

SKY COUNTRY

Our connection to the cosmos



11th - 28th May 2017

Monash Country Lines Archive

Sorry Business is part of life. Yet the death of an Elder is too often mourned by Indigenous peoples Australia wide - not only as a loved one, but also at the loss of the knowledge and language they held. There is a despair for that which was not passed onto the next generations, with a corresponding fear that the smallest part of that will never be recaptured.

There is however, passionate warriors and scholars of cultural knowledge within our communities that are conquering the fear of loss. They work to return language and knowledge and to give strength, encourage pride, and support identity for community, mob, family, and importantly for the self.

Since 2011 the Monash Country Lines Archive's (MCLA) has been working with Indigenous communities across Australia to assist in the continuation and preservation of their languages, stories and narratives. By supporting the

return of language knowledge and using this to teach intergenerational groups; Indigenous languages and knowledge can be reclaimed and held within Indigenous Australian communities. MCLA uses 3D animation to reproduce language, story, and Country as tools for learning; supporting intergenerational learning in the continuation of language and knowledge within Indigenous Australian communities.

Language cannot exist in isolation. Language is the means to communicate, to sing, to tell stories, to remember. It is part of life and living. Art plays a key role in language maintenance and reclamation, it is a way to tell the stories of self and family.

This exhibition was brought together to encourage the revitalisation of Indigenous languages through the engagement with Indigenous artists and youth in their use of the creative arts to



explore Indigenous Australian languages and their importance today.

The MCLA team are so happy that Kate ten Buuren agreed to curate this exhibition. Kate and her family have been a big part in the production of the Taungurung animations. We are also delighted that the Taungurung animation Winjara Wiganhanyan (Why We All Die) has provided the inspiration for the exhibition. Winjara Wiganhanyan shows the connection between the moon and the Taungurung, a story that is both profound and subtle.

Finally, we acknowledge all peoples, communities, stories and languages that the MCLA program has had the opportunity to partner with in the creation of their animations.

The Monash Country Lines Archives is proud to be part of the exhibition Sky Country: Our Connection to the Cosmos.

Thank you to Kimba Thompson and Blak Dot Gallery in your support of this exhibition.

More information on the MCLA program is available at: artsonline.monash.edu.au/countrylines-archive/

This exhibition was made possible by the support from the Australian Communities Foundation, Elizabeth Egelston Fund.

MCLA Team



Left and right: Winjara Wiganhanyan (Why We All Die)

Foreword

Looking to the sky, our peoples have always connected with its stories and lessons in forming our relationship with the earth. There are many valuable lessons to be learned from the astronomic plains that surround us; navigation, seasons, time and story. But the process of connecting with Sky Country can be difficult, halted sometimes by our inability to access language that adequately translates these stories and histories. It is through this curatorial process of facilitating space in which work finds voice, and in speaking to the themes of *Sky Country*, heals this disconnect. Our sky becomes our spirit, a country that can be thought of as abstract in all its forms. This is the place in which we can experiment and play, in search of a meaning or clever form of translation. From the first stories that split the Sky and the Earth, Sky Country is our old people, a place of spirit and from which we learn to translate and make new meaning to bring back to the earth. A quietening of space, *Sky Country* blacks out unnecessary distraction from interfering with the way we read the works. By eliminating extraneous light from entering the space, we allow the audience to spend time with each work, to listen to the words being spoken and the ideas being placed in front of them.

Inspired by the Monash Country Lines Archive (MCLA) animation of the Taungurung Dreaming story Winjara Wiganhanyin (Why We All Die),

Sky Country seeks Aboriginal modes of connection with the cosmos through a mirroring of ourselves and stories from Earth Country. Conveying powerful themes regarding the relationship between the Earth and the Sky and the reclamation of languages and knowledges, *Sky Country* creates a visual language to those languages that lie dormant and hidden through Colonisation.

The through line for *Sky Country* is the connect and disconnect we feel to Country and culture as young Aboriginal people. In facing a reclamation of knowledge, we must acknowledge a living history of its disconnection. This disconnection is a history of bloody conflicts and inheritances of trauma and shame. To reclaim, is to speak back to that imposed shame and to rename it for what it represents. We look to Sky Country to show us the relationships between meanings and to translate these into our practices of song, dance and story. These relationships then echo the patterns of our ancestors in reclaiming knowledge. We work with our communities, connect with our ancient knowledge systems and perform our stories through many mediums, for ourselves first and to then share with others.

Reclaiming our knowledge is therefore intimately connected with the reclamation of language - a reconnection with the material processes and use of language that gives us access to making meaning in the world.

