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Thesis title:

Creative responses to Australian material culture in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection:

Parallels between *We Bury Our Own* and *Mining the Museum*

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Abstract

This theoretical dissertation is a comparative assessment of two exhibitions responding to a museum archive: the work of African-American artist Fred Wilson (b. 1954), *Mining the Museum*, at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1993, and my own exhibition *We Bury Our Own* at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2012. I explore the emergence of the museum as a context and medium for artists as institutional critique. The following research outlines a range of artistic practices and engages a process of ekphrasis to give detailed comprehensive accounts of both exhibitions, demonstrating how studio-based research is able to reveal hidden or previously unseen histories obscured by the imperial gaze. I discuss the differences between my own and Wilson's approaches in order to expose how the work might shift in significance or meaning when it is placed inside and outside the museum context. This thesis introduces the idea of spiritual repatriation, outlines how museum collections are able to contribute to artistic practice and how artists can contribute to the ongoing exhibition, critique and appreciation of museum collections. This thesis also elaborates on the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection and its subsequent influence on recent work, and redefines the title *We Bury Our Own* as a metaphor applied to a wider picture.

Creative responses to Australian material culture in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection: Parallels between *We Bury Our Own* and *Mining the Museum*

Introduction

This written component of my studio-based thesis explicates the theoretical and historical frame of my artwork, which is based on research of Australian Indigenous artefacts held in museum ethnographic archives. Several questions are addressed in this research. First, in inquiring about the structure and motivation of the museum ethnographic archive, it seeks a productive, one might say collaborative, encounter with the museum aimed at revealing marginalised narratives that have been repressed by the classical ethnographic gaze. This gaze represents a Western naturalised view that sublimates the brute hegemony of colonialism and dispossession into the objective discourses of science. My hypothesis is that this act of repression provides opportunities to desublimate the archives' repressed histories. In this respect, at the heart of my project are three questions: how can ethnographic source material seen through the imperial gaze be re-represented without reiterating the ideological assumptions and repressions of its original archival practices? Can it be represented in ways that desublimate what had been lost in these repressions? And, if so, what is the relationship between the original artefacts and their desublimation – or what I call spiritual repatriation?

I also examine the different contexts of exhibiting archival investigations within the museum as opposed to alternative public spaces? What is lost/gained in these two terrains? This raises two further questions: to what extent are the material outcomes

that develop from these artistic approaches collaborative practices with the museum, its history of colonial ethnography, and the colonised subjects of this colonial ethnographic gaze? What effect do these revisions, collaborative or not, have on contemporary museum discourse and artistic practices associated with it?

Detailed textual descriptions of three works will provide the scaffold for addressing these questions: one, a comprehensive virtual description of Fred Wilson's exhibition *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1993; two, a similar virtual recreation of my own show *We Bury Our Own* at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2012; and, three, a narrative account of my compulsive visitations of a single photograph in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection, picturing an Aboriginal man, which was subsequently revealed through research to be coincidentally the first known colonial photograph (daguerreotype) of a South Australian Aboriginal subject to exist in the museum's collection.

Wilson's *Mining the Museum* is a key component of this comparative analysis because of its seminal role in the so-called ethnographic turn identified by Hal Foster, and of which my work is a recent example. Foster described *Mining the Museum* as amongst 'the most incisive' example of this turn.[1] Even though Foster acknowledged the many precedents of this ethnographic turn – and later the related 'archival impulse' – he judged it as a (if not the most) significant development of contemporary art practice that emerged in the 1990s in the aftermath of postmodernism.[2] Foster is both sympathetic to this turn – its inclination is one of critique and its strategies echo those of appropriation art that he championed in the 1980s – but also critical; critical

[1] Foster, Hal, 1996, p. 191.
[2] Foster, Hal, 1994, pp. 12–19, and Foster, Hal, 2004, pp. 3–22.

because he believes it is complicit with the institutions (and archives) it critiques and because it tends to appear, like the avant-garde did, as the 'ideological patron' and thus voice and representative of the subaltern.[3] Foster's critique will echo in the issues and questions addressed in my comparative analysis.

The main purpose of this analysis is to delineate the different operations of the two exhibitions; especially in the ways that each recovers ancestral/cultural/intellectual property. What is recovered and how is each mode of recovery different from the other? However, for the analysis to be credible, it first requires a detailed exposition of each exhibition and its historical and epistemological contexts – including an historical analysis of the museum as a medium for artists.

This exposition will employ a process of ekphrasis that is ever-present in my studio-based practice (through processes of experience, meditation and reflection). Ekphrasis is the use of vivid description as a rhetorical device to enhance the presence of the subject. Of ancient Greek origin, it refers to one medium of art translating the effect of another in such a way as to reveal its essence. It usually refers to a poem inspired by a painting, which uses poetic effect to focus attention on the enchanting qualities of the painting's mimesis. A good example in art criticism is Diderot. After evocative descriptions of many entrancing scenes and his own captivation before them, Diderot reveals that he has been merely describing Vernet's paintings: their charming, blissful and sometimes sublime scenes had an aura that transported him to unimaginable delights. (The best analysis of Diderot's ekphrasis is Michael Fried's, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*.[4]) Ekphrasis, as will become clear, is an important methodology for establishing the central subject of my

[3] Foster, Hal, 1996, p. 171.
[4] Fried, M, 1980, pp. 125–127.

art, which is what I call spiritual repatriation. At the heart of my practice is a concern with aura: what it is, how it can be photographed and how it can be repatriated.

The idea of spiritual repatriation emphasises the repatriation of an essential quality that is evoked rather than clearly visible in objects – what might be called the aura of such collections, rather than the actual physical objects. For Walter Benjamin the aura was a magical element in a work of art that returned the gaze of the viewer: 'To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return'. While admitting that such personification is delusional – a 'chimera' – he insists on its secretive 'ceremonial' qualities, in particular its distancing effect or 'inapproachability', which he said was 'on a level with perception in dreams'.[5] In Benjamin's thinking, it was exactly such evocative associations of art or aura that carry its ideological content. The loss of this aura in photographic reproduction, he believed, underpinned the critical potential of photography to demystify.[6] According to Benjamin, Atget's sharp focus, repetitive subject matter and lack of atmospheric effects initiated 'the emancipation of object from aura which is the signal achievement of the latest school of photography'.[7] Wilson's rearrangements or interventions had a similar effect on the aura of the museum display, demystifying or desublimating its ideological content.

Rather than emancipate the object from its aura or repressed memories, spiritual repatriation is the reverse; it aims to emancipate the repressed memories or aura from the object. Benjamin compared an artwork's aura to a type of involuntary memory – as if it harbours repressed imagery. Spiritual repatriation relinquishes the photograph's

[5] Benjamin, Walter, 1982a, pp. 190–191.
[6] Benjamin, Walter, 1982b, pp. 219–53.
[7] Benjamin, Walter, 1979, pp. 240–257, p. 250.

function as an artefact of reproduction and empirical investigation, and, as if in a séance, calls forth the memories and repressed spirits of its subject, thus investing the photograph with the aura it took when it 'shot' its subject. In other words, against Benjamin's assessment of photography, *We Bury Our Own* reinvests aura in the photograph – more or less along the lines that Roland Barthes did in his Benjaminesque reply to Benjamin when he claimed that photography pictures the past, or memories. In *We Bury Our Own* the interaction with the museum's collection is mediated through the artist from the collection to its public reception. In this sense the Barthian notion of the aura or more particularly its *punctum*, which for Barthes could be a detail that provoked an 'unexpected flash', or what he was most interested in, which was the intensity provoked by the sense of 'Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (*'that-has-been'*), its pure representation'.[8] This lost past is called back to breathe in the present, freed from the constraints and categorisation of linear history. In this way the photograph releases the image into the now.

In the context of studio research Barthes' *punctum* returns to the archive a form of potential agency. It also empowers contemporary artists to bring with them their own biography, their own experiences, in the aftermath of historical practices of representation that repress or forget certain aspects of the past. This, I argue, is how previously unseen histories, sublimated or repressed in the ideological constructs of colonialism and its ethnographic sciences, can be desublimated or brought back from the dead. In other words, the artist's memories and ancestrality become the medium through which the repressed spirits of the archive are called forth.

[8] Barthes, R, 1981, p. 94.

Thus there is also an ethical aspect to my methodology concerned with agency and speaking positions. Following the postcolonial turn after the collapse of the old empires after World War II, the site revolutionary praxis shifted from the First World proletariat – the working class – to the global proletariat – the colonised – thus, in Foster's words, displacing 'the problematic of class and capitalist exploitation with that of race and colonialist oppression'.[9] This, he argued, is the impetus behind the ethnographic and archival turns. His criticism is that in claiming to be its 'ideological patrons', its practitioners, like the previous avant-garde, risked a form of primitivism, in which 'the site of artistic transformation' is 'always *elsewhere*, in the field of the other, in this case with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern'.[10] However, Foster's criticism is ambivalent, especially when the artist in question is seeking to recover what has been lost in her cultural othering. Thus he praises the Indigenous artist Jimmie Durham's *Self-Portrait* (1988) – which he describes as a 'pre-emptively auto-primitivist and wryly anti-categorical' work, as its 'pseudo-primitive fetishes and pseudo-ethnographic artifacts resist further primitivising and anthropologising through a parodic "trickstering" of these very processes'.[11]

The compelling difference of Durham's work is that it is a self-portrait rather than the portrait of an other from elsewhere. Thus his pseudo ethnography is a pseudo auto ethnography or autobiography. In other words, the ethnographic turn assumes a different tenor when the ethnographer is also the subject of the ethnography, or when the biographer is also the subject of the biography. The difference between autobiography and auto-ethnography is really only one of emphasis, but the difference is crucial nevertheless: in auto-ethnography it is not the transcendental self, the

[9] Foster, Hal, 1996, p. 174.
[10] ibid., p. 173.
[11] ibid., p. 199.

individual, but the social and historical context of the individual's coming into being that is the subject. Autobiography has been a favoured genre of Indigenous people to write anti-colonial texts, but their form is more accurately described as auto-ethnography as it draws on the methods of ethnography to construct its biographical narrative. Durham's ironical pseudo-auto-ethnography plays a different game, but it is also one that repatriates from ethnographic tropes the stolen spirits of his ancestors.

While Foster praises Wilson's 'deconstructive-ethnographic approach' because it exposes the institution's repressions of African-American history, he worries that nothing really changes.[12] The institution stays in business; nothing is repatriated. However, Wilson is not so much decolonising the archive – he leaves it intact – as repatriating the memories, histories and identities of his African-American origins that are sublimated in its collections. His practice is one of desublimation, though his methods are deconstructive – they repatriate histories by reworking existing discourses – rather than spiritual repatriation. There are thus certain similarities and differences between his and my work. This, along with the already mentioned seminal role of *Mining the Museum* in the ethnographic turn of contemporary art in which my work is situated, provides the main structure of the written aspect of the dissertation.

In conclusion, this thesis will highlight how *We Bury Our Own* harnesses a similar approach to that of Wilson but differs in its approach by deliberately choosing to conceal the original material from the collection. This is to avoid the re inscription of the photograph as ethnographic object and transform the archive into a touchstone for the production of new forms of cultural expression that empower contemporary

[12] Foster, Hal, 1996, p. 191–96.

Indigenous people and transfer the objectification of such collections into dynamic forms of art.

This methodology presents *We Bury Our Own* within the lineage of artist museum intervention and demonstrates alternative strategies that draw the historical, personal and political together through subjectively engaging with culturally sensitive collections, and simultaneously develops new ways for researchers and audiences to consider such collections. Through this process of 'spiritual repatriation' the sensitivities of living descendants can by-pass the hegemonic power structures of museum histories and display. Replacing the museological frame with cultural references, it directs the viewer away from the physical collection and into a spiritual archive that cannot be contained by the institution. Spiritual repatriation unlike traditional forms of repatriation move the conversation away from the physical and towards the spiritual realm, transferring the aura of the collection – by which I mean the mysterious ideological power it possesses as an official archive – into new dynamic forms of art production amidst other processes of interpretation and appreciation

Chapter 1 outlines how the museum came to be a context and medium for artists, reflecting on the work of Fred Wilson's contemporaries that established a discourse for critique, and examining the artistic landscape that led to *Mining the Museum*. It highlights the crisis within the museum as institution in the 1990s, explores the postcolonial discourse that prompted further inclusion of marginalised groups, and presents a comprehensive virtual room-by-room tour of the *Mining the Museum*

exhibition. Chapter 2 presents Wilson's early life, education and artistic influences. Chapter 3 includes an artist statement of my own creative trajectory, and how I came to work with the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. It includes an ekphrastic essay that reflects upon a single photograph from the Australian Photographic Collection, my own objectives and approaches to the collection, and a virtual tour of the *We Bury Our Own* exhibition. Finally, the conclusion reflects upon both *Mining the Museum* and *We Bury Our Own* and revisits the original research questions.

Chapter 1

This chapter will outline a range of artistic practices using the museum as medium, the crisis of museum discourse in the 1990s, specifically focusing on Fred Wilson and his strategic approaches to the museum format. The chapter will conclude with the textual, virtual tour of *Mining the Museum*.

a. Museum as medium

Museums as institutions were developed in the wake of the Enlightenment with the creation of disciplines that sought to divide things into new rationalism categories, thereby imposing a new hierarchy of knowledge. Eighteenth century principles of freedom also came with 'new impositions of control achieved by ordering, observation, classification and narration'.[13] This inevitably meant the valuing of one type of information over another, and would eventually lead to the epistemological (study of the nature of knowledge) and educational framework of the museum, its heritage and subsequent legacy.

Predating the museum, the Renaissance wunderkammer of the 16th century was, by the standards of the Enlightenment, a hotchpotch of various collected objects: the more bizarre the better. However, as Brian Dillion points out, wonder ('traditionally considered the origin of philosophy') and curiosity were valued because of their ability to lead 'into new territories'.[14] Wunderkammer, or cabinet of wonders, sometimes known in English as 'cabinet of curiosities', was based on the idea that 'the entire cosmos could be controlled within the confines of a single room'.[15] This type of early

[13] Robins, C, and Baxter, M, 2011.
[14] Dillon, B, and Warner, M, 2013.
[15] Putnam, J, 2001.

collection existed across Europe from the 16th to 18th centuries. It was an early ancestor of the modern museum but lacked its rational, scientific and taxonomical classifications, 'refusing to choose between knowledge and pleasure'.[16] Thus it is an important precedent for contemporary artistic strategies of institutional intervention because of its predilection for random subjective juxtapositions keyed to the desires of the individual collector, rather than the Enlightenment epistemology institutionalised in the museum archival practices. The Surrealists later used this very same strategy of placing unusual objects together in order to create uncanny compositions and interrelationships between things. They did this in order to kick against strict classification and to promote an anarchical approach to knowledge.

This assimilation of found objects into modern European art originated in the collage works of Picasso and Braque, who included fragments of ripped newspaper in their paintings; but it was Dada artists who, in the aftermath of World War I, fully established a new genre of art based on using found objects as signs. Man Ray and Picabia, for example, used objects such as combs to denote hair.[17] Kurt Schwitters teased and expanded the possibilities of such signification by presenting objects imbued with social history; for example, simply by the indications on them of wear and tear imparted by the hands of a human individual. This can be perceived clearly in his famous work *Merzbau*[18] in Hanover where he altered the interior of his family house into a series of grotto-like spaces, constructed from rubbish and ephemera collected and found on the street, later destroyed in the Allied bombing of Germany during World War II.

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[16] Dillon and Warner, op cit.
[17] http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picabia-the-handsome-pork-butcher-t07108
[18] Schwitters 'Merz' was a Dadaist term he found by chance in a collage using the German word Kom**merz (**Commerce) and came to denote his own Dadaist approach. Thus Merzbau was a Dadaist house.

The most influential Dadaist on later generations in regard to objects being used to critique the institution of art and the museum at large was the creation of Duchamp's *Readymades*. Duchamp's *Fountain*, first exhibited in 1917, ridiculed the 'aura' of value and prestige that traditionally accrues around the art object. Through his readymades, Duchamp indirectly mocked the museum concept and challenged the uniqueness of genuine works of art.[19] By placing a urinal in an art gallery, Duchamp shocked the viewer into seeing, for the first time, the context into which a work of art was placed.

Duchamp's influence was mainly felt in the 1960s, especially in contributing to the conceptualist turn at this time that was instrumental in creating the context for something like Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* to exist. For example, the practice of Israeli-born American Haim Steinbach[20] (b. 1944) is focused on the selection and rearrangement of everyday, mass-produced objects in spaces that are constructed specifically to mimic particular modes of display. In questioning the objects' status as commodity, his work poses social and political questions to the audience that parallel and can be related to Wilson's interest in ethnographic modes of display and representation.

The American minimalists were particularly instrumental in focusing institutional critique on the white cube gallery space. In 1963, American Robert Morris (b. 1931),

[19] Putnam, J, 2001.
[20] http://haimsteinbach.net/

in whose class Wilson had briefly studied, had an exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York that consisted entirely of large, white, geometric structures, constructed and placed purposefully to disrupt the viewer's experience of gallery space. Opposing the values of the autonomous sculpture or work of art where the viewer contemplates at a distance, minimalist artists such as Donald Judd, Frank Stella and Robert Morris reproduced 'in object-form the aesthetic of the supposedly "White Cube" gallery-spaces they occupied ... intent on throwing the viewer's attention toward these simple, three-dimensional objects back upon itself'.[21] Morris's white geometric forms in the Green Gallery directly reflected the forms of the white cube space, in doing so revealing that rather than receding gently into the background, the blank, pure, white cube also had its own defined and didactic identity to impart. Thus Morris activated the architectural space of the gallery, making it a stage on which the artwork and viewer performed. Michael Fried, the modernist art critic and art historian who published the most substantial critique of minimalism[22], identified this 'theatrical' effect, as he called it, as if the artwork is not an object but 'a situation' that includes the viewer.[23]

In emphasising the transitory and ephemeral act of viewing in the gallery, minimalism enters into the theatrical and performative. Here, minimalism's site-specificity can be said to begin in sculpture, yet reveal itself in performance, a move that calls into question its formal as well as spatial location.[24]

[21] Kaye, N, 2000, p. 2.
[22] See Fried, Michael (1967) in Fried, M, 1998.
[23] ibid., pp. 148–72.
[24] Kaye, N, op cit, p. 3.

Concurrent with his site-specific installations and deconstructed sculptural performances, Morris explored notions of ephemerality in his 'Steam' works. They relied on several external factors including sun exposure, wind and heat to activate the theatrical performativity of his work.[25] Andy Warhol (1928–1987) was one of the first artists of this conceptualist generation to specifically target the museum archive. In 1969, at the Rhode Island School of Art, Andy Warhol put on an exhibition in its Museum of Art. The title of the show, *Raid the Icebox*, was a pun on the idea that museums and collections had huge unseen collections of artefacts in cold storage, generally the museums' basements, only a fraction of which was ever on show. Warhol selected items from storage, the more banal the better, as a way of elevating the status of these objects and disrupting the archival hierarchies of the museum. In doing so, he was also 'mimicking the subjective criteria of the curatorial staff'[26], thus drawing attention to the tension between subjectivity (taste) and the so-called objectivity of the archive's hierarchies.

Another artist simultaneously employing the museum as medium was Belgian Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976). In 1968, he created the *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*, a conceptual museum with neither a permanent collection nor location, manifesting itself around a dozen times between 1968 and 1971. The various locations were used to present 'sections' of the fictive museum, which consisted of works of art, fine-art crates, wall labels, signage and film elements. An element recurring throughout the museum was the motif of an eagle, a symbol associated with power and victory – thus underlining the museum and its archival practices as sites of power.

[25] See Robert Morris's Land Art 'Steam' pieces, dating from 1967, re-staged multiple times.
[26] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 6.

Broodthaers also included a financial section, in which he exhibited a series of gold ingots stamped with the crest of an eagle, each on sale for more than twice their market value. Additionally, he tried to sell the museum through this financial section, citing bankruptcy.

The French artist, Daniel Buren (b. 1938) also challenged the museum and gallery as a site of authority, and through his interventions sought to turn the institution inside out, redefining the museum/gallery space as a physically contextual site. Using his trademark green and white-striped canvases, he would place these outside of traditional contexts, in the street like billboards, for example. In doing so he made the viewer question the space between art and non-art, and the fact that the artwork cannot be separated from its site of context.

