 cm (Eagle 2005, p. 379). As shown by both Sayers (1994) and Eagle (2005), these works introduce us to the complexities of McRae's extraordinary practice.

Compared to McRae's later works, these early pictures demonstrate an excitement and eagerness to record multiple scenes. The layering of vignettes uniquely sets these works apart. The multiple scenes allow McRae to fill the paper with many of his 'principal subjects' of hunting and ceremony (Sayers 1994, p. 32). Motifs include particular dancers, people stalking animals from behind hides, people fishing from canoes and the occasional curious squatter. These early works are experimental and contain features that never again appear, such as a homestead, a fire with ascending smoke, and an arch. The scale of these relatively small works in no way compromises McRae's ability to capture detail; each is filled with volumes of information, including facial expressions, particular dance moves and encoded cultural information, such as different types of shields. McRae's attention to detail is extraordinary.

These early works quickly established McRae's reputation as an artist. A pair (Figures 5.8–5.9) was gifted by Walker to the Royal Geographical Society, London, and today both works are held in the collection of the SLNSW in Sydney. They are inscribed as created in 1864, with McRae listed as 'Yakaduna Fecit' (*fecit* is Latin for 'by' or 'created by'). Another pair (labelled 1860 and 1862) was gifted to Walker's brother, Philip Chauncy, and both are now held in the collection of the SLV (accession numbers H1676 and H1677) in Melbourne. These are inscribed and attributed to McRae as 'Tommy Barnes an aboriginal of the Upper Murray'. However, the date on the 1860 work seems improbable, because Walker had not arrived at Barnawartha by then.

FIGURE 5.8.
Views of a corroboree and hunting scenes, c.1864
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; 21 x 33.8 cm
SLNSW, DG SSV/1
Image courtesy SLNSW

FIGURE 5.9.
Views of a corroboree and a battle, c.1864
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; 20.5 x 32.9 cm
SLNSW, DG SSV/2
Image courtesy SLNSW

The two works owned by Chauncy are reproduced in the publication *The Aborigines of Victoria* by Smyth (1878). In an accompanying text, Chauncy misattributed them to 'Tommy Barnes', describing him as an 'untaught Aboriginal lad [who] possessed … some artistic skill' (vol. 2, pp. 257–258). The inclusion of McRae's work in Smyth's publication is curious, as Smyth claimed that 'the Goulburn tribes, that of Omeo, and many of those that formerly inhabited the banks of the River Murray, have disappeared' (vol. 1, p. xix). Although the works were made just over a decade before Smyth's publication, McRae and his family were still living and working in the region. This denial of the authority of McRae's images, along with his family's very existence, speaks to Smyth's methodology and the way he perceived Aboriginal people as objects to study. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Porou) (2012) reminds us that 'the objects of research do not have a voice and do not contribute to research or science' (p. 64). For James Clifford (1989), Smyth and his contemporaries were part of the 'salvage paradigm' (p. 73), or salvage anthropology, and acknowledging the work of McRae would have compromised Smyth's authority. When discussing Kulin, Woiwod (2017) critiques Smyth's role: 'It could quite justifiably be said that he had done more to bring about the demise of surviving Kulin' (p. 238).

5.3.5. Lake Moodemere

In the 1840s McRae and his family established a camp at Lake Moodemere, a fertile billabong adjacent to the Murray River. Lake Moodemere was 'flourishing in 1849, and in 1861 numbered around 30 Aboriginals' (Eagle 2005, p. 334). McRae lived there permanently from 1866. *The Corowa Free Press* reported on the camp at the time in an article titled 'A visit to the border' (1886), describing how the families lived in small bark huts, with a communal area formed by two fallen trees around the fire: 'Children, dogs, poultry and possum rugs were huddled up in this place, and all seemed happy'. McRae was reported to be the successful 'proprietor of a horse and buggy … he raises poultry, spears the Murray cod, and manufactures possum rugs' and was a respected teetotaller with his own bank account (p. 3). An Aboriginal having such wealth at the

time would have been an extraordinary achievement. Living in their independent camp, the McRaes were relatively free from the problems encountered on missions, the closest being Maloga and Cummeragunja, established in 1874 and 1881, respectively. Frances Edmonds (2007) notes, however, that the Board did monitor 'McRae's movements by issuing travel passes, and oversaw his appeals for building materials' (p. 118).

From this base, McRae and his family—including his second wife, Lilly, their children and other relatives—travelled about the district doing seasonal work. One article titled 'A novel native' (1881) reported that the McRae family

> consists of a native blackfellow driving his wife and the other ladies of his family and children in his own American waggon. They are all dressed in European clothes of quite as good quality as the families of labouring men in the bush usually wear. (p. 4)

McRae was widely known and respected for his independence, and it was here at Lake Moodemere that his reputation as an artist developed.

5.3.6. McRae and Kilborn

McRae's later work is imbued with a more confident and pared-back approach. Perhaps shaped by the use of sketchbooks, which came to dominate his practice, McRae often dedicated a full page to a single scene. Figures became larger and their activity took on a new gravity (Figure 5.10).

During this later period, he developed a strong association with Roderick Kilborn (1827–1916), whose property, Goojung Vineyard, was adjacent to Lake Moodemere. A Canadian immigrant, Kilborn had arrived in Australia in 1852 as part of the gold rush. When he purchased Goojung in 1860 he took up the role of telegraph master for Wahgunyah ('Obituary: Mr Roderick Kilborn' 1916), and married Sarah Foord, the daughter of John Foord, who is widely acknowledged as being the founder of Wahgunyah (McGivern 1983, p. 156). Kilborn was also a justice of the peace, a role that brought him into contact with many Aboriginal people. According to Sayers

(1994), Kilborn 'knew McRae better than any other European' (pp. 29–31). His daughter, G.C. Kilborn (cited in Barrett 1935), recalled:

> The tribe's small reservation was close to our home, and we saw them fairly frequently. My father took a keen interest in the natives, and assisted them in many ways. (p. 86)

Her father 'had known Tommy and his tribe since the early '60s, and had a fair collection of their weapons, as well as many sketches, etc., by Tommy' (p. 86). A reporter noted: 'Like other businessmen, Mr M'Crae receives letters, to which he sends replies, a white friend acting as secretary, for he can neither read nor write' ('A novel native' 1881, p. 4). We can assume that the 'white friend' was Kilborn. It is with this support that McRae's reputation as 'Victoria's famous aboriginal artist' (Barrett 1936, p. 14) developed. G.C. Kilborn (cited in Barrett 1935) described her father's encouragement:

> [He] provided Tommy with several drawing books and pens and ink [and] personally presented the book of sketches to Lord Hopetoun, who, he said, was most interested, and seemed to be genuinely pleased to have them. Local interest was aroused … a great many people supplied him with books, etc., and paid him 10/- per book. (pp. 87–88)

Roderick Kilborn was a key advocate of McRae's work and many of the sketchbooks or individual drawings from sketchbooks have a Kilborn provenance.

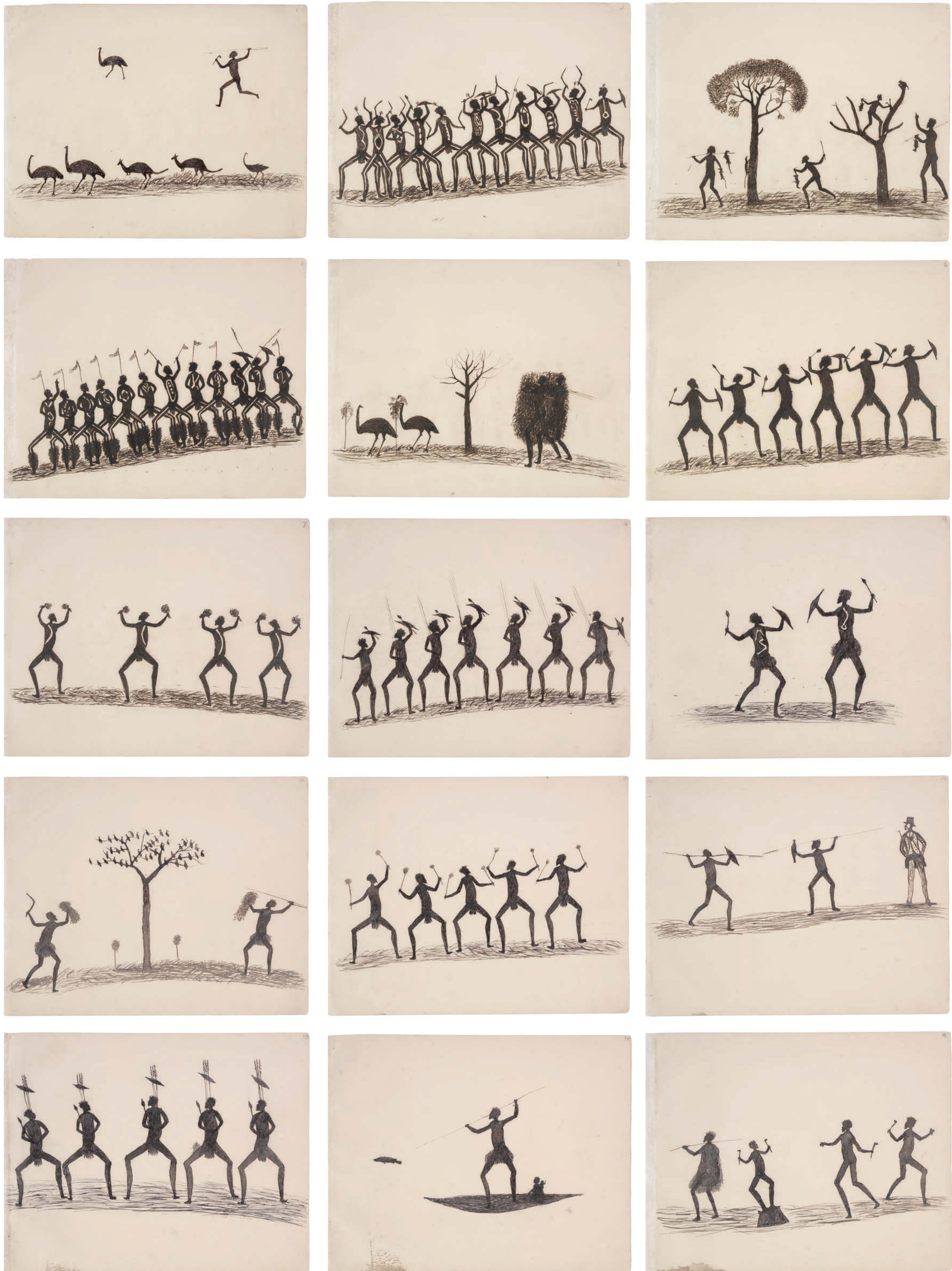


FIGURE 5.10.
Drawings depicting Aboriginal life, c.1885
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; each sheet 24.7 x 31.5 cm
SLNSW, PXA 2129
Image courtesy SLNSW

5.3.7. McRae and Murruwaygu

The key insight into McRae's technique is captured by Roderick Kilborn, who wrote in the front of a McRae sketchbook (c.1865): 'His peculiarity as an artist was that in all his sketches he commenced at the feet and moved upwards; these sketches were made in his gunyah'. It is unclear if McRae created an outline from the feet up and infilled the form in the same direction or created the image and infilled as he went. Either way, he applied small strokes or lines that created solid shapes. This process of applying small strokes, by dipping the pen into the inkwell, is akin to carving, where the form and designs of an object are carved out of wood with small gouges or cuts, working from one end to the other. The overall effect is also paralleled with carving, as the drawings are created with a combination of positive and negative space. And, as with carving, the works are not static, they capture movement, energy and excitement. Similar to Barak, the relationship between carving and drawing for McRae is heightened when we know that he was engaged in creating carved objects, including boomerangs, clubs and shields, along with possum-skin cloaks ('A visit to the border' 1886). As demonstrated by Cooper (1994), these practices were very much part his visual training, understanding and approach to drawings.

The small scale of McRae's drawings helps demonstrate this collective design. The correlation of line and design becomes clearer when we look at both his depiction of ceremonies that show body-paint designs and the overlay of performers who collectively create a group design. In many of McRae's ceremony drawings, male dancers are lined up, with individual body-paint comprising diamonds, chevrons and line-work tracking down their inner thighs and calves. The dancers' legs splay out and interlock, creating a human chain—an effect that is often heightened when participants hold aloft their dance regalia, including clubs, spears, boomerangs, headdresses and bunches of gum leaves. The group becomes a unified front, a design in which legs, arms and boomerangs appear akin to chevron designs on a shield. It could therefore be argued that McRae's images of ceremony should be read as a single design made up of individual participants.

McRae's accuracy and faithfulness to his subject matter is demonstrated when we compare his ceremony scenes to the rare photograph of a ceremony taken at Fernyhurst Station on the Loddon River by magistrate and pastoralist John Hunter Kerr (1821–1874) around 1855. McRae's ceremony drawings speak directly to this image, where Dja Dja Wurrung people, close neighbours of McRae, are painted up and ready to perform. These strong lineal designs, both in body-paint and in the layering of the dancers' limbs, echo McRae's scenes. Dancers are uniformly placed, creating an overall design. Often McRae uses a single tree, with a possum or bird in its branches, to mark the middle of a ceremony, or to separate a hunter from his prey, further strengthening the axis of symmetry in his works.

There are two collections of carved objects provenanced to Kilborn and the Goojung property; one was acquired by Frank Strahan (1930–2003) for the University of Melbourne, the other purchased by the NMA. All objects in these collections, however, are unattributed, so although we know they came from Goojung—and, according to Kilborn's daughter, from Lake Moodemere—we do not know if they are the work of McRae himself. The parrying shields at the NMA (accession numbers 2013.0023.0004 and 2013.0023.0005) are composed mainly of repeating chevrons, which appear to be carved with a knife. These shields display a similar sense of balance and symmetry to McRae's drawing, but without a confirmed McRae carving I am unable to do a comparative study.

5.3.8. Absorption policy

Although McRae was a 'well-known identity throughout the country' (Barrett 1935, p. 88) and was relatively independent, he was sadly not free from the persecution of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Despite the Lake Moodemere community not receiving any funds from the Board, they came under attack in 1891 when two of McRae's children were removed to institutions. Cooper and Urry (1981) reported:

> To prevent the loss of his remaining children McRae and his wife began a series of moves … In 1893 they crossed to Corowa in NSW but when they returned later the same year another child was removed by police. The McRaes remained at Corowa until 1897. When they returned to Lake Moodemere the remaining children were seized. (pp. 82–83)

These actions would have caused immense trauma to the McRae family, who had worked so hard to be respected by the local community.

On at least one occasion McRae sought the assistance of Roderick Kilborn, who did not assist him, however. G.C. Kilborn (cited in Barrett 1935) reflected on this tragic event:

> I remember how broken-hearted Tommy was when his children were sent to Koondrook [Coranderrk]. He came to the house, and, with tears, begged my father to use his influence to allow him to keep the children. (p. 87)

Other children were sent to Lake Tyers in Gippsland. G.C. Kilborn described sending one son 'a photograph of his father, also one of Tommy's drawings' (p. 88). We can imagine that this work inspired McRae's grandson at Lake Tyers, 14-year-old Sydney McRae, to draw; he is featured in a 1929 article titled 'An Aboriginal artist: inherited genius at Lake Tyers' (Edmonds 2007, pp. 151–152). Although there are no records of Sydney's artworks, a brief description reveals his subjects included sports, racing, boxing, football and wrestling.

On 16 October 1901 Tommy McRae passed away. There are some discrepancies as to where he was buried. The *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* reported that following 'a quiet funeral' he was interred on the shores of Lake Moodemere ('An Aboriginal's funeral' 1901, p. 29). However, according to Rutherglen Shire records, McRae appears to be buried in the Presbyterian section of the Wahgunyah (Carlyle) Cemetery, a plot that today has a small bronze headstone. Edmonds (2007) reminds us that 'McRae's pictures and his life exemplify the way Aboriginal people fought for independence in the face of adversity' (p. 119).

5.4. Artist's intention

In 1938 William Stanner (1905–1981) (2011) wrote that 'a wealth of mythology … has been allowed to die unrecorded with unkempt old men in their squalid camps on the fringe of so many Australian towns' (p. 125). This statement rings true when it comes to understanding the practices of Barak and McRae. The complex cultural knowledge clearly depicted in their imagery has repeatedly been oversimplified and misunderstood. This is witnessed in the way the works are titled, with Barak's paintings often titled *Ceremony* or *Corroboree*, while McRae's works are varyingly untitled or called *Corroboree* or *Hunting*. Although it is unclear if McRae provided these titles, which seems unlikely, they do not capture the complexities of the images. Sayers (1994) argued that 'the inscriptions … pose problems' (p. 31); a generic title such as *Corroboree* flattens out these works and diffuses their rich meanings.'

Sayers (1994) proposed that Barak's and McRae's pictures 'were made specifically to be sold to Europeans' (p. 5). Barak's practice has been linked to 'tourist' visits to Coranderrk (Clark 2015, p. 162), and although visitors to the station would have provided a market, this particular audience cannot be interpreted as the driving force of his artistic endeavours. Barak's output was relatively low, especially considering he was 'the most famous Aboriginal person in Victoria' (Sayers 1994, p. 13). In approximately 20 years he made around 50 works, or five works every two years—not enough to maintain a 'market'. Indeed, Sayers (1994) pointed out, 'the original impetus for drawings by Aboriginal artists did not come from compelling necessity'; he argued that Barak had a 'distinctively Aboriginal approach' that places the viewer within the work (p. 6). In this way, Barak's unique images sit beyond market-driven outcomes.

The provenance of a number of Barak's works seems to suggest that they were given as gifts, including to Governor Sir Henry Loch (1827–1900) (Wiencke 1984, p. 83; Woiwod 2012b, p. 127), the de Pury family (neighbours of Coranderrk), and to his friend Anne Bon. Notions of trade, exchange and gift-giving not only existed within

south-eastern Aboriginal communities but were integral to maintaining and developing relationships (McBryde 1984). Barak told how people gave presents to others from distant parts 'to make friends' (Howitt 1904, p. 718). Trade was often the conclusion of a major gathering and embedded into the fabric of ceremonies (Mathews 1897, pp. 150–151).

Many south-east communities continued this practice within their colonial relationships, as witnessed when Coranderrk delegates presented gifts to the government in 1863. Another example was in 1886 when the community gave Premier Graham Berry (1822–1904) a farewell gift of 'a bundle of native weapons' including boomerangs, clubs, spears and spear-throwers at the end of his term (Sayers 1994, p. 23).

The use of artworks by artists like Barak and McRae is perhaps best seen in this light, where the artists were enacting ways of relating to people in order to create a political bridge. I feel that this lens provides a better way for understanding the intentions of their art practices.

5.4.1. Barak's intention

Aunty Joy (cited in Culture Victoria 2016a) understands Barak's works to be documentary in nature, depicting certain ceremonies that were conducted at specific times: 'I don't believe that Barak has just painted that with a picture in his mind. I believe he painted the living things' (para. 33). She describes the two 'horseshoe'-shaped fires often seen in Barak's works:

> A neighbouring clan would come to visit, the two Ngurungaetas would stand each side of the fires and discuss and make agreements about the neighbouring community and how long they would stay for and what they were able to do and what the protocols were. (para. 30)

Leading historian Carol Cooper has pioneered the re-reading of Barak's work, generating a methodology that combines careful visual analysis with detailed historical research.

From complex local events to broader cultural understandings, Cooper (2003) clearly demonstrates that Barak was purposefully creating images of narratives (p. 34). One of Cooper's key findings relates to the work *Figures in possum-skin cloaks* (1898) (Figure 5.6), in which a long, banded, serpent-like form runs through the centre of the image and off the edges. On either side is a row of men in the cloaks; one row holds hands, the other has their right hand up and left hand down. At the very top of the image is a row of trees, a rare landscape feature within Barak's practice. Cooper (2003) has found convincing similarities between this compelling image and the description of a ceremony witnessed by Edward Stone Parker (1802–1865), one of Robinson's Assistant Protectors, and recorded by Smyth (1878). The ceremony, which occurred in a 'strictly tabooed' and 'secluded spot', relates to 'Mindi, an evil spirit, whose sole business it was to destroy' (vol. 1, p. 166); it involved men, followed by women, dancing 'in single file, and in a very sinuous course [in order to] appease his anger and to avert death and other calamities' (vol. 1, p. 166). In this way Cooper has been able to investigate a number of Barak's works and understand them to be, in the words of Aunty Joy, depictions of 'living things'.

5.4.2. McRae's intention

Despite a handful of recognisable narratives, such as the depiction of escaped convict William Buckley, it is generally agreed that McRae repeated generic scenes. Unlike Barak, McRae has not received the close attention of Cooper. Although not always understandable to an outsider, we can indeed recognise elements within McRae's works, and following Cooper's methodology a compelling study of his work can be shown. Because of McRae's eye for detail we can look at his work in relation to early photography to gain a greater appreciation. As discussed earlier, McRae's ceremony drawings match perfectly the rare photographs of south-east ceremonies, such as those taken at Fernyhurst Station by Kerr c.1855.

McRae's pictures illustrate historical texts, particularly in relation to hunting. Edward M. Curr (1820–1889) (1883) describes how

> birds or animals are usually approached by means of an impromptu screen of boughs, which the blackfellow carries before him in his hand … the hunter watches his quarry, advancing quickly whilst the animal is feeding, and stopping instantly he raises his head to look about him … the animal … never observes that, what to him must appear to be a bush, gets constantly nearer and nearer. (p. 228)

This exact form was often drawn by McRae, and Curr's description of the hunter's action could be an annotation for McRae's many hunting scenes.

Social change did not escape the attention of McRae, who unlike Barak, recorded frontier subjects. His pictures not only show colonisation but also how Aboriginal people were adapting their worldviews and surviving. Many of his works illustrate squatters and Chinese immigrants, along with the introduction of guns, alcohol and European clothes. Curator Hetti Perkins (2010) says it is as if 'someone pressed the pause button on an animated home movie of the Australian frontier' (p. 174). With these images McRae has made very clear statements about colonisation. His depictions of squatters are a critique on the western gaze. Spectators to ceremonies and fights, these squatters stand rigid in top hats, boots and the occasional pipe, '[their] feet planted firmly on the ground [as they adopt] a stance both self-satisfied and proprietorial' (Sayers 1994, p. 42). Edmonds (2007) notes that 'by directing the gaze back upon the coloniser, via their own adaptations of the colonising process', artists such as McRae 'were implicit in challenging and attempting to reverse the colonial power base' (p. 56).