In speaking, we act on the knowledge we hold to instigate tangible effects through the magic of storytelling. Connecting Country through storytelling is an ancient mode of conveying meaning; not only through a place-based assertion of knowledge but through the act of speaking and using our bodies to transmit meaning. It is a tangible action that connects us as communities and peoples and provides us with relation to our Earth and Sky Countries. This is why our stories must be told correctly. Our stories have the potential to alter entire ways of being in the world. In making story we perform a translation of meaning into action that connects the Sky and Earth. This connection shows us the complexity of our own knowledge and humbles us with the deeper knowledges we are yet to respect and listen to.

When our old people of high degree tell us stories they are also testing us. They scan our spirit with their eyes asking: "are you listening, so you see?" Our stories, as mediums of knowledge, are conveyed in layers of meaning so that they can be held responsibly. We are responsible for knowledge and responsible to community in connecting us with our ancestors in the big skies above.

Sky Country: Our Connection to the Cosmos is a coming together of oral, visual and written language to form a space where our stories and the ways in which we translate meaning can be observed.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners on the lands on which we both live and work; the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nations. We honour the stories of your people and the continuation of culture that has enabled this exhibition to exist. Thank you for the generosity in sharing Country with us, and for encouraging us to share with others. We pay deepest respect to all Indigenous people who have fought similar battles in holding onto cultural knowledge and practice, and reviving what was stolen. We feel your pain, and acknowledge it.

To our Elders, Kate's of the Taungurung, and Adam's of the Worimi, we are eternally grateful. If it were not for the strength, resilience and guidance of our old people, we would be nothing but lost stars in the universe.

Kate ten Buuren and Adam Ridgeway

Timmah Ball

Timmah Ball is an interdisciplinary artist of Ballardong Noongar descent, working across community cultural development, public art, video, urban design and writing. Most recently she completed a writers residency at The University of Iowa, called Indigenous Voices/Narrative Witness. She has written for The Griffith Review, Right Now, Meanjin and the Westerly. She is currently using zine making to critique mainstream publishing conventions and will produce Wild Tongue zine as part of Next Wave.

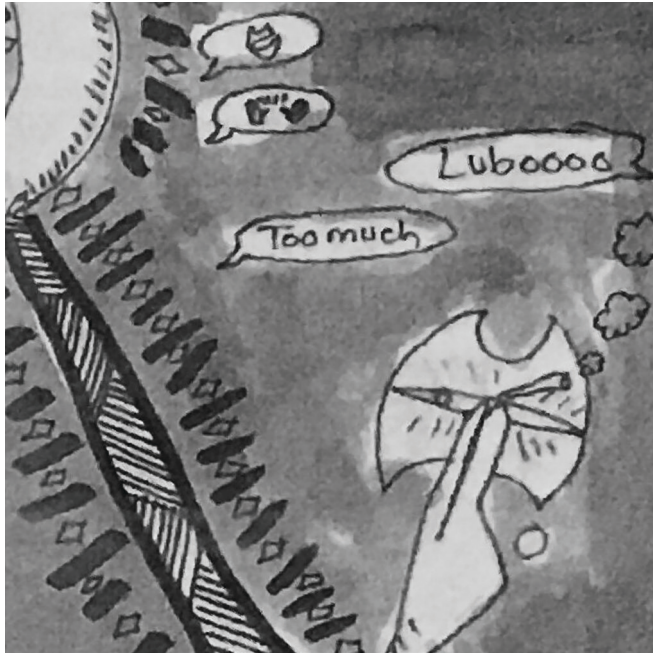
Haunted

York hospital is famous for all the wrong reasons. Considered one of the most haunted buildings in Western Australia it is known to contain the spirit of a nurse who died in horrific ways. Apparitions in the night, unexplained noises, and a rotting stench that pervades the attic are widely known to torment visitors. But this isn't the only story or spirits that haunt the landscape. York is the land of the Ballardong Noongar people and they have their own spiritual connections and stories to share. These are my ancestors and the place where my mother was born.

Using found documentary footage and interviews with my mother reinserting her perspective back into the narrative, the video installation will show the

contrast between Aboriginal and settler connections to the night. The fears of settlers have different meanings to the traditional owners of this land. The video will also address some of the stigmas and ways we view spirituality and haunting as myth; something based in storytelling with no scientific grounding. Ghosts are often viewed as fiction, but for Aboriginal people spirits can have many meanings and connections to the afterlife that carry important lessons.