Hans Haacke (b. 1936), a German artist who studied and eventually settled in America, has a practice that quite clearly is a precedent for that of Wilson. Indeed, their work is often spoken about in the same breath. After early work engaging in natural systems and Land Art, Haacke turned his focus on the art world and the systems of exchange between museums and their corporate leaders. His site-specific work in institutions aims to demystify the relationship between museums, capitalism and ideology by documenting the hegemonic structures of power in which the art world operates. He thus adopts a Gramscian[27]perspective that reveals how the art world is one means by which capitalism establishes its power in the institutions of knowledge production. In his piece *MetroMobilitan* (1985) at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, banners

[27] Francese, Joseph, 2009.

were shown by Haacke that aimed to critically highlight the corporate sponsorship by the oil company Mobil of an exhibition of ancient Nigerian art that was showing concurrently in one of the other galleries. Here Haacke made a visual connection between the violence of apartheid in South Africa and Mobil's continuing decision to supply oil to the South African military and police who were so brutally suppressing a nation.

Haacke's approach to institutional critique is one of destabilisation. He actively makes us think about how we think and forces us to question the familiar. The work of American Michael Asher (1943–2012) has also used institutional critique to question the structures of power and value inherent in the way in which museums and galleries are governed[28], but instead of bringing additional elements or objects into the institution, like Wilson his approach has been one of reconfiguration. He has specifically used strategies of displacement, removal and erasure to question the logic of organisational and architectural structures. In 1992, concurrent with *Mining the Museum*, Asher presented an installation at the Kunsthalle Bern where he re-plumbed all the radiators in the museum so that they were reinstalled together in the atrium. This resulted in a wall of heat as visitors entered the building, a vision of geometric beauty in the pipe-work, rendering the rest of the museum cold and empty of art. Asher's work is a specific type of institutional critique in which, like Wilson's and Haacke's, 'the museum can be made to function as a site for the production of critical publicity'[29], as opposed to Broodthaers and Buren's approaches that engage in a 'material analysis of the perceptual protocols the museum uses to disguise or

[28] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 4.
[29] Ward, F, 1995, p. 81.

naturalize what is in fact the historical bourgeois subject'.[30] This is a useful way of dividing the strategies different artists use in relation to the museum/gallery; one uses the function of the museum/gallery as a medium with which to produce critical publicity/awareness, whilst the other materially analyses the strategies (and affectations) constructed by a museum/gallery that wishes to perpetuate its myopically-envisaged historical past.

All these artists, according to Miwon Kwon, 'have variously conceived the site not only in physical and spatial terms but as a cultural framework defined by the institutions of art. If Minimalism returned to the viewing subject a physical corporeal body, by the end of the 1960s post-minimalist institutional critique was insisting on the social matrix of class, race, gender, and sexuality to the viewing subject'.[31] In this way Minimalism's project evolved into something that was socially and politically focused.

b. Contemporaries

In 1990, American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945) was invited to do an installation at the Brooklyn Museum using its own permanent collection as source material, which he juxtaposed with large-scale texts with quotes from diverse sources such as Adolf Hitler and George Bernard Shaw printed on the walls. His aim was 'to review the history of art censorship in the wake of the American "culture wars" over

[30] ibid.
[31] Kwon, M, 1997, pp. 87–88.

National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] funding'.[32] Called *The Play of the Unmentionable,* Kosuth selected artefacts and objects from across all departments within the museum, from different time periods and cultures, acting as both an artist and a curator. From Egyptian artefacts to a Barbara Kruger, the objects Kosuth selected had all been, at one point or another, controversial or objectionable. It is interesting that whilst the show was mostly funded privately, the NEA also in fact supported it in small part. [33]

This was a controversial period of time for the arts in America. The NEA, established in 1965, was the largest source of funding for projects exhibiting artistic excellence. In 1981 Reagan attempted to abolish the NEA when he entered office, but even his conservative backers agreed that it needed to continue its legacy to support the arts. However, during the early 1990s, just before Wilson was invited to do *Mining the Museum*, there was an extremely conservative backlash in the United States against pieces of work such as Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* and any other works that were seen to be challenging institutional values, leading to certain projects that had been selected through peer review to be vetoed. In 1989 an exhibition of Mapplethorpe's photography at the Corcoran was cancelled due to external conservative pressures.

Another significant contemporary of Kosuth's who was also involved in addressing the context and situation in which a work of art might find itself was Louise Lawler (b. 1947), an American conceptual artist and photographer whose work since the 1970s

[32] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 7.
[33] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 7.

has focused on the presentation and marketing of artwork, especially the situation in which a work of art finds itself, be it the museum, the collector's house, the condition of being viewed by a spectator. She is interested in what lies outside of the artist's sphere of influence when the work of art passes from her hands (authorship) and into a space of interpretation and consumption. Like Haacke, 'Lawler's approach is equally documentary, using photography rather than installation to record the visual logic of museum display spaces and the material conditions of works of art that are hung, stored, and transported in and through them'.[34] An early work of Lawler's, *Figures and Guard* (1983), is a photograph of bronze sculptures that dwarf the museum guard seen in the background.

Andrea Fraser (b. 1965), an American performance artist and contemporary of Wilson, is often associated with his work. In her performance at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), she took on the role of a museum docent called Jane Castleton, conducting tours with visitors who would be guided around the museum galleries, cafeteria and lobby, using lofty and elevated language that was largely drawn from institutional publications to describe the things that she was seeing, including a water fountain. Wilson also employed the same methodology in *My Life as a Dog* (1992), which was a precursor to *Guarded View* (1992), when he dressed up as a security guard at the Whitney and proceeded to talk to visitors to galleries about the works on show. Either people thought he was mad and went down to tell the security desk, or they told him how clever he was and that he should not be a security guard – both problematic reactions.

[34] Gonzalez, JA, 2008, p. 328.

Wilson has often been connected to a network of artists in the 1990s and 2000s, including Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, Ellen Gallagher, Kerry James Marshall and David Hammons, who were termed 'post-black'. This was a term coined by curator Thelma Golden (b. 1965) and artist Glenn Ligon (b. 1960) in the late 1990s to distinguish them from artists – such as Jean Michel Basquiat (1960–88) – whose work had been labelled and pigeonholed in terms of their ethnicity. Post-black art instead investigated 'optical and conceptual understandings of blackness'[35] whilst refuting the label of a 'black artist'.[36] Some of the strategies they employ, particularly in reference to artists like Yinka Shonibare (b. 1959), Walker (b. 1969) and Chris Ofili (b. 1968), could be said to be a counter-colonisation of Western art.

c. Landscape

A contemporary of Wilson's addressing colonial and post-colonial subjectivities is Renée Green (b. 1959). Green makes installations within the context of the gallery that present a conflicted, non-didactic version of history that often focuses on the coloniser and the colonised, black and white, male and female perspectives. In 1992, concurrent to *Mining the Museum*, Green made a piece of work called *Import/Export Funk Office*, a multimedia installation made up of a series of metal shelving units, populated with objects, films and documents that showed how elements of African-American culture had been imported and exported in popular culture across the globe. Navigating the exhibition, visitors were required to draw their own connections between objects,

[35] Correia, A, 2011, p. 640.
[36] Nairne, E, 2011.

developing strings of counter-narratives as opposed to a classical linear narrative. Wilson and Green have worked together in alternative spaces in New York, where they both developed experimental initiatives, such as the Longwood Arts project. Although Wilson's practice is more explicitly political, both artists use allegory as a way of gathering together disparate, fragmentary and incomplete objects and artefacts.

Shonibare is a British Nigerian artist whose work, like Wilson's, explores cultural identity, colonialism and post-colonialism. He examines the complexities within the history of empire, and how post-empire and post-colonial subjectivities are entirely dependent on the legacies of colonialism, deeply inscribing Europe's relationship with its former colonies. His practice involves the re-making and re-staging of specific pieces of art from the Western historical canon, especially Classicism, Rococo and Romanticism, often using diorama-type stage sets, headless mannequins, and 'African' textiles that were actually designed and produced in factories in Holland and exported to Manchester. In 2007, Shonibare was invited by the National Gallery in London to respond to two paintings within their collection that focused on the role that the slave trade had played in the lives of two of the people featured in these paintings. One was *Mrs. Oswald* (1763–64) by Johann Zoffany, and the other was Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Colonel Tarleton* (1782). Shonibare's response took the form of his ubiquitous mannequins, dressed in elegant Georgian outfits made in his signature appropriated textiles, taking aim with muskets at pheasant strung from the ceiling. Shonibare's mimicry of the pictorial is inherently theatrical. Also in 2007, Shonibare and Wilson showed work in *Uncomfortable Truths* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where they shared the Norfolk House Music Room, both inserting works referencing

imperialism's links to slavery. Wilson's work was *Regina Atra* (2006), meaning 'Another Queen', which was a recreation of a British royal crown, but using black diamonds mounted in a matt-grey silver setting. The timing of these two exhibitions was not coincidental: both were conceived in order to commemorate the 1807 abolition (bicentennial) of the slave trade. Shows like this attempt to engage a counter-public to visit museums whose dubious colonial histories were represented in their museum collections.

While the Native American artist James Luna (b. 1950) trained as a painter, his practice has developed with a strong focus on performance and installation in his multidisciplinary practice spanning more than three decades. *Artefact Piece* performed in 1986 at the San Diego Museum of Man is one of his most iconic works. In his performance Luna presents his living body in a museum vitrine in the section on the Kumeyaay Indian people who are the traditional inhabitants of the area.

Luna challenges heavily westernised depictions of Native American people as non-existent or on the verge of disappearing by bringing his living body into the museum context. He merges the personal and political, surrounding himself with personal belongings – including Rolling Stones and Jimmy Hendrix records, political buttons and shoes – from the La Jolla reservation where he lives. He thus employs the mechanisms of museum display to reveal an Indian narrative that demonstrated a living and changing culture. In the vitrine Luna is wearing only a leather loincloth and

he is surrounded by signs that point to imperfections on his body such as scars and scratches incurred during drunken fights.[37]

In 2005 Luna was sponsored by the Museum of the American Indian to present work at the Venice Biennale, creating three installation works and a personal performance dedicated to the American Luiseño or Payómkawichum Indian author Pablo Tac (1822–1841). The Luiseño are the traditional inhabitants of the territories between the Santiago peak and the Agua Hedionda Creek of California. The name Luiseño derived from Spanish settlers who referred to the Indigenous population as the Luiseño due to the fact that many were born at Mission San Luis Rey, established in 1798. They are believed to have resided in this area for between 13,000 and 40,000 years.[38]

Pablo Tac was a significant historian and author who was born at Mission San Luis Rey de Francia. His writings incorporated Luiseño traditions such as dance and drawing to impart a unique Indigenous way of understanding the world. It was because of his distinct approach that his writings embody many traditional spiritual ideas of the Luiseño and with that he is considered a deeply significant figure in the First Nations American history. Luna is also Luiseño. His work draws on ideas of politics and memory and, for Luna, Tac is a powerful figure within the history of the Luiseño people. Luna had his own portrait painted and presented himself as an Indian scholar named James Tac, referencing the tradition of portraiture and hence bringing the legacy of Tac into the contemporary discourse surrounding Indigenous art history.[39]

[37] Lazzari, M, and Schlesier, D, 2002, p. 403.
[38] Williams, Jack S, 2003, pp. 6, 9.
[39] Haas, L, 2011, p. XIV Preface.

d. Crisis within the museum

Since the 19th century, narrating a linear view of history has been at the heart of the pedagogic and educational role of the museum.[40] Thus, museums are ideological sites where hierarchies are established and belief systems are confirmed.[41] For example, in the late 19th century museum displays were constructed to establish a social evolutionist teleology that Western civilisation and the white race were the destiny of history. Through hermeneutically reinterpreting existing material, contemporary art's interventions in museums aim to unpack the value systems inherent in their displays, thereby exposing their contradictions and raising ethical questions regarding institutional power, authority and assumptions of truth.[42]

Historically, the most important guiding aspect of the museum exhibition had always come down to a question of provenance.[43] In the early 1990s, provenance, defined as the place of origin or earliest known history of something and used as a guide to measure its authenticity or quality, had been the touchstone but also the dictating factor over the kinds of exhibitions that could be shown in museums and institutions. As a rule, if you didn't have the object, you couldn't do the show. This contributed to a general feeling around 1990 – at the time of *Mining the Museum* – that the future of the museum was in a state of crisis; that it was in danger of becoming a fossilised relic, its representation of the past lacking in relevance to the present. This was because museums with traditional collections had gained these artefacts typically from the same pool of collectors. However, this had also been a convenient way for museums to

[40] Robins, C, and Baxter, M, 2011, p. 247.
[41] King- Hammond, L. and Wilson, F, 1994, p. 1.
[42] Robins and Baxter, 2011, p. 248.
[43] Ciscle, G, Corrin, L, Crew, S, Wilson, F et al., 2013.

absolve themselves of the responsibility to put on programmes that would speak to a broader spectrum of people from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

These issues coincided with the global economic recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In order to receive continuing government support and funding, public institutions were required to validate themselves through various data collection analyses and justifications such as attendance numbers and revenue figures. This could only be achieved if the museums were active in engaging their public with a diverse and exciting programme. This is what George Ciscle has termed the 'peak of the culture wars in 1989/90'[44], when museums had to start thinking about an entirely new audience in addition to the already prevalent middle-class, white, educated, privileged one. Museums had to do this with their existing collections – there was no substantial additional funding available at this time to expand these in any meaningful way – so museums needed to develop new curatorial approaches, using the objects already there to construct new narratives and dialogues that then in turn could be re-interpreted by an audience, sparking a critical voice, yet simultaneously new life around the museum. Wilson made his installation at precisely the time when museums had, for the first time, to take responsibility for their potential re-representations of their own collections. In doing this museums inevitably highlighted the ideological assumptions of their archive. In effect, Wilson attacked the fact that had existed for so long in museums, that provenance ruled all.[45]

> To speak of the ideological apparatus underlying museum practice is to speak of the relation among power, representation, and cultural identity; of how

[44] http://bmoreart.com/2015/11/conversations-episode-5-interview-with-george-ciscle.html
[45] ibid.

> history is written and communicated; of whose history is voiced and whose is silenced.[46]

Prior to 1950, there were approximately 30 museums devoted primarily to African-American culture and history in the United States. After the Civil Rights Movement of the ’60s, this number expanded exponentially, including some of the first significant not-for-profit museums such as the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, Illinois (founded in 1960), and the Charles H Wright Museum of African American History. By 1991 there were about 150 African-American museums in 37 states.

The whole conceptualist landscape of the 1960s was an attempt to move beyond the museum, from Land artists who sought an alternative space and performance artists who sought to transform art objects into events that could not be either marketed (as consumer objects) or museumfied – minimalists who sought to change the nature of the relationship between the viewer and the artwork to conceptualists like Haacke who critiqued the relationship between the museum, capitalism and power. But all these protests were duly archived in the museum, which perhaps explains the archival turn; that is, that the museum could not be destroyed but it could be deconstructed.

In the 1970s there were also active protests against the museum as a bourgeois, white, patriarchal institution. These did provoke some changes, and the landscape within the institution started to change; for example, with more black people and women being employed at managerial and curatorial levels. However, building connections to the local communities and re-building the collections themselves proved to be a very slow

[46] Corrin, L, 1994, Introduction.

process. There was still this issue of provenance at the heart of its archival practices dominating museum programming, leading to its critical reappraisal as a premise within Wilson's installation:

> He was making the point that provenance is in the eye of the beholder. What is the part of history of the object that gives it authority, that gives it value, that situates it in life? Is it the person who owns it? Is it the person who serves with it? Is it the person who cleans it at night? Whose connection is more important in these stories?[47]

An aspect of the human condition is that we receive most of our information and experience vicariously from others. In this way, says Ivan Karp, the world we see and interpret is mediated, possibly even curated by others:

> In everyday life, people do not experience a world of solid fact. Their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by readymade interpretations, many of them exhibited in museums. The images of the world and of themselves are offered by crowds of witnesses never met and never to be met. Yet for every person these images provided by strangers, and by the dead, are the very basis of life as a human being.[48]

The museum is caught in a conundrum. It came into being as a pedagogical and democratic instrument that, at the same time, is charged with being the guardian and preserver of the canon and, in the West at least, advocate of freedom of speech, challenge and dissent. So, on the one hand, museums are intrinsically political, yet their very nature makes them receptacles of subjectivity.[49] There are also many different categories of museum to take into account, with varying agendas:

[47] Ciscle, G, Corrin, L, Crew, S, Wilson, F et al., 2013.
[48] Karp, I, and Wilson, F, 1996, p. 261.
[49] ibid.

> Some of what museums tell us about the nature of society, of cultures, and of diversity is shared, but some is not ... Just look at the behavior of children in an art museum and the behavior of children in a natural-history or a science museum; clearly they are being invited to act in very different ways.[50]

This also goes for the way in which museums have in the past generally structured their displays around the Western tradition as the heart of its conception of universality, a structure that assumes the precedence of Western ideology and a Western audience. Thus, often non-Western cultures such as Native, Hispanic and African-American are found on the ground or the lower-ground floors. Even in its architecture the museum becomes 'not just a story of the Western canon, but the story of the evolution of art and appreciation in terms of, very often, abstraction and separation'.[51] Whilst natural history museums use the diorama[52] (which can also be seen as a type of trompe l'oeil) to re-enact scenes of gender roles (the male-dominant, female-subservient), cultural-historical museums like the MDHS selectively reveal and conceal what they consider are the important and unimportant aspects of social history. In these ways they construct a story from the perspective of the dominant social class within that cultural space. Karp says that this was the reason, in the early 1990s, for a reaction against museums, because some people enter them with an attitude of faith whilst others – especially those from minority groups – enter them with an attitude of scepticism.[53]

e. Post-colonial discourse

[50] ibid., p. 263.
[51] Karp, I, and Wilson, F, 1996, p. 264.
[52] Almost a type of trompe l'oeil – visual illusion in art, especially as used to trick the eye into perceiving a painting detail as a three-dimensional object.
[53] Karp and Wilson, op. cit., p. 265.

The vast reappraisal of the museum system at the end of the 20th century was prompted by demands for racial, gender and sexually oriented equality. At this time emphasis was being placed on the catchwords 'diversity', 'multiculturalism', 'deconstruction,' and 'inclusion', due to the rising pressure by native populations for museums to return their cultural heritage, and to make new commitments to representing multiculturalism.[54] Karp argues that society at large has always been multicultural, that we have never been monocultural, but that how we might proceed is to 'turn our multiculturalism into something different. Namely a society based on cultural pluralism – a society in which people can be different things, and sometimes can be more than one thing, without suffering censorship'.[55]

In Lowery Stokes-Sim's essay, 'Fred Wilson: Musings on and Mining of Museums', she initiates her dialogue by pronouncing that 'Fred Wilson's career might not have come into being if it were not for the existence of museums'.[56]

In Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, the museum is forced to look at its own social and political constructions of history, including that of prejudice, race and slavery. What happens to museums that have not just hidden or refused to see an aspect of their history, but have alternatively perhaps exoticised other societies and cultures in order to maintain colonial domination over them?[57] Mieke Bal has said that the way in

[54] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 1.
[55] Karp, I, and Wilson, F, 1996, p. 260.
[56] Stokes Sims, L, 2011, p. 11.
[57] Corrin, LG, op cit, p.1.

which museums are repeatedly and emphatically trying to address this issue signals a deeper anxiety:

> There is nothing surprising about this anxiety: the museum is a product of colonialism in a postcolonial era.[58]

The museum has acknowledged itself as an 'endangered' species, engaging in an activity of collection, preservation and presentation that will only serve to turn it into a veritable dinosaur. Therefore, in accepting this fact about itself, it has had to reassess and recalibrate its very reasons for existence.

