

5 SEPTEMBER \ 4 OCTOBER 2014
ARTIST & CURATOR TALK: 5 SEPTEMBER at 1pm

135th MERIDIAN EAST

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Joshua Bonson, Franck Gohier, Wukun Wanambi (The Mulka Project)
Sarah Pirrie, Lena Yarinkura & Bob Burruwul

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Ali Gumillya Baker, Thom Buchanan, Maarten Daudeij, James Dodd
Sue Kneebone, Pung kai, James Tylor, Sera Waters

CURATED BY ANDRÉ LAWRENCE

2014 AEAF Emerging Curator Mentorship recipient

TRaversing the Meridian | *135th Meridian-East* refers to the line of longitude running through the Northern Territory and South Australia, a symbolic Cartesian coordinate. Born in the Top End, I have often crossed this divide from a young age, and one of my earliest such recollections is of a south-bound trip from Pine Creek to Adelaide. It was October of 1989 and my sister and I huddled together on a mattress in the open back of a white Toyota Hilux. Such memories—of the noise, the vastness of the sky, the smell of fuel and cold night air in roadhouses lit by fluorescent light, the receding horizon and meandering landscape gradually swallowed behind us—have remained with me throughout my subsequent wanderings. *135th Meridian-East* is a mapping project of sorts, extending my curatorial interest in connecting people and places. It considers the ways in which these contemporary Australian artists, living in its ‘antipodes’, have inhabited, traversed and contemplated this corridor, establishing affiliations with place, ideas and collective or personal histories. The featured works—many of which were made especially for this exhibition—respond to multilayered topologies: resonant landmarks, zones of contact and exchange, throughout which the Meridian acts as a line of connectivity, a symbolic marker through the heart of Australia.

SOVEREIGN VOICE | As an Aboriginal Australian, **Ali Gumillya Baker** of Mirning people, speaks of personal and collective experiences, connecting them to broader social, cultural and political implications of colonial and Aboriginal histories. In *Ahoy! Nungas re-enacting white patriots re-enacting their murderous invasion of the Lucky Country (Part 1)* (2014), Baker provokes us to question these histories and acknowledge the power and presence of Indigenous voices denied sovereignty since Australia’s colonisation. She decries the “perpetuation of romanticised narratives” infused into our collective acceptance of dominant colonial history. Her work performs the coming of boats, the idea of the First Fleet—a brewing storm at sea, menacing shadows bringing with them a foreign fury.

BINARY LANDSCAPES | Adelaide’s urban landscape—an exercise in planned colonisation—is riddled with place names and monuments that honour historical agents who were instrumental in establishing a European presence. Artist **Thom Buchanan** harbours a deep fascination with the built environment, his superimposed landscapes blurring horizon lines and teasing us in and out of the plane. While linear perspective has been likened to a tool of dominance over space through mastery of landscape representation¹, compositionally, *Landmark* (2014) reminds us that cityscapes are seated upon a prior natural environment. The impress of Architecture disguises the alteration of what stood there before: Indigenous landscapes changed beyond recognition in the face of urban sprawl.