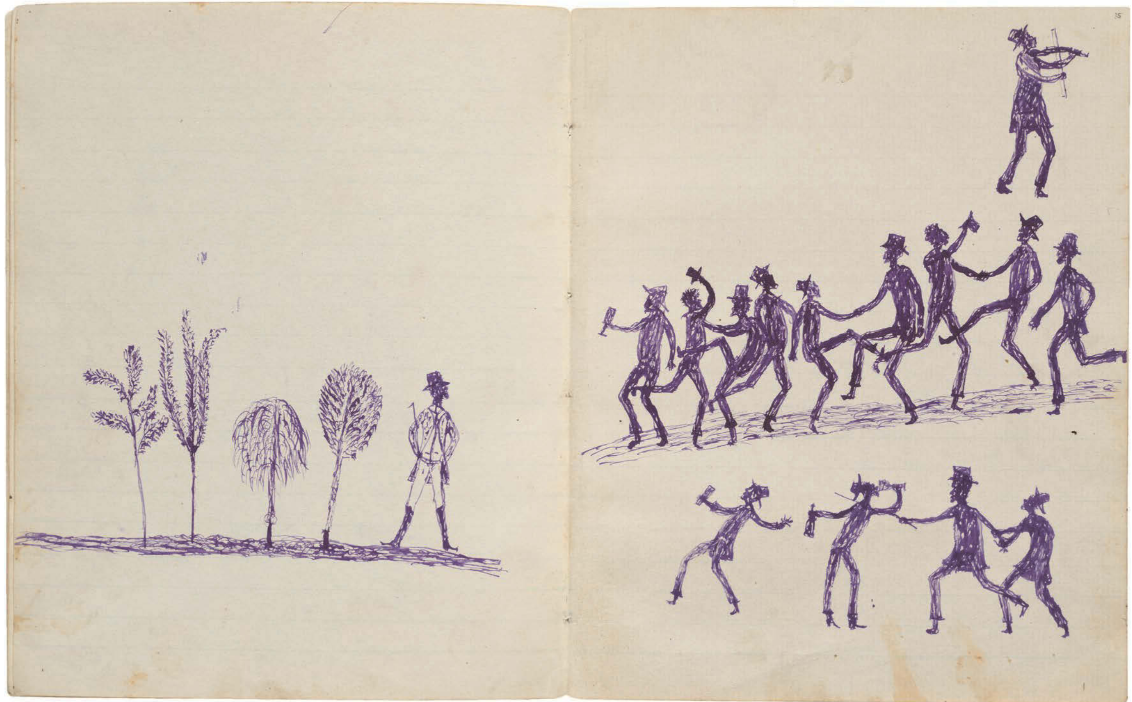


FIGURE 5.11.
Squatter and trees, Drunken revellers, 1890
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; each sheet 20.2 x 16.2 cm
From *Sketchbook of Aboriginal ceremonies and everyday observations of Aboriginal people and European settlers*, 1890
NGA, 89.2253.20, 89.2253.21
Image courtesy NGA

A well-known teetotaller, McRae was equally critical of alcohol consumption. We can imagine he shared Simon Wonga's opinion:

> Before the white people came to our country we were all very happy together; but when they came they gave us grog, and it made us mad. Then we became unhealthy, and began to die off. (cited in Smyth 1878, vol. 2, p. 112)

In one small sketchbook in the NGA collection a page is dedicated to *Drunken revellers* (1890); on the facing page, McRae depicts a well-dressed Aboriginal man standing next to a copse of trees (Figure 5.11). I propose that this is a self-portrait, McRae watching on, in self-reflection of his own role as social commentator, rather than a squatter as the NGA caption implies.

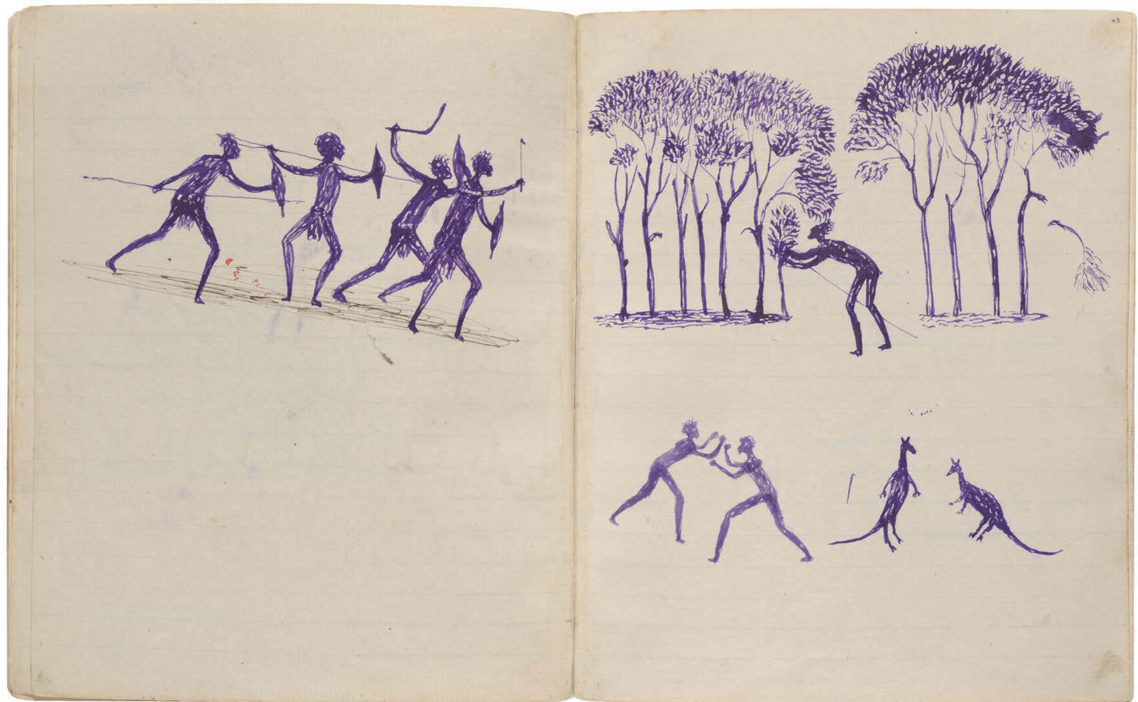


FIGURE 5.12.
Aboriginals with weapons, Aboriginal hiding in trees, fight, fighting kangaroos, 1890
Tommy McRae, Southern Riverine, Australia, c.1835–1901
Ink on paper; each sheet 20.2 x 16.2 cm
From *Sketchbook of Aboriginal ceremonies and everyday observations of Aboriginal people and European settlers*, 1890
NGA, 89.2253.26, 89.2253.27
Image courtesy NGA

In the same sketchbook McRae again joins facing pages. On one side, a group of four armed men seem to gaze across the page at a man hiding among trees (Figure 5.12). Behind him we can see a branch has fallen, giving away his position. Below the hidden man we can see two men fighting with their fists, and next to them two kangaroos similarly fighting or rutting—perhaps there is a link between the man hiding and the depictions of the men and kangaroos fighting. The man who is hiding may be in trouble over a unresolved dispute, is needing to face justice and the other men are coming to retrieve him; or perhaps McRae is reminding people of how to fight fair. These scenes call to mind the south-east practice of controlled judicial operations (see Chapter 4). Barak (cited in Howitt 1904) explained: 'You have both got blood; it is enough; now make friends' (p. 255).

As previously stated, this research did not initially intend to provide narratives for McRae's work; however, following Cooper's methodology, these examples confirm that his pictures illustrate specific narratives and deserve our attention. It is hoped that they will also encourage further research focusing on McRae's practice.

5.4.3. Legacy

The assumption that Barak and McRae created work for a European audience, amusing their invaders with images of yesteryear, removes the possibility of their descendants engaging with their work. I propose that we, their descendants, are their key audience; we are who Barak and McRae created their works for. These were dedicated men who valued their culture and wanted to see it continued.

Cooper (2003) has suggested that the amateur anthropologist Howitt, who was using Barak as a key informant for his research, could have stimulated Barak's painting practice: 'Howitt was one of the main influences in encouraging Barak to make his remarkable drawings to illustrate his stories of Kulin culture' (p. 22). Although there is no direct evidence of this, we do know that Barak and Howitt communicated regularly, for example Barak writing with the assistance of a translator and scribe, and Howitt recording the words and scores of songs in Narrm (Melbourne). Barak even accompanied Howitt on two research trips to Gippsland (Wiencke 1984, p. 78), one of which was to attend the Jeraeil ceremony that Howitt had sponsored the local Gunai/Kurnai to hold in 1884 (Cooper 2003, p. 21).

We can understand Barak's support of Howitt in terms of Barak's dedication to preserving of his Kulin culture. Although Barak was part of an ageing population at Coranderrk, he would have witnessed the expulsion of many young 'half-caste' people, including his own extended family and kin. Seeing their expulsion and understanding his role as Ngurungaeta would have driven him to entrust his knowledge to paper for future generations. Aunty Joy (cited in Culture Victoria 2016a) tells us: 'What he

wanted was people to remember those ceremonies so … people would always know about the ceremonies on Coranderrk and of Wurundjeri people' (para. 24). Sayers (1994) similarly argued that both Barak and McRae were making art to maintain culture in the face of cultural censorship by the authorities: 'Barak's activities in a number of areas can all be interpreted as strategies for maintaining cultural continuity' (p. 5).

Similarly, with McRae's work, the question remains as to why he included such detailed cultural information if he was painting for a mainstream European audience. As noted by Edmonds (2007), McRae's works were a clear 'attempt to ensure the continuity of ceremonial and cultural knowledge' (p. 100). However, as with Barak, no-one seems to have recorded McRae's knowledge. Yet it is evident that he saw value in recording his culture. We may never know if fellow artist Theresa Walker encouraged McRae to preserve his cultural knowledge for future generations, as Howitt may have with Barak. We do know that Barak and McRae were complex men, with deep knowledge of their culture, as demonstrated by Cooper with Barak's work. Their pictures burst with cultural knowledge, and through them they actively resisted colonisation and the annihilation of their cultural life. Their works are timeless—gifts for future generations—and despite the many losses that occurred in their lives, they continue to teach and lead the community. Today, many artists are producing possum-skin cloaks, objects, body decorations and many other aspects of cultural material inspired by the imagery of Barak and McRae (Baum 2017, p. 14). The ceremonies and stories they depicted will always be remembered. Created at a time when Aboriginals were often voiceless, Barak's and McRae's artworks now await the next generations of Koori artists, researchers and descendants. These creations are the cultural inheritance left to us by our ancestors and elders.

5.5. Other Koori artists of the 19th century

Barak and McRae represent a handful of south-east Aboriginal artists working in the 19th century. In fact, Sayers (1994) said that while researching his publication he

was 'struck by the volume of work in this corpus [and that] almost all of the drawings could be firmly attributed to individual people' (p. 9). Artists include Mickey of Ulladulla (c.1820s–1891, Yuin) from the South Coast of NSW, who, like Barak and McRae, created work on a regular basis. Other artists who today are represented with perhaps only one artwork include Barak's uncle Billibillary (Sayers 1994, p. 118), fellow Wurundjeri Timothy Korkanoon (1830s–1875) (Sayers 1994, p. 12), and Coranderrk resident Captain Harrison (c.1844–1908), who is believed to be Wergaia from north-west Victoria (Edmonds 2007, pp. 119–121). There are also Black Johnny (c.1842–1883), who was Gunditjmara from south-west Victoria (Edmonds 2007, pp. 89–92; Sayers 1994, p. 118), and Jimmy Panga (c.1864–1913), a Paakantye man from western NSW (Hansen 2014). The only woman recorded during this era was Ngarrindjeri artist Yertabrida Solomon, whose dates are unknown (Taplin 1879). Barak and McRae were the most prolific artists of this era and therefore best represent this generation.

It is important to consider how these artists created under the full weight of colonialism. Like McRae, Mickey of Ulladulla evokes this tension, often showing ceremonies interrupted by the encroachment of colonisation as represented by sawmills, fishing ships and homesteads. These works push back and claim a space for cultural activity to flourish.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter profiled William Barak and Tommy McRae, who form the second pair or generation of artists, which within the research kinship model is Babiin. As key 19th-century Koori artists, both Barak and McRae attest to the survival and resilience of Aboriginal people in the south-east, and I have introduced their works by describing the invasion and colonisation of their regions. Despite the cultural upheaval brought about in their era, the works of both artists continue the use of the line in relation to both carving and drawing. As Cooper (2003) clearly states, both Barak's and McRae's works 'should not be seen as reiterations of various traditional themes' (p. 24) but as

important illustrations of specific events. This chapter then considered why these artists continued to create, and for which audience. More than anything else, Barak and McRae have clearly demonstrated that south-eastern Aboriginal culture is adaptable and we can incorporate new ideas and stories into our cultural vernacular. The ceremony, hunting, singing and dancing that lives through their art was and still is an essential part of south-eastern life. Their art gives authority to the following generations to engage with new mediums, tools, and ideas in order to continuing cultural knowledge. This chapter follows on from Mumala, the first generation of artists, represented by girran.girran and marga, and precedes Wurrumany, the third generation, represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Roy Kennedy and HJ Wedge.

6. WURRUMANY: ROY KENNEDY AND HJ WEDGE

6.1. Introduction

> Artists are going to keep our culture alive. I want to nurture [those] artists just like powerful societies do with their generals, because they're the people with a vision. I'm yet to meet the surgeon skilful enough to separate art from culture.
>
> —Robert 'Bob' Merritt (Wiradjuri) (cited in Kruger 2017, para. 31)

This chapter discusses two self-taught senior Koori artists, Roy Kennedy (b.1934) and HJ Wedge (1957–2012), who both rose up from the depravities of the 'mission life' to tell their personal stories and share south-east experiences of the segregation and assimilation that deeply scars their generation. Uncle Roy and HJ are both Wiradjuri and together they form the third generation of artists, or Wurrumany (son), within the research framework. This chapter covers a range of ideas in order to establish their position within the research framework and the continuing use of the line within their artworks. While prioritising historical and contemporary Indigenous informants to frame Uncle Roy's and HJ's practices, this chapter relies heavily on the artists' voices and on my personal experience of working closely with both artists. Special mention must be made of the foundational work of historian Peter Read, whose research with Wiradjuri people is unparalleled and, as such, underpins this chapter.

This chapter first introduces Eora College as the shared catalyst for the artists' practices. Adult education is the reason both Uncle Roy and HJ started their art practices later in life. I then profile each artist's biography in relation to socio-political circumstances, principally their upbringing on Aboriginal missions, which frames their work and can be understood as the foundation of their practices. This shared experience of mission life is discussed throughout the chapter as defining not only the artists' generation but a particular era within the history of the south-east.

It should be noted that Uncle Roy's life and work is discussed before that of HJ. While this order does not follow the timelines of their individual art practices (Uncle Roy started working professionally in 1999, while HJ started in 1990), it does follow their lives (Uncle Roy was born in 1934, HJ in 1957). This order is designed to help navigate the history of missions and their impact on Aboriginal people in the south-east.

Furthermore, this chapter conducts analyses of Uncle Roy's and HJ's works in relation to the research topic, discussing their continuing use of the line in new mediums, individually and in relation to other south-east men's work. Finally, the chapter considers peer, self-taught Koori male artists with mission backgrounds, taking into account their shared experiences and artistic responses, to establish a south-east school of art through generational practice.

This chapter follows on from Babiin, the second generation of artists, represented by 19th-century Koori artists William Barak (c.1824–1903, Wurundjeri) and Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901), whose experiences were dominated by the frontier displacement that led to the establishment of Aboriginal missions, and precedes Warunarrung, the fourth generation of artists, represented by professional or trained contemporary Koori artists Reko Rennie (b.1974, Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero), who grew up away from missions but whose immediate family are often affected by mission life.

6.2. Art and adult education

As part of education reform under the Whitlam Government, the newly established Australian Committee on TAFE published a report in 1974 that described the 'main purpose of education [as] the betterment and development of individual people and their contribution to the good of the community' (Kangan 1974, vol. 1, p. 21). It also recommended that tailored vocational education be made available to 'repair inadequacies' (vol. 1, p. 22), making particular mention of Aboriginal people as a

group that 'needed increased opportunities in special education' (vol. 2, p. 297). The Kangan Report is seen as the blueprint for Aboriginal education in the NSW TAFE system, which included the development of specific Aboriginal education programs in 1979 (Cadzow 2007, p. 31) and the founding of Eora College the next decade (NSW Education Standards Authority 2010).

Known simply as Eora to locals, Eora College was established in 1984 on Regent Street, Redfern, in the heart of Aboriginal Sydney. Central to the recognition of urban Aboriginal culture and named after the traditional owners of the Sydney region, Eora College was integral to the growing Aboriginal political and civil rights movement. It was preceded by Tranby Aboriginal College, established in 1957 in the adjacent suburb of Glebe, the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association, founded in 1975 in Redfern, and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, formed in 1976–1977. Read (1988) names this era of self-determination, 'Recovery'.

Eora College was founded by Erambie-born Wiradjuri man Robert 'Bob' Merritt, an award-winning playwright, director and screenwriter known for his acclaimed play *The cake man*, which depicted 'the mission lifestyle—of hope, despair and imprisonment' (Sykes 2000, p. 279) and was the first formal drama production of the National Black Theatre in 1975 (Casey 2004, p. 100). Supported by the NSW Department of Education, Merritt founded Eora College as an Aboriginal alternative to the National Institute of Dramatic Art and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. His philosophy centred on the arts as the key to self-determination:

> We only thought we were lost, simply because we weren't encouraged to practise our culture. … We've never been allowed in the past 200 years to see our own reflection, whether it be in live theatre or film, in any way we care to identify with, and the consolation is that we [have] been reduced to such an extent that we've lost our dignity. (Merritt 1986, cited in Kruger 2017, para. 32)

Merritt attracted like-minded leaders to teach at Eora, including Justine Saunders OAM (Woppaburra actor), Bob Maza AM (Murray Islander/Yidinjdji actor and playwright), and visual artists Isabel Coe (1951–2012, Wiradjuri) and James Simon (b.1959, Wiradjuri) (Board of Studies NSW 2007, p. 54). Within two years Eora had 'nearly 100 young Aboriginal student actors, dancers, painters, musicians and storytellers' ('Aboriginal film wins nomination' 1986). The success of the college was the subject of Merritt's 1985 film *Eora corroboree*. Eora College eventually relocated to its current location at 333 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale, and continues to provide tertiary education.

At the end of each year Eora College hosts a showcase for students' work. Brenda L. Croft (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Bilinara) (1996), founding member and then curator at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, recalls the 1990 student exhibition as an exciting event where 'a keenly receptive crowd, including members of the local Aboriginal arts cognoscenti, and a broader cross-section of the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, were in attendance' (p. 14). A number of graduating artists, such as HJ, became members of Boomalli, which had been established three years after Eora, in 1987, within the same political framework of self-determination. This was a direct response to the oppressive conditions experienced by many during the mission era.

6.3. Missions, stations and reserves

Implemented under different policies and administered by various agencies for more than a century, the types of compounds established to corral Aboriginal people in the states of NSW and Victoria fall into three main categories—missions, reserves and stations. Contributing to their complexity are the structural changes each site underwent. In this thesis I have provided information on each community that is relevant to the research.

When discussing these histories, I use the generally accepted term 'mission'. This term is used by community to describe all these institutions, as from an Aboriginal perspective they were each part of the colonial project, which saw Aboriginal people forced from their lands through invasion onto compounds that restricted their lives, limited their rights and enacted government polices aimed at destroying Aboriginal culture. Similarly, when discussing the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, which during its operation in the states of NSW and Victoria had various names, community generally refers to it as 'the Board'. This has been adopted in this research.

6.3.1. Missions

Missions were initially institutions established by Christian missionaries. They were led by individuals in the name of their religious denomination and often operated with limited funding from both the Church and state, and on state lands, which further contributed to their insecurity. Missions were underpinned by religious ideology; although they offered safety from frontier violence, they were places where Aboriginal people were forced to abandon their cultural practices. Over 1824–1923 around ten missions were established in NSW, and after the 1860s, following the separation of Victoria from NSW, six missions were established in Victoria (NSW Government Office of Environment & Heritage 2012, para. 4). Missions often housed a diaspora of frontier survivors, where old family lines were continued and new ones established. Although most Aboriginal people had little to no choice but to live on a mission, many communities created new attachments to the mission sites. In recent years, the lands and infrastructure of many missions have been handed back to community to be managed by community housing cooperatives and local Aboriginal land councils.

6.3.2. Stations

Stations were established by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board from 1883 and were managed by government officials who exerted complete control over all aspects of everyday life, including marriage, movement and employment (Kabaila 2011, p. 61).

Aboriginal people were often forced onto stations and for legal and social reasons were unable to leave (NSW Government Office of Environment & Heritage 2012, para. 5). Housing and rations were provided, along with limited schooling, and religious organisations such as the United Aborigines Mission and Aborigines Inland Mission operated as adjuncts.

6.3.3. Reserves

Reserves were tracts of land set aside for Aboriginal people to live on without management by the government or its officials. They were often established as a way of centralising smaller fringe-camps in pastoral regions and formed where Aboriginal people had already been living, such as near a traditional campsite. In NSW the first reserve was recorded in 1850, and from 1883 people living on reserves received rations and blankets from the Aborigines Protection Board (NSW Government Office of Environment & Heritage 2012, para. 5).

Although missions in the south-east changed shape over the decades, they define a distinct period in Aboriginal history and have left many Aboriginal people and their descendants affected by the 'mission era' (Macdonald 1986, p. 90). Jimmie Barker (Muruwari) said that although missions 'had a little bit of a voice for Aboriginals to be looked after … they've robbed the Aboriginals of his own belief' ('Jimmie Barker interviewed by Janet Mathews' 1970–1971, p. 224).