Slavery, as a subject, was rarely addressed in mainstream American cultural institutions prior to the late 1970s:

> Since the social upheavals of the 1960s cultural practitioners of various stripes, from historian David Brion Davis to novelist Toni Morrison, have increasingly emphasised the centrality of slavery for any understanding of life, history and politics in the modern West.[59]

The visualisation of this history gives volume and shape to the past, and in doing so 'actively produces it in the present, providing signal points of departure for work within and against institutional settings, hegemonic ways of seeing, and progressive

[58] Bal, M, 1992, p. 558.
[59] Copeland, H, and Thompson, K, 2011, p. 5.

narratives'.[60] Copeland and Thompson go on to propose that the techniques and ways of seeing enslavement in the past reconstitutes it in the present, because the search for freedom is never quite reached, but is an ongoing, 'elusive' process. *Mining the Museum* brings slavery at an intimate distance to the viewer:

> The aim of such strategies is not merely historical recovery, but is part of the attempt to make visible that which was seen and not seen by bracketing the visual phantasms that the archive of slavery everywhere throws up and instead focusing on the hard evidence offered by the ongoing transformation of visual objects themselves.[61]

For Wilson, everyslave – a term that referenced the threat of a slave uprising – denoted in modern America the ever-impending threat of black rebellion.

Approximately a month after *Mining the Museum* opened at MDHS, the Los Angeles riots were sparked by the case of Rodney King, so race was very much present in the public consciousness at that time. Joanne Jones-Rizzi, speaking in Baltimore at the 20-year reappraisal of the effect of *Mining the Museum*, has said that the show proposed each person is made up of a multitude of identities, and challenged the notion of a 'mono-cultural myth of a black community'.[62] This mirrors the way in which Wilson emphasised the importance of individuals bringing their own interpretation to the work.

> Even now, it is not race specifically that is my subject. I am acutely aware of people's racial blind spots, but I am most interested in people who are marginal

[60] ibid., p. 6.
[61] Copeland, H, and Thompson, K, 2011, p.10.
[62] Jones-Rizzi, J in Ciscle, G, Corrin, L, Crew, S, Wilson, F, Jones-Rizzi, J et al., 2013.

or invisible to the majority, and the larger society's denial of certain issues. That goes way beyond race.[63]

f. Virtual tour of *Mining the Museum*

NB To see images of these works, go to:

http://www.mdhs.org/digital-images?SearchTitles=&field_creator_value=&field_collection_value=&field_subject_value=%22Mining+the+Museum%22

Also, search for individual works online.

NB Labels used by Wilson in the actual exhibition are in CAPITALS, whilst the catalogue entries are denoted by the use of square brackets: [ ]

ATRIUM

At the entrance of the MDHS, the signage for the exhibition reflects and mimics official museum language and presentation: a red, green and black exhibition banner is hung next to the official museum sign, announcing that 'another' history is now being told inside. As you enter the atrium, a monitor plays with a short video of Wilson introducing you to the exhibition. The museum is a place 'where anything can happen', a space designed to 'make you think, to make you question'[64], he says, and then asks visitors to consider what might have changed in the museum as a result of the 'mining'.

[63] Wilson, F, Goncharov, K, 2003.
[64] Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al., (contr.), 1994, pp. 13.

This is a way of preparing the audience for a very different version of the museum than they might expect.

'*Mining the Museum* occupied the entire third floor at MDHS, extending through a linked sequence of eight rooms. The wall colors – successively gray, green, red and blue – were components of Wilson's "palette", as visitors moved through the "gray" area of historical truths, the "green" quarters of human emotions, the "red" environs of slavery and rebellion, and the celestial "blue" spheres of dreams and achievements.'[65]

Transcript of educational handout installed in elevators at the Maryland Historical Society, created by project curators for use throughout the museum during Wilson's exhibition:

MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM

What is it?

Where is it? Why?

What is it saying?

How is it used?

For whom was it created?

[65] Stein, JE, 1993.

For whom does it exist?

Who is represented?

How are they represented?

Who is doing the telling? The hearing?

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What can you touch?

What do you feel?

What do you think?

Where are you?

MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM – MINING THE MUSEUM

THESE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE CURATORS OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY[66]

GRAY ROOM # 1

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[66] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 58.

As you go up to the third floor of the MDHS you exit the elevator and enter a room, which presents a silver globe on which a brass relief of the word 'TRUTH', in capitals, has been attached. Eight empty acrylic mounts, highlighting their purpose as objects to perform the function of display, surround this.

'A plaque at the base indicates that the "Truth Trophy" was first awarded to the advertising Men's League of New York, an organization whose commitment to accuracy has no doubt been questioned more than once in the course of the twentieth century. The Truth Trophy offers a sardonic welcome to an exhibit in which truth, universal truth, is at best contested.'[67]

> Whose truth when you're talking about art history? Where's the truth in museums? And so this was the first object you saw. Not the title of the exhibition, not my name, just this.[68]

GLOBE

[by Mr. Thoman, c. 1913, Baltimore

Silver plated copper

Designed and crafted by Mr. Thoman, produced by Steiff Company.]

Word 'Truth' attached in brass letters. Plaque on base reads: 'Awarded to / The Advertising Men's League of New York / 1913 / The Minneapolis Advertising Forum

[67] Berlin, I, 1994.
[68] Wilson, F, 2010.

/ 1914 / The Advertising Club of Indianapolis / 1915 / The Advertising Club of Milwaukee / 1916 / The Kansas City Advertising Club / 1917 / The Advertising Club of Indianapolis / 1918 / The Cleveland Advertising Club / 1919 and 1920.'

Known familiarly as the 'Truth Trophy'.

ACRYLIC MOUNTS

[Maker unknown, c. 1960s

Plexiglas]

'The artist's sense of humor, in particular his fine-tuned instinct for irony, lay behind the central placement of this trophy used by an industry whose modus operandi is the manipulation of truth. The unburdened mounts, now historical objects themselves, focused attention on the covert methodology of museum presentation.'[69]

HARRIET TUBMAN

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

BENJAMIN BANNEKER

[THREE EMPTY PEDESTALS

LABELLED Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Banneker]

[69] Stein, JE, 1993.

HENRY CLAY

[HENRY CLAY (1777–1852)

By Shobal Vail Clevenger, c. 1870

Plaster

Gift of Osmond Tiffany]

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

[NAPOLEON BONAPARTE (1769–1821)

Artist unknown, c. 1850

Marble

Gift of Mrs. Charles J. Bonaparte]

ANDREW JACKSON

[ANDREW JACKSON (1769–1821)

By C. Hennecke & Co., c. 1870

Plaster]

On each side of the Globe there are three pedestals: on the right side white pedestals support the busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte and Andrew Jackson, none of whom actually ever lived in Maryland, whilst on the left side 'dark' pedestals[70] are left empty, signifying the absence of three important historical African-American figures of Maryland history from the MDHS's Collection; Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Benjamin Banneker.

> DOCENT 6: Mining the Museum let's [sic] you 'do your own thing', and people then take the time to think about each detail. Once I said to Fred, 'It's interesting that all of the white people on the pedestals at the beginning of the exhibition were slaveholders – and even Napoleon had slaves from Egypt. It's particularly fascinating that you put Napoleon between Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson, because they were bitter enemies'. And Fred said, 'I didn't know that'. I went on about Henry Clay and how important he was for postponing the Civil War for a period of years through the Missouri Compromise. Fred replied, 'Oh, I didn't know that either. If you want to read into it, that's fine'.[71]

GRAY ROOM # 2

PORTRAITS OF CIGAR-STORE OWNERS

[70] 'A Change of Heart: Fred Wilson's impact on museums', from the Victoria and Albert Museum. A curator he was working with actually brought them out of the basement for him, therefore starting to glean what he was trying to do during the course of the research within the collection. http://vimeo.com/11838838

[71] Extract from an interview with docents who did guided tours around the installation. From Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), 1994, p. 50.

Five statues of wooden Indians stand in a semi-circle, facing the walls; problematic sculptures that a lot of museums in Baltimore possess. These portraits of 'Native American Indians' were used in cigar stores, made by Western artists. German John Philip Yeager is listed as the artist of three of them. One of the figures is even based on the portrait of his daughter, Eva Isabelle.

Wilson has labelled them:

PORTRAIT OF JOHN PHILIP YEAGER'S DAUGHTER by John Philip Yeager

[WOODEN INDIAN (Portrait of the artist's daughter, Eva Isabelle)

By John Philip Yeager (1823–99), c. 1870

Wood, gesso, polychrome

Gift of Mr. Albert Hendler]

PORTRAIT OF UNKNOWN CIGAR-STORE OWNER by John Philip Yeager

[WOODEN INDIAN by John Philip Yeager (1823–99)

1879

Wood, gesso, polychrome

Gift of Mr. Albert Hendler]

PORTRAIT OF JOHN KLEIN by J.C. Yeager

[WOODEN INDIAN, Attributed to John Philip Yeager (1823–99), c. 1878

Wood, gesso, polychrome

Gift of Miss Ida Klein, Mr. Alvin O. Klein, and Mr. G.H. Klein]

PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH BUCKLER Artist unknown

[WOODEN INDIAN 'Minnehanna' c. 1870s

Wood, gesso, polychrome

Purchase, Mrs. Elizabeth Buckler]

PORTRAIT OF BERNARD FASTENHAMER by John Philip Yeager

[WOODEN INDIAN By John Philip Yeager (1823–99)

1870s

Wood, gesso, polychrome

Gift of Russell E. Birney]

The contiguous gallery contained five cigar-store Indians, labelled as portraits of cigar-store owners and audaciously placed with their backs to us. The gender of these

stalwart advertisements for tobacco was not always easy to read (pecs look like bosoms); they appeared to embody the buxom ideals of Victorian beauty and as such could be viewed as progenitors of the cuties in modern cigarette ads. Following the gaze of these wooden stereotypes, visitors encountered a collection of borrowed photographs of Native Americans, images unremarkable but real people recorded in everyday circumstances.[72]

NINA ROBINSON, ROSALIE ROBINSON, LOUISE ROBINSON, MARGARET PROCTOR, SELENA PROCTOR

[American Indian Culture Center, Brandywine, Maryland

Photographer unknown, 1990

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

GLADYS AND RAY PROCTOR

[Brandywine, Maryland

Photographer: Marion Warren, 1990

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

[72] Stein, JE, 1993.

GERTRUDE AND AUGUSTINE SAVOY

[Saint Ignatius Church, Bel Alton, Maryland

Photographer unknown

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

RICKY ROBINSON AND LAVENNE THOMPSON

[Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Photographer unknown, 1946

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

GONZIE SWANN

[Photographer unknown, c. 1935

Black-and-white photograph

Collection: Ricky Swann Robinson

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

JIMMY LINKINS, JENNY PROCTOR

[Faulkner, Maryland

Photographer unknown, c. 1930

Black-and-white photograph

Collection: Ricky Swann Robinson

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

SAMUEL A. GRAY, MARY V. GRAY, SONDRA (PROCTOR) GRAY

[Gray's Store, Marbury, Maryland

Photographer: Marion Warren, 1990

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs, Maryland Historical Trust]

On the walls are hung framed black-and-white photographs. These are of the Native American community in Maryland. When Wilson asked one of the curators whether there was a Native American community, he was told there wasn't one, so he went out

and found it. And the people in this community gave him these photographs, the only objects brought in from outside the museum.[73]

> Some say this exhibit is more about art than about history, but it is profoundly about history, about objectivity versus reality and changing concepts of race over time. Societal construction of race is suggested by wooden Indians, whose backs are toward to audience, facing photographs of real Native Americans. Reference to African Americans who 'passed' for whites shows the fluidity of race boundaries and definitions, at different costs to both races.[74]

CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERFOWLING REGION

There had been a decoy duck show on previously (initiated and sponsored by a trustee). Wilson left one of the maps, printed on the wall, of the hunting club locations in Baltimore, simply adding the names of the native tribes in that area.[75] For example, next to the 'Whittington Point Gun Club', Wilson has added the tribe name 'ASSATEAGUE', next to 'Thomas Point Gun Club' and 'Cedar Point Gun Club' are the tribe names 'NANTICOKE' and 'ANACOSTIA', in capitals.

COLLECTION OF NUMBERS 76.1.25.3 – 76.1.67.11

White drawing ink, black India ink, lacquer, c. 1976

[73] 'A Change of Heart: Fred Wilson's impact on museums', from the Victoria and Albert Museum, http://vimeo.com/11838838
[74] Frankel, N, 1993, pp. 106.
[75] See 'A Change of Heart: Fred Wilson's impact on museums', from the Victoria and Albert Museum, http://vimeo.com/11838838

[AMERICAN INDIAN ARROWHEADS c. 1600

Stone, 76.1.25.3 – 76.1.67.11

Gift of the Maryland Academy of Sciences]

There is a vitrine containing a pile of hewn arrowheads, each labelled with a number in black ink on a white ground. By placing them in a pile surrounding two acrylic mounts and labelling them by their numbers, with the date 1976, Wilson is highlighting the fact that the information made most prominent by the museum is the white lettering on the stones that records the date on which it was found; 'the registration system has eclipsed the object registered'.[76]

WE SHARED OUR KNOWLEDGE AND OUR LIVES

AMERICAN INDIAN

Stone arrowheads, axes, hoes, pelts, oyster shell tool for hollowing canoes. c. 1600

[AMERICAN INDIAN ARTIFACTS c. 1600

Stone arrowheads, axes, hoes, pelts, oyster shell tool for hollowing canoes

Marion V Brewington Collection]

Prototype model of five-log canoe showing a finished side and a rough-hewn side

[76] Stein, JE, 1993.

Prototype built in 1893

[MODEL OF CANOE, FIVE LOG TYPE

By William Calvert Steuart, 1893

Wood, M. 62.9.60

Gift of William Calvert Steuart]

In another vitrine the model of a boat with its sails unfurled sits at the back, whilst arranged in front are various Native American tools used for boat-building. Two images of Indians in canoes also sit at the front of the vitrine.

GREEN ROOM #1

In Green Room #1 is a series of paintings depicting wealthy families in the 19th century. Notable in all of them is a black child, most often in the corner of the painting, or peering out behind a corner or in a doorway. These figures were often used as a compositional tool to balance the central figures in 18th-century portraiture.[77] The pigments used to paint the skin were generally very tonally flat rendering the black children virtually invisible. Wilson has installed a motion-activated sensor that, when triggered, lights the section of the painting that they occupy, and simultaneously audio is played, giving voice to those historically silenced individuals.

[77] See Corrin, LG, 1994, p.14, and Bindman, D, and Gates, HL (eds), 2014, p. 239.

Three significant works:

CHILDREN OF COMMODORE JOHN DANIEL DANIELS

[Attributed to Robert Street (1796–1865), c. 1826

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Elinor Douglas Wise De Richelieu]

Five white children sit in a living room each holding an object of play; for example, a bubble-maker, a flute and a book. A black boy in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting lies on his side, looking up at the children. In the top left-hand corner, barely visible, another black boy peers from behind a half-open door.

Audio:

WHERE DID I COME FROM?

WHERE DID I GO?

WHAT ARE MY DREAMS?

THE ALEXANDER CONTEE HANSON FAMILY

[By Robert Edge Pine (c. 1730–88), c. 1787

Oil on canvas

Dr. Michael and Marie Abrams Memorial Purchase Fund]

The mother of the family sits on a couch with a baby on her lap, whilst a young girl at her feet clutches the lead of a dog. The father, standing, gestures to his land whilst looking at his wife who stares into the middle distance. Barely visible, a young black girl stands at the left-hand edge of the painting, the frame of which cuts her in half.

Audio:

WHERE IS MY MOTHER?

WHO WASHES MY BACK?

WHO COMBS MY HAIR?

WHO CALMS ME WHEN I AM AFRAID?

HENRY DARNALL III (1702 – AFTER 1788)

[By Justus Engelhardt Kuhn (?–1717), c. 1710

Unsigned

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Miss Ellen C. Daingerfield]

A white boy dressed in red and gold brocade holds an arrow in his right hand, whilst his left rests on the end of a vertically balanced bow. On his back is a quiver of arrows. He stands in front of a stone balustrade, behind which the sumptuous parks and buildings of his family can be seen. To his right, leaning over the balustrade, a black boy of around the same age is proffering up to the white boy the spoils of the hunt: a dead bird. Around his neck is a silver collar, indicating his status as the boy's possession.

Audio:

AM I YOUR BROTHER?

AM I YOUR FRIEND?

AM I YOUR PET?

> DOCENT 9: One fourth-grader asked me [in reference to the painting of Henry Darnall by Justus Englehardt Kuhn], 'Why does he have the silver band around his neck?' I said (because that's the way we used to say it), 'That's his little friend.' He said, 'You don't put a collar around your friend's neck.'[78]

In the same room is a series of watercolours by Benjamin H Latrobe, which shows genre scenes of the everyday lives of slaves in America. Wilson has renamed each one, personifying them, in order to correspond to other material (documentation) in RED ROOM #1 that refers to particular named slaves, either in the form of a landowner's inventory or reward notices for slaves who had escaped:

[78] Extract from an interview with docents who did guided tours around the installation. From Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), 1994, p. 51.

EASTER'S MOTHER

[MARKET FOLKS

by Benjamin H. Latrobe (1764–1820)

Undated (c. 1819)

Pencil, watercolor

Purchase, Mrs. Ferdinand C. Latrobe II]

JOB AND JOSEPH CHEW

[EXTRAORDINARY APPEARANCES IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH

by Benjamin H. Latrobe (1764–1820)

August 2, 1797

Pencil, pen and ink, watercolor

Purchase, Mrs. Ferdinand C. Latrobe II]

RICHARD, NED AND THEIR BROTHERS

[PREPARATIONS FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF A FINE SUNDAY AMONG THE BLACKS, NORFOLK

by Benjamin H. Latrobe (1764–1820)

March 4, 1797

Pencil, pen and ink, watercolor]

JACK ALEXANDER IN A CANOE

[VIEW OF WELCH POINT AND THE MOUTH OF BACKCREEK

by Benjamin H. Latrobe (1764–1820)

(After August 4) 1806

Pencil, watercolor]

PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN MAN

[by Henry Bebie (c. 1824–88)

1860

Oil on canvas]

This portrait is one that Wilson insisted be taken out of storage. He has flouted institutional convention by showing a work meant for restoration, a work normally hidden away in storage. It had been defaced, with a rip running right across the subject's face. Wilson has placed a video behind the gap in the painting showing a recording of one of the black maintenance men who works at the MDHS with whom

Wilson had been engaged in long conversations about the Society's collection. Wilson has installed a motion-activated audio loop that pronounces to visitors:

> Nobody knows that I'm inside you, except Mamma. She lives far away. I promise that I won't expose myself to your wife. And if you move, your children will never know. But you have to live with me constantly reminding you of what you've been missing and what you did until the day you die.

With brilliant economy of means Wilson conveys the complexity of racial identity, suggesting the covert heritage of African-American blood in those persons society perceives as Caucasian.[79]

Wilson suggests, through the disembodied black eye and nose emerging through the portrait of the white man, a narrative of the unknown subject – a hidden racial identity – the son of a white master who raped the subject's enslaved black mother.[80] Wilson is questioning the concept of a pure racial identity.

PATRIOTIC ENVELOPE

[Confederate States of America, c. 1861

Lithograph

Gift of the Hon. Henry Stockbridge, 1923]

[79] Stein, JE, 1993.
[80] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 14.

On a circular table covered in blue silk sits an envelope on which is printed the oval portrait of George Washington, above naming him as ‘One of the Rebels’, and below ‘The Southern Gentleman, and Slaveholder. C.S.A.’ A replica plastic hand with a white silk cuff rests gently on the envelope.

FREDERICK SERVING FRUIT

[COUNTRY LIFE OF A BALTIMORE FAMILY]

[By Ernst G. Fischer (1815–94),

1850

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Ruth Katz Strouse]

Wilson has added an additional label on the left-hand side of the painting, ‘Frederick Serving Fruit’, to highlight the sole black servant in the painting, who serves white people fruit. On the right-hand side is the label ‘Country Life of a Baltimore Family’.

OU EST MON VISAGE? (WHERE IS MY FACE?)

[MRS. THOMAS EVERETTE AND CHILDREN

by Joshua Johnson (c. 1735 – c. 1835, active 1796–1824),

c. 1818

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Miss Mary Augusta Clarke]

Wilson has renamed another oil painting of a white Baltimore lady with her children, to ask 'Where is my face?' in reference to the fact that the painter who made this painting, Joshua Johnson, was African-American, and perhaps also in reference to himself. There are many paintings by Joshua Johnson in the archives of the Society, but not one single portrait of him exists.