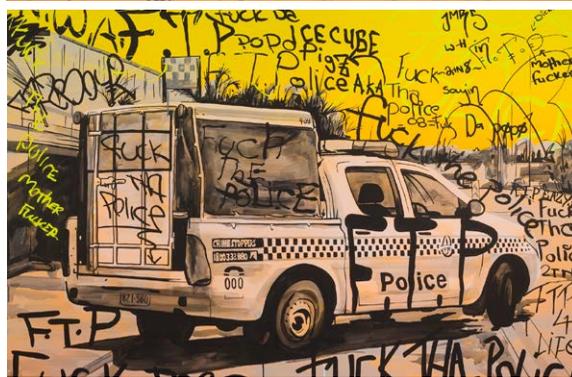
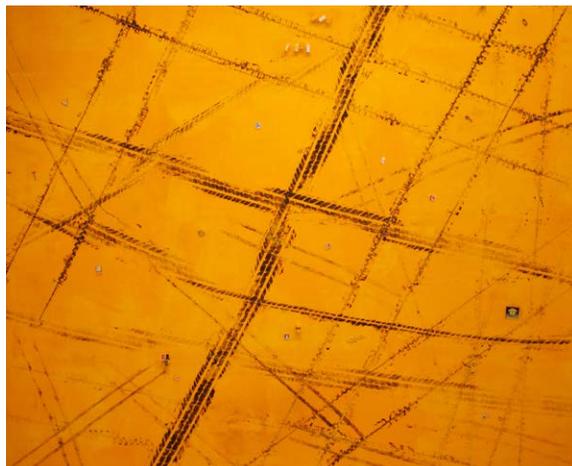
PUSHING NORTH | Motivated by trade, power and pastoral interests, the 1830s colony of SA sought to expand northwards.² One such successful endeavour was The Overland Telegraph Line that linked to northern shores. **Sue Kneebone**’s practice investigates settler and colonial histories and the social and environmental impact of pastoralism in the Gawler Ranges. Acutely aware of these incursions into ancient Indigenous territories, her assemblages convey a sense of foreboding that seeps from within the tensions contained in her choices of materials and artefacts. In *Hearing loss (Volume II)* (2014), Kneebone resurrects an authentic, history-rich native pine telegraph pole, connecting it to a chandelier adorned with kangaroo skulls, that floats “like a séance pendulum”³ above a writing desk. The pole is brought back to life, immersing us in a Morse soundscape, an arcane message reaching out from history.

FAMILIAL HISTORIES | **Sera Waters**’ practice unfolds an ongoing discovery and unravelling of her own familial settler histories, investigating narratives entrenched in her forebears’ experiences. Infused with fluid topographical mapping cues, *Fritz and the rose garden* (2014) honours her German grandfather who arrived in South Australia in 1927. Intent on starting a new life here, he made his way to the Riverland (Pinaroo and Loxton), built a house from forty thousand bricks he made himself, and established a prize-winning rose garden in a notoriously arid environment. Waters sees this achievement as a feat of endurance, a desire to flourish in a new place. She describes her work as being like “a domestic language through which we come to terms with our surroundings”; a contemplative repetition of gestures, enveloped in thoughts of familial histories, wearing the work like a blanket, immersed in a landscape.

EMBRACING LANDSCAPE | A recent Dutch migrant to SA, **Maarten Daudeij** often immerses himself in the Flinders Ranges, Ororoo and the remote mid-north of SA. He says of his deep bond with these places: “it’s so easy to connect out there, with oneself, beyond the mind, to experience a tremendous peace”. Yet, as he investigates notions of connection to Country, the awareness of his problematic European presence provides a tension that permeates his practice. Scribed in barbed-wire, *Be done* (2013) suggests a surrender to the longings of the land, to mortality. It leaves us to wonder who the words address: dominant foreign agencies that have transformed ancient landscapes; or the ancestral forces that inhabit them. *A Country Walk* (2014) captures these terrains from a bus window, in transit to the promised peacefulness of the Flinders Ranges. Taken at 100km p/h, the footage is slowed to walking pace. Its meditative blurriness spurs us to consider whether we compromise our connection to place when we speed complacently toward a destination and neglect the journey.

NAVIGATING SPACE | In *A nautical journal of Country* (2014), **James Tylor** of Aboriginal, Maori and English heritage, charts his connection across land and borders, from Victoria (his birth-place) to the Kimberleys in Western Australia. This assemblage, of sticks and shells bound together with handmade string, is a hybrid experiential map inspired by Polynesian seafaring charts and the varied ocean-bound origins of his ancestors. The accompanying work, *Yard rope* (2014)—also a nautical reference—is made from native plant fibres he gathered on journeys along waterways. These threads of experience are charged with contemplation of the paths we tread, of distance and how we navigate our own trajectories. *Postcards from the Frontier (An anthropological study)* (2014) captures the ruins of post-colonial European frontiers and failed settler experiments in Central and Northern Australia. Annotating the images, Tylor appropriates the anthropological gaze, subversively placing himself within a Western tradition that claimed the discovery of an already inhabited landscape.