6.4. Roy Kennedy

Roy David Kennedy, known to his family and friends as Dootcha, was born in 1934 in the Riverine town of Griffith on his Wiradjuri homelands. Like many Aboriginal families in the area, he, his mother, Jessie, his younger brother, Keith, and stepfather, Thomas 'Digger' Davis, lived on the government-sanctioned fringes of society. Uncle Roy was 'reared up' on the small Aboriginal reserve behind the Darlington Point police station, commonly known as Police Paddock Reserve (Figure 6.1). Although

the reserve was situated on the opposite side of Murrumbidgee River, the local white community of Darlington Point waged a campaign for the Aboriginal community to be relocated even further away from town (Random 1930). Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009) recollects the mood of the time:

> Out of sight out of mind. This is what the Aborigines Protection Board wanted. They moved missions and reserves two and a half to three miles out of towns—this was to satisfy the white people. (p. 33)

FIGURE 6.1.
Days of harmony on my mission in days gone by, 1998
Roy Kennedy, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, b.1934
Etching, edition 2/10; plate 22.2 x 40.4 cm
AGNSW, 448.2001
Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary Aboriginal Art, 2001
Image courtesy AGNSW and the artist

Yet for Uncle Roy's family the Darlington Point region had been their home for generations. Although many were undocumented, it is reasonable to assume that families with a long attachment to the particular region were direct descendants of that specific Wiradjuri clan (Read 1988, p. 4). When some basic housing was provided on Police Paddock Reserve, the local white community again protested and the Board wrote to the Carrathool Shire in an attempt at conciliation. A newspaper account outlined how

> [the reserve] within the police paddock … would be under supervision [of the police], for the accommodation of those aborigines who were at present living under squalid conditions in the vicinity of the township. ('Darlington Point Aborigines' 1930, p. 2)

Growing up in the Depression years meant that Uncle Roy's life was one of unimaginable hardships. According to Read (1988), 'for the Wiradjuri the years of the Depression were a dark and bitter time' (p. 84). Although disliked by the local whites, Aboriginal fringe communities provided cheap labour for the pastoral industry, particularly after the establishment of irrigation in the Riverine in the 1920s (Kabaila 2011, p. 15), which enabled the region to intensify its fruit-growing and other agricultural industries. Uncle Roy and his family would often engage in itinerant work, 'in a circuit encompassing Hay, Hillston, Griffith and Leeton' (Scarlett 2009, p. 1). As he remembered it: 'We used to travel together, running along behind the old wagon' (cited in Scarlett 2009, p. 1). Building on Read's research, Peter Kabaila (2011) argues that these labour circuits were governed by cultural links to country and kin, as opposed to employment opportunities:

> The ancient travelling way of life thus became grafted onto new patterns of Aboriginal employment and settlement, as generations of people moved between the new Aboriginal settlements, followed seasonal fruit-picking and casual station employment, or took up travelling work such as droving, railway fettling and tent-boxing. (p. 19)

Police Paddock Reserve was made up of a row of red 'corrugated ripple-iron huts' with dirt floors (Kabaila 2011, p. 356). Other key structures were the community-built church, erected in 1937 under the encouragement of Aboriginal pastor Bobbie Peters, who had come to the community from Cummeragunja Station on the Murray River, and the police station, which today is the only building left standing. The 'red huts', the church and the police station, along with natural resources, including the river and the mulberry tree, are central to many of Uncle Roy's artworks. Uncle Roy

speaks fondly of this church: not only does he recall the enormous community effort in constructing it, but it also represents the coming together of the wider Wiradjuri and extended Aboriginal community for the Aborigines Inland Mission conventions. These gatherings saw the influx of hundreds of people under the umbrella of the introduced religion; but like the employment patterns that honoured established movement routes, these conventions were also a way for the community to maintain connections. For Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009), 'the mission was home to lots of Aboriginals from all over NSW. A great place for holding conventions, plenty of singalongs. Name it and it happened at the Point' (p. 9). Conversely, Uncle Roy also has negative memories of the church and recalls the harsh rules imposed on the community. He often calls missionaries 'the brainwashers' who were openly trying to convert Aboriginal people to their brand of Christianity. They, along with the police, whom Uncle Roy refers to as the 'Gestapo', controlled life at Police Paddock Reserve.

6.4.1. Warangesda

Prior to Police Paddock Reserve, Darlington Point was the site of Warangesda Mission (later Warangesda Reserve) (Leeton Local Aboriginal Land Council, 2014, p. 4). Warangesda was established in 1880 by the missionary John Brown Gribble (1847–1893), who had self-published a flyer (1879) detailing the 'extreme physical wretchedness and deep moral degradation of the remnants of this unfortunate race' (p. 3) after touring the Murrumbidgee in 1879 and seeing the appalling conditions that many Wiradjuri were forced to live in. Gribble (1884) described 'waifs and strays' in a state of 'wretchedness and woe' (p. 34), refugees created by the bitter campaigns of the Murrumbidgee Wiradjuri Wars of the 1830s and 1840s (Gammage 1986; Read 1988). Gribble (1879) also reported on the rape of 13 and 14-year-old Aboriginal girls by local white pastoralists (pp. 3–4) and the threats by local pastoralists to have 'all the "half-caste children … thrown into the river"' (Gribble, cited in Read 1988, p. 29). Read (1988) described this era, characterised by massacres and disease, as the first cycle of the Hundred Years War on Wiradjuri. He contextualised the people that Gribble

would have encountered: 'If several men of an extended family were killed, the surviving women, children and old people would often, within a few months, congregate near a friendly station or town' (p. 24).

Gribble was inspired by the Maloga Aboriginal Mission Station, established by missionary Daniel Matthews (1837–1902) in 1874 near the Murray River border townships of Moama and Echuca. Leaving his comfortable parish posting at Jerilderie, Gribble took a 500-acre lease from the Henry Parkes Government and started Warangesda. The site had been chosen with the assistance of senior Wiradjuri men from Maloga, including James Turner and Bill Foote, and there is speculation about their preference for Warangesda, as it was the site of one of the last major burbung, or initiation ceremony, as documented by Robert Hamilton Mathews (1841–1918) (Kabaila 2011, p. 308). The layering of the site in this way can be seen as both an Aboriginal way of bridging a Wiradjuri sacred site with a mission, but also as a way of protecting the site from the vandalism created by the pastoral industry, something that deeply upset the Wiradjuri.

6.4.2. Mission to reserve

In four years, Gribble and the community had managed to get the mission operational, with homes, a dormitory for girls and other necessities such as a butcher established (Figure 6.2). But they faced enormous opposition from the local white pastoralists and the mission was often besieged, with fences and property destroyed and violence inflicted on the community (Gribble 1884). Gribble also had trouble converting the community to Christianity; they refused to discontinue many of their ways. Stan Grant Jnr (Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi) (2016), whose grandmother was born at Warangesda, describes the worsening conditions:

> It collapsed into a living hell and when the blacks would try to flee, the pastor would round them up on horseback and tie them together with rope and drag them back again. (p. 42)

John Ferry (1979) has attributed the failure of missions in NSW to three major reasons: the problems associated with transitioning from an Aboriginal way of life to a western one; the fact that the Christian religion contradicted what was happening on the ground; and that the religion itself had no benefit for Aboriginal people. HJ Wedge (1996) was keenly aware of this, making it a subject of his work:

> It's a joke the way the Christian people go around [and] spread the good Lord's word and I find it's a very hypocritical way. They supposed to love their neighbours, love their enemies. Love their enemies all right, they sure did. They destroyed them 'cause they didn't believe in something. (p. 82)

FIGURE 6.2.
Warangesda Mission in the days gone by, 2001
Roy Kennedy, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, b.1934
Etching, edition 3/20; plate 10 x 32 cm
NGA, 2003.125
Gordon Darling Australasian Print Fund, 2003
Image courtesy NGA and the artist

Gribble eventually suffered what can be understood as a breakdown, and Warangesda was taken over by the Aborigines Protection Board in 1884. This change in governance marks a shift in NSW Aboriginal affairs, where Christian missionaries 'fail' and a government agency becomes the main point of contact for Aboriginal people in the state. Read (2006) defines this era as the second cycle of the Hundred Years War waged on Wiradjuri. The *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* was then introduced, enabling the Board to remove Aboriginal youth, in particular anyone of mixed descent, to be trained

as either domestics or farmhands. It has been estimated that this policy, amended in 1915 and active until 1939, saw the Board remove over 4300 children in NSW (Read 2006, p. 12). While some were taken to Warangesda, two institutions remain synonymous with the removal of children: Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, in operation 1911–1968, and Kinchela Boys Home, in operation 1924–1970. Uncle Roy's mother, Jessie, who had been born at Warangesda in 1910, was taken to Cootamundra girls home at the age of seven.

By 1924 the population of Warangesda was so depleted through the removal of children and expulsion of community members that the Board saw no value in keeping the reserve open and handed the site back to the NSW Lands Department. The closure of Warangesda saw the dispersion of many Wiradjuri families to other reserves, missions and fringe-camps across the state. Read (1988) wrote that Warangesda played such an important role in people's lives that nine out of ten Wiradjuri 'have some kind of family connection with either Brungle or Warangesda' (p. 46). By the time Uncle Roy's mother had returned, Warangesda was shut and Police Paddock Reserve had been established, which is where she started her family. This shift is a major setback for the self-determination of the community, as Warangesda was working towards independence by producing its own food. But when the community was forced to exist on a small paddock block, they became completely dependent on government rations for survival.

As an Aboriginal person who was not of mixed descent and who 'spoke the lingo', as Uncle Roy puts it, his grandfather David Kennedy was forced to live outside the reserve. But determined to reside in the area, he lived down by the riverbank in a hollowed-out old red-gum log. Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009) remembers visiting him to hear stories and learn about Wiradjuri knowledge, including hunting and carving wooden objects such as boomerangs and clubs:

> My grandfather would sit and tell me and my brother about things which he had to do to be a man among the elders … [He would] keep telling a little every time we would sneak down to the hollow log he was living in. (p. 20)

6.4.3. Memories of the mission

Uncle Roy's memories of his childhood are marked with a mixture of affection and loathing; 'the bittersweet', as coined by Hetti Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon) (2004c, p. 56). Happy memories of days on the mission with extended family are tainted by those of being controlled by the Board, the Police and the Church. Stories of desperate hunger and the humiliation of living on meagre rations that could be cut or withheld at the whim of the authorities are contrasted with Uncle Roy's deep affection for the mulberry tree and its annual sweet bounty, and his pride in his ability to catch and cook 'wild food'. These skills were invaluable when Uncle Roy and his brother would run into the bush at the first sight of the Board agents coming to take the children away. Together they would live off the land for days until it was safe to return.

In 1940 the Aborigines Protection Board was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board, marking a shift in policy from protection to assimilation. This meant for Uncle Roy and others living on missions, stations and reserves that they were free to leave, to seek employment and assimilate into a mainstream community that for the most part did not want them. The Board enforced this change, regardless of community opinion, by shutting down, defunding or disbanding many missions around NSW.

In artist's talks and conversation Uncle Roy speaks sparingly about the rest of his life and these later chapters don't feature in his artwork. We can glean that the itinerant employment that Uncle Roy experienced as a child continued throughout his life. Along with having his own family, he spent much of his adult life chasing employment, working as a 'brickies labourer, fruit-picker, sleeper cutter and rabbitter as well as working as a ganger and in railway break-down gangs' (Scarlett 2009, p. 1). Uncle Roy admits that this was a difficult time for him as he was addicted to alcohol and cigarettes, both of which he gave up in 1980 and 1996, respectively, at which point he started to turn his life around. Like so many elders who lived through enormous hardships, Uncle Roy has remained optimistic and willing to share his story. Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr

AM (Wiradjuri) (cited in *Speaking out with Larissa Behrendt* 2017) similarly retains a positive outlook:

> If I went through life remembering and dwelling on past injustices to myself I would become a bitter old man. I am an old man. But thanks to the teaching of my father, I have been able to forgive the past injustices and to look forward and to go forward and not remain in the past. (46:59)

6.4.4. Uncle Roy and the Eora College

At the age of 61, Uncle Roy finally settled in the Sydney suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo and enrolled at Eora College:

> With all my wandering around, doing seasonal work wherever and not finding any satisfaction with the rough life which I led, not caring much about tomorrow. But when I came back to Sydney next time around, I settled down some after finding my sobriety. Getting a little older, a lot wiser and no education I got to talking to some folks and I was told about the Eora Centre. I joined up in 1995 to try and better myself. The teachers were terrific in whatever I took on, the teachers were there to help this old bloke who knew nothing. (Kennedy 1999)

He originally wanted to build on an interest in photography, but at Eora he was introduced to acrylic painting, pen-and-ink drawing, ceramics and the medium he has become best known for, etching.

Uncle Roy quickly turned his attention to telling the story of his mission life, calling on his childhood memories of Police Paddock Reserve and stories about Warangesda Mission told to him by his mother and grandfather. He is able to distil in his works what it was about photography that attracted him—the ability to document places, events and time—and present this in a simple way, while also situating his artwork in the past, in a time that was largely hidden to most Australians, when Aboriginal people were 'under the thumb of the Aboriginal Protection Board who ruled over them' (Kennedy, cited in Scarlett 2009, p. 33).

Uncle Roy's passion for history was evident at a young age, when he would go exploring, curious about Warangesda's past: 'As kids we used to cross over the river. There was nothing there, only the church and a couple of old buildings' (Kennedy, cited in Scarlett 2009, p. 5). To create his detailed images of the old mission, Uncle Roy taps into the memories of his mother and grandfather and skilfully grafts them onto his own stories of Warangesda's ruins. In many works the inherited memories are literally combined with his own. This merging of timelines highlights the different phases of mission histories, emphasises the different polices that Aboriginal people lived under, and importantly draws on an unbroken family connection to the region.

For Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009), the focus on his family's two missions is a way to return to a simpler time:

> All my artworks are mainly about my upbringing on missions … All the things that happened since have happened in the white man's world. Drugs, grog you name it, the white man brought it. So [I am] going back to things which I knew in the simple world of the Black people [which] have gone. (p. 36)

Working with these subjects is personally rewarding: 'I'm never alone … all my lovely memories of my mission are always there. Some are sad times and some are good memories. I love them all' (p. 47).

It is worth noting that a handful of artworks stray from Uncle Roy's Warangesda and Police Paddock themes, focusing on related subjects, such as Mossgiel and Booligal Weigh Stations, important stops on the coach route, and the Threeways Aboriginal Reserve at Griffith, a place where many Wiradjuri from Warangesda and Police Paddock moved to. One landscape etching depicts seven key rivers of the region—the Darling, Wakool, Edward, Goulburn, Murray, Murrumbidgee and Galari (Lachlan River). Another unique etching shows the crucifixion of Christ.

Uncle Roy's work came to attention at his end-of-year exhibition in 1999, when he graduated from Eora College as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student of the year. In a relatively short time he received national recognition; from 2001 his work was collected by the AGNSW, under curator Hetti Perkins, and from 2003 by the NGA, which holds the most significant collection of his etchings. Although showing with a number of commercial galleries, Uncle Roy has avoided representation, preferring to manage his practice independently and free from control and commissions. His work is also held by a number of regional galleries, most from within the Riverine, and private collections. In 2009 he won the Parliament of NSW Aboriginal Art Prize with his acrylic-on-board painting *Mission series 2*. This major work is one of the largest Uncle Roy has made and profiles the family missions, Police Paddock and Warangesda.

Since leaving Eora College, Uncle Roy's etching practice has slowed down, primarily due to limited access to printmaking equipment and lack of funds. Old prints have been printed by alternative printers until their edition has run out, but they 'cost [him] a fortune' (Kennedy 2016, artist's talk, 11 January), and he has often worked with mediums not requiring specialised equipment, such as pen-and-ink drawings and paintings.

6.4.5. Art and history

Uncle Roy's works can be read as faithful depictions of history, particularly when comparing his representations of the Police Paddock church with a rare historical photograph of the structure (Figures 6.3–6.4). Reproduced in the 1944 publication *Treasure in an earthen vessel: the story of Bobbie Peters, hunchback native pastor*, the photograph shows Peters at the opening of the building in 1837. The church was

> made of bush timber and in its construction a lot of work was involved. The walls were made of bags sewn together by the women and afterwards cemented, and the windows with their peaked tops were made from boxes. A platform and pulpit were erected and seats installed in two rows, with an aisle through the centre. (Long 1944, p. 29)

When comparing the photograph to Uncle Roy's depictions we see a number of shared elements, including the step-down gable church entry, as shown by a shift in the hatched line-work in Uncle Roy's etchings, the arched French doors, arched windows and landscaped elements of plants set within plant guards

Uncle Roy's eye for detail is also evident in the way he draws the old Darlington Point Bridge (Figures 6.5–6.6), officially opened in 1905 as a bascule bridge that allowed paddle-steamers to pass. The paddle-steamer was an important way of transporting goods up and down the Murrumbidgee River and this allowed Darlington Point to prosper as a port town. Uncle Roy (cited in Scarlett 2009) explains:

> The bridge of ours at Darlington Point was very important. The steamer, which brought food to the township, passed there and the bridge would draw its tracks up and let it through. (p. 18)

This unique structure was dismantled in 1979 and relocated to the caravan park, where it stands today. Uncle Roy captures the bridge in many of his works—its rolling weights, pullies and steel cables, its riveted steel cross-bracing—in an effort to preserve both Aboriginal and white history. In the 2001 etching *How soon they forget* (Figure 6.5), the bridge becomes a metaphor for the divide between the Police Paddock community and the white members of town.

FIGURE 6.3.
My original mission, c.1999
Roy Kennedy, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, b.1934
Etching, edition 2/10; plate 11 x 24.4 cm
NGA, 2003.133
Gordon Darling Australasian Print Fund, 2003
Image courtesy NGA and the artist

FIGURE 6.4.
Bobbie Peters at the time of the opening of the church building, Darlington Point, c.1930
Photographic print
Australian Indigenous Ministries pictorial material
SLNSW, PXA 773 / Box 1
Image courtesy SLNSW

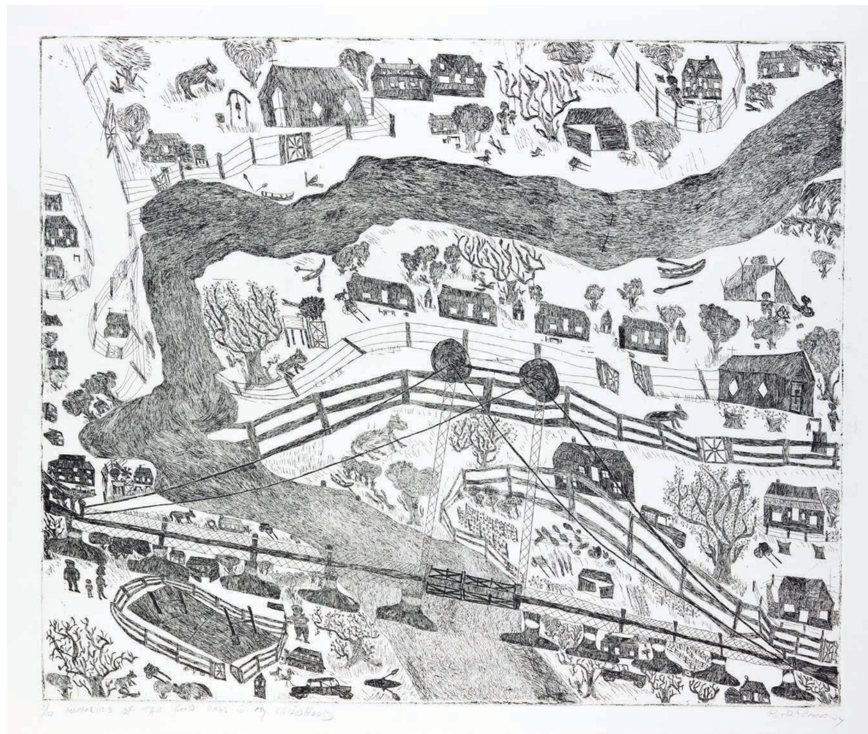


FIGURE 6.5.
How soon they forget, 2001
Roy Kennedy, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, b.1934
Etching, edition 2/10; plate 49.3 x 59.3 cm
AGNSW, 447.2001
Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary Aboriginal Art, 2001
Image courtesy AGNSW and the artist

FIGURE 6.6.
Old bridge at Darlington Point, NSW, 2015
Image courtesy Jonathan Jones

All these elements are accurately depicted in Uncle Roy's works and demonstrate the artist's ability to be both creative and depict the truth. We can therefore look at his artworks, and those of others in his generation, as documents recording a hidden history. Curator Hetti Perkins (2004c) describes Uncle Roy's 'memories of mission life' as

> bittersweet, underscored by the sense of community that saw his family through hard times. His *Mission series* prints chronicle his first-hand observations of a chapter of Australia's history that is finding increasing expression in the work of Indigenous artists. (p. 56)

Artworks that embody this forgotten history enable our community to connect with a tangible representation. In this way, we can reflect on the work of 19th-century artists Tommy McRae and William Barak (see Chapter 5) and understand their expressions as both artistic and factual.

6.4.6. Uncle Roy and Murruwaygu

Lines underpin Uncle Roy's artwork through the technique of dry-point etching. With a sharpened steel tool or needle he marks, incises and carves a metal plate, which he then processes and prints from, thus creating his etchings. He deploys different types of lines to achieve a variety of subjects. Thin lines represent wire fences that slice through his landscape, anchored only by their posts, while the river and mission homes are formed through amassing heavier lines. Uncle Roy explains how sharper and rounded tools give different depths and tones: 'Different needles there for dark work or light work, branches or fences, I got special needles to do all that' (Kennedy 2016, artist's talk, 11 January). Uncle Roy's lines, drawn freehand and sketchy, capture the rough and makeshift nature of the mission homes, which were often made from recycled and abandoned materials. But they also speak to the artist's life, as gossamer-thin lines drift across the page like fading memories or old black-and-white photographs.

The process of carving onto a metal plate with needles engages the same visual and technical understanding as woodcarving. The scraped-away surface and the push–pull

of positive and negative spaces are akin to the carved surfaces of shields. Like the images on shields, Uncle Roy's etchings rely completely on lines—their direction, concentration and relation to each other—to tell a story. In this way, one of the intergenerational observations of this research is that Uncle Roy's 'carved' etchings can form a framework through which to understand the carved images on shields.

One example is the use of a central form dividing both the etching and the shield's surface. In many of Uncle Roy's works the Murrumbidgee River courses through the mission scene (Figures 6.1 and 6.5). This dominant feature is deeply scored, conjuring the river's force. In many shields, such as the broad shield with matching parrying shield from the Darlington Point region in the Australian Museum collection, a similar prominent channel is carved down the centre of the shield, with diamond designs radiating from either side. For this reason, Uncle Roy's work was exhibited alongside these two shields in the exhibition *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors* (Figure 6.7). Perhaps this shield similarly speaks to the importance of rivers in country, like Uncle Roy's more figurative etchings, albeit in an abstract vernacular. Rivers are key parts of most nations and Wiradjuri are often described as the Three Rivers People, because of the deep connection to the Wambool (Macquarie River), the Galari (Lachlan River) and the Murrumbidgee River, which define our country. Carol Cooper (1994) has found that south-eastern Aboriginal practices employ both figurative and abstract forms to depict the same story:

> Discerned from a western artistic point of view, this major linear or abstract style coexisted in the same mediums with a less formalised and less prominent figurative or directly representational style. (p. 91)

While stressing the uniqueness of south-east figurativism, Cooper's comment supports the possibility of the equal comparison between Uncle Roy's work and the shields.