Wilson forces the visitor to recognise the paradoxical invisibility of African-Americans in portrayals of American life. This sense of frustration at not being seen is exemplified by the caption '*Ou est mon visage?'* (Where is my face?), placed by a portrait of whites by the African-American painter Joshua Johnson. Ironically, there is no extant portrait of Johnson.'[81]

PICNIC AT WYE HOUSE

[Photographer unknown, c. 1888

Albumen print]

[81] Frankel, N, 1993, p. 106.

A black and white photograph shows over 30 people having a picnic. Wilson has enlarged the detail of a black figure at the top right-hand corner of the photograph:

> The artist discovered that the scene depicted a reunion of former slaves and their owners. One man had worked in the kitchen, established himself as the caterer, and returned to service the affair.[82]

[PERRY HALL

By Francis Guy (1760–1820),

1805

Oil on canvas

Mrs. Drayton Meade Hite Purchase Fund in memory of her husband]

[PERRY HALL SLAVE QUARTERS WITH FIELD HANDS AT WORK

By Francis Guy (1760–1820)

1805

Oil on canvas

Gift of Edwin White Obrecht in memory of his wife, Doris Merle Obrecht]

[82] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 14.

[BATTLE MONUMENT, BALTIMORE

By W. Goodacre, Jr.; Archer & Boilly

Copyright: 1834

Engraving]

In a vitrine, there are glassine-covered 19th-century lithographs of city scenes:

[BALTIMORE CITY SPRING

By August Kollner

Deroy, copyright: 1848

Lithograph, printed with buff tint]

[BALTIMORE HOSPITAL

By August Kollner

Deroy, copyright: 1848

Lithograph]

[WATERLOO INN: THE FIRST STAGE FROM BALTIMORE TO WASHINGTON

By F.F. de Roos; T.M. Baynes

Copyright: 1827

Lithograph]

_____

GREEN ROOM #2

MODES OF TRANSPORT

In this room is a variety of ‘Modes of Transport’, including two baby carriages, a sedan chair and a model of a schooner sitting on top of a glass-covered display case that contains the state inventory of Nicholas Carroll.

MARYLAND IN 1750

by Frank B. Mayer, c. 1856

Oil on canvas

[MY LADY’S VISIT or ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND, IN 1750

by Frank B. Mayer, c. 1856

Oil on canvas

Deposited by the Peabody Institute]

An oil painting shows white dignitaries being transported by sedan chair, carried by black valets.

SEDAN CHAIR

Maker unknown, c. 1770

Used by Governor Eden, 'one of the last royal governors of Maryland'.

[painted wood, gilded gesso, leather,

Gift of Mrs. Alexa du Pont Oritz de Bie and Miss Elizabeth Vrendenburgh Knight]

The room features a sedan chair displayed beside a model slave ship and a painting depicting a similar chair in use. Selective lighting on the painting highlights who carried whom in the once lavishly decorated chair. (Wilson was emphatic about leaving the dust that had gathered on the poorly conserved chair while in storage. He again makes the point that the issue of 'quality ... the hidden dagger of "my taste"' is used for avoiding the exhibition of such an object.[83]

BABY CARRIAGE

[83] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 15.

Maker unknown, purchased in Baltimore, c. 1908

Black with bone-colored wood handle, black leather hood, and padded interior.

[Wood, leather and metal,

Gift of Mrs. John Norris]

Inside is placed a Ku Klux Klan hood:

HOOD

Maker unknown, Maryland, 20th century

White muslin hood with eyeholes, faded red tassel,

and interfacing

Obviously used in Ku Klux Klan activities.

Found in attic in house in Towson.

Anonymous gift

[HOOD

Maker unknown, Maryland

20th century

Muslin, 87.22

Anonymous gift]

A Ku Klux Klan hood in a pram signifies the irony of African-American women raising generations of white supremacists. In this instance, for white men and women, the personal failed to connect with the political although, under segregation, power relations were very personal for African-Americans.[84]

Nearby is a set of vintage photographs of black nannies looking after white children:

MOUNT VERNON PLACE

Photographer unknown, c. 1900

Gelatin silver print

ESTATE INVENTORY OF NICHOLAS CARROLL

1812, Nicholas Carroll Estate Inventory

[MS. 2634, Manuscripts Division, Maryland Historical Society Library]

ACCOUNT OF CALEB GOODWIN'S ESTATE SALES c. 1855

[Johnston and Donaldson Papers, MS 1564

[84] Frankel, N, 1993, p. 106.

Manuscripts Division, Maryland Historical Library]

This is a list of all the possessions of Caleb Goodwin. On the left side is listed vegetable produce. On the right side are slaves and animals listed with their equivalent monetary value.

Extract:

‘One negro boy Daniel Hensly aged eighteen years	600.00
One negro girl Sophy twelve years of age	350.00
One negro woman Hannah seventy three years of age	1.00
One old Mule called Coby	5.00’

MODEL OF BALTIMORE CLIPPER (RIGGED AS A BRIG) OF THE TYPE CONVERTED TO SLAVERS AFTER THE WAR OF 1812

Made by Henry Pratt Jones, c. 1942

[MODEL OF CHAUSSER, BALTIMORE CLIPPER SCHOONER

Scale 1/4” = 1’

Gift of Mrs. Henry Pratt Jones]

The model of a boat sits in a vitrine that in turn stands on a display cabinet that holds a variety of documentation about slaves, including the Nicholas Carroll inventory and this following reward notice:

> [BROADSIDE FOR THE RETRIEVAL OF THE RUNAWAY SLAVE, ANANIAS DIVERS
> Baltimore, May 30, 1810]
>
> ’50 Dollars Reward
>
> Absconded from on board the Sloop Jolly Miller, in Baltimore, on the 28th inst. a Negro Man, named JACK, sometimes calls himself JACK ALEXANDER; about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high; not very black, with a small scar on his forehead, round face and talks fast when first spoken to; he is a very active and a good countenanced fellow. It is supposed he will obtain a pass as a free man: his objective is to go to sea and will be trying to ship on board some vessel bound out. He had on and took with him a brown jacket with pearl buttons, and waistcoat of the same; his trousers coarse white country cloth, with a variety of other clothes that he has with him. Whoever takes up and secures said Negro in any jail, shall receive, if taken in the city, 20 dollars; if 30 miles from Baltimore, 30 dollars; if 40 miles, 40 dollars; and if out of the state, the above reward, and all reasonable charges, if brought home to
>
> Ananias Divers,
> Near Wm. PATTERSON, Esq’rs. Mills, Gunpowder Falls.
>
> March 30th, 1810.
>
> N.B. All Masters of vessels and others are forewarned harboring or taking off said Negro, at their peril.
>
> Baltimore – Printed by W. PECHIN, Office of the American.’

METALWORK 1793–1880

SILVER VESSELS IN BALTIMORE REPOUSSÉ STYLE

1830–80

Contained within a standard exhibition case, simply labelled with 'Metalwork, 1723–1880', is a series of goblets, urns and decanters surrounding a set of slave shackles. Additional labels have been placed inside the case: 'Silver vessels in Baltimore Repousse style' and 'Slave shackles'.

> I put on view things they had in storage but had never shown. For example, in a case with silver I placed, with the label 'Metalwork 1793–1870', some slave shackles from the collection. In addition to showing things from the collection that had never been shown, the exhibition also introduced a history which the museum and the community wouldn't talk about: the history of the exclusion and abuse that African-American people experienced in that area. It also examined the museum's viewpoint on that history as indicated by its collecting patterns since 1840. What they collected – and didn't collect – really showed where they were at. … So I placed them together, because normally you have one museum for beautiful things and one museum for horrific things. Actually, they had a lot to do with one another; the production of one was made possible by the subjugation enforced by the other.[85]

[85] Karp, I, and Wilson, F, 1996, p. 256.

Indeed, the dates in the work's title denote the years of two blows against slavery in the Western Hemisphere: the institution was curtailed in Canada in 1793 and the law that would end it in Cuba was passed in 1880, though this temporal framing flies in the face of the histories told by the vessels themselves ... Wilson's dating not only reorients the historical and discursive positioning of these objects – often displayed in exhibitions of Baltimore silver – but also undoes their functioning as vehicles for the commemoration of communal ties and the transmission of white wealth ... he decreases their value and underlines their fundamental liquidity as assets.[86]

[SILVER REPOUSSÉ CAN

By Bailey & Kitchen, Philadelphia

1845

Gift of Mrs. Channing LeClare Delaplane]

[SILVER CREAMER

By A.E. Warner, Baltimore

Gift of Mrs. Edward B. Powell]

[SILVER CHRISTENING MUG

[86] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 50.

By Leonard & Wilson, Philadelphia

1850

Gift of Mr. Campbell Lloyd Stirling]

[SET OF FOUR SILVER GOBLETS

From the U.S.S. Baltimore

Gift of the City of Baltimore]

[SILVER REPOUSSÉ PITCHER

By Samuel Kirk & Son, Baltimore

1890

Gift of the City of Baltimore]

[SILVER URN

By Samuel Kirk, Baltimore, c. 1830

Kirk Collection]

[SILVER PITCHER

By Samuel Kirk, Baltimore, c. 1830

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Neubauer, Jr.]

SLAVE SHACKLES

Maker unknown

Made in Baltimore, c. 1793–1872

[Loaned for *Mining the Museum* by a private collector]

DOLLHOUSE

Maker unknown, c. 1900

[Painted wood

Purchased at the auction of the Estate of Van Lear Black]

This is the first of two dollhouses in the show in which Wilson overthrows race and slave hierarchy. In one of the rooms a female black doll is surrounded by a circle of small black warriors clutching spears and lassos, whilst behind her on the wall hangs a portrait of two white female dolls side by side.

Another Victorian dollhouse with a conjurer woman suggesting the power of African-American culture in helping slaves create their own spiritual space removed from the masters.[87]

RED ROOM #1

A gun is placed on three red silk-covered plinths that are lined up end to end. The gun is supported by three red mounts, which aim the direction of the gun squarely at the exhibit opposite – a black, jointed doll, surrounded by wooden decoy ducks, sitting on another red, damask-covered plinth – suggesting the connections between the sport of duck hunting and the tracking of runaway slaves.[88] On the walls is one account in the form of a father's letter to his daughter of 'tolling' (duck hunting with dogs), next to an account of how bloodhounds were trained to track runaways, 'tracking', from an interview with a former enslaved African-American. Next to these are many reproductions of reward posters for runaway slaves.

'PUNT GUN', AS NAMED BY MARKET HUNTERS FOR GAME BIRDS IN CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA

[Maker unknown, date unknown

Wood stock, metal barrel

Gift of Andrew V. Dumaine]

[87] Frankel, N, 1993, p. 107.
[88] Stein, JE, 1993.

WOODEN JOINTED DOLL IN ZOUAVE UNIFORM

Normally operated to make it jig or dance, c. 1882

[TAP TOY

Maker unknown, c. 1882

Painted wood, metal

Gift of Dr. Michael Abrams]

[BLACKHEAD DRAKE DECOY,

Susquehanna Flats type

Maker unknown

Painted wood

J. Kemp Bartlett Jr. Collection of Waterfowl and Shore Birds Decoys]

Gift of the Bartlett Family]

There are six other decoy ducks that I have not listed.

The brutality of the decoy room, with its curious shift in scale, dominating diagonal positioning of the punt gun, and dramatic red walls, signals an abrupt change in pitch from the cool grays and colonial greens in the first third of the installation.[89]

[BROADSIDE FOR THE RETRIEVAL OF THE RUNAWAY SLAVES, RICHARD AND NED

Baltimore, December 24, 1825]

There are five copies of this poster on the wall. On each one, Wilson has highlighted various phrases; for example, 'stuttering a little' and on the other 'leg which is a little bit crooked from having been once broken'. This emphasis on the repetition and highlighting of individual phrases forces the viewer to consider the violent and deprived conditions in which the slaves might have lived.

Transcript as follows:

> $200
> REWARD
> Ran away from the subscriber, living eight miles from the city of Baltimore, on the Falls Turnpike Road, on
>
> Friday, the 21st of May,
> NEGROES
> RICHARD & NED

[89] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 16.

RICHARD aged about twenty-six years, five feet six or seven inches high, yellowish complexion, small beard, has a scar on his forehead, stutters a little in conversation, but when he is alarmed it is increased considerably: He is straight and well proportioned, except one leg which is a little crooked from having been once broken. His clothing not known, except a new wool hat, a dark grey broad-cloth surtout coat, and a blue uniform United States soldier's coat, both half worn, and two pair of new calf-skin shoes, one pair of which were right and left. Richard ran away from me in 1814; he was then taken up in Pennsylvania, at the house of a man named Gross (near York Haven) where he learned the distilling business — It is probable he will return to that state (and will call at Mr. Gross' house, as he left there a watch and some other articles) and engage with a distiller again.

NED, who was decoyed away by Richard, is about twenty years of age, quite black, five feet nine inches high, stout and well formed, has a pleasant countenance, and generally smiles when spoken to, naturally slow in his motions and of an easy quiet disposition, he walks very erect and when in conversation has given himself the habit of spitting through his teeth. He has no particular marks recollected, except a scar on the back of his hand — His clothing like Richard's not particularly known, except a blue cloth coat with long skirts, a pair of greenish pantaloons, both half worn, and an old furred hat — Richard has provided himself with money by robbing Mr. Edmond T. Scarff of 75 dollars the night he ran away, and it is probable they will soon change their dress.

I will give FORTY dollars to any person that will give me information where they are so that I get them again, or ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each is brought home, and all reasonable charges paid.

Thomas Johnson
N.B. They took with them two blankets, blue stripes, commonly called point blankets
1-2 points.
MAY 25, 1819.

There are two other broadsides that I have not listed.

Also hanging on the walls are two watercolours by Benjamin H. Latrobe, labelled as such:

PERRY MEN, COLUMBIA, SUSQUEHANNA

By Benjamin H Latrobe

[(1764–1820), Dated by artist;

January 14, 1808]

AN OVERSEER DOING HIS DUTY. SKETCHED FROM LIFE NEAR FREDERICKSBURG

By Benjamin H. Latrobe

[(1764–1820), Dated by artist;

March 13 1789]

Two black women chopping wood are watched over by a white man standing on the stump of a tree smoking.

BOOTJACK ‘NAUGHTY NELLIE’

Maker unknown, c. 1880s

In another case, sitting beside a reward poster, ‘a cast-iron figurine of a black woman with legs splayed and arms clasped behind her head, provided powerful visual evidence of the myths of loose morals and eternal availability often assigned to African-American females’.[90]

CABINET MAKING 1820–1910

SIDE CHAIR WITH LOGO OF BALTIMORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY

Baltimore, c. 1820–40

Poplar, paint, and gilding

[BALTIMORE PAINTED SIDE CHAIR WITH LOGO OF BALTIMORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY ON CREST RAIL

Maker unknown, c. 1820–40

Poplar, paint, and gilding with cane seat]

ARMCHAIR

Made by J.H. Belter, New York, c. 1855

Rosewood

[90] Stein, JE, 1993.

[ARMCHAIR

by J.H. Belter

1855

Rosewood]

ARMCHAIR

Maker unknown (probably Baltimore), c. 1896

Wood, mother-of-pearl, brocade

[GOTHIC REVIVAL SIDE CHAIR

Maker unknown, possibly Baltimore

1896

Wood with mother-of-pearl inlay

SIDE CHAIR

United States (possibly Baltimore, c. 1820–60

Walnut

[SIDE CHAIR

Maker unknown, c. 1840–60]

WHIPPING POST

Platform and post

Gift of the Baltimore City Jail Board 63.93.1

[WHIPPING POST

Manufacturer unknown, possibly Baltimore, date unknown

Various hardwoods

Gift of Baltimore City Jail Board]

Four ornate Victorian chairs surround a whipping post, mounted on a wooden platform. The post itself is reminiscent of a crucifix, and it was last used by the Baltimore City jail in 1938 to punish a wife-beater. As an object, it can be read as having a symbolic relationship to slavery, but also more generally in its stark representation of public spectacle where the viewer becomes complicit in the violent act of punishment. On the wall, the title of the piece is screen-printed and spot lit: 'Cabinet Making 1820–1910'.[91]

An arc of four Victorian easy chairs is grouped around a 19th-century wooden whipping post, like seats in a theatre facing a lone actor. The contrast between the chairs and the post could not be more stark: rich ornamental detail versus unforgiving

[91] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 43.

austerity, the promise of plush comfort versus the threat of pain and suffering, an air of upper-class gentility versus the suggestion of lower-class violation. Taken together, these objects appear to be in conversation with one another, counterpoising signifiers of privilege and oppression that rarely, if ever, share the same page in historical narratives or the same space in museums.[92]

Each chair was chosen to suggest a distinct social class: clergy, middle class, blue blood, businessman. The chairs gaze voyeuristically at the crucifix-like shape on a raised platform. Many visitors commented on the strange resemblance of its austere form and rugged texture to contemporary assemblages. Read in this way, Wilson illustrates again how aestheticising objects represses the pain and complexity dwelling within them.[93]

The whipping post acts as the threshold from one red room to the next.

RED ROOM #2

In Red Room #2, a lit-up dollhouse sits on a plinth. Next to it, on the wall, are mounted four pikes. To the left of them hangs a painting called *Gap at Harper's Ferry*. On the red walls are projected in large letters the names of enslaved persons who rebelled, such as Harriet Tubman (mentioned in the Gray Room #1), William Parker, David Watson, William Still, Isaac, Daniel, Moses, the list goes on. This room is about

[92] Berger, M, 2001, p. 9.
[93] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 16.

active resistance to enslavement. The slide projections flash the names of rebellious slaves over the walls, as if the uprisings were a product of the inherent violence of slavery. In 1831, Nat Turner (1800–31) led a slave rebellion that spread across Maryland. A deeply religious visionary known by his followers as 'The Prophet', he claimed that God guided his apocalyptic attacks in which 60 white men, women and children were slaughtered (only poor whites being spared). White militias answered with the indiscriminate slaughter of up to 200 blacks. Turner was hung, flayed, beheaded and quartered, 18 others were hanged, and a series of repressive laws enacted against blacks. This excessive response was a symptom of the paranoia that then existed about black rebellion and which still echoes in the American psyche. This room is an echo chamber designed to amplify the violent history repressed in the American Dream.

DOLLHOUSE

Made by child’s father, c. 1904

[Made by donor’s father, c. 1904

Painted wood]

A dollhouse that would usually show the traditional social scene of the time (that is, the male dolls in the parlour, the women in the bedroom, the black male doll standing by the door and the black female doll in the kitchen) has been rearranged by Wilson to demonstrate rebellion:

In a dainty Victorian dollhouse Wilson enacted a fantasy of rebellion – diminutive adults and children lay scattered on the floor, cradles and chairs overturned. An outsized black man sat nonchalantly on top of the dining room table, his head grazing the delicate glass chandelier. As Wilson's 'Everyslave', the figurine epitomised the slaveholder's worst nightmare of violent uprisings.[94]

For some, the metaphor of the larger-than-life interloper in the Victorian drawing room could serve as a metaphor for the entire show. Wilson quipped about a concern of some MHS (sic) staff about 'a black guy messing with our stuff!'[95]

The room depicts an inversion of the power relations between slave and master described on the other side of the wall. To emphasise this inversion, Wilson again juxtaposes disproportionately large and small objects. Another black toy, this time a crudely made, gigantic figure of a shrunken old black man, is placed within the tiny domestic setting of a dollhouse. Around him, small white dolls appear to have been the subjects of a massacre.[96]

THE BURNING OF THE WAREHOUSE OF HENRY WEBB & COMPANY, MARCH 18, 1827

[94] Stein, JE, 1993.
[95] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 16.
[96] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 16.

Attributed to Nicolino V. Calyo

(1799–1844), c. 1827

Oil on canvas

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MRS ENOCH LOUIS LOWE

Hand-copied 1925

Lowe Family Papers, MS. 1949

Manuscripts Division, Maryland Historical Society Library

Also in this room is a diary entry, chronicling panic over a 'negro uprising', providing insight into white imagination of the black other, and how this takes on mythical proportions.