Gabi Briggs

Gabi Briggs is a sovereign Anaiwan and Gumbangier kajira (woman) who documents her body, and how it occupies places and the viewers' gaze (you). She does so in order to examine power, privilege, and the colonising and politicising of her body and narrative. Forever complexed and possibly hoodwinked, Briggs looks to the arts as a place to have agency, to decolonise and to find absolute autonomy and sovereignty.

Tkaranto to Naarm and Back

I created this work whilst I was living and surviving in Tkaranto, Turtle Island (Toronto, Canada). At this time in my life, I was living in two worlds, travelling the skies via portals that opened the doors of home. I challenged and transversed the idea that my Blak body could not exist at once on both sides of the world. I was in love, travelling a songline at the speed of light. Crossing time zones, seeing home, seeing love. I pulled all-dayers and all-nighters, drinking timms, just to be with you. Blak love. Queer love. Strong love.

Whilst in Tkaranto, I had the opportunity to work outside of usual confines of performance, photography and video to play with illustration, in particular comic

style, whilst at OCAD University. It was through the process of illustration that I was able to translate and communicate a reality of mine in Tkaranto, being in a long distance relationship with my dhubay 16286 km away. In retrospect, the work retains the memory of something that existed within two time zones and came at a time when I was coming to understand decolonial love, queerness and my Indigeneity.

Dean Cross

Dean is a multi-disciplinary artist who works across the sculptural and pictorial fields. He began his adventures in art with QL2 Dance in Canberra, Australia's premier youth dance company. Following that, Dean worked for over a decade both nationally and internationally as a contemporary dance performer and choreographer.

Dean's non-theatre based work has also been exhibited extensively up and down the east coast of Australia.

Some key exhibitions include the group show *Blak Mirror*, curated by Jason Wing, *FRINGE DWELLINGS*, a solo show at Huw Davies Gallery, Canberra and most recently his second solo show, *TIME TAKES TOO MUCH TIME* at M16 Gallery. Dean's work was also seen in the 2015 Konica Minolta Redlands Art Prize, The Churchie and The Macquarie Group Emerging Art Prize, in which his work *RIGHT LAND'S* was awarded the highly commended prize by artist Joan Ross.

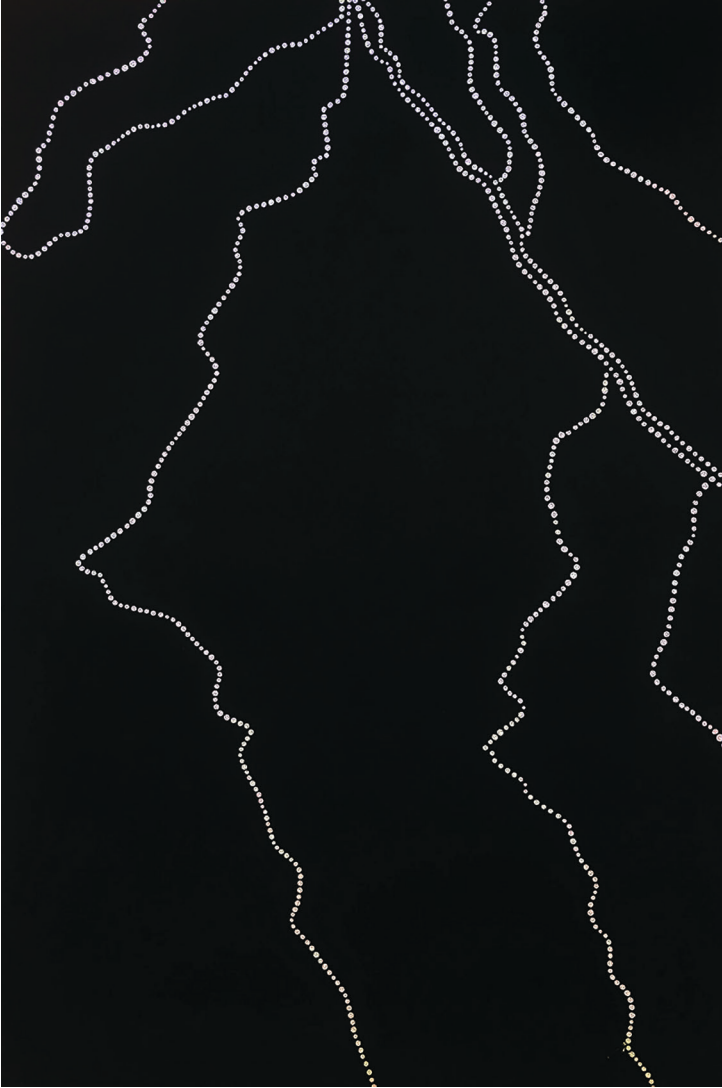
kurruwon koora

(summer night - Ngunnawal country)
from the sunset studies series

As the day's dying light fades, the dawn of evening begins. With each new summer night, the Wren's gentle chatter is silenced and the protective clicks of the Willy Wagtail's fall away. Usually, there is a brief shining moment of stillness, where one is neither here nor there. A pause between breaths where the boundaries between you, me and Country disappear.