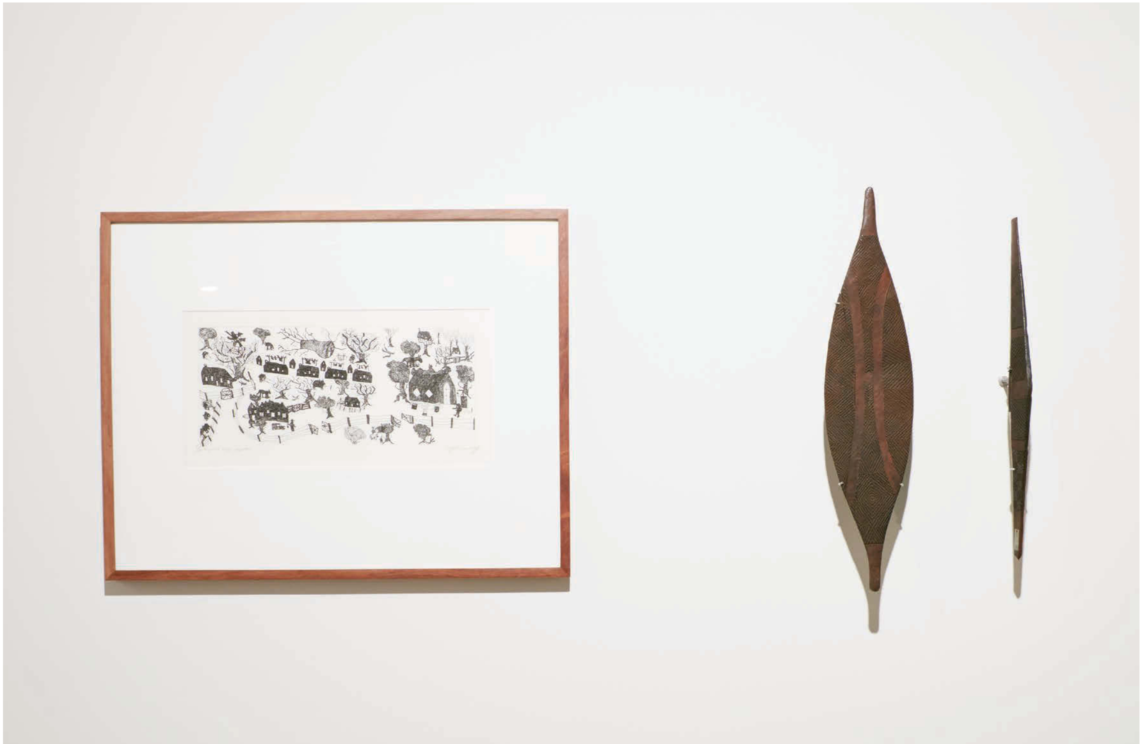


FIGURE 6.7.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy the artists, AGNSW and AM

Mission boy dreams, 2006
Roy Kennedy, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, b.1934
Etching; approx. 50 x 60 cm
AGNSW, 50.2006
Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary Aboriginal Art, 2006

Broad shield, n.d., Parrying shield, n.d.
Artist unknown, attributed to Wiradjuri (listed as Lachlan River, NSW),
Southern Riverine, Australia
Wood, natural pigments; 60.5 x 9.3 x 3.4 cm, 71 x 5 x 15.9 cm
Australian Museum, Sydney, E024088, E024089

Uncle Roy's practice of maintaining a singular narrative—that of his personal connections to missions—also helps us to understand the way artists approached the creation of shields. As I have demonstrated within this research, the work of individual artists can be discerned from within the archive; from the way they shaped the form of the shield to the personal line designs they used, often creating works that are almost aesthetically identical to Uncle Roy's mission etchings. This intergenerational observation assists our understanding of historical artists' intentions and allows us to consider how to decolonise museum collections.

Uncle Roy's process of building up imagery through line-work similarly connects with the pen-and-ink compositions of Tommy McRae. From what we know of McRae's practice, both approached the creation of the image in a similar way, slowly hatching away at the composition, working from one side of the image to the other. But unlike McRae, who uses space sparingly, Uncle Roy fills much more of the page, giving his subjects greater context and making the marginalised location of the mission clear. In this way Uncle Roy's practice connects with the four earliest known works of McRae—two in the SLNSW collection (Figures 5.8–5.9), and two in the SLV collection (see Chapter 5)—where multiple scenes play out, forming a layered landscape. However, McRae removed this style from his subsequent works.

The realisation of a deep visual connection between Uncle Roy's and McRae's works is a significant anchor for my research. While previously unaware of McRae's imagery, through the process of this research Uncle Roy is now familiar with it. When Uncle Roy's etchings were displayed alongside McRae's *Spearing the kangaroo* (c.1880s–1890s) (accession number AGNSW 210.2004) in the AGNSW Study Room, Uncle Roy identified strongly with McRae's imagery, even using *Spearing the kangaroo* in his artist's talk to highlight how cultural practices had been suppressed on the mission, and how as mission rations were insufficient, people would often hunt wild food to survive. While Uncle Roy's work provides a strong sense of segregated mission life and McRae's offers a rare Aboriginal perspective on the colonial frontier, both artists have preserved their cultural experiences for future generations.

6.5. HJ Wedge

Harry James Wedge was born on Erambie Mission on the banks of the Galari (Lachlan River) in 1957. Erambie, without any services and separated by the river, is situated about two kilometres from the outskirts of Cowra. The 32-acre allotment was officially gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve in 1890, centralising the local displaced Wiradjuri families who had been living in unregulated fringe-camps along the river (Macdonald 1986, pp. 90–91).

The Upper Galari region experienced a protracted process of colonisation. After exploratory incursions of the Lachlan Valley in 1815, a military outpost named Soldiers Flat was established in 1820 near present-day Billimari, some 20 kilometres north of Cowra. Four years later, martial law was declared against Wiradjuri in the region, which saw 'the largest official military force ever to set out against the blacks and placate the settlers' (Read 1988, p. 5). This official military campaign opened up the Lachlan Valley region and by 1831 the fertile lands along the Galari were seized for farming.

6.5.1. Relative independence

Erambie was a small plot of unwanted land, unable to be farmed and therefore not self-sufficient like Warangesda or the closer Brungle Mission. But since the frontier wars the community had experienced a relatively successful history of employment in the pastoral industry, with many Wiradjuri droving and stockworking. John Robertson (1816–1891) (cited in Goodall 1996), the Commissioner of Crown Lands for the local Bligh district, noted at an early stage that local Aboriginals were

> a very fertile source of labour to the squatters … In my official tours throughout the district, I have often met 'gins' or female Aborigines herding … and these females shepherd flocks of sheep with greater care and diligence than many European shepherds, so much so that some of the best flocks during last year have been under the guidance of the Aborigines. I have myself seen at farms or squattages other 'gins' or females performing all the operations required at a dairy while their husbands or brothers I found acting as stockmen … Indeed during the present great scarcity of labour from the discovery of gold I do not think the pastoral interests of the district could have been carried on without the Aborigines. (p. 60)

In highlighting the enduring work ethic of Erambie residents, Read (1980) noted that many people were known to travel across NSW seeking work, and Gaynor Macdonald (1986) detailed how 'women could boast of their cooking, needlework and other domestic skills' (p. 93). This engagement in the workforce defines the Erambie community.

As an unmanaged community during the period 1890–1924, Erambie was an appealing place for Wiradjuri to live and 'had a more stable history than many other reserves in the sense that people were not relocated after its establishment' (Macdonald 1986, p. 91). In fact, Erambie swelled, as the populations of other missions and reserves decreased due to expulsion and closure (Read 1988). This prompted the white community of Cowra to complain and request, unsuccessfully, for the mission to be moved further down the river (Macdonald 1986, p. 91).

6.5.2. Reserve to station

After 34 years of self-governance and relative independence, Erambie came under the control of the Aborigines Protection Board, officially becoming a station in 1924:

> As a result of complaints by the townspeople of Cowra regarding the necessity of resident supervision of Aborigines residing on and visiting the local reserve, the Board decided to establish a regular station at that place, and a substantial residence was, as a consequence, erected, and a teacher-manager appointed. (Board for Protection of Aborigines 1924, p. 1)

The teacher-manager position remained until 1965, making Erambie one of the last missions in NSW to be 'managed'. This state of imposed welfare, along with other factors, led to Erambie becoming a site of intense resistance and politicisation for Wiradjuri—an atmosphere that is still felt today and that frames the work of HJ.

By the 1930s, the small community had grown to '136 individuals bearing 25 separate family names drawn from all points of Wiradjuri country and beyond … the largest and most complex of all the Wiradjuri living areas' (Read 1988, pp. 88–89). Lawrence Bamblett (2013b), an Erambie-born Wiradjuri, sees the growth in the community as strengthening a thriving network of extended families (p. 43). But Aboriginal people, who occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder at the time, slipped into overwhelming poverty and faced unyielding discrimination during the Depression years. The combination of these conditions, along with the amassing of people onto remaining

mission communities such as Erambie, created a situation where people rallied together and questioned the authorities. Read (1988) described this as a sudden emergence of a 'black militancy [created by] men and women of like mind, close kin relationship and appalling experience [who were] thrown together in large numbers' (p. 87).

6.5.3. Black militancy

These sorts of conditions were the call to arms for leading 20th-century Aboriginal civil and political campaigners such as Warangesda-born William 'Bill' Ferguson (Wiradjuri), William Cooper (Yorta Yorta), John Thomas 'Jack' Patten (Yorta Yorta) and Pearl Mary (Gambanyi) Gibbs (attributed Ngemba/Muruwari). Uncle Roy remembers: 'We had all those people fighting for us back in the days, trying to get rights for our mission' (Kennedy 2015, artist's talk, 28 November).

In 1937 Ferguson launched the Aborigines Progressive Association in Dubbo and established branches at other missions, where he raised awareness of the growing Aboriginal discontent and rights while putting pressure on the Board. On Australia Day (26 January) 1938, Ferguson, Cooper and Patten organised the watershed Day of Mourning conference for Aboriginals in Sydney, which called for land rights, citizenship, and education and employment opportunities, along with the promise to 'abolish the Aborigines Protection Board' (Teaching Heritage 2010, para. 13). Members of the Erambie community were involved in the campaign (Macdonald 1986, p. 101), and the Day of Mourning and other such protests marked 'a turning point in the affairs of the Wiradjuri and all Aboriginal peoples, heralding new directions in Aboriginal history for the rest of the century' (Read 1988, p. 87).

During World War II many members of the Erambie community who had not enlisted found positions in the diminished workforce in local mines, factories and the Japanese Prisoner of War Camp at Cowra. In the workforce they not only received pay and respect but they also witnessed first-hand the 'discrepancies between their

material standard of living and those of Europeans' (Macdonald 1986, pp. 136–137), and became more resolved in the struggle for independence (Read 1988, p. 91). There were numerous reports from the Board where Erambie residents asserted their 'special character', as Bamblett puts it (2013b, p. 43), including wanting payment in money, not in rations, for their work on the mission, the ability to freely come and go, and improved housing conditions. In 1947 it was reported that after gaining membership to the local Labour League the Erambie residents became 'cheeky in their new-found knowledge [and] showed little respect for the manager or the Board's kindness' (cited in Read 1988, p. 92). Erambie gained a reputation for being the most difficult mission to manage in NSW, a thorn in the Board's side (Read 1988, p. 88).

In an attempt to supress the rising black militancy, the Board responded with tighter restrictions. Visitors to the mission were refused entry, rations were removed, an alarming percentage of people were charged and imprisoned for trivial or fabricated offences, and children were taken at an unprecedented rate when compared with other Wiradjuri communities (Read 1988, p. 90; Macdonald 1986, p. 102). But 'a recurring theme in the accounts of older Kooris is the claim that [they] refused to submit to pressure' (Macdonald 1986, p. 99). The Board's actions and the community's steadfast position saw tensions mount, coming to a head with the abolition of the manager position in 1965, the same year that activist Charles Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon) led the Freedom Rides in NSW. Two years later the 1967 Referendum gave Aboriginals full citizenship and the Commonwealth the power to legislate on their behalf, which also represented a shift in the political position of communities such as Erambie.

The oral histories taken by Read (1983, 1988) and Macdonald (1986), and the continuing work of Bamblett (2013b), characterise Erambie residents as strong and politically aware. After the station was handed back to the community in the 1970s, Erambie's political leadership continued to grow, with the involvement of Erambie residents in the establishment of the Sydney-based Aboriginal Legal Service (Isabel Coe, Paul Coe Jnr

and James Wedge), Aboriginal Medical Service (Paul Coe Jnr and Shirley 'Mum Shirl' Smith), Murawina Preschool (Millie and Norma Ingram) and Eora College (Robert 'Bob' Merritt), and the Tent Embassy in Canberra (Bert 'Bertie' Williams). According to Macdonald (1986), the proximity of Wiradjuri country to both Sydney and Canberra enabled Wiradjuri, in particular Erambie Wiradjuri, to 'commute to or even move to these cities without losing touch with their home base' (p. 137). The younger Erambie community also actively took to the streets, protesting for their rights (Macdonald 2005, p. 100). According to NGV curator Judith Ryan (1996), 'the energetic political climate in Sydney [set] the stage for Wedge's explosive entry onto the contemporary Australian art scene' (p. 25).

6.5.4. Life on Erambie

In the 1950s when HJ, as he preferred to be known within the art world, was born, Erambie was overcrowded with a population of 124 people living in 22 small 'fibro' houses. Most of the community was unemployed or able to obtain only casual work on properties and fruit-picking in the Young and Griffith areas (Kabaila 2011, pp. 393–396). 'We got water in the house in the 1960s, but sometimes it used to be all frozen up and you couldn't turn the tap on', HJ recalled (Wedge 1996, p. 32). He explained:

> There wasn't any TVs or electricity—we used to have the old kerosene lamps, or candlesticks, and the way we used to boil our water to wash our cloths in the big old copper. (Wedge, cited in Croft 1996, p. 9)

Despite the hardships, HJ had happy memories of growing up:

> Everybody all looked after each other on the mission, we were just like one big happy family. If something was wrong, another person was there to give … that family a lot of support. (Wedge 1996, p. 29)

The mission school at Erambie closed in 1952 during the Board's crackdown, and the Aboriginal children had to go to Cowra Public School or the Catholic convent (Kabaila 2011, p. 396). HJ was one of the first children to go into town for schooling and it

was here that he came face to face with the racism that his community was fighting to overcome: 'The white kids stay with the white kids and the dark people stay with the dark people' (Wedge 1996, p. 33). It was at school that HJ found his passion for art, but he was unable to conform:

> We couldn't do this and we couldn't do that, had to do everything [the teacher's] way. It used to piss me off … She started to whinge about me using too much paint in my artwork. (pp. 34–35)

It wasn't long before HJ lost interest in school. In 1969, at the age of 12, he was sent off to a boys' detention centre as punishment for being caught with alcohol, an overly harsh sentence in what Read (1988) described as a targeted campaign against the community of Erambie for asserting their rights (p. 90). In addition to a lifelong injury, correctional centres and institutions have played a constant role in HJ's life (Jones 2002).

6.5.5. HJ and the Eora College

On a visit to Sydney, HJ was encouraged by a cousin and an art teacher acquaintance from Bathurst to study at Eora College, and in 1988 he enrolled. Like Uncle Roy, HJ was initially interested in photography, but after receiving some encouragement for his paintings he focused on this more immediate medium. HJ recalled:

> We used to sit down and they used to tell us to draw something we remember … We'd be there for about half an hour trying to think of something to draw, then we had to sit down and work. You start to get more relaxed and used to the place when you start to paint. (Wedge 1996, p. 40)

HJ's first painting was a 'dot painting' titled *Mother earth* that had taken him a few months to complete. While he admits that *Mother earth* was not his own style—he later mastered a way of employing dots that signalled Indigeneity—using landscape as a metaphor for the destruction of culture was something he would return to (Wedge 1996, p. 41). At home, HJ received a lot of support from his wife, Elizabeth Matheson, who helped him with techniques and inspiration. 'The teacher at the Eora Centre was

the same. They'd really sit there and try to explain things to you' (Wedge 1996, p. 41). HJ attended Eora during a critical moment in Australia's history, with growing awareness of Aboriginal issues brought to the fore by the Black Power movement. Reflecting on HJ's practice, Croft (1996) described how

> the bicentenary exploded upon Australia, embraced by a large majority of the population in a self-congratulatory and nationalistic bearhug. While Australia partied on, celebrating 200 years of colonisation, the Indigenous caretakers of this ancient continent mourned. (p. 11)

With the bicentenary on 26 January 1988, Sydney became the site of one of Australia biggest protests (Onus 1993a, p. 11), when 40,000 people from across the nation walked the streets and showed the world that 'white Australia has a Black history' (MV 2009). On the same day, Aboriginal activist Burnum Burnum (Harry Penrith, Yorta Yorta) (cited in AIATSIS 2014c) planted the Aboriginal flag on the White Cliffs of Dover, England, in an unreal scene reminiscent of one of HJ's paintings, and declared:

> I, Burnum Burnum, a noble man of ancient Australia, do hereby take possession of England on behalf of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. In claiming this colonial outpost, we wish you natives no harm but we're here to bring you good manners, refinement and an opportunity for a 'Koompartoo', or a fresh start. (para. 7)

As argued by Croft, it is within these Aboriginal responses and acts of defiance that HJ's work should be placed. For example, in reference to his 1991 painting, HJ labelled Captain Cook a 'conman':

> This painting shows Captain Cook standing so proud that he has stolen a new land for the British Empire. The British Empire should be ashamed of itself for sending a conman like Captain Cook out to swindle the natives of their homeland. (Wedge 1996, p. 46)

The bicentenary was followed by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991 and the High Court of Australia's Mabo decision of 1992, which

overturned terra nullius, or empty land, in Australia. These major events of national concern are the stage on which HJ's creative imagination takes shape. Croft (1996) noted their impact: 'The Aboriginal flag—along with the Union Jack and the Australian flag—is a recurring symbol in HJ's work' (p. 14). In his own words, HJ painted:

> What I dream, what I hear on *A Current Affair*, things you can even hear people talking about on the train. When you sit down with other blacks, have a little drink and that, especially when they're from other tribes. And they sit there and talk about what happened in their life. (Wedge 1996, p. 41)

In this way, HJ became a voice of the times, his works featuring an outpouring of eyewitness accounts, raw opinions and unique perspectives. Like placards, HJ's works are as much at home on the gallery wall as they are in protest marches on the street. HJ commented:

> Back in '90, that's when it really started to develop properly. That's how come now you got the Spirit Man and the different expression on their faces for their anger or their happiness, or loneliness. (Wedge 1996, p. 41)

HJ's humour is also evident in much of his work and can be understood as part of the wider cultural milieu. Marcia Langton (Yiman/Bidjara) (1993) attributed the origin of this type of humour to Black theatre, where 'cynical anti-racist humour became a powerful mode of expression' (p. 42).

HJ would often weave popular culture and childhood memories together. Ghost stories were a key source of inspiration, as he recalled how spooky the mission was to him as a child, how he saw ghosts there and experienced the supernatural. Yet as he grew up and became aware of his history, his nightmares became reality. The processing of national issues through HJ's personal lens—and, conversely, the nationalising of personal issues—saw the Aboriginal standpoint of a disenfranchised, often uneducated and incarcerated south-east community expressed at a national level. Perkins (2010) describes HJ's practice as an 'anecdotal anthology [from which] Harry draws a skeleton of fact, fleshing it out with his own perceptions and his own experiences' (p. 139).

6.5.6. Wiradjuri Spirit Man

With a loaded brush, HJ developed an unmistakable style where his 'Wiradjuri Spirit Man' takes centrestage. This subject defined his career, becoming the title of both his major solo show at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, in 1992 and his 1996 monograph. In the vein of Erambie activism, HJ inscribed rude and often nude figures in a whimsical yet menacing way, playing out historical re-enactments, documenting domestic violence and revealing struggles with alcoholism. Perkins (2010) writes that HJ's 'world is inhabited by angels and demons, those without and within; the stuff that dreams and nightmares are made of' (p. 142).

Croft (1996) first encountered HJ's work at the Eora College Annual Student Art Exhibition of 1990. She was 'immediately struck by the raw quality and instinctive style' of his work and 'found it difficult to reconcile the shy, quietly spoken individual with the powerful images on exhibition' (p. 14). Croft and Perkins went on to champion HJ's work, and after graduating from Eora he became a significant member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative. Critical to Boomalli's identity, HJ's solo exhibition in 1992 launched the organisation's exhibition space at Abercrombie Street, Chippendale (Jones 2007), and he was commissioned to create a permanent street mural on its walls, which remained long after Boomalli had moved on. Perkins (2010), curator of Boomalli at the time, describes HJ as 'one of our most sought-after artists' (p. 134).

HJ was quickly to become a leading voice in the burgeoning urban art movement and his work was included in most major survey exhibitions on urban identity. He represented Australia nationally and internationally, both in exhibitions and residencies, and his work has been collected by many of the major public institutions (Croft 1996, p. 19). Like Uncle Roy, HJ resisted commercial gallery representation, preferring to work within the protection of the artists cooperative.

HJ passed away in 2012, but his potent and confronting paintings will long be remembered for the honest way they distil ideas and experiences into raw image and text. Discussing the impact of his art practice, HJ (cited in Macdonald 2005) stated:

> People liking them and that. It's my opinion, it's up to you how you want to take them. You like them or you don't. You can say you don't agree but that's my opinion. (p. 113)

6.5.7. HJ and Murruwaygu

With its hollow linear figures animated by staring eyes and howling mouths (Figure 6.8), HJ's body of work has strong links to my research framework. But it was his idiosyncratic technique of creating lines that became a 'eureka' moment for me during this study. While spending time with HJ and assisting him with his works I observed how his process deeply connects to south-east carving practices. He would begin by painting the background of his canvas, often in dark muted colours and sometimes with a horizon line, distant rolling hills or starry night. Once it had dried, he would mark on the canvas with a blunt pencil the outline of the subjects that he intended to paint, including figures and trees. By using heavy pressure on the canvas, he indented the surface and carved his image into it (Figure 6.9). The pencil left little to no graphite mark, just an indentation; and because of the properties of canvas, the surface would eventually turn smooth once wet. This process was recorded in the ABC TV documentary and accompanying publication *art + soul*, with curator Hetti Perkins (2010) describing HJ's technique as unique. HJ would then use bright colours, straight from the paint container, to create an outline, often working with an opposing colour to create a second outline. Some of his figures were filled in; others were not, with only the dual-colour outline to distinguish them from their background, creating a sense of dynamism within these elemental works. When asked about his technique, HJ would say it was a way of assisting him to plan his paintings, particularly the large canvases. This technique squarely places him within my research framework and has become another anchor point for my research.

FIGURE 6.8.
Stop and think, 1993
HJ Wedge, Wiradjuri, Southern Riverine, Australia, 1957–2012
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas; 5 panels, each 76 x 91.2 cm
AGNSW, 217.1994.a–e
Purchased 1994
Image courtesy AGNSW and the artist's estate

Like Uncle Roy, HJ did not know the works of either William Barak or Tommy McRae or have the opportunity to study carving practices through viewing shields in museum collections. HJ recalled the restrictions placed on maintaining culture on Erambie Mission; language was prohibited: 'A lot of people on other missions was too scared to even speak it and even pass it down' (Wedge 1996, p. 41). His knowledge of artistic practices was similarly limited to the fragments that he came across in the landscape:

> When we was out, now and then we used to come across a tree with some type of shape cut out to probably make a shield or something, or make a basket or something out of it. Then a little bit further you can see where there's been rock paintings. (Wedge 1996, p. 38)

On discussing my research with HJ, he welcomed the connections between his practice and that of other generations, and on one occasion he took me to see a carved tree depicting a goanna within a half-hour drive of Erambie. He clearly understood the cultural connections and also raised the possibility of his work connecting to local rock art he had seen, which he described as 'stick figures'. (He was unable to remember where the rock art site was.)

FIGURE 6.9.
Stills from HJ Wedge interview, Erambie, Cowra, 2007
Image courtesy the artist's estate

A direct connection can be made when comparing the works of William Barak and HJ, particularly in their composition and rendering of figures. Infilled linear figures, often outlined in tones contrasting with the background, populate their works. A similar style is seen in the rare examples of figurative elements engraved on shields, such as the broad shield from Museum Victoria depicting a man with boomerangs in each hand and three emus (Figure 6.10), where human and animal forms are reduced to active outlines. Both Barak and HJ cast animals or anthropomorphic figures as central to their works. Barak's animals are seen performing in ceremonies, while for HJ they are the main characters, representing either native or invasive species and often engaged in colonial conversations. This use of animals, their fluid identity in both human and animal forms, speaks to a much older practice of storytelling, where animals play a key role in understanding not only the environment but the interconnected relationships between humans and animals. This intergenerational observation can be understood as an enduring element of totemism, which is the use of animals as activate agents in narratives. This concept has similarly sculpted the structure of this research with the incorporation of the Eaglehawk and Crow moiety system (see Chapter 3).