GAP AT HARPER'S FERRY

Artist unknown, c. 1800

Oil on canvas

[Gift of Elsie N. Woodall]

Positioned before this spectacle, viewers could turn to consider one of several pikes purportedly used in John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, the site of the

white abolitionist's attempted slave insurrection. While examining these objects, fraught with a violence in which they themselves could have been enmeshed, spectators might be momentarily blinded by a projector that cast the names of Tubman and other famous figures of black resistance onto the wall, rendering dark heroes in bright lights.[97]

PIKES USED IN JOHN BROWN'S RAID ON HARPER'S FERRY, OCTOBER 1859

[PIKE

Maker unknown, known as 'Confederate Georgia Pike'

Date unknown

Wood with metal tip

Gift of Carroll A. Brice]

[PIKE

Maker unknown, known as 'John Brown Pike'

Date unknown

Wood with metal tip

[97] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 45.

Gift of Augustus L. Shutt]

[PIKE

Maker unknown, known as ‘John Brown Pike’

Date unknown

Wood with metal tip

Gift of Dr. Joseph T. Smith]

[GAP AT HARPER’S FERRY

Artist unknown, c. 1800

Oil on canvas

Gift of Elsie N. Woodall]

_____

BLUE ROOM #1

This is a light blue, long corridor, populated with objects sitting on blue plinths, for the most part made by unknown slave craftsmen from the surrounding area. After the rebellion in the early 19th century, a state-appointed commission tried to force Maryland blacks to be repatriated in Liberia. The free-black leadership rejected this decision, as most of these people had been born in Maryland. This room shows objects

made by slaves who came from Liberia. In this way, Wilson emphasises the complexity of the black diaspora.

The blue corridor is in some ways the most conventional space in *Mining the Museum*. Wilson has neither employed theatrical effects nor parodied museum techniques as he has elsewhere in the installation. And yet it is one of the most affecting in the exhibition. The woven shawl, straw basket, and cane seat of a chair used to rock another woman's children all give voice to a shared history born in Africa, but they also speak of the unbridgeable divide that persisted between native Africans and those born of enslaved Africans in America.[98]

RESIDENCE OF GEORGE HENRICK REPOLD

LEXINGTON STREET NEAR FREMONT AVENUE

By Henrietta Metta Waesche

Gouache on paper

[VIEW OF THE REPOLD-WAESCHE HOUSE, RESIDENCE OF GEORGE HENRICK REPOLD, LEXINGTON STREET NEAR FREMONT AVENUE

By Henrietta Metta Waesche

(1806–1900), c. 1822

Gouache on paper

[98] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 18.

Bequest of Miss Margaret E. Maund]

LARGE WATER JUG

Made by Melinda, an enslaved African-American on the Cockey Plantation

c. 1830

Clay and sand

[LARGE WATER JUG

Made by Melinda, an enslaved African-American on the Cockey Plantation

Date unknown

Unglazed clay and sand

Gift of Miss Anna Cockey]

Wilson's powerful strategy of countering hierarchy and status in displays with understated evidence of humanity and difference is apparent in works like the utilitarian object produced by a slave named Melinda around 1830.

> In displaying her work [Melinda's jug cited above], Wilson did not reply on the modes of sonic, textual and bodily redirection that he had deployed elsewhere in his installation to work through and against the conventions of representation

> that curtail the expression of black humanity. Instead, he directed viewers' sight to the simple recalcitrant fact of the thing itself, which offered a riposte to the historical society and the regimes of representation that structured its displays.[99]

[WOVEN BASKET

Made by enslaved Africans/African-Americans on the Woodlawn Plantation, Prince Georges County, Maryland, c. 1860

Broom sedge and reeds

Gift of Mr. Otho J. Beale, Jr.]

[CIRCULAR HAND-WOVEN FRINGE

Maker unknown, Africa, date unknown

Hemp (?)

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

[SMALL BOX

Maker unknown, c. 1870

Mahogany, c. 1870

[99] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 49.

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

SOUVENIRS OF LIBERIA

1836

Black-and-white beaded neck rope and amulet; strip of ivory; hand carved African long tooth wood comb; and brown beads on a cord

[BEADED NECK ROPE AND AMULET

Maker unknown, c. 1870

Glass, stone, and shell beads with hemp or fiber

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

[LETTER OPENER

Maker unknown, c. 1870

Ivory

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

[COMB

Maker unknown, c. 1870

Wood

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

[BROWN BEADS ON A CORD

Maker unknown, c. 1870

Wood beads on fiber cord

Gift of Mrs. Harry R. Slack]

[VIEW OF CAPE PALMAS] MARYLAND IN LIBERIA

By John H.B. Latrobe c. 1836

Oil on canvas

[MARYLAND IN LIBERIA

By John H.B. Latrobe (1803–91) c. 1836

Oil on canvas

Gift of J.H.B. Latrobe]

The painter, Latrobe, was in fact a founder both of Liberia and the Maryland Historical Society. Wilson does not mention this in the installation.[100]

> The work depicts a small group of half-dressed figures – some in togas, others in loincloths – standing before a beach scene representing the colony establishing at Cape Palmas for recent African American émigrés. Sunlight burnishes the clouds, ships float through the harbor, and modest dwellings dot the horizon of a world that seems to proffer the blessings of civilization to the Negro on his own ground and in forms deemed appropriate to his needs. The painter of this at once classicizing and primitivizing dreamscape was John HB Latrobe (1803–1891), son to Benjamin, the hand behind watercolors such as 'An Overseer Doing His Duty'.[101]

[ROCKING CHAIR

Made by an enslaved African-American in family of Dr. George W. Bishop, c. 1825

Pine and rush

Gift of Mrs. Charles B. Bishop]

Before *Mining the Museum*, only the jug, made by the slave Melinda, had been exhibited, and few had seen the Liberian objects until Wilson inadvertently discovered them after finding registrar's cards suggesting the society owned objects from Africa. In fact, when Wilson stumbled on them, it was virtually the first time the wooden

[100] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 14.
[101] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 48.

tourist box with its ticket of passage to Africa had been seen by the museum staff since being given to the society in the mid-19th century.[102]

BLUE ROOM #2

At the end of the long blue corridor is the final room of the show. This room is focused on the dreams and achievements of freed and enslaved African-Americans and is almost solely dedicated to Benjamin Banneker, a self-taught, free, black and respected scientist who spent the majority of his life in the Baltimore area. Whilst he has been present in record and document, the Society has previously failed to ever mention him in their exhibits. On a Chippendale table sits Banneker's Astronomical Journal, placed in front of an IBM desktop computer that demonstrates the accuracy of Banneker's calculations, which Wilson shows using computer software. On the back wall is a series of projected astronomical drawings from Banneker's journal. On the walls are extracts from his journal that are accounts of the dreams that Banneker recorded, that demonstrate that however 'free' Banneker was, he was never free of the oppression that continued to be levelled at his people. The last object in the installation is a globe, which formally and metaphorically reflects the 'Truth Trophy' at the start of the exhibition.

ASTRONOMICAL JOURNAL

Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), c. 1790–1806

[102] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 17.

Banneker Astronomical Journal

Banneker was hired by Thomas Jefferson to help survey Washington, D.C. His journal contains a letter sent by Banneker to Jefferson urging him to abolish slavery and stating that his life's work was not only about mathematics but also about trying to save his own people.[103]

MARYLAND CHIPPENDALE DINING TABLE

Maker unknown, c. 1756

[Walnut

Dr. Michael and Marie Abrahams Memorial Purchase Fund]

IBM PERSONAL COMPUTER WITH 1.2 MEGA DRIVE, 360K B DRIVE

Silicon chip, metal, and plastic, c. 1980s

A computer monitor (duly labelled as such) was programmed to display the night sky on 18 Oct. 1800, a day on which Banneker had accurately predicted an eclipse, so noting in his journal, which lay on the table.[104]

[103] Corrin, L, 1994, p. 18.
[104] Stein, JE, 1993.

[CELESTIAL GLOBE

Maker unknown, owned by Colonel Washington Bowie (1776–1825), date unknown

Mahogany-and-brass stand, wood, gesso and printed paper globe

Gift of Mrs. Lucy Leigh Bowie]

> The celestial globe placed at the end of the installation not only encouraged viewers to reflect on Banneker's work and writing, but also to look on the 'truths' of subjection in a global frame, referring them back to the shiny spherical sphere trophy and the empty pedestals with which they began.[105]

[105] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 47.

Chapter 2

a. Fred Wilson and *Mining the Museum*

Fred Wilson was born in the Bronx in 1954. He currently lives in New York with his partner, Whitfield Lovell, who is also an artist with a tendency to collect artefacts and ephemera. In 1999, Wilson received a high profile MacArthur Foundation 'genius grant' and he sits on the board at the Whitney. His father was of African-American, Native American and European descent and his mother of Caribbean descent. Over the course of his young childhood, his family moved every five years or so, from one ethnic community to another, until they eventually settled in an all-white neighbourhood in the suburbs. This was when Wilson was around the age of 12, and he remembers it being a difficult time for the family. Before they had even moved into the house, racist graffiti was daubed on the walls – 'NIGERS [sic] GO BACK TO AFRICA'[106] – the foundations of the house were undermined, and there was a local petition that sought to stop the family from moving into the community.[107] He remembers having a solitary childhood, one where he did not have many friends, 'so I developed this whole world on my own'[108] and in doing so had, from an early age, developed a sophisticated internal life:

Growing up as an outsider in the 1960s and early 1970s in all the communities I found myself in, I was always acutely aware of being an observer of the environment around

[106] Hoban, P, 2003.
[107] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 25.
[108] Hoban, P, op. cit.

me rather than a participant. I also always had a keen interest, even as a child, in current events, however naive I was about them.[109]

The African-American Civil Rights Movement was most active from the mid-50s to the mid-60s, punctuated with the Civil Rights Act, which was passed in 1964. This is key to understanding the social and political environment in which Wilson grew up, and the level of public engagement in and awareness of racial discrimination. After the Act was passed, there were many inner city riots in black communities from 1964 through to 1970, coinciding with the emergence of the Black Power Movement.

Wilson's parents divorced when he was a teenager, and he continued to live with his mother and sister. His mother was an art teacher and a musician, who taught Wilson how to use materials and took him and his sister on his first trips to museums. Wilson's father lived in Manhattan when the family split. A civil engineer whose work took him across the globe, he eventually represented for Wilson a 'counterculture' because he wasn't afraid to reject the 'status quo'.[110]

As the only African-American child at elementary school in Westchester, Wilson felt an immense but unarticulated pressure to somehow represent 'the Race'.[111] When he graduated, he felt that he had failed to do this but didn't really understand why, or the connection to social and political issues of ethnicity at large in the United States.

[109] Wilson, F, Goncharov, K, 2003, p. 20.
[110] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 26.
[111] ibid., p. 25.

However, these negative experiences of the processes of integration have positively informed his attitude and approach today. He says that 'in many ways the work I do is describing my experiences over and over again'.[112]

b. Influences

As a teenager, Wilson started to become aware of the issue of race in museums. His mother took him to see an exhibition at MoMA where he saw the work of Romare Bearden and Richard Hunt:

> It was the first time I saw African-American artists being celebrated in a museum ... At the time I didn't know there were black artists; I assumed there were some somewhere, but I didn't know of any.[113]

Wilson has said that this was one of many experiences of his visits to museums where he sensed an overwhelming 'absence; an emptiness'.[114]

From his experiences of being the only African-American child in his elementary school in Westchester, he went on to attend junior high and high school in the Bronx. It was a relief for Wilson to be out of the suburbs, and was the first time he was

[112] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 25.
[113] Garfield, D, 1993, p. 47.
[114] ibid.

initiated into cultural exchanges with the predominantly Hispanic and black communities, leading him to quickly shift his tastes in music and art.

After leaving high school Wilson applied to SUNY (State University of New York), Purchase College. This was a good experience for Wilson as he was greatly supported by the faculty, who included artists Abe Ajay (1919–1998), the son of Syrian migrants known for his contributions to New Masses magazine in the 1930s and 1940s and his relief sculptures often incorporating found materials, wood, gypsum and plastics[115] and Tal Streeter (1934–2014), a sculptor who at the height of his career turned his attention to kite traditions and would become known for his acclaimed book *The Art of the Japanese Kite* first published in 1974.[116] He took an experimental approach to the study of sculpture and photography, but also performance. Robert Morris encouraged his interest in the relationship between form, performance and the body (manifested later in works such as *Guarded View*, 1991, where Wilson appears as a gallery attendant and tours audiences through the gallery) and also took courses in archaeology, urban design, makeup and lighting, and had dancing lessons outside of college.[117, 118] Wilson's familiarity with museums comes from the fact that at Purchase his art classrooms were located in the campus museum, the Neuberger, where Wilson did a performance for his senior project and also worked as a museum guard.[119]

[115] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abe_Ajay
[116] http://www.windart.subvision.net/aca-windart/sub/talstreeter/index.htm
[117] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 26.
[118] Copeland, H, 2013, p.27.
[119] Garfield, D, 1993.

In 1975, his last year of college, Wilson went to Africa with a programme called Art Safari. This had an unequivocal impact on his practice in expanding his worldview and in developing his understanding of the 'incredible complexity' of Africa itself.[120] He also travelled to Egypt because his father was working there, and to Peru, where he was fascinated with monumental structures that could only be seen from above.[121] Wilson was therefore well-travelled from a young age, and this would inevitably have already been informing his understanding of the links that could be made between the experience of a culture and the subsequent representation of that culture:

I was particularly interested in 'site' as sculpture, which reflected my seminal experiences in West Africa and visits to the ruins of Peru and Egypt. I think I've always been interested in the notion of 'the public', but also in the 1970s and 1980s in New York, as a young black artist, the public art and non-for-profit organizations were the only arenas where I could display my work. The world of museums and commercial art galleries was tacitly not open to artists of color or those not of European descent. It was unspoken segregation and this was very upsetting. The whole situation mirrored my childhood experience. I was faced again with a blindness that amounts to bias.[122]

In order to support himself after he graduated in 1976, he worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History and the American Crafts

[120] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 29.
[121] ibid., p. 30.
[122] Wilson, F, Goncharov, K, 2003.

Museum, where he was employed as a freelance educator. Wilson has called this in hindsight, 'a really linchpin experience'[123]:

Working in the education department at the Met and at the Museum of Natural History, I was very aware of what wasn't being shown to the public. Those were the experiences that really got me thinking.[124]

Instead of attending graduate school, he additionally worked for a social service agency in East Harlem running art programs. This included:

running a program called the Business of being an Artist in which I brought in people from all different facets of the art world. From that program I learned a great deal about the inner working of museums and the art world in general.[125]

At this time he had friends who went to Hunter College, so he would join them to sit in on the class of Robert Morris.[126] As previously discussed, Morris was a proponent of Minimalism, who had a particular interest in the relationship of the body to objects.[127] Fresh out of college, Wilson's practice was based around making large-scale sculptures that were intended to be interacted with. It is therefore perhaps significant

[123] King-Hammond, L, op. cit., p. 29.
[124] Hoban, P, 2003.
[125] King-Hammond, L, op. cit.
[126] ibid p. 27.
[127] See Robert Morris's Installation 'Bodyspacemotionthings' (1971) that was re-staged and revised (due to health and safety issues) at the Tate Modern in 2007.

that he chose to attend Morris's class for a year or so, and also perhaps unsurprising that Morris took an interest in what Wilson was doing.[128]

Another key influence on Wilson at this early stage in his career was the artist Isamu Noguchi because of the artist's mixed cultural background and his approach to cross-disciplinary practice.[129] Noguchi, of Japanese and American descent, successfully transcended racial categorisation, working with great artists from around the world such as Brancusi and John Cage. His large scale sculpture and cross disciplinary[130], bold and reductive forms, integrated various international influences and traditional techniques with a minimalist aesthetic in both form and materials.

Wilson has repeatedly stated that he didn't find his path to where he is now in addressing museum discourse through the influence of contemporary art or art history, but through his experience of working in museums as a guard and an art educator.[131] He has said that he was unaware of Andy Warhol's seminal piece of 1969, *Raid the Icebox,* at the time of *Mining the Museum*, but that he became familiar with it through subsequent analyses of his work by others. He has said that his main influences came from having worked in museums, institutions and as a person of colour – how these things combined together became a point of friction, incitement or anger for him precisely because he came to the realisation that the museum communicated to a primarily non-black audience. Wilson didn't see his own African and Native American

[128] King-Hammond, L, op. cit., p. 27.
[129] ibid., 1994, p. 33.
[130] Furniture design, landscape architecture and garden sculptures, theatre sets, etc.
[131] From an interview with Fred Wilson by Art21, on museums and collections.

heritage or experiences reflected in the museums of that time, although they were supposed to address a broad American public and all museums suffered from this predicament. Coming from an art historical perspective, it is easy to connect Wilson's work to either Broodthaers or Duchamp, but for Wilson his inspiration and his subject as an artist came from his own anger provoked by what he saw as the divided relationship between museum and the black children he worked with in The Projects[132]:

All this denial. All this history of America, all this history of Europe, and the relationship between people is not being talked about. Museums just pretend that we can overlook it, that we can experience 'culture' without having those feelings [of oppression]. That's why I like working in museums, because they're so much of America to me – unconsciously.[133]

Wilson was 38 years old when he was given the opportunity to work with the Maryland Historical Society (MDHS) on *Mining the Museum*, the first institution to give him access to their permanent collection.

Mining the Museum took place at the MDHS in Baltimore from 4 April 1992 to 28 February 1993, and received record visitor numbers exceeding the 55,000 mark. The

[132] Wilson states this in the questions and answers session at the 2013 conference in Baltimore entitled: *From what we talk about when we talk about race: 'Mining the Museum' / revisited / after twenty / Baltimore / 2013*
[133] King-Hammond, L, 1994, p. 29.

show was initially meant to run for two months, but was extended to 11 months as critical acclaim gave it greater exposure.[134] The project was a collaboration between two contrasting venues; one, The Contemporary, a young 'roving museum', which had no fixed location as a nomadic contemporary arts venue, and the MDHS, a museum whose portrayal of history was from the perspective of its all-male, white trustee board and the epistemology of post-Enlightenment Western civilisation they inherited.

As chance would have it, a year or so before Wilson was invited to Baltimore, The Contemporary's and the MDHS's paths had already crossed. The Contemporary had been engaged in a project at a derelict Greyhound bus terminal next to the museum and needed toilets for their volunteers, so George Ciscle, the director, had gone over to the MDHS in order to see if they could come to a mutual arrangement. During the meeting, the director of MDHS expressed an envy of The Contemporary's ability to appeal to a wide audience, saying he wished he could find a way with which to connect the MDHS to the schools down the road[135]:

He made an off-the-cuff suggestion that The Contemporary and the Maryland Historical Society – two very different institutions – might someday find an opportunity to work together.[136]

[134] Frankel, N, 1993, p.107.
[135] Ciscle, G, Corrin, L, Crew, S, Wilson, F et al., 2013.
[136] Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), 1994, p. 10.

Barely a year later, Wilson had chosen the MDHS as the museum with which he wanted to work, selecting it from among many other major museums and institutions in Maryland. Wilson's invitation to come to Maryland was initially made by The Contemporary after Lisa Corrin, Assistant Director, and George Ciscle, Director, had seen his work in New York. They wanted to collaborate with an artist who would get across their message about established museum practices. Soon afterwards they invited Wilson to create an installation using the permanent collection of whichever institution he chose, and who in their turn would agree to work with him. He has varyingly expressed his first encounter with the museum as one of: 'This is it'[137], to wanting to 'run out of the door'[138] because of the 'alien' [139] experience of walking into the Society. Everywhere he looked, there was nothing of him. What was there was an all-white, male conception of the history of Maryland.

Incorporated in 1844, the MDHS was founded to collect, preserve, and study objects and documents related to the state's history 'in reference to any remarkable event or character, especially biographical memoirs and anecdotes of distinguished persons'. This mission included histories of 'colonialisation, slavery and abolition' and 'any facts or reasoning that may illustrate the doubtful question of the origin of the North American tribes'.[140]

[137] Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), 1994, p. 11.
[138] Ciscle, G, Corrin, L, Crew, S, Wilson, F et al., 2013.
[139] Garfield, D, 1993.
[140] Corrin, LG (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), op. cit., p. 11.