SPACES OF CONTENTION | Nyoongar and Pitjantjatjara artist **Pung kai** is informed by his Aboriginal culture, a great reverence for Country and concerns regarding disturbances to sacred land caused by mining. In *Longa longa time, I bin mine my business, now everyone cummin mine my business* (2013), he embraces an experimental approach to materials and processes. Here miniature tyre marks carve into a topographical ground strewn with plastic road-works toys, like waste left in the wake of resource exploitation. While acknowledging the national ‘economic’ importance of such industries, Pung kai laments the dire effects they have on traditional lands: the irreversible loss of cultural and spiritual capital in altered sacred sites, and the rifts within, and lack of any sustained benefit to, the communities that live there.



THE HIGHWAY | James Dodd has a long-standing interest in and appreciation for the lands and cultures of the Top End, specifically Darwin and remote Arnhem Land. His practice sustains a thorough engagement with the histories, societies and iconographies of remote frontier landscapes and the fringe cultures that inhabit them. Although not uncommon in urban areas, encountering a burned or abandoned car in the bush or on a stretch of remote highway—at times places of psychological and physical extremes—can be an apprehensive experience. Through his own treks into the outback, Dodd's appropriation of found graffiti and mark-making—as in *Sigma* (2010), *Falcon* (2010) and *Fuck tha Police* (2009)—registers the conditions of dwelling in or passing through the 'edge of nowhere', of traces left behind saying 'I Was Here'.

PAROCHIAL COLONIAL | Through a satirical use of popular culture iconography, Franck Gohier comments on parochial socio-political/socio-historical attitudes in 'frontier' culture. In remote Aboriginal communities, he witnessed the popularity of the comic book *The Phantom*, which is unique in its representation of Indigenous people as protagonists. Yet, he appropriates its central figure "to parody colonialism in its many forms", seeing him as another patronising colonial hero: "washed up on native shores, he establishes himself as the law, imposing his sense of morality on a pre-existing Culture."⁴ In *Death & taxes* (2006) Gohier has created his own such breed of Northern Territory idol: The Phillip. Accompanied by his wife, *Mrs Phillip* (2006), these characters personify a certain archetype of provincial frontier identity. Gohier wonders: "washed up in Darwin, would The Phillip have been dealt with by local mob straight away, or settled down in Humpty Doo on his twenty-acre lot, a Toyota Hilux 4WD and a pig-dog?" *The Tracker* (2014) pays homage to, and borrows its title from, Rolf de Heer's 2002 film shot at Arkaroola in the Flinders Ranges. Featuring the Latin words 'Fiat Justitia' (Let justice be done), this emaciated figure embodies 'payback'—as enacted in the film—as reprisal for racist and cruel treatment of Aboriginal people.

SPIRITED BEINGS | The works by husband and wife collaborators, Lena Yarinkura (Yirritja) and Bob Burruwul (Duwa), are contemporary embodiments of ancestral narratives from the cultural psyche of Northern Arnhem Land. Their sculpture and fibre works possess a distinctive sensibility in their innovative adaptations of traditional forms and materials, depicting their innate relationship to Country. Made from woven Kurrajong fibre and white and black pigment, these slender skeletal *Wyarra Spirits* (2012) stand tall, anthropomorphic and life-like in their bearing. Wyarra are said to be discreet nocturnal creatures that populate the bush. Invisible to the uninitiated they can sometimes be heard at night. Both cheeky and friendly, Wyarra can follow, visit or interact with humans, either playing tricks or being of assistance when lost in the bush.

PAINTERLY SKIN | Joshua Bonson's emerging practice investigates his Indigeneity and connection to his Jawoyn and Torres Strait Islander forebears, through a rigorous exploration of painterly texture emulating the skin of his totem animal, the crocodile. A self-taught artist, he is celebrated for striking abstract compositions in which he builds layers of thick paint onto canvas over time. *Skin* (2008) is a work in a growing series of the same title that connects him to kinship, Indigenous cultural and spiritual beliefs and the associations and sense of belonging that come with this ancestral worldview. Born of Saltwater, the bold, monochromatic black, textured panels seem to shimmer and flow – effecting a dark, aqueous and absorbing presence.