6.6. Texts and stories

Both Uncle Roy and HJ, along with other artists of their generation, created text statements to accompany their works. Understanding their motivation for this is important, as both received little education and identified as illiterate. In Uncle Roy's case, these texts are usually small paragraphs of around a hundred words that incorporate the title and help the viewer to focus on the core subject or intent, while in HJ's case they can be a page or more of typed text. Like Perkins, the curator of Boomalli before me, one of the key tasks of working with HJ at Boomalli was typing up his stories as he dictated them. HJ (1996) explained the importance:

> You got to have the stories beside them 'cause you wouldn't understand them and nobody else would, only me. A lot of youse would be taking wild guesses at them and you'd probably be way off face with it. (p. 41)

FIGURE 6.10.
Broad shield, mid-19th century
Artist unknown
Wood, natural pigments; 96 x 20 x 4 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X99623
Image courtesy MV

Philippa Scarlett (2009) sees the addition of text to Uncle Roy's work as a transformative action where through the 'union of text and image … the art becomes history and story' (p. 32).

Uncle Roy has said: 'I done all this because this is where I lived. I lived it. I been through it and I know what it's all about' (Kennedy 2015, artist's talk, 28 November). In this statement, a sentiment often repeated by many from this generation, we see the artist's comfort in drawing on his own authority. His work is the story of his life as he witnessed it. This dedication to personal stories can been seen throughout the generations of artists in *Murruwaygu*, in both Barak's and McRae's intense documentation of ceremony and in the repetition of designs on shields by individual artists. In this way, these texts and artworks can be seen as autobiographical in format, which Anita Heiss (Wiradjuri) (2003) identifies as one of the main genres of Aboriginal literature. Heiss argues that autobiography is a way of

> documenting their life experiences and expressing both their own anguish and the anguish of their fellows. Autobiographies are the history and textbooks of Aboriginal Australia. Writing autobiography is a way of retrieving and reclaiming a past that in many parts has not been either written down or recorded accurately. (p. 35)

Heiss references *Don't take your love to town*, the renowned 1988 autobiography of Bundjalung author Ruby Langford Ginibi as 'one of the most widely read autobiographies in Australia', quoting the author:

> I thought if I wrote about my experiences as an Aboriginal person, it might give the other side, the 'white side', some idea of how hard it is to survive between the Black and white culture of Australia, and they might become less racist and paternalistic towards our people. (p. 36)

Ginibi's motivation for gifting her personal story is shared by both Uncle Roy and HJ, and by the other artists of this generation who work within the autobiographical mode.

Although this generation has been supressed, through their work they are not silenced. Continuing the strong Koori tradition of keeping stories alive through their practice, their artworks can be seen as extraordinary acts of generosity and bravery.

6.7. Mission days artists

Both Uncle Roy and HJ are part of a movement of artists who are largely self-taught and who initiated their practice late in life within an era of self-determination, often while undertaking adult education. These artists generally return to the nostalgia of their childhood, their autobiographical work filling the vacuum in Australia's history of these times. While for the purpose of this research I have focused on male artists, there are several female contemporaries, including Margaret Adams (b.1942, Kamilaroi) and Elaine Russell (1941–2017, Kamilaroi).

Robert Campbell Jnr (1944–1993) was one of the early pioneers of this movement. A Ngaku man who grew up on Burnt Bridge Mission outside of Kempsey on the North Coast of NSW, Campbell's only training was in assisting his father to make boomerangs from local mangrove and wattle for sale to tourists. He would decorate the boomerangs with pencil and 'his father would then trace over the young Robert's design with a red-hot wire, to burn it into the wood' (Kleinert & Neale 2000, p. 553).

By the 1980s Campbell had found his own unique style, characterised by bold, graphic figures. Like HJ, Campbell deployed his own style of dots and an x-ray figuration to evoke a sense of Indigeneity, often underscored with heavy line-work to build a layered background. His work can be understood within the genre of ground designs, carved trees and possum-skin cloaks. Campbell is perhaps best known for creating paintings that reflect on his own personal experiences of growing up in pre-Referendum segregated regional NSW. Many of his key themes come together in his seminal painting *Abo history (facts)* (1988), now in the NGA collection in Canberra.

Kevin Gilbert (1933–1993), a Wiradjuri man born on Erambie Mission, was an artist, writer and political activist. During incarceration Gilbert (1996) taught himself lino-printing, famously working with salvaged linoleum and makeshift tools (p. 40), and he made a collection of plates that he printed in the coming decades. He actively campaigned for Aboriginal land rights and the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty, and was involved in the Tent Embassy in Canberra. While Gilbert's life of activism is inseparable from his writings, many issues are addressed more subtly in his artworks, which explore the virtues of Aboriginal life and lament the imposition of colonisation, as signalled by titles such as *Christmas Eve in the land of the dispossessed* (1968/1990).

Creating an image through mark-making, Gilbert's works inherently speak to south-east carving practices. He also incorporated rock art motifs and iconography into many of his works, such as *My father's studio* (1965/1992). Heavy line-work dominates the images and background spaces are often filled with a herringbone pattern, as seen in *Lineal legends* (1965/1990), or texture that resembles an adze's surface, such as in *Mabung* (1965/1992).

Respected elder William 'Badger' Bates (b.1947) was born in Wilcannia on his Baakantji country in far western NSW. Uncle Badger spent his childhood on the move with his grandmother and Baakantji monarch, Ann 'Granny' Moysey, in order to avoid removal by the Aborigines Protection Board. Brought up by Granny Moysey, who taught him how to carve emu eggs, he also learnt from his uncles how to carve boomerangs, clubs and shields from local materials. Uncle Badger worked for many years as a heritage officer at NSW National Parks and Wildlife, which enabled him to maintain connections to his country, in particular Mutawintji National Park. Mutawintji is renowned for a wealth of petroglyph rock art and Uncle Badger was a key advocate for the 1998 handing back of the park to the Baakantji people. In 2006 he retired to become a full-time artist.

In the 1990s, under the curatorial vision of Phil Gordon (Gureng Gureng), the Australian Museum, Sydney, acquired Uncle Badger's shields, clubs and emu eggs. His lino-prints came to attention at a Tin Sheds Gallery exhibition in 1993 and have since been collected by the AGNSW, Sydney, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. When asked about the translation of carving to lino-carving, Uncle Badger (cited in AGNSW 2013a) commented:

> When you carve an emu egg you get a pocketknife, and you hold the egg and you pull the knife towards you. With the lino you have to push it away from you. It was the hardest thing. When I carved it there was a lot of cursing going on because it was a new technique. (1:30)

Jim Stanley (1927–2015, Kamilaroi) was born on the banks of the Mehi River at Top Camp, one of three missions in the rural community of Moree in northern NSW. Uncle Jim grew up in the Depression days and was nicknamed 'the wanderer' because of his curiosity. As he got older, he worked in the local pastoral industry to support his family, but he was seriously injured during the Christmas period of 1983 in an accident that left him in a wheelchair. While in care he was encouraged to paint, and he started to show his work at the Moree Plains Gallery (AGNSW 2013b). Echoing Uncle Roy's approach to art-making, Uncle Jim (cited in AGNSW 2013b) looked exclusively at his memories of growing up on the mission and recorded the knowledge and stories he had heard as a child: 'I'm a man who lives in the past. I don't live in the future, I live in the past. That's why I do all the paintings in the past, 'cause I lived it' (4:13).

Uncle Jim is best known for his works that meticulously document the Top Camp enclave. Rows of houses line the small canvases, and in the front-yards and rooftops he writes directly onto the surface in pen or pencil the names of everyone who lived in the house. These pictorial family trees are both geometric, like shield designs, and figurative, and literally fuse the artist's story with the canvas. His imagery is often set within red, yellow and black dots, or in his later works, a border of stars and moon cycles that reference knowledge of the heavens.

Along with others, these artists firmly establish a generation of south-east mission artists who, although collectively receiving little art training, recall memories of their childhood while adhering to south-east practices.

6.8. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the work of two self-taught senior Koori artists, Roy Kennedy and HJ Wedge, placing their work within the research framework. Both artists are Wiradjuri, from what is known today as NSW, and share the experience of 'mission life'. This mission experience not only underpins their individual art practices, as both draw on stories from their childhood and wider ideas about their upbringing, but also defines an era in the history of south-east Australia. Their lives spanned different mission periods, marked by different policies of administration, but both shared the experience of missing out on childhood schooling, coming to education later in life, and studying at Eora College where they engaged in visual art courses. This chapter has shown how the line is not only present in both their practices, but how their use of the line connects to the previous generations. This chapter follows on from Babiin, the second generation of artists, represented by 19th-century Koori artists William Barak and Tommy McRae, and precedes Warunarrung, the fourth generation of artists, represented by professional or trained contemporary Koori artists Reko Rennie and Steaphan Paton.

7. WARUNARRUNG: REKO RENNIE AND STEAPHAN PATON

7.1. Introduction

> I always say education is the future of our people. But they've gotta have both educations. They've got to have the Koorie one, make them feel good and strong about their Aboriginality and give them understanding about their culture and their history and their heritage … I respect the land where my ancestors are and I'm answerable to them and nobody else. And I think that our young people have got to understand that more. That education and that respect thing has to be very strong, embedded in them, and they need to spend a lot more time with people who have that vision with those things. I mean, you can have the rap dancing, you can have the discos, you can have all that sort of stuff. But don't forget that important education.
>
> —Uncle Albert Mullett (Gunai/Gunditjmara) (Mission Voices 2004, p. 7)

This chapter explores the work of two professional Koori artists, Reko Rennie (b.1974, Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero). Both tertiary-educated, they are part of a growing movement of south-east artists with academic training. Reko and Steaphan work as full-time artists, developing critical practices and championing new mediums, spaces and audiences, while continuing to assert their cultural knowledge and unique south-east practices, such as the use of the line to create both geometric and figurative forms. Reko and Steaphan form the fourth generation of artists, which within the *Murruwaygu* research Koori Kinship Theory is Warunarrung, or grandson. This chapter provides context for their positions within the contemporary south-east and the wider urban Aboriginal art movements, tracking the progression of these movements through other key artists. These movements are the framework for understanding Reko's and Steaphan's practices.

Reko and Steaphan are at the start of their careers—both have exhibited in galleries for no more than a decade—and as such there is limited commentary and critique of their works, particularly Steaphan's. As a result, the artists' voices are prioritised in this chapter through interviews and statements, along with available contemporary accounts and visual analysis of their artworks. My collaboration with Reko and Steaphan for this research and our development and staging of an exhibition together has allowed a strong working relationship to evolve between us and provided me with deep personal insight into their works.

This chapter charts Reko's and Steaphan's works to date and considers their positions within the current landscape, including the social and political circumstances. The research investigates how they continue their culture, which can be understood as the foundation of their art practices. Their shared experiences are discussed in order to demonstrate the connections with other artists of their generation. I first discuss Reko's artistic influences, from street art to the gallery context, his inherited cultural knowledge and his development of signature symbols to create major artworks. I then profile Steaphan, who trained under the direction of his late grandfather and cultural leader Uncle Albert Mullett. Steaphan explores his inherited Gunai/Monero knowledge by making works on paper and installations that celebrate both Gunai designs and his contemporary experience. Key artworks or styles are called on to speak to the overall practice of both artists.

Further to this, I analyse Reko's and Steaphan's work in relation to the research topic, discussing their continuing use of the line individually and in relation to the other artists within the research framework of south-east men's work including intergenerational observations. This chapter follows on from Wurrumany, the third generation of artists, represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Roy Kennedy (b.1934, Wiradjuri) and HJ Wedge (1957–2012, Wiradjuri), and precedes the conclusion.

7.2. Professional artists

The term 'professional artist' best describes any creative practitioner who sees their primary occupation as artist. NAVA (2018), Australia's 'peak body protecting and promoting the professional interests of the visual and media arts, craft and design sector' (para. 1), has expanded this term, defining a professional artist as someone who

a. has regular public exhibitions of artwork
b. offers work for sale, or is selling artwork
c. is eligible for or has been awarded a government grant
d. is selected for public exhibition, awards, prizes
e. has secured work or consultancies on the basis of professional expertise
f. has had work acquired for public or private collections
g. is a member of a professional association on the basis of his/her status as a professional practitioner/s. (2017, p. 2)

My research interprets the practices of both Reko and Steaphan within this category of 'professional artist'. Arguably, some of these definitions could have been applied to the previous generation of Uncle Roy and HJ; however, the difference between the two generations is that both Reko and Steaphan have made deliberate career choices to become artists, whereas Uncle Roy and HJ discovered art via the alternative education scheme in which visual art was one part of a wider education program. Furthermore, Uncle Roy and HJ elected never to have commercial gallery representation, unlike Reko and Steaphan, and their work is exhibited on an irregular basis.

The professionalisation of south-east Aboriginal artists is relatively recent, with its origins in the era that frames the lives of both Uncle Roy and HJ Wedge, the post-Referendum 1970s, when Aboriginal communities began to actively assert their rights and reject the policies of the protectionist era. This was a time dominated by the civil rights movement and self-determination. Tasmanian Aboriginal academic Ian Anderson (2008), writing from an Aboriginal health policy perspective, describes this

period as a 'social movement that reclaimed a public space and inserted new forms of representation about our identities and cultures' (p. 761). He further proposes that people were putting an end to mission-era perspectives:

> Indigenous Australia would no longer accept being divided into breeding classes: full-blood, half-castes, quadroons or octoroons. Nor would we represent ourselves as the degraded and somewhat pathetic and bewildered remnants of a primitive and savage race. (p. 761)

Within this new era, art came to represent the complexity of Aboriginal identity within a colonial paradigm. Arrernte and Kalkadoon curator Hetti Perkins (1994/2003) explained:

> Against this backdrop of static models of cultural diversity and authenticity, an increasingly strident and sophisticated art was emerging from the more densely populated parts of Australia made by artists whose people continue to suffer the extremes of dispossession. The political climate of the early 1970s fostered an articulate and forceful response from these artists, who, using their greater access to a range of mediums and familiarity with the language of the dominant discourse, adopted an overtly political stance. (p. 99)

This is a perspective that Aboriginal communities in the south-east have had considerable experience with, and art within this contemporary framework art has become an ally in the promotion of our political position.

One of the earliest professional artists to break new ground was painter Trevor Nickolls (1949–2012), whose work, underpinned by his meta-narrative of 'Dreamtime to Machinetime', heralded the new era. Nickolls's Ngarrindjeri heritage has been acknowledged in catalogues during the later years of his practice, and is reaffirmed by his long-time friend and associate Angelika Tyrone, who manages his estate. After receiving a Diploma in Painting from the South Australian School of Art in 1972, Nickolls went on to complete a postgraduate diploma at the Victorian College of the

Arts in 1980. He is one of the earliest south-east Aboriginal artists, if not the first, to receive specific visual art tertiary education. Nickolls received several professional grants and awards, and his work has been collected by all the major institutions. In 1990, along with Rover Thomas (1926–1998, Wangkujunga), Nickolls represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. Described as the father of urban Aboriginal art (Brenda L. Croft, cited in *Trevor Nickolls Art Award* 2012), he was also the subject of a major touring retrospective exhibition and catalogue, *Other side art: Trevor Nickolls—a survey of paintings and drawings 1972–2007* (2009).

Following Nickolls's lead was Yorta Yorta artist Lin Onus AM (1948–1996), who learnt most of his skills via informal training at his father Bill's art studio and shop, Aboriginal Enterprise Novelties, in the outer Melbourne suburb of Belgrave. Other artists and artisans also trained at the studio, which, Sylvia Kleinert (2010) notes, 'was vitally important to negotiating respect and recognition for a dynamic urban Aboriginal presence in south-eastern Australia' (para. 15). Onus's informal training continued under the instruction of senior central Arnhem Land artist Djiwut 'Jack' Wunuwun (1930–1991, Djinang). With his first solo exhibition at the Aborigines Advancement League in 1975, Onus followed his father's advocacy for Aboriginal rights and joined the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council in 1986, later becoming Chair over 1989–1992. Onus was also instrumental in the establishment of the Aboriginal Arts Management Association in 1990 and Viscopy in 1995 (Neale 2000a). Like Nickolls, Onus is represented by all the major institutions and was the subject of a retrospective exhibition, *Urban dingo: the art and life of Lin Onus*, at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2000 (Neale 2000b), which is understood to be the first major touring retrospective of a south-eastern Aboriginal artist (Grossman 2003, p. ix).

Both Nickolls and Onus were pioneers. Their distinct practices brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concepts and visions, which had historically been kept apart, in order to represent the lived reality of south-eastern Aboriginal communities.

Onus (1990/2003) described Nickolls as 'the great innovator of the 1970s … the first to merge European and Aboriginal imagery within his work' (p. 93). Commenting on Nickolls's blended symbology in the 1979 painting *Dreamtime machinetime*, Kamilaroi academic Donna Leslie (2008) describes how

> the rainbow serpent is transformed into a dollar sign ready to be swallowed whole by a towering skyscraper that stands as a metaphor for a society and its values so foreign to Aboriginal tradition. This early work is an interaction that not only embodies coexistence and contrast, but the integral experience of both at the same time. (p. 105)

Nickolls made work that speaks to the engagement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ideas, while Onus literally fused recognisably Aboriginal styles and photorealism to create his own vision (Neale 2000b). Onus (1990/2003) noted that in the early 1970s there was little public awareness of south-east artistic practices, and that for artists 'the only role model of that era was Albert Namatjira' (p. 93). But, as Uncle Herb Patten (Brabralung/Gunai/Kurnai) (cited in Edmonds 2007) explains, 'since Lin Onus and onwards, there has been an explosion of art [and] artists in Victoria' (p. 177). Onus has written of the struggles he and Nickolls faced as arts practitioners in both educating audience members and establishing their own style. In this way Nickolls and Onus are mavericks who worked tirelessly to break through established stereotypes and barriers.

As the increasing number of south-east artists shaped their art practices they often felt similarly blocked and pigeonholed by the mainstream art world. In an attempt to overcome these issues, a collective of ten 'urban' artists came together in 1987 to form Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative (Croft 1999). In the era of self-determination and change, Boomalli created a platform for urban artists to show their works independently. But Boomalli's stance did not go unchallenged and the artists 'continued to have their art and even their identities questioned' (Perkins 1994/2003, p. 100). The group was predominately made up of artists from NSW and Queensland, and as such they did not represent or purport to represent solely south-east artists.

Michael Riley (1960–2004), a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi filmmaker and photographer, was the most prominent south-east artist to emerge from the group. Riley had moved to Sydney in the late 1970s from his hometown of Dubbo and took up a Koori photography course in 1982 at the University of Sydney's Tin Sheds Gallery. In Victoria, a similar Koori-run course at Swinburne University had been established in 1974 by Wiradjuri filmmaker and activist Bruce McGuinness (1939–2003). Courses such as these were part of a wider program to engage Aboriginal participation and provide bridging courses to art schools, and can be seen as a major factor in the development of professional south-east Aboriginal artists.

In many ways Riley forged new ground; his work was unlike anything seen before. Shedding overt signs of Aboriginality and working in mediums then considered unconventional in Aboriginal art, Riley's films and photographs depict a unique south-east vision of beauty and decay that commands attention. As a leader in these fields, Riley was recognised and his work acquired by state institutions. He represented Australia both nationally and internationally, received several grants and awards, and was the subject of a major retrospective titled *Michael Riley: sights unseen* at the NGA in 2006. His lifelong friend Linda Burney (Wiradjuri) (2006) encapsulates the significance of Riley's work:

> There was an 'otherness' about this Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi man. Michael saw things we could not. This 'otherness' is so clear in his art, capturing a look, gathering light, reflecting pain, survival and challenge. The sheer beauty of Michael's landscapes, portraits and films are all bound up in narratives of the most powerful kind. (para. 17)

Following in the wake of Boomalli, where preconceived ideas of Aboriginality were shattered, artists such as Brook Andrew (b.1970, Wiradjuri) and r e a (b.1962, Kamilaroi/Wailwan) started to create. Both were part of a new generation of artists receiving formal training from universities. Andrew completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree at the University of Western Sydney in 1993 and went on to graduate in

1999 with a Master of Fine Arts degree from the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Sydney. Andrew has received numerous grants, commissions and awards, and is represented both nationally and internationally. r e a completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, in 1993, and went on to obtain a Master of Arts, Visual Arts, degree from ANU, Canberra, in 2000 and a Master of Science in Digital Imaging and Design degree from New York University in 2002. She is currently undertaking her PhD at UNSW. Andrew and r e a mark a further development in south-east artists' work, as they have moved away from the cooperative model of Boomalli to working with mainstream private galleries.

The trajectory of professional artists within the south-east can be understood as a relatively new phenomenon established by artists such as Nickolls and Onus since the 1970s. The path they set, often embedded within the wider urban Aboriginal art movement and followed by other south-east artists, can be seen as the framework for understanding the industry that Reko's and Steaphan's practices spring from.

7.3. Reko Rennie

Reko Rennie was born in 1974 and raised in the working-class suburb of Footscray, in inner-city Melbourne on Woiwurrung country. He is Kamilaroi through his grandmother Julia and has strong family connections to the town of Walgett on the junction of the Namoi and Barwon rivers in northern NSW. Julia grew up on the banks of the Namoi with her extended family until she was 'enslaved and forcibly removed at a very young age' (Reko Rennie, cited in Cuthbertson & McManus 2017, para. 7). Although growing up off country, Reko has remained deeply connected to Kamilaroi country and describes his grandmother as 'a huge force' in his life (cited in Cuthbertson & McManus 2017, para. 9). He would visit his grandmother on holidays, and he continues to make pilgrimages to the region, seeing family, connecting to culture and creating artworks.

Similar to other regional towns in NSW, Walgett has a long history of racial problems. The Namoi River region experienced a violent invasion, which the local Aboriginal community resisted, often resulting in massacres such as the Mooki River Massacre (Butler, Percival & Cameron 1995, pp. 186–187). Kamilaroi defended themselves and their country, and in 1837 Major James Nunn and a force of troopers stormed Kamilaroi with the orders 'to act according to your own judgement and use your utmost exertion to suppress these outrages' (Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Snodgrass, cited in Wright 2011, p. 158). This was the catalyst for a massive campaign of killings, including the infamous Waterloo Creek Massacre in 1838 (Butler, Percival & Cameron 1995, pp. 190–191). In the aftermath of invasion, violence continued with policies of segregation implemented through the establishment of missions and reserves via the Aborigines Protection Board, creating deep racial divides. The effects of these policies were felt well after the missions were officially abandoned. Actively excluded from the town and unable to access services, Aboriginal people were treated as second-class citizens. From 1917 to 1940, for example, Aboriginal children were officially excluded from Walgett Public School following advice from the Walgett Parents and Citizens Association (Kass 2003).