This quote is from the MDHS annual report. Founded by an all-white, male board, the Society was initially a members-only club that put on exhibitions to be enjoyed solely by its members. This was at a time, post American Revolution, where societies like this cropped up all over the United States; instituted by wealthy, white, well-to-do families that wanted to create an alternative to the 'circuslike environment of dime museums'.[141] Amateur historians and naturalists founded them. So the MDHS's early efforts at collecting after the Revolution were focused first and foremost on the memory of that war, and the statesmen who descended from those American patriots and military leaders, celebrating their achievements. Evolving over the subsequent century into a display that solely extolled the triumphs and cultural output of the leading social class in Maryland, the museum showed and still shows furniture, silver and other domestic objects as 'decorative arts' and busts and portraits of the good and great in Maryland. Following the Winterthur tradition[142], the display is also composed of dramatic lighting, fabric backdrops and systems of support that elevate and canonise them above the visiting public. Women are represented through domestic objects such as needlecraft and a few paintings, whilst the civil riots of 1968–69 that greatly affected Baltimore are absent. The only reference to African-American history comes in the form of two vitrines filled with the jazz memorabilia of Eubie Blake, whilst 'the slave system that divided the state in the Civil War is but briefly cited in a room entitled "Blue against Grey"'[143], and the life of freed blacks is only referenced in the form of a painting from the collection of Isaac Myers, the first African-American owner of a Maryland shipyard.[144]

[141] ibid.
[142] The Winterthur museum in Delaware contains one of the most comprehensive collections of Americana in the United States.
[143] Corrin, LG, (ed.) and King-Hammond, L et al. (contr.), 1994, p. 12.
[144] ibid., p. 13.

This was the collection that Wilson started to 'mine'. He and the Society drew up a list of rules together that would set out the conditions of Wilson's residency. He would have complete access to the entire collection and, for his part, he would become part of the museum's staff, simultaneously fulfilling the roles of curator, registrar, archivist, director, trustee and artist. It is also perhaps significant that for the duration of his time at the Society he was given the office space of the president of the board of directors as his 'studio'.[145] Whilst The Contemporary was the driving force behind the project, in fact both institutions had to relinquish all control. Rather than working with existing curators, who would be familiar with the collection and therefore bring with them their own habitual ways of seeing and dealing with the material, The Contemporary arranged that Wilson would be assisted in his research by independent volunteers who were at once familiar with the subject-matter (that is, had knowledge of African-American local and state history, astronomy and museum history) yet at the same time they, like Wilson, were coming to the collection afresh and without bias. Over the period of a year, Wilson worked with over 100 objects, excavating new information about each one, and in some cases discovering the existence of new artefacts not recorded by the Society.

Wilson interviewed all the staff at the MDHS as part of the process, in order to understand the framework of the institution, the hierarchies existing within it, and the relationships between people in constructing that framework for the museum. He discovered that as an interloper coming into the museum he was actually able to be a

[145] ibid., p. 12.

sounding board for all the tensions and unexpressed problems that already existed in that network … 'some have said I became a kind of museum therapist'[146]:

I can't talk about everything that I learn about an institution because, if I did, then the next institution would probably not allow me to do what I want to do. Accepting that restriction allows me to hold on to a certain amount of autonomy when I go on to work with other institutions.[147]

When the exhibition opened, the usual practice of providing educational handouts was not adhered to. Instead, the museum guards, volunteer guides (docents), the receptionist and the gift shop manager were asked to compose a list of the most often asked questions about the installation. From this, a simple photocopied handout was developed, and a copy of this was taped to the inside of the elevator from which the audience would enter the show. Aside from this lack of textual information, there were also a group of docents that would do guided tours of the show. Instead of Wilson giving them prescribed material with which to inform the viewer, he intended for them to construct their own versions of the tour, using their own narratives, according to their own personal take on the installation. This is very much in line with Wilson's engagement with all the employees working at every level within the institution. For him, the janitor has just as much to say about a piece in a collection as the director does. In ignoring the established hierarchies between people working at the MDHS,

[146] Barry, J, Green, R, Wilson, F, Muller, CP and Fraser, A, 1997, p.121.
[147] ibid.

Wilson actually managed to bring them closer together.[148] The staff at the museum were subsequently so attached to particular pieces within *Mining the Museum* that they brought back a smaller version of the show, which was exhibited in the MDHS for the next 10 years.

Douglas Crimp's essay 'On the Museum's Ruins' (1993) took the position that postmodern artistic practices such as Wilson's fundamentally 'undermined the modernist principles on which museums and their taxonomic structures had originally been based'.[149] This allowed for a new discourse to emerge, one of institutional critique. However, this was not one institution pitching itself against another, but more a self-critique by an invited artist that revealed how power and capitalism works itself through social institutions.

Lisa Corrin, in her essay 'Mining the Museum: Artists look at museums, museums look at themselves', outlines a whole gamut of artists using museological practices 'to confront the ways in which museums rewrite history through the politics of collecting and presentation'.[150] She uses examples such as the French artist Daniel Buren, who questioned in his essay 'Function of the Museum' (1970) the motivations of the museum in collecting, preserving and constructing hierarchical representations of the historical, thereby ensuring its own consumption and survival.[151] Other artists such as Michael Asher, Andrea Fraser and Hans Haacke, whom I mentioned earlier, have also

[148] Barry, J, Green, R, Wilson, F, Muller, CP and Fraser, A, 1997, p.121.
[149] Gonzalez, JA, 2008, from Crimp, D, 1995, p. 47.
[150] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 5.
[151] Buren, D, 1970, p. 189.

employed conceptual strategies to show how an artwork cannot be read autonomously from its environment, but is in fact informed by the situation in which it finds itself, whilst reciprocally transferring its own meaning to the museum experience.[152]

Corrin traces this historical background of artists contesting the museum apparatus to one of reconciliation, where artists have returned to the museum format as a space in which to situate critically imaginative work. She mentions artists such as Christian Boltanski (b. 1944), who has worked with images and artefacts of holocaust victims, amongst others. Boltanski has stated that his practice is 'telling stories known to all' and presenting a 'universal history' of memories[153] (a differing strategy to Wilson who wishes to expose the fact that there is no universal truth at all). Whilst she says that these artists continue to challenge museum discourse, they also 'often inadvertently reassert the validity of the museum'.[154] By this, she means that a work lacking in ironic self-reflexivity can somehow reinforce the sanctity and mystique of the museum:

> What are the implications of such activities? From dissecting the museum apparatus to mastering it on its own terms, artists have not only returned to the museum as a site of activity but have also reshaped the institution in a permanent way that will affect the ways audiences see collections in the future.[155]

In 1993, a year after *Mining the Museum*, there was a spate of shows that involved institutions inviting artists to curate objects, either amassed externally or taken from

[152] Corrin, LG, op. cit., p. 4.
[153] Putnam, J, 2001, p. 35.
[154] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 5.
[155] ibid., p. 7.

collections (a good example was *Rendez(-)vous)*, an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, which consisted of a series of 'curated' exhibitions of objects donated by the citizens of Ghent and enacted upon by artists including Ilya Kabakov and Jimmie Durham). This seemed to be setting a trend – what Corrin has termed 'museumism' – but an area that she says has become increasingly 'politically neutralised', in actual fact comfortably existing within the white cube it originally sought to critique:

> The history of modernism is strewn with the ruins of the museum, yet ironically while avant-garde artists criticized museums for collecting 'dead' art, their work has been continually acquired and displayed by them.[156]

What sets Wilson's work apart in this museological landscape is his direct use and presentation of subjects that most museums and institutions would like to avoid.[157] Highlighting the post identity politics agenda of exposing inequities and critiquing the museum's dominant cultural framework by insisting on the social matrix of class, race, gender and sexuality, for example in his cigar-store Indians*,* illuminates the complexity of the marginalised subject's experience.

In the self-validating structures of an almost all-white art world, Wilson's work stepped outside of those dominant values, and instead provoked a debate that had always been there but had been concealed and suppressed, both within the world of museums and contemporary art. *Mining the Museum* cleverly made people engage in a kind of 'critical pedagogy' with the museum[158], unfolding reconfigured narratives that

[156] Putnam, J, 2001, p. 25.
[157] Corrin, LG, 1994, p. 8.
[158] Berger, M, 2003, p. 248.

brought to the surface its gaps, holes and secrets[159], whilst also bringing to mind the personal agendas that curators might imbue into their narratives.

[159] ibid., 2003, p. 252.

Chapter 3

This chapter introduces the background to my involvement in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection and the development of this archival research into a subsequent body of work, *We Bury Our Own*. Within this I will insert an ekphrastic narrative of a photograph of the South Australian Aboriginal man, which will then be followed by discussion about my own approaches to the collection. The chapter will conclude with the textual, virtual tour of *We Bury Our Own*.

a. My practice

My own practice has spanned more than a decade. My formal training is in sculpture and textiles and, like Fred Wilson in his undergraduate work, I produced textile sculptures that could be worn and performed in. This brought me to photography and video as a means to document the performance nature of my sculptural work. Since my first solo exhibition in 2000 I have moved closer to real time and performance in my practice. My second solo exhibition, *Blaks Palace,* titled after a sacred site in south-west Queensland where my paternal ancestors come from, was a series of three machine-made jumpers with generic Aboriginal Australian designs lifted from a pattern book entitled *21 Australian Knits*. The patterns including the 'Tiwi' Island jumper, the 'Ayers Rock' now known as Uluru jumper, and the Kangaroo and

Boomerang jumper, which all bore pseudo Aboriginal Australian designs but in fact could not be further away from authentic.[160]

In this body of work I approached friends and colleagues from the Aboriginal art and academic community to model in my work, including renowned Aboriginal academic and Chair of the Indigenous Studies Program at Melbourne University, Professor Marcia Langton, amongst others. This series, which included the sweater made out of muted tones such as Camel Brown, Galah Pink and Delft Blue, was synonymous with the 1950s in which Aboriginal people are often depicted as flora and fauna on ornamental plates, tea towels and ashtrays.

The sleeves of the sweater were six metres long and became immobilising wearable sculptures that act as metaphors for the perpetual misrepresentation of Aboriginal people and culture by the dominant Western Anglo culture in Australia, and the weight of it that Aboriginal people are forced to bear.

In my next body of work, *Emotional Striptease* (2003), part of the Melbourne Fashion Festival (as was *Blaks Palace*), I once again worked with peers from the Aboriginal community in Melbourne. *Emotional Striptease* reworked the trope of early colonial photography. During this time I was working at the Melbourne Museum in the Aboriginal Collections department and, like Wilson, was struck by the huge disparity

[160] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!blaks-palace-2002/c203b

between the lived reality of many Indigenous peoples and the linear historical narratives told in such institutions.

In the *Emotional Striptease* series I employed backdrops with iconic Melbourne institutions such as the Melbourne Museum, Federation Square and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and questioned the inclusion of Aboriginal people within such institutions. The models in the work all wore fragments of Victorian clothing such as ruffled collars, hoop skirts and gloves, a reference to early colonial studio portraiture but at the same time a parody and reclamation of such imagery by young contemporary Aboriginal people. I also appeared as a model in this series of work.[161]

This was the beginning of bringing my self into my work as a model and armature for my sculptural works. This was a step closer to the performance aspect of my work and also to live performance and video. Subsequent video works, such as *The Sixth Mile* (2006) and *Desert Slippers* (2006), included traditional and domestic rituals such as three generations of family members combing one another's hair, an exploration of the idea of knowledge transmitted through intimacy or the ritual greeting of passing sweat from father to son in the *Desert Slippers* video.[162]

[161] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!emotional-striptease-2003/c1j57
[162] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!the-sixth-mile-2006/c28g

These were works often coming from a combination of lived experience and the dream world where they will manifest as complete works. Later works such as my *Australian Graffiti* series, in which I constructed headdresses out of native Australian flowers such as kangaroo paw, red gum blossoms, banksia and eucalyptus, further pushed the idea of performance and played with ideas of connection to the natural world. They also relate to a near-death experience and being faced with one's own mortality.[163]

The resulting series was a union with the natural world. I think of myself as a picture maker rather than a photographer because my works are highly staged and aestheticised via my training as a sculptor. In 2007 I was accepted into a program at Dasarts for Advanced Studies in Performance in Amsterdam and relocated from Melbourne to the Netherlands. This is where I developed my 45-minute solo performance work *Tree of Knowledge* (2010), an autobiographical work produced during my Master of Theatre at the Amsterdam School of Arts, where I was mentored by renowned Bulgarian performance artist / theatre maker, Ivo Dimchev.[164] Dimchev (b. 1976) is a choreographer and performer known for his visceral theatrical performances that often montage dance, music, theatre, drawing and video into his provocative[165] and autobiographical works. He has won numerous international awards and has performed in America and Europe.

[163] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!australian-graffiti-series-2007/c1ucy
[164] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!Tree-of-Knowledge-performance-by-Christian-Thompson/c23gh/984BF53F-3BCD-4240-AF89-DC1112134317
[165] http://www.ivodimchev.com/

It was at this time that I ventured into sound work, producing *Decent Extremist* (2011) for the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art. The immersive audio work developed with a sound designer replicates the sound of a bee swarm, employing the Bidjara words for swarm of bees, *nguwal*, and singular bee, *muna*. Using my own voice to record the words in a sound studio, these samples where then arranged in the algorithm structure of an actual bee swarm to animate the meaning of the words. This work was presented using binaural speakers so that when the audience stood between them the sound of the bee swarm created from the Bidjara words sounded as if it was being whispered in the audience members' ears. [166]

I was interested in the way that I could introduce our endangered language into popular culture so that the audience hearing the work could also feel the lyrical texture of the language, so it is both audio and sensory. This led to other works including *Gamu Mambu* (2010), which I produced for the Sydney International Biennial *Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*, curated by David Elliot.[167]

The work was produced through the cultural lens of Amsterdam where I lived at the time and was shaped by my fascination with opera, which I frequented often. The final work is a musical iteration I wrote and then invited a baroque Dutch opera singer to learn and render in the operatic style. I was interested in this hybridisation. Much like the work of Yinka Shonibare, my work emerges through this kind of hybridised identity and internationality as an Australian artist who has lived in Europe for almost

[166] https://soundcloud.com/tarrawarrama/christian-thompson-decent-extremist
[167] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kRKpwxdqds

a decade. My series *Lost Together* (2009) was the first series I produced outside of the studio context. It utilised the formality of the Dutch landscape, references to Australian landscape paintings such as *Down on His Luck* (1889) and *The Pioneer* (1904) by Frederick McCubbin. The work began to move away from this re-visioning of the historical and into a more organic process informed by the conscious and unconscious realms where images and memories merge into a third space.[168]

Tree of Knowledge (2010) incorporates my musical and sound iterations in eight different scenes, which have a performative action in each scene including smoking cigarettes and reading magazines, taking off layers of hoodies with Aboriginal motifs in slow motion with a harp soundtrack playing in the background, singing a melancholy song in Bidjara whilst crunk dancing – an aggressive form of dance popularised by African-Americans in the 1990s – whilst reciting childhood memories and conversations with ex-partners with a robotic filter over my voice, watching myself on a television monitor doing mundane daily activities like grocery shopping, my niece and nephew saying hello to me from Australia, my cat looking out a window and singing a song *Gamu Mambu* in Bidjara.[169]

This performance merged the personal with the political and ironically was in part about my desire to move to England; hence, in one scene I read out the racial demographics of Liverpool whilst brushing my hair violently until it becomes a giant teased Afro halo. At the end of the performance I undress a Boy George doll, a symbol

[168] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!lost-together-2009/czt3
[169] http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Crunk+Dancing

of my childhood in the ′80s and my obsession with the pop singer. My pet cat, which appears in the footage on the monitor, is a metaphor for relocating to England – this is where my personal life becomes political, I adorn myself with a cat mask and become my cat wearing a Union Jack T-shirt and then sing 'Victims' by Culture Club acapella with the doll shoved in my mouth – the soundtrack to my childhood. The performance was a cathartic goodbye to the repressive and inherent racism targeted at Aboriginal people in Australia and looking towards a new context and space for my work.[170]

That same year I produced a work entitled *HEAT* (2011), which is a three-channel video projection featuring three young Aboriginal girls whose hair slowly lifts off their shoulders and sways around their heads, with a harp score playing in the background. This brought me to apply for the Inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholarship to undertake postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford.[171]

I had previously been interested in working with international collections, especially those held in Europe, of Australian material. A colleague many years earlier who had undertaken studies at Oxford suggested I work with the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. I was awarded the Charlie Perkins Scholarship in 2010 and became the first Aboriginal Australian to be accepted to the University of Oxford and the first to read a DPhil of Fine Art at Trinity College / Ruskin School of Art.

[170] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!Tree-of-Knowledge-performance-by-Christian-Thompson/c23gh/984BF53F-3BCD-4240-AF89-DC1112134317
[171] http://www.christianthompson.net/#!heat-2010/c14fc

b. The Pitt Rivers Museum invitation

In 2011, shortly after taking up my candidature, Dr Christopher Morton approached me by email on Thursday 20 January:

Dear Christian,

Just to introduce myself, I curate the photograph collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Recently I have been involved with a team on a successful application to the Australian Research Council for a 5-year project called 'Globalization, Photography, and Race: The Circulation and Return of Aboriginal Photographs in Europe'[172]*, led by Jane Lydon at Monash, which will get underway soon. I have attached a summary of the project for you. It will involve collaboration between a number of European museums and Australian colleagues to create new networks, relationships and resources for Indigenous Australians to access these historical collections. I will be travelling to Australia for example in a couple of years' time to forge links between the Pitt Rivers and some communities represented in our collections.*

Which is all very timely considering your arrival in Oxford to begin doctoral work, and given the obvious connection between your own work and interests and this project. So it would be good to start a dialogue with you about potential involvement. An idea that immediately springs to mind is the opportunity to work towards an exhibition in our Long Gallery. To connect with the ideas behind the project I wondered whether you might consider making some work in response to the photograph collection at the Pitt Rivers? Thanks to previous funding the collection is now catalogued and digitized, although the database is currently not illustrated so I can't give you remote access to it.

[172] http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/arcproject.html

Anyway, I hope that the project and the idea of getting involved with it strikes you as interesting. Hopefully it will complement your other work and studies well.

Have a read and let me know what you think. It will be good to meet when you get back to Oxford.

All the best,
Chris[173]

I met with Chris Morton at the Pitt Rivers Museum and accepted the proposal to create a body of work in response to the Australian Photographic Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum for the Long Gallery, to be exhibited in February 2012.

There were strong synergies between the works I have produced in the past and the overarching intention of the Australian Research Council grant to foster new relationships and provide access to international collections by Aboriginal people. Thus my research project was timely.

The exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum would become the centrepiece for my research project entitled *Creative responses to Indigenous Australian material culture in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection* and later would come to focus on *Mining the*

[173] C Morton (personal communication, 20 January 2011)

Museum in parallel with *We Bury Our Own*. This also led me to my research on Wilson and museum discourse more broadly.

While Christopher Morton offered to give me the images on disk, I instead opted to spend periods of time looking through the collections in the viewing rooms at the Pitt Rivers Museum. An important aspect of my own approach to the museum collection was to allow the images to become part of my time at the University of Oxford, part of my research and consequently part of my art.



Figure 1: One of my early research visits to the Australian Photographic Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum. (Image: Dr Christopher Morton)



Figure 2: One of my early research visits to the Australian Photographic Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum. (Image: Dr Christopher Morton)



Figure 3: One of my early research visits to the Australian Photographic Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum. (Image: Dr Christopher Morton)



Figure 4: One of my early research visits to the Australian Photographic Collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum. (Image: Dr Christopher Morton)

Since being based in Europe my work has transitioned away from the kind of historical re-visioning apparent in earlier bodies of works such as *Blaks Palace* (2002) and *Emotional Striptease* (2003) but, with the more recent *Gamu Mambu (*2010), *Tree of Knowledge* (2010) and *Lost Together* (2009), gravitated towards my personal history, my dream state, drawing on a more auto-ethnographic approach.

These later works take form from the visual vocabulary of wherever I am in the world at that moment interacting with my personal history. The aim is to develop a methodology that will circumvent the influence of ideas, either my own or others, on the production of the work. While the methodology is very different, its aim is akin to Marina Abramovic's ritualistic endurance performances that physically pushed her mind beyond its conscious limits. After learning meditative and telepathic techniques from central Australian Aborigines in 1980, Abramovic's performances focused on these mental techniques to access states beyond the conscious mind. I also work with dream-like states in which I allow the collections to permeate my being and unconsciously guide the outcome of my work.