COLOSSAL FLOW | Sarah Pirrie's delicate handmade paper and pigment installations articulate a meeting point between land and sea. Inspired by the spectacular weather and colossal natural forces of the tropical North, Pirrie draws great beauty from forms and materials she encounters. In an ecological convergence of nature and culture, she combines handmade natural forms with found objects—discarded detritus claimed by the elements. *Runoff* (2014), a fresh iteration of a 2012 work, speaks of tides and currents, of water-flows, of foliage and debris carried towards the sea, displaced in the lush, fluid and sometimes savage monsoonal environment of a Northern Territory Wet Season.

CULTURE ALIVE | Yirrkala, in north-east Arnhem Land, stands as a bridge between land and Saltwater. The *Mulka Project*, a community-driven digital library and media production centre, nurtures and activates an archive of collected, reclaimed media material depicting Yolgnu lands, law and stories. Artist and Cultural Director at the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Wukun Wanambi explains that contemporary Culture is being re-invigorated through the archive: "the word, dance, song, and law of Elders past return to the minds and hearts of (our) people and repeat on through the generations". In *Nhina nhama ga ngama (Sit, look, and listen)* (2014) Wanambi presents us with powerful imagery, an abstracted view into a century of Yolgnu spiritual and cultural life, which celebrates the ongoing importance of Ceremony. Formidable forces, these practices permeate the lives of remote Aboriginal people, recharging their relationships to Country and Culture: a culture alive and thriving.

ONE TERRITORY | The Northern Territory and South Australia have a long-standing historical relationship⁵. *135th Meridian—East* is a proposition for an ongoing relatedness across Country that remains rich in zones of contact, exchange and history. The complex milieus that inspire artists, the divides they traverse and connections they establish, resonate with the notion that "out of one territory, one map, can bloom a thousand geographies"⁶. As sites of discovery and experience, the conversations evoked in this project highlight these ecologies within a geographical area so rich in culture and history it defies delineation.

André Lawrence, September 2014

FOOTNOTES

1. Cosgrove, Denis. 'Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10, no. 1 1985: 46 2. Cross, Jack. *Great Central State the Foundation of the Northern Territory*. Adelaide, Kent Town, S. Aust.: Wakefield Press. 2011: 4. 3. Sue Kneebone. *Hearing Loss (Volume II)*, artist notes, 2014 4. Lee Falk's character The Phantom is shipwrecked, after a pirate attack, on the shores of *Bengali*, a fictitious place, and nursed back to health by the 'natives' 5. In 1863 the southern settler colony succeeded in annexing the 'northern wasteland', governing it until its independence in 1911. For thousands of years prior to European settlement this space was and continues to be crisscrossed by a complex and diverse Aboriginal cultural ecosystem 6. Stephen S. HALL. I, Mercator, in Katharine A. Harmon. *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*. 1st ed. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004: 17

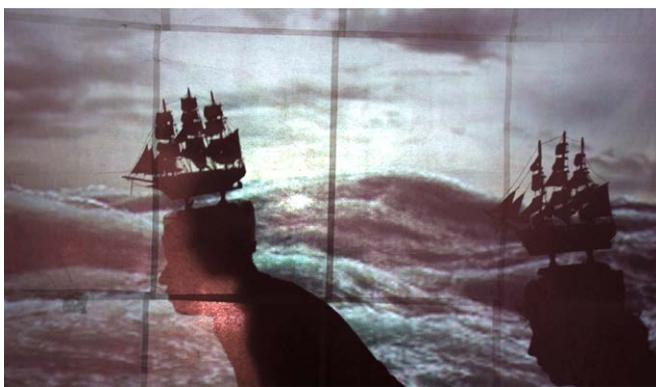
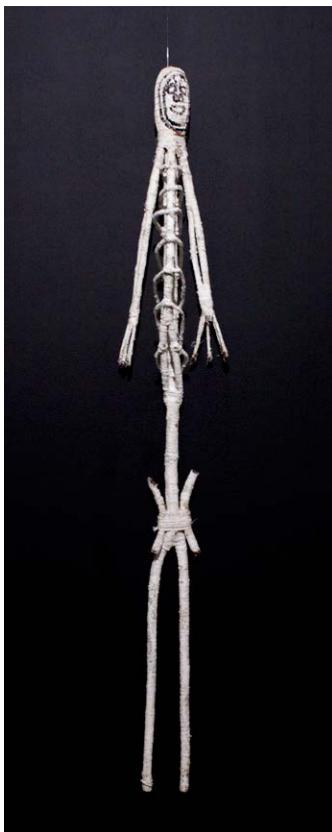