The issue of entrenched racism was brought to national and international attention in 1965 when University of Sydney students led by Charles Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon) visited Walgett on the Freedom Rides and protested outside the Walgett Returned and Services League of Australia club and other local establishments that were known to refuse to admit or serve local Aboriginal people. The student protestors feared for their safety in Walgett, and while leaving town their bus was run off the road in what Minister Ted Noffs (1926–1995) described as attempted murder (Clark 2008, p. 171). Reko's family was involved in the ongoing advocacy for Aboriginal people, and in the wake of the Freedom Rides the community's campaigns were renewed (Goodall 1996, pp. 282–283). Reko (cited in Harvey 2013) references one key instance, when his great-uncle Reginald Murray 'fought against the curfew that prohibited Aboriginal people from entering the town after six o'clock at night' (p. 78).

7.3.1. Street art

Although he grew up away from these histories, activism and protest form an integral part of Reko's practice. These same issues were playing out on the streets of Melbourne in the 1980s, and they propelled the protest art movement. Frances Edmonds and Maree Clarke (Mutti Mutti/Wamba Wamba/Yorta Yorta/Boonwurrung) (2009) describe how in the 1980s 'prints and posters became a means for Aboriginal artists to focus on political messages, such as land rights, deaths in custody and cultural heritage' (p. 33). Edmonds and Clarke also cite murals as a major feature of the Melbourne Aboriginal community in the 1980s; murals not only 'enabled the exchange of information about Aboriginal ideas with outsiders [but] provided people with opportunities to work together' (p. 28). Many of the murals 'portrayed pictures that highlighted the continuation of Aboriginal culture in the south-east' (pp. 28–29), such as the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League mural on St Georges Road in Thornbury, which Onus was involved with.

As both witness and participant, young Reko continued the process of protest and social commentary inherited from his family through the form of street art. Although the life experiences of his grandmother were not his own, they had left a mark. Reko explains: 'I was also very conscious politically and interested in my family history and what had occurred to Aboriginal people in this country. Art provided me with a voice' (Rennie 2014, para. 6). It was during the years 1985 and 1986 as a teenager, breakdancing and listening to hip-hop, that he took to the streets with spraycans and found his artistic expression by painting on the side of buildings, trains and laneways (Jones 2015c). Reko was so deeply inspired by the landmark publication *Subway art* (1984) by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant that he stole a copy from the local library in Footscray. Reko recalls:

> It was definitely an eye-opener, seeing all those trains and beautiful colours on panels and walls, and that really resonated with me. It was just an extension of the subculture I was already in, so it felt like a natural progression. Also around

> this time I was already noticing older writers who were bombing the lines I rode on and painting walls, and this was something that also certainly influenced me. It was graff that really provided an outlet to express myself through spray-paint. (Rennie 2014, para. 3)

As he spread his messages on the streets and laneways of inner-city suburbs, on suburban railways and tramlines, the elements of text and figurativism, rendered in an explosion of carefully choreographed colour, as seen in the work documented in *Subway art*, became the hallmarks of Reko's practice. Reko (cited in AGNSW 2015f) explains:

> People would make political statements just with a paintbrush and a can of paint, and that was something that resonated with me. Any kid loves the rush you get from writing your name when you're not supposed to and doing things that are against the law. Graffiti really gave me an early apprenticeship in terms of creating art. (unpublished video recording)

In this way, Reko became part of a much larger movement that had already seen Melbourne's laneways and streets defined by its street art and recognised as the stencil art capital of the world (Smallman & Nyman 2005).

Another early influence on Reko's practice was American popular culture, which manifests both practically and conceptually: his studio is filled with quality spray-paints imported from America, while the 2014 artwork *No sleep till Dreamtime*, discussed below, draws its title from the 1987 Beastie Boys song *No sleep till Brooklyn*. These references help to unpack Reko's layered works.

A key step in Reko's decision to become a professional artist was his award of the 2009 Australia Council of the Arts Paris residency at Cité Internationale des Arts. He cites this moment of industry recognition as a turning point in his practice. In this one trip Reko saw the streets of Paris, remnants of the Berlin Wall and the lanes of London.

His international engagement has since continued through exhibitions and residencies in America, Europe and Asia (Rennie 2017).

7.3.2. Galleries

Before turning his full attention to his art practice, Reko studied and worked as a journalist. Yorta Yorta/Wiradjuri curator and communications consultant Jirra Lulla Harvey (2013) describes 'crime and resistance' (p. 78) as an ongoing theme in Reko's career, one that connects his often illegal work as a street artist with his crime reporting for *The Age*—his former career and current art practice both underpinned by messages of social justice. While working as a journalist, Reko would spend much of his time creating artwork both on the streets and at home:

> [I] worked as a journalist to pay the bills and painted in my spare time. There were many times I would create all night and then roll into work at *The Age*. I soon realised where my passion was and that was when I decided to do art full-time. (cited in Feagins 2013, para. 10)

Harvey curated Reko in one of Reko's first major institutional shows, the 2007 exhibition *Nguurramban: from where we are* at Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts in St Kilda, Melbourne. At the time Reko was still a full-time journalist, but the work he exhibited, *Blak urban guerrillas*, can be understood as a key major work. Reko took an entire room of the gallery, spray-painting yellow, red, orange and black camouflage designs directly onto the walls, and stencilling a self-portrait holding a placard. The intense colours bounced off the walls and the intoxicating smell of acrylic spray-paint still lingered long after the show had opened.

For Reko, the use of camouflage 'attempts to render the visible invisible by disorienting our eyes and employing the art of disguise … [It] aims to amplify, rather than conceal' his identity and support his claim 'to a luminous, commanding form of cultural visibility' (cited in AGNSW 2016b). Here, with *Blak urban guerrillas*, Reko had brought the

politics of the street into the gallery. After the show, the work was painted over and destroyed, but in many ways Reko's presence within the contemporary art world had been announced. Shortly after this exhibition he quit journalism to become a full-time artist.

Part of this process of becoming professional involved creating portable, and potentially 'sellable', works of art, which saw Reko sometimes work with boards. Reko (cited in AGNSW 2015f) explains the transition:

> It was about investigating different mediums and surfaces and seeing where the skills that I'd acquired through my years of doing graffiti, illegally and legally, could then be applied in a different format. (unpublished video recording)

Reko also credits the inspiration of Melbourne-based painter Howard Arkley (1951–1999) and his clinical airbrushed images of houses, interiors and suburbia:

> This work really blew my mind … because technically it was a lot like doing a piece in graff, the background imagery was filled in with various colours and a black line, like a final outline was placed on the shapes to tie everything together. So that certainly inspired me to create my own works on canvas and years later that's what I did. I love the colours and imagery from Warhol and pop art, as well as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. I always liked that these guys started out making work on the street and went from there. (Rennie 2014, para. 7)

7.3.3. Concentric diamond

A key icon that emerges in Reko's practice is the equal-sided concentric diamond (Figure 7.1), which he has turned into a highly defined lineal form. Reko has inherited Kamilaroi knowledge regarding the diamond and it features in almost every work, underpinning his aesthetic. Within a Kamilaroi framework, the diamond represents knowledge, relationships and beauty, and Reko refers to the diamond as part of his DNA. The diamond is often seen on classical Kamilaroi material such as shields and on the many dendroglyphs, or carved trees, that once populated Kamilaroi country.

FIGURE 7.1.
Message stick (green), 2011
Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine, Australia, b.1974
Hand-pressed textile foil, screenprint on Belgian linen; 140 x 140 cm
NGA, 2012.832
Purchased 2012
Image courtesy NGA and the artist

The prolific use of the diamond throughout the south-east demonstrates two important ideas: it was (and is) a highly significant symbol; and its widespread use would have naturally given rise to a number of different meanings, based on the relevant community's interpretation. Reko (cited in AGNSW 2015f) supports this understanding, describing the diamond as 'one of four male symbols for Kamilaroi, from my understanding'. While the form that Reko works with in his artworks is

'a very clean-cut diamond representation', he stresses that there are different versions of the diamond; this, he says, is 'just my own representation in a contemporary sense of my connection, my family connection, to that symbol' (unpublished video recording).

Reko understands that while these designs are deeply personal and connected to his family, they sit within the recognised aesthetic of the south-east. Harvey (2013) explains:

> The geometric patterns that feature so strongly in Rennie's work are for Kamilaroi people a visual language that was once integral to keeping records of marriage lines, family groups and territorial boundaries. They featured in sand paintings for ceremony and tree carvings to mark sites of significance. Young men were given their own design as part of their initiation into manhood. The patterning is, like so many of Rennie's motifs, a representation of Aboriginal identity. (p. 80)

From this dual perspective, honouring both his family and the wider Kamilaroi and south-east communities, Reko (cited in AGNSW 2015b) sees his contemporary use of the diamond as a powerful act of reclamation:

> These markings that were on the trees that were cut down and then the sand engravings that were done for ceremonial … They were all outlawed. They were all deemed paganistic at the time. So for me to acknowledge them and to reintroduce them into work in an appropriate way, one that I'm not reproducing female symbols and law symbols and things like that, but in a contemporary sense and acknowledge that past. I think it's really important because there was a time when they were lost. (2:28)

Reko often works and reworks the diamond within his artworks through a prism of colours. His employment of the diamond in this way and his understanding of its cultural origin in carved trees also help frame his use of colour. The designs found on trees have deeply engraved marks that create an intense push–pull of negative and positive lines. This is perfectly interpreted by Reko's use of colour—often fluorescent

and always highly contrasting—to create discordant and pulsing graphics. In this way Reko can be seen as continuing south-east carving through his application of colour.

The diamond is fundamental to Reko's practice; it can be employed as a lens for understanding his work to date. The following sections consider two key strands of Reko's practice: the creation of portable works for private galleries and the development of site-specific artworks. Both types build on his informal training as a street artist and are underpinned visually and conceptually by the diamond.

7.3.4. Multipanel works

The process of sampling designs, words and symbols emerges in Reko's work, where icons are reproduced, distilled and remastered en masse, time and time again. This process moves away from the single image and uses multiple boards of different sizes to make up one artwork. The visual effect of these assemblages connects to the way street art is built up over time or the layering of posters on walls and hoarding, while also recalling key south-east ceremonial sites where multiples are used within a matrix of cultural mapping. Some 60 dendroglyphs, or carved trees, were recorded at Collymongle, a Kamilaroi site believed to hold the greatest number of trees in one location and where a ceremony took place in the early 1890s. It was noted that the designs on carved trees were not only diamonds and linear forms but also depictions of 'weaponry and human and animal figures' (Leigh Purcell, cited in Briggs et al. 2011, p. 4).

Works such as Reko's *Initiation* (2013) (Figure 7.2), held in the NGV collection, and *No sleep till Dreamtime* (2014) (Figure 7.3), featured in the research exhibition in 2015–2016 and part of the AGNSW collection, are key examples of this style, consisting of 41 and 44 boards, respectively. The boards are individually inscribed with the symbols that anchor Reko's practice. The fluorescent pinks, greens and blues that jar with the white walls of the gallery slowly give way to a more highly textured and luminous surface created by metallic textile foil, diamond dust and gold leaf.

FIGURE 7.2.
No sleep till Dreamtime, 2014
Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine, Australia, b.1974
Birch plywood, metallic textile foil, synthetic polymer paint, diamond dust, gold leaf; overall 310 x 1030 cm
AGNSW, 173.2014.a–rr
AGNSW Contempo Group, 2014
Image courtesy AGNSW and the artist

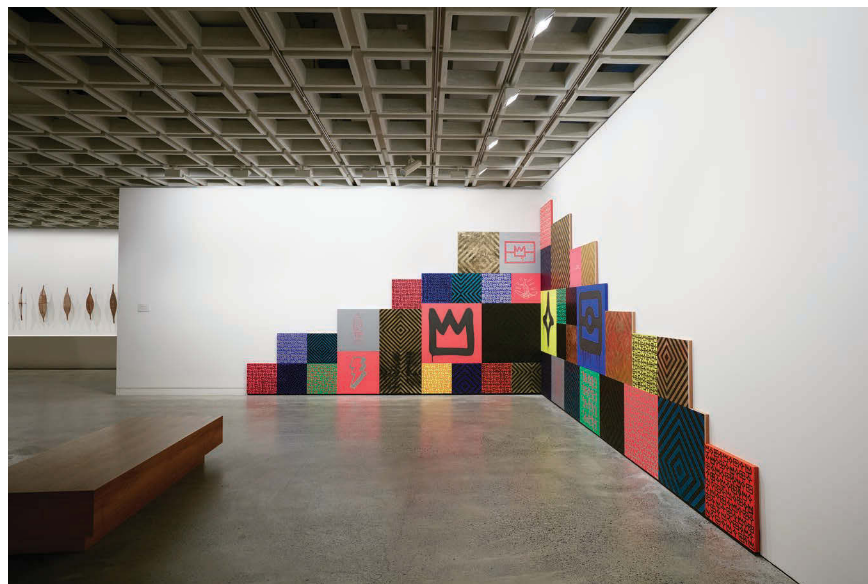


FIGURE 7.3.
Initiation, 2013
Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine, Australia, b.1974
Synthetic polymer paint on plywood; overall 300 x 520 cm
NGV, 2014.41.a–oo
Purchased with funds donated by Esther and David Frenkiel, 2014
Image courtesy NGV and the artist

Graphic tags, slogans and emblems of Reko's ancestors and memories are combined with political statements and his own personal references to growing up in Melbourne. Figurative images of a BMX bike, spraycans, lighting bolts and a flick-knife are dealt out along with Aboriginal political mantras such as 'Always was, always will be' and 'Deadly'. All are embedded within a network of the ubiquitous diamond. Collectively the imagery tells an intimate story of place and engagement. Reko is laying out clues—brushes with the law, rallies and marches, inheritance and insights are all alluded to. He retains the ideology of street art, which seeks to personalise the public and helps to further familiarise his audience with his work, connecting the past, mapping the present and politicising the future.

One of the key distillation processes witnessed in Reko's practice is the patternisation of his own personal triptych tag of a crown, a diamond and the Aboriginal flag, each repeated. The paint on these symbols of Aboriginal sovereignty is often left dripping, signalling an act of spontaneity, of unfinished business. Reko works and reworks this trio of symbols to such an extent it has become his signature. Their application speaks to a more mercurial position of protest while quoting the aesthetic of fellow street artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) (Jones 2015c). But for Reko (cited in Varano 2015), the trio is

> an emblematic statement about the original royalty of Australia … The crown symbol is both in homage to my graffiti roots and also pays due respect to Jean-Michel Basquiat, but most importantly symbolises sovereign status. The crown reminds us that Aboriginal people are the original sovereigns of this country. The diamond symbol is emblematic of my connection to the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi people. This diamond symbol is similar to a family crest; it is a part of me. The hand-drawn Aboriginal flag in the form of a graffiti tag pays respect to all Aboriginal people, from environments both urban and remote, and anywhere in between. (para. 4)

This process of repetition, of radiating lines and a proliferation of icons, is also found in south-east shields, with one particular example coming from the Namoi River (Figure 4.7), where Reko's family originates. This shield, held in the Museum Victoria collection, features a central outline of a stylised goanna, with radiating lines filling out the entire surface of the shield. This composition style was commented on by anthropologist Robert Brough Smyth (1830–1889) (1878):

> When an animal was figured, it was common … to fill in the space around it with lines … This style of ornamentation is effective. When a figure of some bird or beast is carved in wood—as on shields or throwing-sticks—it is, in some specimens, in relief, the surrounding lines being cut on a somewhat lower plane; but most often it is cut out to the depth of the eighth of an inch, the surrounding lines being raised. Both methods are striking, and when colours are used, the effects are far from unpleasing. (vol. 1, pp. 288–289)

By celebrating the multiple creation of symbols through a process of repetition, Reko's work cites pre-contact south-east art practices in a contemporary landscape.

7.3.5. Public artworks

Reko has also continued to layer artworks directly onto built spaces, speaking to his street art aesthetic and Kamilaroi cultural practices. Located on both the exterior and interior of buildings, shipping containers and street hoarding, and exhibited both nationally and internationally, these works often take the form of a public commission or temporary intervention. Two key examples in Sydney are *Always was, always will be*, which was located at 1–5 Flinders Street, Taylor Square, over 2012–2017 (Figure 7.4), and *Welcome to Redfern* on the corner of Caroline and Hugo streets in Redfern, installed 2016. Both were commissioned by the City of Sydney and curator and advisor Hetti Perkins. Through these works we are sharply reminded of the political underpinnings of Reko's practice and the power of street art.

FIGURE 7.4.
Always was, always will be, 2012–2017
Reko Rennie, Kamilaroi, Northern Riverine, Australia, b.1974
Paint, signage, LEDs; dimensions variable
Commissioned by City of Sydney, 2012
Image courtesy the artist

For *Always was, always will be*, Reko transformed a historic and highly visible two-storey building dating to 1910, the former Commonwealth Bank situated at Taylor Square, a major intersection in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney. The entire facade of the building was adorned with fluorescent pink, blue and black equal-sided concentric diamonds that engulfed the building and inverted our senses of the built environment. Overlaid onto the diamond pattern in pink text was the statement 'Always was, always will be', sitting proud of the building and constructed in a style akin to contemporary sign-writing with backlighting. The dominant pink colour of the work can be understood as a nod to the local LGBTQ community, and each year the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras would parade past the work.

'Always was and always will be Aboriginal land', a statement that the Taylor Square work took its title from, is a mantra of Aboriginal politics. Harvey (2013) describes it as 'arguably the slogan of an urban generation; burnt into the memory of anyone that has walked a NAIDOC march or attended an Aboriginal protest in the last 30 years' (p. 80). She explains that 'Rennie makes further comment that while urban structures come and go, Sydney will always be Gadigal country' (p. 80). Indeed, Gadigal elder Uncle Allen Madden makes this statement at every Welcome to Country he gives in Sydney. In this way, the Taylor Square building became a visual signpost for a familiar political message.

Welcome to Redfern is situated on the last remaining terrace on the corner of Caroline and Hugo streets in Redfern. Perkins (cited in City of Sydney 2013), who commissioned the project, explains: 'The terrace on Caroline Street sits at the heart of a neighbourhood known for its Aboriginal history and activism, community life and cultural expression' (para. 1). For Reko, this commission combined two of his artistic goals—working on the streets, in the heartland of Sydney's Aboriginal community, and engaging with young locals, who assisted him in the work's development and production. It is telling that Reko cites this work as one of his dream projects (Feagins 2013). Harvey (2013) states:

> [It is] community projects like *Welcome to Redfern* in the historically significant Aboriginal hub of Redfern that humbles [Reko]. He is passionate about creating connections with Aboriginal youth and spends a minimum of one month per year running community workshops. (p. 80)

This small terrace in Redfern was once part of a line of buildings that accommodated the local Aboriginal community, with prominent families such as the Davisons of the Gadigal clan residing in the house (Uncle Charles 'Chicka' Madden 2017, pers. comm., 9 May). The preservation of this building speaks to the era of Redfern's development as Australia's 'Black Capital', which Reko draws on in his work. For *Welcome to Redfern*

Reko has applied his work to three exterior sides of this small two-storey building, including the bevelled corner, sending the colours of the Aboriginal flag across the building in red, black and yellow diagonal stripes. Where the lines meet at the corner they take a 90-degree turn, giving a ricochet effect across the building. On top of this treatment are portraits of the people who helped Reko in the production of the work, along with an image of an Eora man in a nowey, or canoe. This image is based on a 19th-century engraving by Samuel John Neele (1758–1824) (1804) titled *Pimbloy: native of New Holland in a canoe of that country*, which is believed to be the only depiction of Pemulwuy (c.1750–1802, Bidjigal), a key figure in the resistance campaigns in Sydney during the early days of the colony. These images, along with the words 'The Block', written in a three-dimensional black font, are applied as if floating off the building, resembling a paste-up image. Written on the other side of the building, without any line treatment, are the words 'Welcome to Redfern' in a retro 1950s-style font, harking back to the era when Redfern was establishing itself as the Black Capital of Australia.

These public artworks returned Reko to his earlier days of practising art on the streets and to the political dialogue emblazoned on the walls and streetscapes that informed his career. They are both a connection to place and a creation of place. This concept can again be understood by looking at the parallels between street art and carving, particularly that of dendroglyphs, or carved trees, which characterised a number of the nations of NSW. Carved trees signposted ceremonial grounds, burial sites and places of significance, and in this way made spaces and defined the landscape. The anthropologist Robert Etheridge (1846–1920) (1918) once declared NSW 'the country of dendroglyphs' (p. 1), and amateur ethnographer Edmund Osmond Milne (1886–1963) (1914, cited in Briggs et al. 2011) wrote of how carved trees 'indicate skill, industry and artistic design of exceptional quality; many of them may be described as elegant, and all represent strenuous mental and physical efforts' (p. 18). This description could just as easily be applied to Reko's artworks. But for a young Kamilaroi artist

who is connected to the city rather than the 'country of dendroglyphs', Reko (cited in Harvey 2013) makes the distinction:

> I cannot re-create traditional practices but what I can do is draw from my own experiences and express my identity from what I know. I am an urban Aboriginal man, I am comfortable with my identity and this is what I try to show through my work. (p. 78)

7.3.6. Reko and Murruwaygu

Reko's purposeful use of the line—citing a long and continued practice of carving within his family—makes his practice significant to this research. Elements of carving can be found throughout his work, including in the conceptualising, the process and ultimate outcome. As described above, Reko's art actively connects with the cultural ideas of line-work, specifically the knowledge and practice of carved trees. Much of Reko's work, in particular his early work, is dominated by carving plastic stencils to overspray in order to create his images, while the final outcome is the depiction of strong line markings in the form of the equal-sided concentric diamond.

The creation of repeating linear symbols to form patterns is seen in the shields mentioned in earlier chapters and in Reko's work. The use of the line to create energy and movement is thus seen throughout the generations. The surface of shields, the composition of William Barak's (c.1824–1903) men dancing and rows of women singing, or Uncle Roy's sinuous fence-lines cutting across his mission images—all these works employ active line-work, often creating a dynamic energy of positive and negative, an optical effect that stimulates your eye to move rapidly around the design, constantly engaging with the artwork's surface, and an energy that speaks to the power of south-east cultural stories. In continuation of these practices, Reko plays with black backgrounds and uses vibrant fluorescent colours to create his concentric diamonds, similarly producing a push–pull effect of the line.

The use of colour and the ability to play colours off each other are skills that define the works of Reko and HJ, both of whom sought to capture the everyday. Whether by bringing tags into the gallery or by interrogating the latest gossip from the mission on canvas, both artists remind us that cultural presence is found in the everyday. In following these threads, Reko and HJ have produced artworks that are highly engaging. In this way, their works relate to those of Barak, who created lively depictions of Wurundjeri life. Reko (cited in AGNSW 2015c) similarly seeks to create vibrant representations of life:

> For me it's all about pigments … the colours I work with are so intense. And I want something really, really bright and things that are not far off from fluoro. (00:39)

All three artists work with highly layered meanings and deliberately adopt metaphor and symbolism to tell their story in full colour.