In truth, the Sun does not set, the Earth turns. And we turn with it.





Edwina Green

I am a proud Palawa woman, and received my formal education on Wurundjeri country. I am a relatively 'new' artist as I always had a passion for law. I am now working with a range of mediums including photography, painting, sculpture and media. I plan to further expand my practice by exploring other mediums. My identity and my culture as a Palawa woman almost entirely informs my practice. It ensures I am on the path to growing into the artist that I want to be. We need to see more Indigenous artists within the art world, especially female Indigenous artists, and this is why I am determined to continue with my practice.

Lutana

Lutana translates to Moon in my mob's language; Palawa Kani. On Country, we often have days - even weeks of continuous rain, filled with thunder and lightning. This is represented through the lines in the painting; the way that they start collectively at the top and each take their own path toward the bottom of the canvas.

Latuna was inspired by images I have taken on Country. After these huge storms have come throughout the day, there is a moment in time, just before the sun sets and the moon is already in the sky. The light, distorted by the rains, shines down on the town. This is what Latuna depicts.

The piece explores connection to Country; building a bond with the land where I am from, and continuing this throughout my generations. 'Winjara Wiganhanyan (Why We All Die) also incorporates and informs this piece through passing on culture, and keeping it alive, which is what I aim to do through my art practice.

Hayley Millar-Baker

Hayley Millar-Baker is a Gunditjmara artist born in Werribee Victoria.

Hayley completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) at RMIT University in 2010, Master of Teaching (Visual Arts) at The University of Melbourne in 2015, and is currently completing a Master of Fine Arts at RMIT University.

Hayley's arts practice is influenced and informed by being a Koorie woman existing in a contemporary urban culture. She highly values her connection to culture, as place, land, identity and history are all indispensable inspiration to the construction of her practice.

Growing up in an urban culture means Hayley's work has naturally become highly political and engages with both personal and historical issues regarding Indigenous

life to open a gateway to create narratives concerning themes of displacement, alienation, suppression and oppression, connection to culture and land, identity, racism and social confinement.

Through the perception of darkness, these four works translate to communicate inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness of space particularly the openness of night sky on country.

Growing up away from country (Gunditjmara land) I adopted Wathaurong land to compensate and nurture my connection and culture. To revive, reflect, evolve and renew the women of my family, we often visited the You Yang mountain areas. For myself, I often visited at night to connect myself to the moon in order to find guidance and rejuvenate in the stillness of dark night.

Dark 1, Dark 2, Dark 5 & Country at Night

Dark 1, 2 & 5 represent the complexity of space (sky), darkness (night) and connection (awareness) through thickly layered medium and multidimensional canvases.

Country at Night speaks to meeting place, the moon, and standing on country under the night sky. The 71 rocks within this work were collected from the particular area that my family can find clarity from while away from our own country.



Neil Morris

Neil Morris is a Yorta Yorta man and a constantly evolving multi-disciplinary performance artist. Neil performs primarily as a musician fusing traditional Indigenous song with modern genres. Neil is also a writer and performs spoken word poetry along with Indigenous dance. Neil's aim as an artist is to ensure the sacredness of Indigenous culture is brought forth into contemporary society in a way that reminds us of its enormous beauty, power and necessity.

A Song Universal

A Song Universal is a haunting meditative film focused on the value of Country through the eyes of Neil Morris. Filmed on Yorta Yorta Country, Neil's story is illustrated by sensory cinematography, combining images of Kaeila (Goulbourn River) and Dhungula (Murray River) areas, with intimate scenes of Neil's interaction with the landscape.

Throughout the film, Neil reflects on parts of his journey in engaging with Country. The film shares Neil's memory as a young man going through a highly difficult time in his life, in which Country guided him through.

Some key messages conveyed in *A Song Universal*, are the value of Country as a redemptive and powerful

transformative tool beyond replication. The film embodies subtle expressions of the inherent challenges of being an Indigenous person with strong cultural values, living in a modern societal construct, as well as the broader human need for connection to Country.

A Song Universal brings to light the intrinsic link between the power of Country and the power of language in a beautiful and delicate form to which culture and identity can be shaped.

The film was made in collaboration between Neil Morris and filmmaker Eliya Cohen, who directed, filmed and edited the piece.