IMAGE CREDITS | Front: Pungkai, *Longa longa time, I bin mine my business, now everyone cummin mine my business* 2013 (detail), synthetic polymer paint and plastic objects on canvas, 185x191cm. Photo: Karen Zadra. James Dodd, *Fuck tha Police* 2009, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 108x152cm. Photo: Sam Roberts. Joshua Bonson, *Skin* 2008 (detail), synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 9 panels of 155 x125 cm. Photo: Jessie Victoria Bonson. Franck Gohier, *Death & taxes* 2006, wood carving, baked bean tins, nails, artist acrylic, 66x40x25cm. Photo: Bronwyn Wright. Sue Kneebone, *Hearing loss (Volume II)* 2014 (detail), mixed media installation. Maarten Daudeij, *A Country walk* 2014 (video still), digital video, duration 100min looped. James Tylor, *A nautical journey of Country* 2014, sticks, shells, handmade Harakeke string, 60x40cm. Photo: Alex Lofting. Back: Wukun Wanambi (The Mulka Project) *Nhina nhama ga ngama* 2014 (video still), digital video, 10:21sec looped. Lena Yarinkura & Bob Burruwul, *Wyarra Spirit* 2012, Kurrajong (Brachychiton Diversifolius) with ochre pigment, 191x32cm Photo: Alex Lofting. Thom Buchanan *Landmarks* 2014 (detail), digital print and synthetic polymer paint on mdf, 340x480cm. Photo: Alex Lofting. Sera Waters, *Fritz and the rose garden* 2014 (detail), felt, hand-dyed calico and string, cotton, wool, hand-made stones, trim, approx. 300x150cm. Photo: Alex Lofting. Sarah Pirrie, *Runoff* 2012 (detail), paper and pigment, wire, found objects, dimensions variable. Photo: Fiona Morrison. Ali Gumilya Baker, *Ahoy! Nungas re-enacting white patriots re-enacting their murderous invasion of the Lucky Country (Part 1)* 2014 (video still), timber frame, digital video, 46sec looped. All images courtesy of the respective artists.

Joshua Bonson represented by Lynda Brown. Thom Buchanan represented by Paul Johnstone Gallery, NT & Hill Smith Gallery, SA. Maarten Daudeij appears courtesy of his beloved wife. James Dodd represented by Hugo Michell, SA & Ryan Renshaw Gallery, QLD. Pungkai represented by Marshall Arts Gallery, SA. James Tylor represented by Marshall Arts Gallery, SA, Vivienne Anderson Gallery, VIC and Paul McNamara Gallery, NZ. Wukun Wanambi appears courtesy of Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, NT and is represented by Yirrkala Art Centre, NT. Lena Yarinkura & Bob Burruwul represented by Maningrida Arts and Culture, NT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | Nigh a year in the planning, this project comes with its fair share of thanks: for the sustenance gleaned from the encouragement of friends, family and peers; the many conversations, time freely given, and previous achievements of artists, curators, writers and arts professionals whose visions have delved into these discourses and space; for the open-handed dialogues shared with the exhibiting artists, who have generously engaged in various ways with the ideas in this exhibition; to the respective agents and gallerists who helped facilitate access to some of these works; for the generous support of Arts SA who have made possible, through their endorsement, the commissioning of South Australian artists and a more direct curatorial engagement with artists interstate through studio and art centre visits; and to the Australian Experimental Art Foundation staff for their sustained support, above all Fulvia Mantelli who, in a time of change, took on the mentor mantle, her gentle steering, trust, kindness and immense patience, granting me with the confidence and professional outlook to embrace and present an idea much greater than myself. With gratitude.