7.4. Steaphan Paton

Steaphan Paton was born in Mildura in north-west Victoria in 1985. His country is Gunai and Monero, which adjoins the Snowy Mountains and high country of NSW and takes in the plains and coastline of Gippsland in eastern Victoria, where he grew up. Steaphan's art practice covers a range of mediums, including installation, painting, sculpture, video and printmaking. His work, like Reko's, sits within the postcolonial discourse, engaging with complex issues of race, ownership and relationships. Steaphan comes from a long line of artists and leaders, most notably his grandfather, the late Uncle Albert Mullett, whom he cites as a key source of inspiration and learning. It is because of this connection that Uncle Albert's voice and practice is relied on to contextualise Steaphan's work in this chapter. Uncle Albert was a key leader in the Victorian Aboriginal community in education, land rights and the continuation of cultural practices. He had strong ties to the Gunai mission of Lake Tyers in East Gippsland, which was established in 1861 for survivors of the frontier wars and later became a tourist destination.

The Gippsland region is the homeland of the Gunai nation, which is made up of five key clans (Fison & Howitt 1880/1991). While Gunai had previously endured European sealers and whalers raiding their coastline, in the 1830s their country suffered sustained overland invasion by squatters who desired its rich pastures and the ease of shipping that came with proximity to the burgeoning township of Melbourne. As pastoralists staked out their interests with imposing might, Gunai resisted and a frontier warfare broke out, resulting in a program of massacres intended to destroy the Aboriginal population (Gardner 1993). One notorious perpetrator was Angus McMillan (1810–1865), a Scottish-born pastoralist and 'pioneer' of the region who led a bloody campaign against the Gunai nation. Commanding a highland brigade and rebel squatters, he drove Gunai 'east and north into the hills away from the central plains, the lakes and shores, which the whites coveted' (Morgan 2004, p. 26).

The Gippsland landscape is marred with bloodshed; its history is recorded in placenames such as Skull Creek, Boney Point, Butchers Creek and Slaughterhouse Gully. One Gippsland squatter, Henry Meyrick (cited in Morgan 2004), wrote in 1846:

> The blacks are very quiet here now, poor wretches. No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot whenever they can be met with … For myself, if I caught a Black actually killing my sheep, I would shoot him with as little remorse as I would a wild dog, but no consideration on earth would induce me to ride into a camp and fire on them indiscriminately, as is the custom whenever the smoke is seen. They [the Aborigines] will very shortly be extinct. (p. 28)

Following the first wave of frontier wars in the region, the newly formed Victorian Colonial Government assembled the Central Board in 1860, later known as the Victorian Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, to oversee Aboriginal welfare (see Chapter 5). With the support of religious groups, the Central Board created staffed missions at the out-of-the-way Gippsland sites of Lake Tyers and

Ramahyuck, amid protests from local squatters (Barwick 1963, p. 123). Gunai initially treated the missions as seasonal camps and continued to live on isolated parts of their country or on friendly pastoralists' runs (Wesson 2002, p. 259), but as these options diminished they were forced to live under religious and government sanctions.

7.4.1. Lake Tyers

Established by Reverend John Bulmer (1833–1913) on an inaccessible peninsular of Lake Tyers, the mission was run by the Church of England. Gunai people had guided Bulmer to a site known as Bung Yarnda, significant as an important meeting place and for its fresh waters and good hunting grounds (Pepper & De Araugo 1989, p. 39). Reverend Bulmer permitted Gunai to maintain their hunting practices in order to supplement their meagre rations. Lake Tyers quickly became one of the most important missions in Victoria, with the Board using it as a dumping ground for the many Aboriginal families and communities displaced from the closure of other missions and reserves across the state during the late 1800s and early 1900s (Barwick 1963, p. 86). This policy eventually became known as the 'Concentration Plan' (Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust 2018, para. 4), and it was during this era of 'concentration' that Uncle Albert's grandparents David Mullett and Maude Stevens met at Lake Tyers and started their family. Uncle Albert (cited in Mission Voices 2004) explained:

> [The] policy of government [was] to remove part-Aboriginal people from these mission stations, and my grandfather … from [Lake] Condah was removed. My grandmother [was] from Ramahyuck when they closed Ramahyuck down in 1909 and relocated the people to Lake Tyers. And that's where my grandfather and grandmother lived before my time. (p. 3)

But the combining of different cultural groups on the mission also became a strength. Uncle Albert (cited in Couzens, Eira & Stebbins 2014) recalled:

> We had an influx of people that married in, but also relocated, in Gippsland, in our country. So they brought words of their language with 'em, and they brought their stories with 'em. And since, it's part of our language. (p. 208)

Bulmer retired in 1907 and the Church of England handed over administration of Lake Tyers Mission to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, which left the community at the mercy of officials. After bringing Aboriginal families and communities from all over the state to reside at Lake Tyers, including many Coranderrk residents and Tommy McRae's family from Lake Moodemere, the Board changed their policy again, this time to one of assimilation. As at Coranderrk, this shift in policy split up families, with individuals judged to be of mixed descent expelled from the mission, and those judged not of mixed descent allowed to remain. Uncle Albert (cited in Mission Voices 2004) remembered:

> In the middle to late '30s they removed them again from Lake Tyers. There was only full-blood Aboriginal people to live on Lake Tyers. So all part-Aboriginal people, we lived across the lake. And we were sort of then the, I suppose you would say, fringe-dwellers then. Living outside of the mission because the government policies didn't want part-Aboriginal people. In their devious ways, saying: 'We cannot afford to keep these people. They've got to assimilate into wider society and they've got to survive by the best way they can'. (p. 3)

By 1924 Lake Tyers was the only remaining official reserve in Victoria where people could receive government assistance.

7.4.2. Tourism

The Lake Tyers Mission had been a tourist destination since the 1870s. But by the 1920s, 'this interaction assumed a new dimension when Lake Tyers came into conjunction with an emerging tourist industry at nearby Lakes Entrance' (Kleinert 2012, p. 90). As boatloads of tourists began arriving (Pepper & De Araugo 1989, p. 79), many of the residents on the mission and others living in fringe-camps such as Toorloo Arm and Jackson's Track (Landon & Tonkin 1999) started to capitalise on the outsiders' interests as both an opportunity to maintain cultural practices and a source of income. Kleinert (2012) notes:

> Visitors witnessed displays of boomerang-throwing and fire-lighting, they purchased artefacts such as boomerangs, coiled baskets and brooches, they took photographs and they attended a concert in the hall featuring an array of traditional and contemporary music that included Aboriginal songs from the south-east, Afro-American spirituals, popular songs and the distinctive Lake Tyers gumleaf band. (p. 91)

Uncle Albert (cited in Mission Voices 2004) recalled these culturally vibrant times:

> I can remember at times there was a tourist bus coming to Lake Tyers and they'd come there to buy craft-work off our old people. I remember that really well, down near the jetty. Really well. The old fellas with their boomerangs made from the roots of wattle trees—and old aunties and great-aunties and their mum and with the baskets and that—and the people would go along and buy them for about two and sixpence each. (p. 5)

The income from cultural material was so significant that some people were able to make more money from tourists than from the paltry wages on the mission, and this financial independence challenged the Board's control and overarching paternalistic intentions. As a result, the Board attempted to clamp down on sales by restricting the hours that tourists could visit; this was followed by restricting visiting days, and then by attempts to shut the trade down altogether and direct all sales through the store, with profits to be used by the mission (Kleinert 2012; Pepper & De Araugo 1989). Uncle Albert (cited in Mission Voices 2004) described life on the mission as 'very controlled … You look at these private prison farms today, the same principle … Controlling people. And our people weren't criminals' (p. 6). Kleinert (2012) cites this conflict between the Board's attitude and that of the general public as a way of understanding how out of touch the Board was regarding the wider perceptions of the abilities of Aboriginal people and the abilities of their communities.

For community, the creation of cultural material, including carved objects and woven baskets, along with cultural performances of boomerang-throwing and singing,

represented more than just economic development. It represented independence and freedom through the continuation and celebration of their cultural knowledge and practices. Kleinert (2012) references Aileen Mongta (Bidawal) and Ted 'Chook' Mullett (Gunai), who

> recall with pleasure how they gathered around the person making the boomerang and were shown how to shave the wood with a piece of broken glass and learn the skills in making them fly whilst listening to humorous stories from a past hunter-gatherer way of life. (p. 92)

In Mongta's and Mullett's view, making boomerangs is not just a skill, it 'reminds you of what you know. It's all related, it's a way of keeping up the culture' (p. 92). The twin concepts of making and sharing encapsulates how Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) remembers his grandfather's practice of making boomerangs:

> He made them constantly. He was always out in the shed and making stuff, and constantly sort of refining and testing his designs and ideas, and then sharing that with people. I feel like it was more of a sharing experience than trying to sell to an audience or anything, it was just to give out to people. (unpublished video recording)

7.4.3. Boorun's canoe

Steaphan attributes much of his cultural knowledge to his grandfather. Uncle Albert (cited in Paton & Cope 2013), in turn, traced his knowledge to his elders at Lake Tyers and beyond:

> I used to watch the old fellas at Lake Tyers when I was a boy and I wanted that knowledge, and I paid respect all the time to those elders and spent a lot of time around the fire learning. (p. 3)

He went on to reflect on the passing of this knowledge to Steaphan and his generation:

> I feel very proud of those grandsons of mine, it's teaching them about respect, and about learning their culture and don't be shamed of it, of who they are as young Aboriginal men, Gunai men. They have a duty in time, to carry on what I'm doing now. So that the story is never going to end. (p. 3)

The Aboriginal process of learning from elders is evident in all of Steaphan's works. A key project that defines Steaphan's practice is the creation of a Gunai canoe with his brother and cousins under the guidance of his grandfather. Known as *Boorun's canoe*, this seminal project saw the revitalisation of canoe-making in order to 'safeguard it for future generations' (cited in Paton & Cope 2013, p. 6) and created the bridge between Steaphan's previous role as a heritage project officer for Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and his becoming a recognised artist. The project was also timely, occurring during the successful judgement of the Gunai/Kurnai native title case (Paton & Cope 2013), some of the implications of which are discussed below.

The *Boorun's canoe* project gathered together Steaphan's kin to collaboratively make a canoe over a weekend. The practice of making canoes in the Lake Tyers region has a long history, with many early photographic images depicting bark canoes in use from the 1800s and into the early 1900s (Pepper & De Araugo 1985). Prior to *Boorun's canoe*, Albert 'Choppy' Hayes (Bidawal) and Foster Moffatt had made one for Museum Victoria in 1969 (documented by Alan West). Another was made in the early 1990s by Uncle Albert Mullett, which was documented by Uncle Sandy Atkinson (Bangerang) (Culture Victoria 2014). *Boorun's canoe* was documented by photographer and filmmaker Cam Cope (Figures 7.5–7.6) and the finished canoe was acquired by MV and placed on permanent display. The documentary material, which shows how the team collected the bark and treated it over fire, how they folded it into shape, made rope to lash the canoe and finally launched the vessel, accompanies the display, as does a supporting catalogue.

FIGURE 7.5.
Boorun's canoe, 2013
Cam Cope, Australia, b.1985
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Photograph
Image courtesy the artists

FIGURE 7.6.
Boorun's canoe, 2013
Cam Cope, Australia, b.1985
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Photograph
Image courtesy the artists

Central to *Boorun's canoe* was how it was both conceived and made using intergenerational knowledge. Steaphan (cited in Paton & Cope 2012) explains:

> With this project we wanted to bring the idea of that intergenerational knowledge and pass it on. It was passed on to Uncle Albert Mullett, my Pop … That knowledge was passed on to him by his elders in the traditional way, not from a book or an archaeologist. It's from a traditional owner, the person who has this knowledge. That's what this project is about. This is about teaching young boys the knowledge that they should know … to get that hands-on knowledge and guidance from an elder, to show you how to do this stuff … you'll never forget that knowledge. (pp. 14–17)

Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015c) describes this Aboriginal way of learning as 'watching how people were making stuff and learning by doing and observing, and then checking back in for advice with your elders and aunties and uncles' (3:00). Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) describes his education as based on this very principle:

> I come from a family of artists. They've all really practised art as a part of life, they just do it. It's not a career as such, but people just do it and make art. It's been handed down from my grandmother and my grandfather, through the family to a lot of their kids, my aunties and uncles, and then flowed down to the grandkids. (unpublished video recording)

The *Boorun's canoe* project not only gave Steaphan the skills of making a canoe and working on country but also involved his family: 'Pop was talking about respect and instilling respect into [his brother and cousins] … I hope that that helps them in their general life, and being a young Aboriginal person' (cited in Paton & Cope 2012, p. 17). This process of learning through collaboration and intergenerational knowledge is central to understanding Steaphan's practice.

The importance of canoes, an essential vehicle in Gunai country with its rivers, lakes and estuaries, can be understood in the creation of Gunai people. Steaphan (cited in Paton & Cope 2012) explains:

> Boorun is the pelican, so he is integral to our story of who we are, and where we come from. Boorun travelled down into Gippsland, down across the mountains to Gippsland lakes. He was carrying a canoe on his head and the whole time he was travelling he heard this tapping on the top of the canoe. He couldn't figure it out until he got to Port Albert and put the canoe in the water, and out came a musk duck, which was a beautiful woman, and they became mother and father of all Gunai people. That's our story of where we come from. (p. 14)

7.4.4. Gunai artefacts

Following his grandfather's teaching, Steaphan constantly sources material and ideas from his local environment in order to create work. In doing so, his practice builds a sense of place. Curator Kimberley Moulton (Yorta Yorta) (2014) describes Steaphan's work as maintaining 'traditions and Aboriginal knowledge, which he takes into his urban life' (p. 56). His work, she says, reminds 'us that culture is present in everything we do' (p. 54). This concept is witnessed in a small set of works on paper depicting 'Gunai artefacts' (Figure 7.7). Made with pens fashioned from found sticks, the images depict objects that Steaphan remembers his grandfather making, including shields, clubs and boomerangs. The process of working with makeshift pens challenges the restriction urban communities face in accessing materials such as hardwoods to produce the objects depicted; the works also poke fun at the establishment and return our attention to country, as suggested by Moulton.

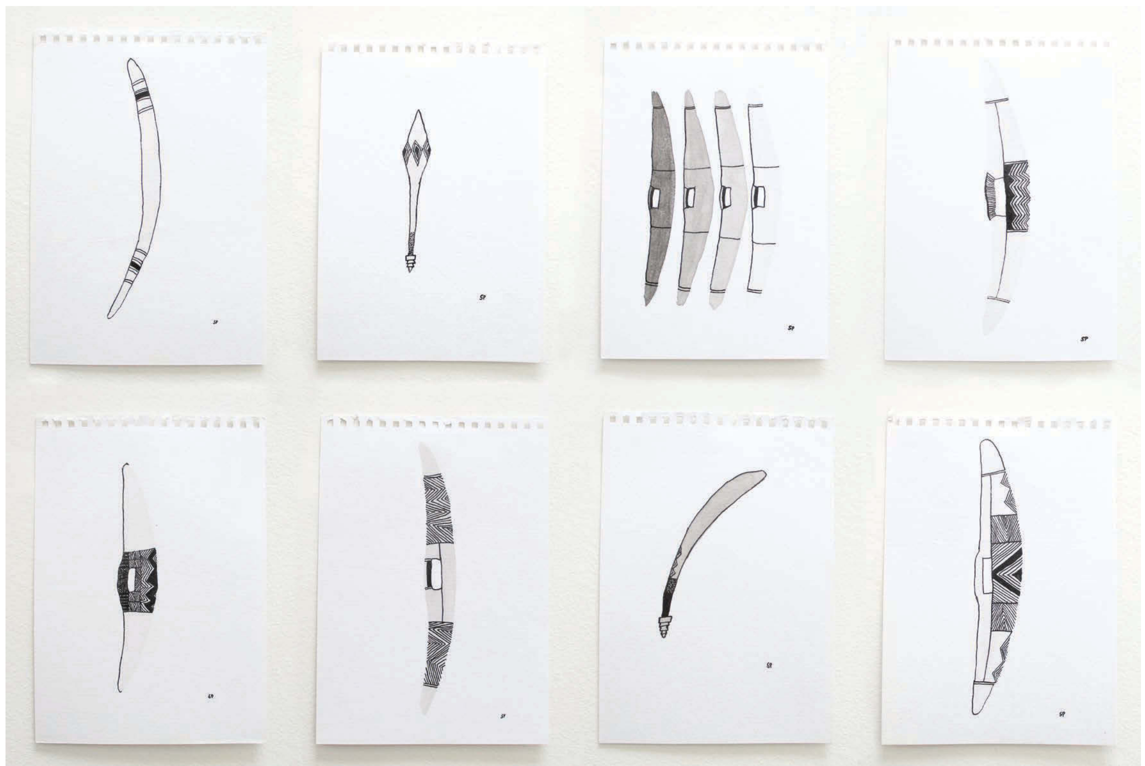


FIGURE 7.7.
Untitled, Gunai artefacts, 2011
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Pigment ink on watercolour paper; 8 sheets, each 21 x 14.5 cm
Private collection, Sydney
Image courtesy the artist

These small works pay homage to Steaphan's grandfather's lifelong practice of making wooden objects. Uncle Albert learnt how to make objects from his older relatives at Lake Tyers as part of the tourist trade; he then passed the skills and knowledge down to his descendants, including Steaphan. Growing up watching his grandfather's work has informed Steaphan's practice (cited in AGNSW 2015f):

> Even just cutting out boomerangs as a kid and shaping them and getting them right, that really influenced what I'm doing now. I think that's why I lean more towards sculpture and installation, because of that carving and woodworking background. (unpublished video recording)

Steaphan explains that his grandfather's instruction began early in his life:

> Even when we were little, little kids we would get involved in the process. We'd go out to the bush with him and find the right piece of wood and cut it, and then we'd come back in and watch him shape it. (unpublished video recording)

Learning these skills during his formative years has provided Steaphan with a solid grounding, which continues to inform his practice.

FIGURE 7.8.
Installation view, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*, 2015–2016, AGNSW
Image courtesy the artists, KHT and AGNSW

Shields, 1980–1990
Albert Mullett, Gunai/Gunditjmara, South-east, Australia, 1933–2014
Wood; 81 x 11.3 x 4.1 cm, 73.1 x 11.5 x 6.8 cm, 74.9 x 11.3 x 3.5 cm
Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne, AH03174, AH02120, AH02119

Untitled, Gunai artefacts, 2011
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Pigment ink on watercolour paper; 8 sheets, each 21 x 14.5 cm
Private collection, Sydney
Image courtesy the artist

As part of this study's exhibition *Murruwaygu*, Steaphan requested that his grandfather's works be exhibited alongside his own works on paper (Figure 7.8). Three shields from the KHT, Melbourne, were displayed, demonstrating not only the faithfulness of Steaphan's depictions but also Uncle Albert's unmistakable style. Uncle Albert's classical shield forms are overlaid with minimal design work, which serves to highlight the tips and accentuate the edges, revealing the beauty of the native timber grain.

FIGURE 7.9.
Ramahyuck Mission broad shield, mid-19th century
Artist unknown, South-east, Australia
Wood; 88 x 18 x 4 cm
Museum Victoria, Melbourne, X080596
Acquired from Miss R.L. Hagenauer (granddaughter of Reverend F.A. Hagenauer)
Image courtesy MV

Uncle Albert, like many contemporary carvers, decorated his works with burnt-in pokerwork designs, which can also be found in historical work from Lake Tyers. An early example of pokerwork from the region features on a broad shield by an unknown artist collected at Ramahyuck Mission and now held in the Museum Victoria collection (Figure 7.9).

This shield was donated by the granddaughter of Friedrich August Hagenauer (1829–1909), the founder of Ramahyuck Mission, and it is assumed to have been collected during the relatively short 45-year existence of the mission over 1863–1908.

The influence of Uncle Albert's design and pokerwork on Steaphan's practice is evident in the Gunai artefact drawings and in Steaphan's pared-back design aesthetic. But the sense of purpose and outcome in Steaphan's work can also be traced to Uncle Albert's practice. Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) identifies education and promotion as driving factors in his grandfather's work, outweighing the interest to derive an income from his creations; it was 'more about the process of practising culture for him, and constantly, constantly doing it' (unpublished video recording). This idea of a process-driven practice underpins Steaphan's work.

7.4.5. Cloaked combat

Cloaked combat is a 2013 installation (Figure 7.10) composed of five roughly shaped broad shields, each pierced with carbon-fibre hunting arrows, presented on the gallery wall like trophies. Accompanying the objects are two films (Figure 7.11) showing Steaphan dressed in camouflage hunting-gear on Gunai country, shooting arrows at the shields. Now part of the NGV collection, this installation has become central to Steaphan's practice to date and has been shown as a whole and in part in several exhibitions.

FIGURE 7.10.
Cloaked combat, 2013
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Bark, carbon fibre, synthetic polymer resin, synthetic polymer paint; 86.1 x 55.9 x 62 cm, 76 x 56.5 x 79 cm, 79 x 66.2 x 79.5 cm, 72.5 x 73 x 77.5 cm, 83.5 x 56.5 x 79 cm
NGV, 2013.720.a–e
Yvonne Pettengell Bequest, 2013
Image courtesy NGV and the artist

FIGURE 7.11.
Cloaked combat #2, #3, 2013
Steaphan Paton, Gunai, South-east, Australia, b.1985
Single-channel video; 0:37 mins, 0:36 mins durations
Collection of the artist
Image courtesy the artist

The five shields of *Cloaked combat* represent the five clans of the Gunai nation, with each bearing the characteristic diamond design of its clan. Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) describes the diamond design as

> symbolic of identity and maybe of place in some ways. But the diamonds are from country, they're from the land, and they have markings that are specifically south-east, in terms of design and line-work, which is all about identity and place. Those designs really resonate with a lot of people in the community. I guess it gives you something. It enlivens you a little bit and keeps the fire going a little bit. (unpublished video recording)

As embodiments of the Gunai clans, the shields, riddled with arrows, are a visual allegory of a culture under attack. Steaphan explains the overall concept of the work as addressing 'the brutality of colonialism, but also this kind of underhanded cloaked combat that is still happening today' (unpublished video recording).

In many ways *Cloaked combat* takes its visual cues from images of St Sebastian, the 3rd-century Christian martyr who was sentenced to death for practising Christianity while serving in the Roman army. He was tied to a stake in a field, 'and the archers shot at him till he was as full of arrows as an urchin is full of pricks, and thus left him there for dead' (Fordham University 2000, chapter 32). As if by miracle, he survived, only to be martyred again for criticising the Romans over their treatment of Christians. This dramatic image of martyrdom is the subject of countless artworks, with many key images created during the Renaissance.

In 1968 the motif of St Sebastian was appropriated for the *Esquire* magazine cover portrait of Muhammad Ali, accompanied by an article titled 'The passion of Muhammad Ali' (Shecter 2016). A world champion boxer, member of the Nation of Islam and central figure in the civil rights movement, Ali had famously refused to be inducted into the US army during the Vietnam War on religious grounds. As a result, he was vilified, stripped of his world titles and banned from boxing. The media set Ali's

blackness and religion against American nationalism. He appeared in the portrait with his arms behind his back and head thrown back, akin to many classic St Sebastian poses, but wearing white boxing shorts and boots, his athletic body pierced with arrows.