I call it auto-ethnographic because I seek to engage the environment I inhabit in a sort of conversation that will release correspondences between my own life experiences and that of the environment. As Tracy Warr states:

> Thompson's work is not limited to issues of identities, histories and geopolitics. His Bidjara heritage also comes into play in a pantheistic vision of the relationship between human and nature. There are echoes of other (Western) artists in the work: Andy Warhol's video and photographic portraits, Marina Abramovic's crystal power-objects, Bruce Nauman's video and photographic works featuring himself, Man Ray's portraits of Marcel Duchamp dressed up

> as Rose Sélavy, Leigh Bowery's extraordinary clothing structures. These resonances are combined with evocations of the sensations of the land: the cornucopia of nature, the shimmering mirage, the heat, the smells of the landscapes in the sub-tropical, desert, and temperate zones of Australia.[174]

Thus the strategy I employed with the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection was a visceral, reflective and experiential relationship, so as to be receptive to its environment and maintain a highly subjective state of mind that, as if in a séance, would leave me open to the voices of its objects obscured by the archival practices of the museum and the history of colonialism. In this way I became a sort of medium, facilitating safe passage, through which the objects in the collection could find new forms, of which my photographs are projections.

As an artist I felt that my work had the ability to harness aspects of the collection, to embody them and simultaneously emancipate them from their ethnographic status and archival history. Early in my visits with Chris I coined the term 'spiritual repatriation' to reflect my process as an artist – that I was not so much interested in the physical object but rather the spiritual content held in such objects, thus referencing the ceremonial nature of traditional Aboriginal art in ritual practices or used as utilitarian devices.

Copeland elucidates Wilson's critique of museum collections as effectively mobilising political claims *'*on behalf of the slave (the stateless, the socially dead, and the disposable) in the political present … What Wilson's tactics go to show is that redress can at least reckon with the violence of the past, create a link to its long-dead subjects,

[174] Warr, Tracey, 2012, p. 3.

and denaturalize the logic of reification so central to slavery and colonization'[175]. In comparison to Wilson's approach which, as Copeland argues, operates 'within a rhetoric of redress', my work goes beyond redress and seeks to transmogrify such temporal containment to embrace the corporal and metaphysical.

In the following year, 2011, I undertook two residencies that I had been awarded before taking up my candidature at the University of Oxford: one from the Australia Council for the Arts, in Greene Street Studio in New York, and the other at the Darling Fonderie in Montreal, which I was awarded by Parramatta City Council in Sydney, Australia.

I decided that I would utilise these studios for a period of three months to delve further into the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection, to reflect on my time with it and begin experimenting and developing the series which at this point I had already titled *We Bury Our Own*.

The title emerged from an experience when I was at the funeral of my great aunt. When we were at the cemetery my father turned to me and said 'grab a shovel; we bury our own'.

[175] Copeland, H, 2013, p. 34.

This stayed with me for many years and I knew even before I arrived at the Pitt Rivers Museum project that this would be the title of my next body of work, a reference to a traditional Bidjara custom, and as an artist it played into these ideas of repatriation, drawing on aspects of the collection and as the framework and content for this new body of work.

I deliberately employ the methodology of ekphrasis for its power to convey qualities and experiences beyond the physical attributes of an object. The transferral of the physical into the imaginative is already a vernacular of both the rhetoric of redress and evidenced in much of the imagery in these collections. In order to distance oneself from the authorship of such images, the photographer's photography is used as a tool or mechanism to colonise the body and historically employed this new technology in order to further racial privilege and the Eurocentric eroticisation and othering of Indigenous others. The deployment of photography in conceptual and aesthetic endeavours to control one's own representation is a shared process of empowerment for many disenfranchised groups including African-American, Native American and Indigenous Australian artists. Their histories correspond, are intermingled and intertwined, sharing the burden of historical representation as purported by the dominant imperial gaze. Thus they share an inheritance of misrepresentation but also the possibility of being able to extend upon and reinterpret those histories.

Ekphrasis as a strategy can also be appropriately utilised by artists of colour for its potential to reinvigorate and realign the intersections of the visual and the verbal – in this way relaying an image and reclaiming the oration of difference, sharing subjective experiences of conflict and the potency of word and image as pertaining to Indigenous

experience. Thus my own work ruptures the tension between the authorship of the non-Indigenous photographer and the voicelessness of the Indigenous subject.

In my visits I took into consideration different kinds of materials and modes of representation present in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. I visited several times, sometimes with Chris, and often to show visiting Australian colleagues the collection and the museum, or with my supervisor.

c. A creative, ekphrastic account of one particular photograph

The original image in the Pitt Rivers Museum Australian Collection was taken between 1836 and 1847 in South Australia (believed to be taken circa 1860). It was donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum from the estate of Henry Wentworth Dyke Acland in 1902, an English physician and educator. Diminutive in size, the original image is scaled at 9.5 cm x 6.0 cm, and the description reads: '[One of a] series of 7 portraits of men and women, possibly copied from daguerreotypes of 1847. Wearing kangaroo skin cloaks and body-paint. Frontal portrait of man with scarification on chest and shoulders, wearing a kangaroo skin cloak and sitting on a chair. Plain studio background.' The research notes state:

'Related Documents File – These are among the earliest albumen photographs of South Australian Aborigines found anywhere, though there remains considerable uncertainty surrounding their date and authorship.'

A man sits in a studio on a chair. You can see the edge of the chair peering from behind his left-hand side. The top of the chair sits just below his left-hand shoulder, the viewer's right-hand side. The processing of the image leaves a vignette around its edges. The edges are darker; the centre is lighter towards the subject. The image is sepia-toned in different shades of Greco Roman reddish brown.

His hair is parted down the left-hand side, combed towards his ears and flattened down into his head. The ends flick up just above his ears, which are not visible to the viewer. His hair appears like a helmet. It is thick; it's coarse and dark, very dark. His beard meets the flicked tufts that sit at the end of his combed-down locks and, perhaps controlled with a pomade or wax, it looks as if it has been forced into this style. His beard is wavy, it is free, it moves around in different currents like ocean waves. He has a moustache as well, which travels across his upper lip over the crooked contour of his mouth. His bottom lip peers from under the distinct line of his moustache. Light chimes across its surface.

The outer corners of his lips are not met with hair, but peek out, turning downwards. There is a small white spot just under his bottom lip in the midst of his beard, possibly a result of the photographic processing. His cheeks sit high; there are no nasolabial folds. His right cheek captures a more abundant reflection of light; the light contours the edge of his nose. His nose is distinct in shape; it appears like a hammerhead shark,

his nostrils forming the shark head as it is about to dive into the rapturous waves of his beard. Light caresses its shiny surface.

His lower cheek is full; under his eyes are lines, shadows, a crease, a ring with a darker depth towards the inner eye. His eye is very clear and dark; he stares directly into the camera. On the left side of his face, the contours are less visible but still there … a greater sense of the shape of his face and still the commanding presence of his gaze. He is defiant, he is powerful, and he is strong. His brow is robust; his cheekbones are widely set, yet the styling of his hair into a forced parting looks imposed, uncharacteristic. The hue of his skin is deep and dark; it persuades the light to behave in a particular way over its surface. His brow is distinct yet his forehead is small. You cannot see his neck; it hides behind the splayed edges of his powerful beard.

His shoulders appear relaxed – his shoulder blades project out and sink inside his frame simultaneously, leaning into the centre of his chest, meeting just under his beard. He has traditional scars that look like separated fragments of quicksilver or mercury travelling across his defined chest. They are elaborate and beautifully arranged. Here is an initiated man; this is what such scars denote and this man must be important to have so many precisely placed and intensely arranged scars.

On his shoulders they are like microorganisms hovering over his muscles. They travel upwards in perfectly proportioned lines. They are like chainmail, like armour. They

allude to the size of his frame. He could be small but great in strength. His chest muscles are pronounced; they meet in the centre of his chest, their contours providing a distinct dark line, a crevice. His scars become thicker in the centre, they are longer in length, and they capture more light like pools of water.

Under his left arm is a dark line; the light vanishes into a dark shadow, which falls upon the top of a fur cloak that wraps his lower body. The scars fragment, they splay out and have been done in a manner where they begin to disappear, they become less intense clusters until they are no more, and they evaporate and fade away. The under line of his chest is defined yet softened by the fluffy edges of the soft fur cloak. His left nipple is exposed; his right nipple is concealed.

The fur pelt covers his lower body. It cascades into three different sections: one neatly sits under his chest, the second fold bursts out like a little tuft, and the third is like a cascading wave of fur. The longer you look at this pelt faces begin to emerge … the shape of a sleeping koala. It is wrapped around his lower body and his hand falls into his lap and out of the frame. His sturdy arms blur into the quadrant of the image, creating a V-shaped cradle that forces the fur cloak into a heart-shaped impression.

Across the bottom of the photo scrawled in black marker in the left-hand corner is the text ‘M42’ and the letter ‘b’ sits in the white border of the image. The lowest part of the photograph has a larger white border, more generous than the other furthest edges; in this section, centred, is the text ‘S. Australia’ and beneath it the dates ‘1836–47’.

d. Approaches to the collection

Over the following year I utilised the studios in New York and in Montreal to develop the *We Bury Our Own* series, experimenting with video and photography. As stated earlier I took the images with me in my mind, their impression left in the subliminal realm of unconscious. I allowed them to permeate my life and enter my work, trusting in my cultivated process and life over ten years of making art.

There was a natural gravitation towards raw materials in the images, the texture of one's hair, and the colour of one's skin, the earth, ochre and stones. There is a sense of play in the collection. The images traverse moods from the deeply ethnographic through to the playful antics of studio portraiture in the latter part of the 19th century.

I was interested in how contemporary creative research and studio practice could provide new ways of 'seeing' or indeed 'looking through' the colonial tropes of bygone eras to access a truth that has been obscured by the colonial gaze. I examined how the legacy of subjects goes beyond the patronising voyeurism projected onto such material housed in international collections and acts as a portal that harbours ongoing spiritual and cultural importance for Aboriginal people today. I was allowing for a rebuilding of culture through a fragmented bricolage of experience and family narrative, a place for ancestors in modern day life and simultaneously providing an Indigenous view of history.

Characteristics of the archive organically emerged in the work, from the primarily monochrome palette of the images, their decorative nature, the ritualistic tone created through the employment of objects and materials that related to the natural world or stories relayed to me by other Aboriginal people such as crystals, flowers, butterflies, candles and water. The process allowed the collection to intermingle with my own experience and also my desire to bring these collections to the fore in a way that allows audiences entry into the collection and for the collection to gain new currency in the form of contemporary art.

An objective for *We Bury Our Own* was to capture some essence of the Pitt Rivers Museum's Australian Photographic Collection but at the same time to respect the subjects and their living descendants by deliberately choosing not to replicate the images. Elizabeth Edwards in *Raw Histories* comments on historical photography:

The most overtly oppressive photographic practices, such as anthropometric photography, where the humanising marks of culture – the arrangement of hair, the cultural marking of the body such as cicatrices – pierce the objectifying image and allow possibility of the subject experience. Indeed, it is perhaps the tensions between the intense objectified presentation of the subject and the awareness of the 'beyond' that is the power of such images.[176]

[176] Edwards, E, 2001, p. 19.

The humanising marks, the 'subject experience' that Edwards speaks of, were really the inspiration for *We Bury Our Own*. Through a process of meditation followed by recollection these traits, inscriptions and details were able to emerge organically.

The collection got me thinking about artifice and the way that these images are constructed to purport a particular historical narrative or power relationship, one in which the non-Indigenous photographer focused more on the terms of the recorded information than the subjects themselves, who often carried no personal information at all. This made it difficult to work with the collection.

In one visit in early 2013 with my supervisor, Tracey Warr, we looked through the images and after leaving the museum reflected upon the powerfully unsettling effect of the collection. The colonial overtones of the images and the obvious imbalance of power and its reverberations influenced *We Bury Our Own*.

Whilst at the Greene Street Studio I produced two new works, which explored the idea of artifice and also pushed this idea of very simple materials with more of an emphasis on the body and performativity. I titled the works *Howl Your Troubles* and *The Devil Made Him Do It*. In these images I utilised materials such as feathers and body paint. Following on from my previous *King Billy* series, I was interested in the forms I could create using the body and very simple materials. In the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection there was always the sense that the hand of the non-Indigenous photographer had a greater presence than the subjects themselves, and in these new works this is something I pushed against.

In *Howl Your Troubles* (2011) I am painted with yellow body paint and my eyes have been almost blacked out in Photoshop so that you can just see a faint impression. I am standing in front of a red backdrop. My black curly hair comes just down to my shoulders. Around my mouth is a red section framed with white dots, and under my eyes are red rings also with white dots inside them. There are little cat's eye flicks at the corner of my eyes. In my hair are lurid red, white and yellow flowers; two extra-large ones point out at either side like rabbit's ears. They are black and white, the tips marked with red and yellow feathers.



Figure 5: An early exploration of the use of make-up and raw material such as feathers. *Howl Your Troubles* (2011), produced during my residency at Greene Street Studio in New York.

In *The Devil Made Him Do It* (2011) I am painted white, and there are two turquoise blue sections, which cover the majority of both sides of my cheeks. They run right under my chin and create the outline of the white section that circles my mouth. My black hair also falls down and rests upon my shoulders. At the top of the edge of each nostril are two silvers dots. Two long fluffy sections of white feathers fall from around my ears and then upon my head are clusters of white feathers, which fall down over my eyes. My right eye is visible peering through the feathers, towards the top of my head are black feathers patterned with white dots, and then either side two long brown feathers peek out from either side of my head again like rabbit's ears, or elf-like antennae. The image is shot against a white backdrop.



Figure 6: *The Devil Made Him Do It* (2011) – also produced at the Greene Street Studio in New York and also incorporating the use of feathers and make-up.

These were my early experiments influenced by the photographic archive. The idea of artifice and also my gravitation towards simple and natural materials such as body paint and feathers really drove these works. Also I was interested in things that were drawn from my immediate environment, so in New York I retrieved everything I needed from a costume and party supply store. This I think is also the beginning of a more auto-ethnographic way of working with the collection.

If these reference the colonial gaze, they do so in a highly contrived and staged manner that unsettles its hierarchies and assumptions. The photographer who is the subject controls every aspect and so this becomes a window and frame of reference for the viewer. During my time in New York I experimented on other video works using language and wrote new songs, trying to navigate my way around this desire to bring myself into my musical iterations.

Later that year I took up my residence at the Darling Fonderie Studio in Montreal from 11 July to 30 September 2011. It was here that I really began to experiment much more with different types of backdrops and kinds of costuming, especially the strong ceremonial aspect that would later emerge in *We Bury Our Own*. This included using different kinds of body paint, feathers, plastic props, and clothing. I retrieved most of these props from Chinatown and other cheap stores I found whilst exploring Montreal. It was a great space to think about the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection and how I was going to navigate my way around the subject material.

This intense period of experimentation led to some outrageous experiments, but I think through this process I allowed the aura of the Oxford collection to permeate my work. I painted my body purple, I made hats out of flowers, I glued flowers to sweaters, I made shrines with candles. Many of these elements would later appear in *We Bury Our Own* but in a much more aesthetically refined and subdued way.

When I returned to Oxford I continued pushing the idea of artifice. I produced another work for the Basil Sellers Art Prize in Melbourne entitled *To Make Me Feel This Way* (2012). This work related to a childhood experience of winning a school carnival swimming race only to be disqualified for allowing my foot to come out of the water.

The work follows on from the other works. In the image again my eyes are almost blacked out, my skin is painted gold and there are fragments of gold leaf peeling away from its surface. I am wearing a blue swimming cap that has flowers on it. My eyebrows are pencilled into a dramatic shape. My lips are pink. There is a red towel draped over my left-hand shoulder, around my neck are cheap costume medals with red, white and blue striped ribbons, and four gold medals sit on my right shoulder. I am standing against a pink background and peer off into the distance. The work was printed on Fuji Pearl metallic paper and framed in a pink frame.



Figure 7: *To Make You Feel This Way* (2012) – produced in Oxford at Bullingdon Road Studio. Drew on biographical experiences and also harnessed the decorative and ornate.

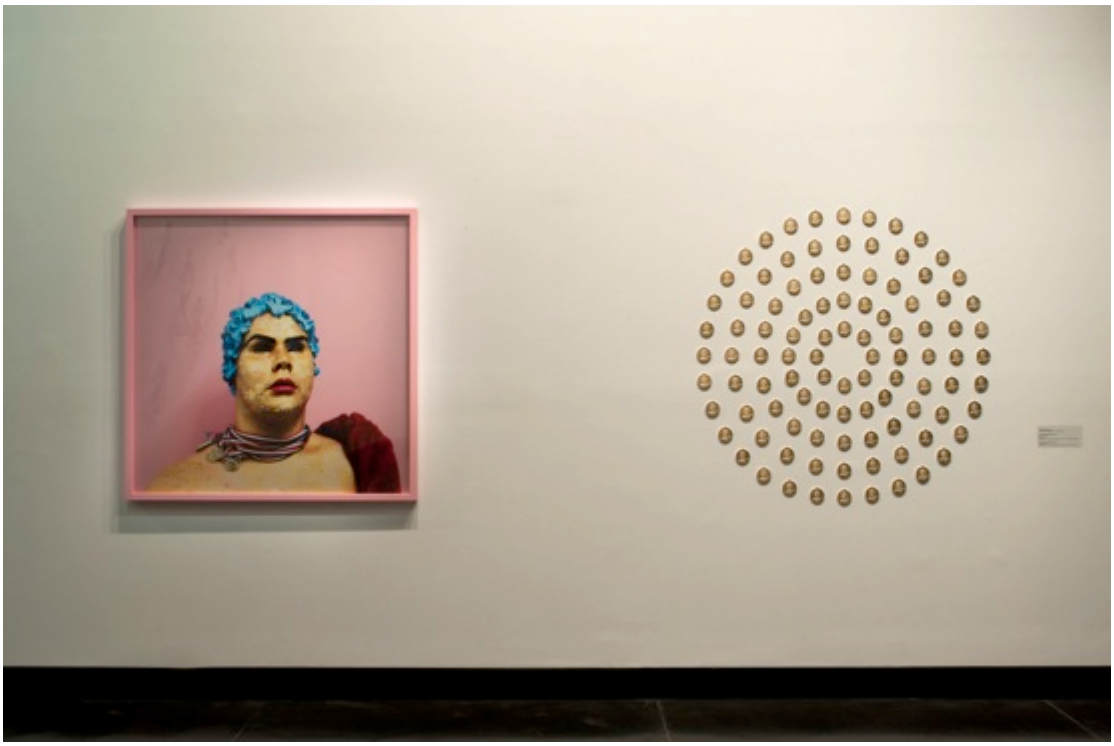

Figure 8: Installation image of *To Make You Feel This Way* (2012) with embossed medals displayed next to conceptual portrait.

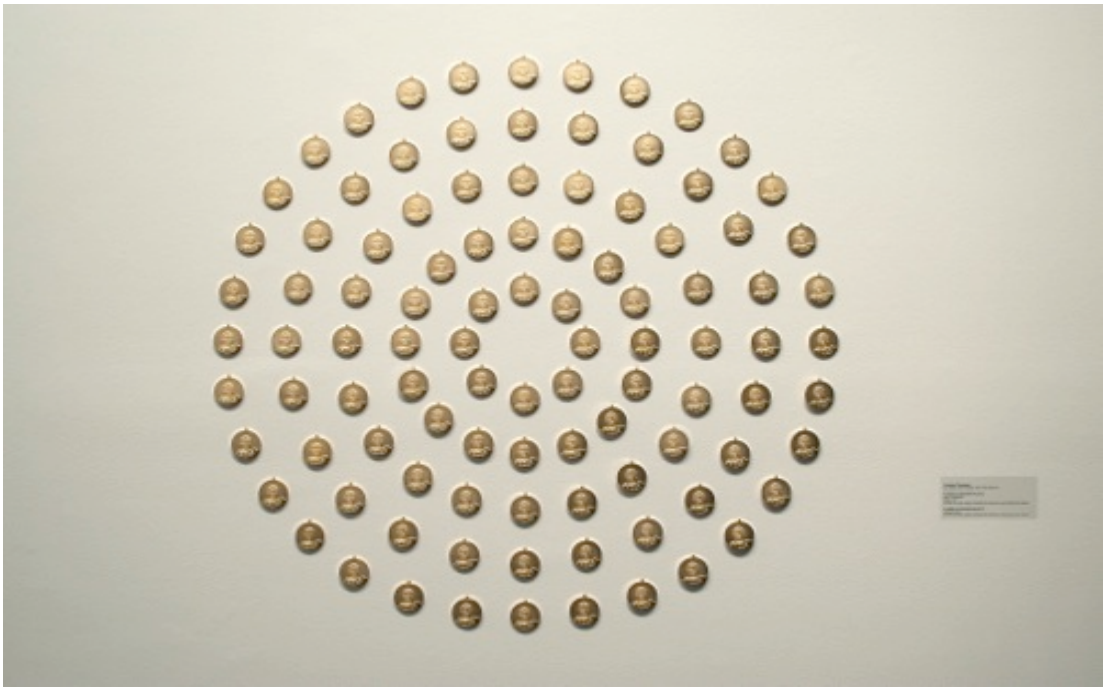

Figure 9: Medals embossed with *To Make You Feel This Way* image and displayed in circular formation.