Katie West

Katie West is an interdisciplinary artist who considers the renewal of human connections with and within the natural environment through textile, video and installation. Katie is of Yindjibarndi descent, from Noongar Booja (Perth and surrounding areas) in Western Australia. She is now based in Naarm and is currently completing a Master of Contemporary Art at the Victorian College of the Arts. Katie's work is

influenced by studies in sociology and work experience in Indigenous health. In 2015 Katie participated in Next Wave Festival's Kickstart program, and this led to her first solo show, at West Space for Next Wave Festival 2016 - Decolonist. This worked considered the practice of meditation as a means to decolonise the self.

Julu/Everything

Julu/Everything is a textile piece created through cutting out stars from plastic mass-produced Australian flags, or sewing stars by hand, and bringing them together on a piece of bush-dyed fabric. This is a simple and meditative process where time with each star is time to reflect on both transgenerational trauma and cultural renewal.

A star may be someone I knew, or someone whose story I hear about. Someone who passed too soon because of poor health. Someone who died in custody. Someone who took their own life. An Elder I wish I had met. An ancestor and the life I imagine they led.

It is about mourning, and the continued poor health of the Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander population as a whole, within a supposedly developed nation such as Australia. It is about the continuance of culture and the health and wellbeing this brings.

The stars sewn by hand point to a deeper sense of time and human existence on this landmass. And the knowledge that creates a direct link between the Earth's ecologies and cosmos.

Julu means everything in Yindjibarndi language. Like specific knowledge related to the night sky, language is something I was not able to inherit directly. Naming this work in my Grandmother's language, for me, is a personal act of cultural renewal.



Berrin Ngawiin Ningula-bil

The Taungurung words Berrin Ngawiin Ningula-bil translate to English as New Moon Shining.

For one day, artists Tahnee Edwards, Corey Harding, Mitchil Harding, Kate ten Buuren, Iluka Sax-Williams, and Isobel Morphy-Walsh participated in a collage-making workshop led by Peter Waples-Crowe.

Each artist sought inspiration from the Taungurung animation Winjara Wiganhanyin (Why We All Die), produced through the Monash Country Lines Archive.

In the story, the powers of Mirnjan, the Moon, are taken from him, meaning he can no longer bring humans back to life. Instead, Mirnjan takes onto himself the cycle of life and death, high up in the sky.

Berrin Ngawiin Ningula-bil represents the emerging nature of the young people who worked hard to create the collages, and how by connecting with their stories and their language, these artists are shining brightly, just as Mirnjan does most evenings.



Artist: Mitchil Harding
Title: Smokin' Dog in the Sky

The Taungurung words on this piece mean Heal No More Moon. This is in reference to the Winjara Wiganhanyin Dreaming story. While I was making this piece, I was thinking about how we as Aboriginal people walk in two worlds and how these worlds collide to make the place we live in. The five diamonds depict Mount Buller, the other symbols represent surrounding mountains. The top half of the piece is about how alien Western ways and ideals are to our culture. I made this artwork to depict the collision of the two worlds.

Right: Artwork by Iluka Sax-Williams



Artist talk

Saturday May 20th | 2pm

Join us for an afternoon of conversation with the artists involved in Sky Country: Our Connection to the Cosmos. Get a deeper understanding of the works and what they mean to each artist, whilst enjoying the light refreshments supplied.

Ngobi-an Woorá // Ngobi-an Biik

(Drinking in Knowledge of the Sky // Drinking in Knowledge of the Earth)

Saturday May 27th | 2pm

Language holds intense power. It holds knowledge, culture, practices, and is a reflection of our old people. Ngobi-an Woorá // Ngobi-an Biik (Drinking in Knowledge of the Sky // Drinking in Knowledge of the Earth) is a panel discussion that will respond to the themes in Sky Country: Our Connection to the Cosmos.

A panel will discuss the stories that connect Country; the ways that tales from our Dreaming inter-connect the land with the sky; to learn about our earth we must first look up to the sun, the moon and the stars.

The discussion will reflect on the importance of translating these stories

back into the languages that, for Victorian Aboriginal people, have been missing from our dialogue until recent projects have begun reviving them. Panelists will join us for an engaging conversation about the importance of language for contemporary Aboriginal people.

The title for this panel was developed by Isobel Morphy-Walsh at Berrin Ngawiin Ningula-bil, a day-long collage making workshop for Taungurung youth.

Acknowledgement of Country

Blak Dot Gallery acknowledges the original custodians of the land on which we work, live and create: the Wurrundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin Nations.



Proudly supported by



Australian Government
Indigenous Languages and Arts



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VICTORIA**



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