This image of Ali was reappropriated in Australia for a 2010 portrait of Bundjalung boxer Anthony Mundine, which saw him adopt an identical pose, complete with white boxing shorts and boots and wounded by arrows, for the cover of a special sports magazine for *The Age* newspaper ('Anthony Mundine: is this the end of The Man?' 2010). Mundine is also seen as an outspoken and controversial sportsperson who converted to Islam. After leaving a successful professional football career, citing racial issues, Mundine followed his father's career and became a world champion boxer. Like Ali, the press targeted Mundine with the expectation of failure, making the appropriation of Ali's image even more pertinent.

The referencing of the African–American civil rights movement has a long history in Australia. Many Aboriginal civil rights leaders have cited figures such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jnr, a key example being the 1965 Freedom Rides led by Charles Perkins, which were informed by the American Freedom Rides from 1961 onwards.

With the Lake Tyers community being at the forefront of Aboriginal civil rights in Victoria, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, the *Cloaked combat* films documenting Steaphan piercing the shields with arrows on Gunai country bring these two stories together. The catalyst for Lake Tyers activism occurred after the Board for the Protection of Aborigines was abolished in 1957 and the Victorian Government tried to close the community, relocate the residents and sell the land. With the support of the civil rights organisation the Aborigines Advancement League and Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls (Yorta Yorta) (Broome 2012), the community fiercely protested and petitioned the government to make Lake Tyers an independent, Aboriginal-run farming cooperative (Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust 2018). Diane Barwick (1963) explained:

> To all of them the land at Lake Tyers has a special value because it is the last remaining reserve of any size in Victoria, and their last chance to obtain title to any Aboriginal reserve. Their protests and demands for self-government and community development schemes on this land reiterate their petitions of the ’50s, the ’40s and earlier decades. Now, however, their demands are supported and given much publicity by various voluntary associations. (p. 343)

After intense lobbying, the mission was declared a permanent reserve in 1965, and following the *Aboriginal Lands Act 1970*, 4000 acres of Lake Tyers was transferred to the newly formed Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust 2018). In 2010 the Federal Court recognised that the Gunai people hold native title over much of Gippsland in the form of national parks and Crown lands (Gunaikurnai 2018). Although this has benefitted Gunai, it has also placed them in dialogue with other stakeholders such as hunters. In rural regions like Gippsland, professional and recreational hunters have a large presence and arguably enjoy greater public recognition and support than Aboriginal communities do, whose issues are often compromised by hunting and fishing. In the Gippsland region, deer were introduced in the 1800s to be hunted as a form of colonial sport. But they have run wild and become feral, destroying the region’s ecosystems. Currently in Gippsland, hunters can apply for a licence for not only deer and other feral animals but also for native animals such as ducks and quail, while traditional owners like Steaphan continue to experience obstacles in collecting materials and engaging in Gunai cultural activities. Steaphan states:

> I’ve been harassed a few times and trying to practise culture on country. I’ve had the police come up and ask me what I am doing when I was collecting spears. (Paton 2015, artist’s talk, 28 November)

This is something Steaphan has experienced all his life; he recalls his grandfather Uncle Albert fighting the same fights:

> He would stand up to these people who were trying to control [Gunai] people through regulation and not being open to this idea that we are still practising culture and we have been, there is a tradition of practising this. (28 November)

Indeed, Uncle Albert (Mullett 1991) stated that access to country for hunting and gathering is integral to Aboriginal identity: 'It is inextricably tied to culture' (p. 46).

This relationship to country through hunting and the lack of Aboriginal rights to country are also reflected in the works of McRae (c.1835–1901), who draws our attention to the loss of land faced by his community around the Murray River in the 19th century. McRae's collection of hunting scenes talks directly to the loss of rights he and his family faced when their land was stolen for farming, the native animals were dispersed and kilometres of fencing impeded both hunters and game.

In the films *Cloaked combat #2* and *#3* we see Steaphan on Gippsland country armed with a contemporary compound hunting bow and wearing camouflaged hunting-gear that he bought from one of the many hunting shops in the region. In character, Steaphan takes aim at the shield, hitting his target repeatedly with the highly specialised carbon-fibre arrows. This performative act, which sees him firing on his own cultural identity, talks to the complexity of cultural politics and questions the individual's role within these issues. The arrows shot from the compound hunting bow pierce the shield, not only challenging the ethics of hunting but reminding us that Gippsland has a long history of violence. The compound hunting bow, a high-tech form of a primitive weapon, is foreign to Aboriginal culture, thus representing the differences in cultural worldviews and Steaphan's ability to speak to intercultural ideas.

The performative element of these films also speaks to the history of tourism and voyeurism at Lake Tyers, where people would often 'perform' for tourists by throwing boomerangs. Maria Nugent (2005) comments on cultural performances in the Sydney community of La Perouse, which she coined as 'domestic primitive': 'To satisfy a general desire for native-ness, local Aboriginal people performed "being Aboriginal" for visitors in quite stylised ways that emphasised the exotic, the primitive and the traditional' (p. 76). Reflecting on these performances in Lake Tyers, Aileen Mongta

(cited in Kleinert 2012) also reaffirms that tourists took what they wanted: '[Tourists] wanted to see the boomerangs being thrown but they didn't want to know about the culture and didn't listen to what Dad and Uncle Albert were saying' (p. 97). By locating *Cloaked combat #2* and *#3*—which sees Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) firing 'with a foreign weapon at the shields, which are representative of traditional culture and nationhood, and Aboriginality in some respect' (unpublished video recording)—within this performative history, we can see Steaphan openly challenging the audience's expectations and turning the act on its head.

Steaphan sees his work as 'a form of storytelling that is not radical but is relevant. It is resistant but not rebellious' (Paton 2014). *Cloaked combat* achieves this balance of enduring resistance, citing concepts of martyrdom, civil rights and country set within the contemporary Gunai realities. Steaphan conveys the complex and continued colonial assault on Aboriginal Australia, and encourages us to resist the oversimplification of history.

7.4.6. Steaphan and Murruwaygu

Steaphan, with his strong family ties and cultural background, is an important artist within my study. Having received training from his grandfather in the art of carving cultural objects, such as shields, clubs and boomerangs, as well as formal university education in visual arts, he is keenly aware of how to continue cultural practices within a gallery context. This is witnessed in his involvement with cultural revival projects such as *Boorun's canoe*. As discussed above, his work engages with the carved line in the creation of drawings and installations. These lines purposefully connect with shield designs and the more contemporary technique of burning-in or pokerworked designs. Conceptually his major work *Cloaked combat* talks to similar concerns faced by McRae, as previously discussed.

Beyond a similar conceptual relationship Steaphan's minimal and often raw approach to his artmaking is reminiscent of both McRae's and Uncle Roy's practices. Their works

present frank and open discussions on their cultural position. Steaphan's roughly made shields, briskly carved with axe and knife from a sheet of bark with purpose as their priority, speak to Uncle Roy's emotionally charged works. Both cite colonial violence. The row of shields, each endowed with their diamond designs, sitting starkly on the white gallery wall, reminds us of McRae's formal rows of dancers, with their individual body-paint designs. And the way the shields are pierced calls to mind scenes from McRae's works on paper, where spears are captured flying through the air in various hunting vignettes.

Steaphan (cited in AGNSW 2015f) tells us, 'Tommy McRae's drawings have influenced me a lot in terms of the story, but also the way he has depicted these characters, in these stories' (unpublished video recording). This connection can be seen in relation to McRae, Uncle Roy and Steaphan who all use their work to remind us of a forgotten story. All three artists create works of *memento mori*, harking back to a much older language, whether in the form of canoe-making, or depicting a forgotten mission or a ceremony that is no longer practised. In this way, these three artists act as cultural safeguards, reflecting our past and holding onto our collective memories.

7.5. Intergenerational observations

Both Reko and Steaphan, through their professional art practices, consciously engage with south-east stories, heritage and traditions, including the line. The knowledge of these south-east influences originates for both artists from their families, and each has commented that the lines and the diamonds are part of his identity. This advantage was unfortunately not afforded to the previous generation of mission-based artists, HJ and Uncle Roy, who were unable to practise their cultural identities, told that their culture was a hindrance to their progress in society and punished for expressing it.

We can therefore understand that the position that both Reko and Steaphan take requires two key contributing factors: inheriting knowledge or having access to

knowledge through community elders; and, more importantly, practising in a culturally safe place where that knowledge can be openly displayed and discussed without fear of retribution. It should be noted that the retention of knowledge in the south-east is due to historical factors well beyond the control of most families. Additionally, the shift from a hostile to safe environment, one that enables culture to be asserted, represents a major social change between the two generations of Wurrumany (son) and Warunarrung (grandson). This culturally safe space to assert cultural identity is important to both Reko and Steaphan, as their practices sit beyond the stereotypical idea of what it is to be Aboriginal, and it enables them to openly display south-east culture to a receptive audience. Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM often talks about the development of a safe space in which languages can be spoken again. This shift has happened in Grant's lifetime: as a child he was not allowed to speak his language, while today he is driving the revival of Wiradjuri language in schools, universities and public spaces (*Speaking out with Larissa Behrendt* 2017). Uncle Michael McDaniel (Wiradjuri) (2015) similarly describes the culturally safe space that has enabled possum-skin cloaks to be created again.

The role of being a professional artist also means that Reko and Steaphan actively research and engage in new ideas, visiting galleries and museums and seeing their south-east practices as part of a larger worldview. This position of critical engagement within cultural frameworks was again not afforded to the previous generation of Uncle Roy and HJ, whose works centre on their personal mission stories and experiences of living through successive government policies designed to both marginalise and assimilate them. Neither HJ nor Uncle Roy ever went into a museum collection to look at historical material, while both Reko and Steaphan are active researchers. By looking at museum collections the Warunarrung (grandson) generation has closer contact with the classical material from the south-east region and connects to the first generation, or Mumala (grandfather), thereby completing the cycle of knowledge and kinship pattern (see Chapter 3).

We can therefore use the work of both Reko and Steaphan to understand the classical Koori material discussed in this research, material that due to colonial reasons has minimal first-hand knowledge supporting it. Reko's designs, for instance, hold deep personal and communal significance; they have taken years to develop and encapsulate a depth of knowledge. He uses them repeatedly in various compositions. By appreciating the designs that Reko creates, we have the framework for understanding the designs used on shields, designs created by individuals with the community in mind. Like Reko's compositions, shields use key and oft-repeated designs, and although we may never know what the designs mean, through Reko's work we can glean their importance and the knowledge held within each line. Reko describes the diamond as part of his DNA. This helps frame and understand each shield as the creation of an individual artist, and the kinship cycle sees the following generation informing the next.

Similarly, when we look at Steaphan's *Cloaked combat* we are given another new lens with which to approach the shields. Not only has Steaphan used different diamond insignia to highlight different clans, but he encapsulates the enormous pressure artists would have felt while maintaining their culture during invasion. Like the shields represented in Steaphan's work, the Babiin (father) generation of Barak and McRae were under assault; and for that generation to have maintained their knowledge, which was eventually passed on to practitioners like Reko and Steaphan, is an extraordinary act.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the work of two professional Koori artists, Reko Rennie and Steaphan Paton, placing their work within the research framework. Both tertiary-educated, they are part of a growing movement of south-east artists with academic training. The shift towards professional or full-time artists was discussed by introducing leading south-east professional artists Trevor Nickolls and Lin Onus, who have informed the contemporary south-east art movement. Their family and cultural

backgrounds, along with artistic influences and social and political circumstances, were presented in order to understand both Reko's and Steaphan's practices. A detailed look at particular works by Reko and Steaphan was provided, with each work representing key underlining concerns within their careers. These works also highlight the artists' use of line to create both geometric and figurative forms, which in turn addresses their contribution to this research. This generation of artists was shown, by virtue of their position within history, their families and access to education, to offer intergenerational insights into the works of the other artists within this study. For instance, by using the designs created by Reko as a lens we can understand the line designs featured on shields. This chapter follows on from Wurrumany, the third generation of artists, represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Roy Kennedy and HJ Wedge. The next chapter concludes this thesis.

CONCLUSION

> We might have lost some of it but now, through our dreams, we are sharing the past, the present and the future.
>
> —HJ Wedge (1957–2012, Wiradjuri) (1996, p. 41)

This research has demonstrated the continuing use of the line by Koori male artists in south-east Australia from pre-contact to today. By tracing line-work in the practices of four generations of south-east male artists, it has shown that the line, in both figurative and abstract imagery and in varying mediums, underpins the region's visual expressions. By analysing the constant use of this artistic element through the changing social, political and cultural climates of each generation, this research has also demonstrated that the line is embedded in the region's cultural practices. In this way, the line has been shown to take on new meanings, representing the continuation of culture and unbroken lineage of Koori epistemology and knowledge. Rodney Carter (Dja Dja Wurrung/Yorta Yorta) (cited in MV 2000) has likened the carved designs on shields to

> what we use now as titles for our houses. The lines, the colours, the carvings—they tell people who you are, and, more importantly, they tell people where you come from … These are all distinct to south-eastern Australia and would have been passed from generation to generation. (p. 16)

Influential south-east artist Lin Onus (1948–1996, Yorta Yorta) (1992) similarly stated that 'design, imagery and stories stretch back countless years [but] the use of contemporary technology', as seen in the practices of the artists in this research, has given 'Aboriginal artists the opportunity to communicate matters, important to them, on a much greater scale than ever before'. As Onus stressed, this continuum of subject in new mediums has been 'perhaps the most significant development in the imagery produced by Australian Aboriginal people during the last 60,000 years' (p. 4).

The four generations of artistic material that make up *Murruwaygu* were selected to show the diversity of circumstance and experience faced by Koori people in the south-east and the cultural continuums they maintain. The use of Wiradjuri names for these generations creates a layered way of understanding history and culture and reasserts the cultural lineage between the men. The first generation of classical Koori or pre-contact material, named Mumala (grandfather), was represented by marga (parrying shields) and girran.girran (broad shields). The next generation, called Babiin (father), profiled 19th-century Koori artists William Barak (c.1824–1903), a Wurundjeri man from what is known today as Melbourne, and Tommy McRae (c.1835–1901), from the Upper Murray River border of NSW and Victoria. The third generation, or Wurrumany (son), was represented by self-taught senior Koori artists Uncle Roy Kennedy (b.1934) and the late HJ Wedge (1957–2012). Both are Wiradjuri who through their art documented their life experiences of growing up on missions in NSW under strict government segregation policies. The fourth generation, called Warunarrung (grandson), featured professional or trained contemporary Koori artists Reko Rennie (b.1974, Kamilaroi) and Steaphan Paton (b.1985, Gunai/Monero), both of whom reside in Melbourne, have undertaken tertiary education and work with new mediums while continuing figurative line traditions. Within each chapter an introduction to the social conditions for each artist and artform was provided to contextualise their practices. These artists are key representatives of their generations and collectively they provide the data for this research, allowing for a more complete understanding of the continuity and changes within the region.

By tracing the line throughout the four generations, *Murruwaygu* has provided a unique art-historical framework for the south-east. Research on the region's art histories is vitally important. As demonstrated in this research, a variety of western theories have resulted in a fragmented understanding of the region's cultural practices. These western theories, which reflect and support waves of colonisation, have been shown to fail south-east artists and their audiences. The protracted colonisation

endured by the region and the general lack of understanding have resulted in south-east artists and communities being accused of either having 'lost' their cultural identity or being 'broken down' and inferior to 'traditional culture', leading the region to be under-researched (Cowlishaw 1988, p. 67). *Murruwaygu* seeks to silence this claim by demonstrating the continuation of an unbroken practice through artistic generations. In doing so, this research provides a much-needed framework for understanding the work made by south-east male artists historically, today and into the future.

In order to analyse the history of the region over time this research drew on a number of sources from different eras and fields. Each generation has its own specific literature reinforcing the fragmentation and colonisation of the region. This includes early accounts, government reports and the work of amateur anthropologists constructed within a 'salvage anthropology' framework that positioned south-east Aboriginal people as disappearing (Howitt 1904; Smyth 1878):

> The native tribes have more or less died, and in the older settlements of south-east Australia the tribal remnants have now almost lost the knowledge of the beliefs and customs of their fathers. (Howitt 1904, p. xiii)

In this research, texts reflecting such western agendas were critiqued, used with caution and often discussed in relation to ideas posed by south-east voices. James Clifford (1988) commented on the relationship of surviving Indigenous communities to such historical texts: 'More than a few "extinct" peoples have returned to haunt the western historical imagination' (p. 16). More recent and appropriate studies (Edmonds 2010; Kleinert 1994; Leslie 2008) have looked at specific generations or timeframes, which have also been used within this research to varying degrees. In Chapter 7, journals, interviews and statements were quoted extensively. This process of privileging south-east voices has included artists' families and extended community, especially when representing the other generations. Statements made by Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin AO (Wurundjeri), in particular, were relied on to appropriately discuss the work of

Barak. It is hoped that this research connects a line through the variety of sources to create a continuum in south-east literature.

This research has both theoretically and conceptually referenced the publication *Aboriginal artists of the 19th century* by Andrew Sayers (1994), in particular the essay 'Traditional visual culture in south-east Australia' by Carol Cooper (1994), who connects pre-invasion cultural practices of the south-east with the work of 19th-century artists Barak, McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla (c.1820s–1891, Yuin). This essay can be seen as a development of an earlier linkage Cooper (1981) made between pre-invasion practices and 19th-century artists, where she went further to suggest that future south-east artists will 'recapture the dynamic feeling for line and design at which their forefathers excelled' (p. 40). By connecting subsequent generations of artists to the work of their ancestors, Cooper has provided the foundation for this research, which has expanded on her ideas to consider the ways artists from other generations are connected.

More than anything, this research sits within and contributes to the wider cultural resurgence and revitalisation movement in the south-east, and where possible draws on the voices of the artists, their families and communities. These practices are varied and include the creation of canoes, weaving, language and land management; they are part of a growing cultural awareness, what Onus (1994) called 'a quest of absolute importance' (p. ix). Integral to this movement is the development of strong research and knowledge. Brabrawooloong/Gunnai artist Ray Thomas (b.1960) (cited in Edmonds 2007) states: 'You've got to educate people about who we are [and] about history in this state, or in this region' (p. 319). By creating a history of the region's art practices, this research supports education, which will in turn inform and inspire future generations of artists.

Beyond the core research subject and the writing of this thesis, this study included the development and staging of a major exhibition, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps*

of our ancestors, held over 2015–2016 at the AGNSW. This exhibition followed the model championed by Arrernte and Kalkadoon curator Hetti Perkins, who presented the landmark exhibitions *Papunya Tula: genius and genius* in 2000 (Perkins & Fink 2000) and *Crossing country: the alchemy of western Arnhem Land art* in 2004 (Perkins 2004a). Through intergenerational relationships, these exhibitions established the origins of contemporary regional movements that have been inspired and informed by cultural visual practices developed over countless generations. *Murruwaygu* the exhibition brought together many works from across generations and institutions to demonstrate a regional style for the first time, including the first major inclusion of south-east shields in an art gallery. The exhibition was also supported by a series of public programs and the production of five short films. These additional elements were essential to the practical development and realisation of the research and can be understood as a way of giving back to the community and creating real and meaningful outcomes for the artists. Importantly, these outcomes also created a tangible opportunity for the artists, their families and communities to be aware of the research and provide feedback on it, in accordance with my Indigenous research methodology.

In order to appropriately construct this research within a south-east standpoint, it also has encompassed the development and implementation of a specific Indigenous research methodology, known as Yindyamarra Winhanganha (Respectful Thinking). This methodology is based on the teachings of Dr Uncle Stan Grant Snr AM (Wiradjuri) and is embedded in Wiradjuri knowledge and language. One of the key outcomes of this methodology has been the development of a south-east cultural framework for the exhibition based on kinship. This kinship system involves two key moieties, and is broken down into four subclasses. These subclasses are represented in *Murruwaygu* by the four generations of artists outlined above, while the pairs of artists or artforms represent the two key moieties. The presentation and categorisation of the research in this way uniquely contributes to the region's cultural practices and reinforces south-east understandings. Furthermore, the use of a south-east kinship system as

a framework has meant that the two artists from each generation are not seen as exemplars but as keys to understanding their generation.

The idea of intergenerational knowledge was further reflected in the research title, *Murruwaygu: following in the footsteps of our ancestors*. A Wiradjuri word, murruwaygu refers to the linear designs carved onto trees and other cultural material that are unique to the south-east region. Murruwaygu also includes designs used by artists today. It connects to notions of entwined pathways and inherited knowledge. In this research, murruwaygu is shown to continue across generations, from pre-contact to today, enduring massive change. As such, murruwaygu is central to south-east identity. Richard Mulvaney (1983) commented on the importance of recognising the continuation of south-east communities:

> Contrary to popular opinion or prediction the people have survived and the interpretation of their cultural expressions since is every bit as important as the understanding of what preceded contact. (p. 17)

The kinship model provided a new framework to overcome some of the cultural damage and harm that has occurred through colonisation. Within this model, knowledge from each generation was transferrable up and down the generations. A key example of this is the appreciation of Reko's designs, which he describes as part of his DNA. We can use this understanding as a framework for reading the line designs on shields, which have little recorded information but were created by individuals artists like Reko. In this way, we gain deeper appreciation for the designs on shields. Conversely, knowledge can be seen as cumulative, where more recent generations of artist—Uncle Roy, HJ, Reko and Steaphan—are seen as part of a deep cultural lineage. These intergenerational observations, or the 'cycling' of knowledge, insert Indigenous values and are therefore central to decolonising our knowledge and creating a culturally specific art history. Most importantly, they enable future generations of artists to connect to their heritage. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Porou) (2012) describes how 'a critical aspect

of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history'; she says that as Indigenous people we are '*re*writing and *re*righting our position in history' (p. 29; emphasis in original). She goes on to propose that 'Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes', and that we are rewriting and rerighting our histories to 'restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying' (pp. 29–30). In this way, this research contributes to the greater movement of unpacking the colonial baggage that we have inherited.

This research has come from a male Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi artist/curator position. It needs to be stressed that line-work is not the only lens for understanding those continuing south-east cultural practices. It is just one way of connecting the enduring cultural practices of the region and creating a culturally appropriate framework to understand the region. It is hoped that this research will encourage other ways of understanding south-east cultural practices, and that further readings will be made in order to develop and build multiple lenses for understanding this culturally rich region. As this research relies on a small group of practitioners, there is room to broaden the scope of similar research to include many more south-east artists, types of practices and elements of art production. Further, by focusing on men's work, this study invited research on women's practices and the continuums that occur within that sphere. Such opportunities to continue research into the south-east region are perhaps the most exciting part of the region's future.

By connecting four generations of south-east male artists through the use of the line, *Murruwaygu* has demonstrated a long and unbroken practice that the region's artists and audience can be proud of. Celebrating cultural continuums strengthens the region's communities and provides a framework to support future generations of artists. Although the region has long been misrepresented and misunderstood, as inheritors of our cultural lineages we can and are, as Smith says, '*re*writing and *re*righting' our

histories. This research has sought to mend breakages and stitch lines back together. 'We might have lost some of it,' said HJ, 'but now, through our dreams, we are sharing the past, the present and the future' (Wedge 1996, p. 41). With each generation we are following in the footsteps of our ancestors. It is vitally important to remember that this research has no end, and as new generations of south-east male artists emerge, many of these ideas, like murruwaygu, will continue.

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