The image was embossed onto 200 gold medals and displayed next to the photograph in a concentric circle pattern and shown in the Basil Sellers Prize at the Ian Potter Museum in Melbourne. These works emerged around the time that I began my visits to the Pitt Rivers Museum and, while very different from the final works, the element of experiment in terms of artifice and raw materials began and they were also more personal in content, reflective of where I was at each time.

While I was conscious of how other artists had worked with such collections, I wanted to avoid the tendency to overly frame my response by the tenets of the museum archive. My concern was not so much the archive itself or its structure but more in creating a window, a frame of reference that was not weighted down by the historical baggage of such imagery, not to dismiss it but to circumvent it. When I returned from Montreal I met with Christopher Morton at the museum and we had many conversations about how to navigate this sensitive area. He also referred me to readings: *Photography's Other Histories* including Michael Airds essay *Growing up with Aborigines*, which informed my decision-making process. I showed him the early experiments. I shared with him my interest in other aspects of the collection including the English folklore material and the Inuit and Native Canadian material. There was something about the ritualistic aspects of this strange hybrid of materials that inspired *We Bury Our Own*.

While the imagery in *We Bury Our Own* is drawn from the collection but also from my childhood memories, my lived experience and my ambitions for the future, perhaps most influential has been the unexpected collisions of things in the collection – materials from seemingly disparate realms that, while much framed by the museum's

archival practices, also seemingly escape it in their very excesses. There was *Moles Severed Forefeet* in a box gifted by Edward Lovett (1852–1933)[177], which looked like human hands and were said to be a cure for toothache if kept on one's person after the living mole had been set free; a thorn in formaldehyde with a slug on a thorn, a cure for warts[178], and the witch's ladder – a suspended rope with cock's feathers pierced through it, found in an old woman's house in the Somerset area, which, it was said, was to be used to get milk from the neighbours cows or for causing people's death.[179]

As I began to produce *We Bury Our Own* these aspects of the collection began to emerge, to become clearer and more refined. The image of the South Australian Aboriginal man that I detailed in the ekphrasis description became my guide. When I thought of the collection it was his face that emerged. Uncannily he was a South Australian man and I was born in South Australia, just outside of Adelaide, so interesting biographical synergies were at play. He would emerge as the embodiment of the collection, as if I was taking his dictation in making aesthetic and compositional decisions about the work. He was there through the whole process; he came to me with such vivid clarity.

Aspects of the collections seep through and crystallise in *We Bury Our Own*. The monochrome palette, the composition of the body, the raw organic materials, the solemn overtones, the stillness, the portraiture and, embedded in this, the elements of my own lived experience as an Aboriginal person at Oxford University today. The

177 http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-Edward-Lovett.html
178 http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-slug-on-a-thorn.html
179 http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-witchs-ladder.html

meditative state I went into to discover the work, to excavate it from my own subconscious world, was something that appeared so powerfully in *We Bury Our Own*. It even surprised me when we finally hung the exhibition how precisely and accurately it manifested itself.

I knew as an artist that I had to surrender myself to the documents or subjects of archives and allow them to speak through me rather than me speaking on their and anyone else's behalf. I wanted to find the 'subject experience' that Edwards speaks of. Perhaps through studio research where a voice was once stifled, one can be empowered and both can be gained?

e. Virtual tour of *We Bury Our Own*

We Bury Our Own was presented in the Long Gallery at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, from 26 June 2012 to 17 February 2013. The gallery is situated just off the right-hand side of the Pitt Rivers Museum ground floor. The space is a long corridor-like gallery. The exhibition opened at Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi in Melbourne simultaneously and featured a full-colour catalogue, which included artist statement and two essays: one by Dr Christopher Morton, Curator of Photograph Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum, entitled 'Spiritual repatriation and the archive in Christian Thompson's *We Bury Our Own*', and 'Camouflage, Display, Dazzle' by Tracey Warr, Senior Lecturer of Contemporary Art Theory / Art & Design, Research Coordinator School of Arts, Oxford Brookes University.

ENTRANCE

Upon entering the Long Gallery there was additional wall text by Brian Catling, which read:

‘Christian Thompson is an Inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholar, one of the first Aboriginal Australians to be accepted into Oxford University. He is a Bidjara man of the Kunja nation from Central South Western Queensland. His Great Great Grandfather is senior tribesman King Billy of Bonny Doon Lorne. He can also trace his maternal heritage back into London and Oxfordshire, which makes him an inspired translator of the University's obscure tribal ceremonies; the city's bi-polar tides of migration and the country's hidden saturation of myth.

‘Christian is a photographer, performance artist, musician and video maker, one of the brightest stars in the new firmament of Australia’s rising visual culture. In this, his most recent exhibition *We Bury Our Own* made while he is completing his PhD at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, he exposes our assumptions and anxieties in a vivid mirrored lens. Curved in parody and dressed in a sardonic subfusc of ghost portraiture, part funerary memento, part Green man, and part Mayday somnambulist.’

Left-hand side wall

Desert Melon

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait in full Oxford subfusc attire, white collared shirt, grey suit and formal gown draped over the shoulders. Shot against a grey wall; plastic flowers cover the eyes and taped to the head is an image of a tree – the tree is a ghost gum and is reference to a ghost gum tree planted on the outskirts of Barcaldine in Central South West Queensland. The image is rendered black and white and then saturated with a purple hue throughout. The image has been printed on an A4 piece of paper and scrunched up and then smoothed out. It is taped upright to my head with the image facing the audience. Transparent masking tape is circled around my forehead holding the image in position. The flowers and the image are in colour, while the rest of the image is in black and white. Shot against a black backdrop.

Danger will Come

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait with a frame held in front of my face. The hands appear as if they are coming from nowhere; you cannot see my body. The fingernails are painted with white nail polish. The frame has small details of roses and leaves with an architrave along the outside and inside edges; it is an off-yellow hue. The frame is in colour, while the rest of the image is in black and white. Inside the image is the surface of the ocean with lights sparkling on its surface. It is the water from Sydney Harbour, Australia. Shot against a white backdrop.

Invaded Dreams

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait wearing a white collared shirt with opal cufflinks; one of the cufflinks is visible to the viewer. The figure holds a model boat of the *Mary Rose* in front of the face; the face is covered with a black balaclava. The hands are splayed out either side of the small boat, the fingernails are painted white, and on the right-hand side a small anchor hangs down between the fingers of the subject. The image is black and white,

and the only things that appear in colour are the British flag at the top of the *Mary Rose*, the small metallic plaque on the front of the model boat and the opal cufflink.

Lamenting the Flowers

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait shot against a white backdrop. The figure wears a netted veil, which hangs over the face. Upon the head is a headband that is decorated with red plastic flowers. Covering the eyes under the veil are two Australian butterflies that cover the eyes. The figure wears a white collared shirt. The veil comes right down and is suspended under the chin. The flowers and the butterflies are in colour; the remaining image is in black and white.

Forgiveness of Land

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait shot against a black backdrop. The figure wears a headscarf with generic Aboriginal designs of circular dotted patterns broken into red, dark red, blue and dark blue with white dots. The scarf is wrapped around the face and tied under the chin. Covering the eyes of the figure are quartz crystals, clustered together; they appear like sunglasses over the eyes. Wearing white collared shirt. The crystals and the scarf are in colour, while the rest of the image is in black and white.

_____

Right-hand side wall

Down Under World

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait wearing Oxford University subfusc – grey suit, white collared shirt, bow tie with formal gown draped over the top. Quartz crystals rest on the eyes. Brown hair is pushed back and comes down to the shoulders, Headband holds back the straight hair; adhered to the headband are different crystals: amethyst, quartz and blue calcite. The crystals appear in colour, while the rest of the image is in black and white. Shot against a grey backdrop.

Energy Matter

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted

Self-portrait shot against a black background. Wearing a white collared shirt. Holding hands in front of the face; there are dotted areas in the form of a circle. The palms are placed in the pockets of the eyes. The fingers nails are painted white. There are gold cufflinks visible on the sleeves, with Australian opals set in them. The audience can see the nose and mouth between the hands. The cufflinks are in colour, while the rest of the image is in black and white.

Three Sisters

100 cm x 100 cm

C–type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

in black box frame and dry mounted.

Self-portrait wearing a hooded sweater, which is covered in plastic flowers. The face is visible but the hood, which hangs just over the eyes, obscures the eyes. Holding three

red candles, which are lit and half burnt, melting. They are positioned in the lower part and centre of the frame, being held in the hands. The candles are in colour, while the remaining image is in black and white.

Dhagunyilangu (Brother)

Duration 2:19 minutes

Video, 2011

A small monitor is positioned on the wall. It is secured in a small black box, which conceals any cords running to the monitor. In the video footage and Caucasian male appears topless from the waist up. The top of his chest is visible. He begins to sing acapella in an operatic style. The video is shot in colour and is against a black backdrop. He sings the lyrics:

Verse:

Mardi widhany

Mardi Yinda Dhana

Burdimundu

Wugu wadya

Chorus:

Dhagunyilangu

Dhagunyilangu

Wugu wadya

Gundangya

Verse:

Mardi widhany

Ngaya Gamagu

Yambird Nagalina

Wuthu

Chorus:

Dhagunyilangu

Dhagunyilangu

Wugu Wadya

Gundangya

BRIDGE:

Ardi ngalangu

Gandu badalgu

Gurru wugu wadya

Gurru wugu wadya

Ardi ngalangu

Gandu badalgu

Gurru wugu wadya

Gurru wugu wadya

Verse:

Mardi widhany

Wandadumay

Nungarra

Mardi

Chorus:

Dhagunyilangu

Dhagunyilangu

Wugu wadya gundangya

Wugu wadya gundangya

The model directs his gaze to the viewer. He sings with pronounced facial gestures. When he finishes singing he pauses and looks off camera for a moment before it fades out and starts again.

End of exhibition

WE BURY OUR OWN series



Figure 10: *Desert Melon* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 11: *Danger Will Come* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 12: *Invaded Dreams* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 13: *Lamenting the Flowers* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 14: *Forgiveness of Land* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 15: *Down Under World* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 16: *Energy Matter* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 17: *Three Sisters* from the *We Bury Our Own* series (2012).



Figure 18: *Dhagunyilangu (Brother)*, screenshot from video featured in the *We Bury Our Own* (2012) exhibition at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Long Gallery.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I will explore the critical responses to *Mining the Museum* and institutional /post-institutional critique, and attempt to answer the original research questions posed in the introduction, expanding on the work by Wilson and me, and the obvious differences in our approaches to the museum collection and where this diverges. I will also discuss the impact of the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection on my later work.

I will conclude my findings of how the museum might be used to reveal and revitalise Indigenous histories, and how I do not see the works I have made as a revision or a re-enactment of existing material/history, but rather as a point of departure.

The role of the museum was to divide things into categories developed during the Enlightenment, creating a hierarchy of knowledge achieved through ordering observation, classification and narration. *Mining the Museum* was one of reconfiguration to make institutional critique that questioned the mechanisms of museum culture, perceptual protocols and display to highlight particular historical narratives and injustices.

Wilson's response to the museum crisis initiated the trend of reconfiguring collections. He questioned the hierarchy of Western tradition as the defining historical narratives and further interrogated the idea of provenance to define authenticity.

Mining the Museum came at one of the most prolific periods of Wilson's career. It coincided with a project called *Translation* (1992) in Poland at the Centre for Contemporary Art, located at the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, where Wilson used their collection of Socialist Realist art. This was just one of 13 group shows that Wilson was involved in during 1992, but by far the most significant solo commission at this time – *Fred Wilson: The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993) – took place at the Seattle Art Museum. This was an almost converse experience to *Mining the Museum,* as the Seattle Museum was in the process of being located to new premises, essentially a 'white cube'. Wilson utilised the museum's permanent collection; for example, installing in the African collection (which consisted of traditional robes, masks and tools) a scattering of other types of objects associated with Western symbols of rank and status present in African capitalist society: the grey business suit with a conservatively patterned tie, and a gold Rolex watch (which Wilson had borrowed from a trustee of the museum).

Another significant commission for Wilson was the American Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale where he presented *Speak of Me as I Am* (2003), the title taken from a line from *Othello*, Shakespeare's 1603 play that thematically addresses racism, love, jealousy and betrayal. Wilson's installation combined fabricated and found objects and videos that addressed how, in Renaissance Venice, black Moors were represented and subsequently neglected in the historical accounts of Venice's cosmopolitan past. Carved wooden 'blackamoors' (black figurines in subservient poses found all over Venice) holding acetylene torches and fire extinguishers, a huge black Murano glass

chandelier and a video of *Othello* (the most famous Moor of all) playing in reverse, were shown in a museum-like setting[180]:

> Unlike most of the artists exhibited in Venice, Wilson created site-specific work, scavenging Venetian culture to construct a uniquely Wilsonian view of blacks, past and present, in the ancient city. Not everyone was a fan. In The Times, Michael Kimmelman called the installation 'a big disappointment, obvious and overwrought'. Juan Puntes, Director of White Box, an alternative space in Chelsea, described it as 'readymade to be dropped into Metro Pictures' – Wilson's New York Gallery.[181]

In 1998 Wilson did an installation at The Ian Potter Museum of Art in Melbourne, Australia, called *Viewing the Invisible.* He focused here on the Aboriginal community, addressing the cultural and social politics of depiction:

> He highlighted how so-called scientific representations of Aboriginals became almost sanctioned politicized racism that influenced both the laws and formulation of policies that determined the fate of indigenous populations.[182]

In the show he included one of the cleaning trolleys of the janitors in the museum, who were all Aboriginal, and placed a pair of disembodied, brown plastic hands on it. The trolley was only present in its place during the day, but was used to perform its usual function by night, a fact that 'destabilized the object as a static record', making audiences aware of the context in which they were viewing the artwork.[183]

[180] For a more detailed account, see Erickson, P, 2005.
[181] Hoban, P, 2003.
[182] Stokes Sims, L, 2011, p.16.
[183] ibid.

Wilson has said himself that had he not been given these opportunities to work in museums his practice would have ceased to exist in this way. Whilst his work can be placed in its contextual relation to the practice of other artists applying institutional critique to museums, it is hard to ascertain his influence on artists per se. What is clear is how influential he has been for the discourse of museum studies. Wilson is regularly invited by museum professionals to present his practice as a way for them to reassess their own curatorial strategies, so his impact could be said to have been largely institutional rather than artistic, which is not without its own irony.

Wilson takes a postmodern approach to museology by removing objects from their context. However, this is never with the aim of their 'repatriation', but is instead aimed at constructing a mise-en-abyme of representation; a narrative that sits within a narrative, or a museum that sits within a museum.[184] At the heart of this practice is a paradox or potential pitfall – that Wilson's work is in fact completely dependent on that which it seeks to critique. Andrea Fraser, in a group interview with Martha Buskirk, asks Fred Wilson a question that expresses the problematic aspect of 'serving institutions':

> If you're trying to serve the audience by engaging in a critique of the institution, to what extent is the success of that conditioned upon the collaboration of the institution and its representatives according to their own interests? For me this is an ethical question.[185]

[184] Stokes Sims, L, 1994, p. 15.
[185] Buskirk, M, 1994, p. 126.

Fraser has also gone on to say that with regard to institutional critique, we need to have 'nuanced' readings that acknowledge specific categories within the discourse, and that this must also be with the recognition that 'artists and their works are always already imbedded in systems of display and circulation that are ultimately inescapable'.[186] It isn't just in the museum or gallery where the site of the institution lies, says Fraser; it is also 'internalized, embodied, and performed by people'.[187]

Frazer Ward, talking about Wilson and Haacke in his essay 'The Haunted Museum' (1995), also states that 'it is more productive for a contemporary critical endeavour to recognize that the modern museum has always been a space in which were folded together different, often contradictory forms of publicity'[188], ones that were never separate or autonomous from the institution of art.

The most influential and trenchant critique of Wilson's practice and others like it, which either use or draw on the museum, is Hal Foster's (b. 1955) 'The Artist as Ethnographer?' (1996). Of the same generation as Wilson, Foster made an early name for himself as a leftist critic who established the critical credentials of postmodernism in the first half of the 1980s. Mixing French post-structuralist theory and the Western Marxist 'critical theory' of the German Frankfurt School – in particular Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) and Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) – Foster advocated an art founded on its critical credentials. In the process he became the most effective policeman of his generation, keeping in line those leftist artists and critics whose critical aspirations

[186] Gonzalez, JA, 2008, p. 329.
[187] Frazer quoted in Gonzales, JA, ibid.
[188] Ward, F, 1995, p. 88.

were, in his view, wanting. In this spirit he singled out Wilson's *Mining the Museum* as exemplary and indeed 'the most incisive' of what he called the ethnographic turn in contemporary art.[189]

Foster speculates that the type of site-specific ethnography that Wilson practices with various museums has the potential to become 'a museum event' in which the institution itself 'imports critique', 'whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation'.[190] As this work is invited in by the museum, it becomes an accepted genre of event and spectacle, to be consumed within this way, and in turn the museum can use the artist's interventions for its own self-promotional ends[191]:

> The institution may overshadow the work it otherwise highlights: it becomes spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star.[192]

This criticism of the conditions of institutional critique can extend to that of institutional Hermeticism (insiders' knowledge) and/or exploitation of the audience that it engages:

> However, for all the insight of such projects, the deconstructive-ethnographic approach can become a gambit, an insider game that renders the institution not more open and public but more hermetic and narcissistic, a place for initiate only where a contemptuous criticality is rehearsed.[193]

[189] Foster, H, 1996, p. 191.
[190] ibid., p. 174.
[191] ibid., p. 191.
[192] ibid., p. 198.
[193] ibid.

Despite the growing practice of such ethnographic art, especially amongst Indigenous artists, Foster's criticism has not yet been effectively answered let alone refuted. It remains the benchmark on the subject. For example, referencing Foster's essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer?', Miwon Kwon argues that the '"locational" anchor' of site may end up positing itself in a discursive realm: 'the legacies of colonialism, slavery, racism, and the ethnographic tradition as they impact on identity politics has emerged as an important "site" of artistic investigation', 'sometimes at the cost of semantic slippage between content and site'[194], perhaps leading to the notion of a mythic and subsequently exoticised community. The artist who takes an anthropological approach to questioning ethnographic authority, rather than applying institutional critique, may in fact end up coming full circle to embody it.

Foster acknowledges that:

> This position within the museum [taken by the ethnographic artist] may be necessary to such ethnographic mappings, especially if they purport to be deconstructive; just as [postmodernist] appropriation art, in order to engage media-spectacle, had to participate in it, so new site specific work, in order to remap the museum or to reconfigure its audience, must operate inside it.[195]

However, Foster offers no way out of this impasse. In his later writing this impasse becomes an increasing issue, as if the impossibility of a fully critical art – or a critical

[194] Kwon, M, 1997, p. 93.
[195] ibid., p. 191.

art that is not at the same time complicit with the institutions and ideology it critiques – is the defining feature of contemporary art.[196]

Black artists such as Wilson and Glenn Ligon emerged precisely at a critical moment within museum discourse when the word 'multiculturalism' was on everybody's lips. Whilst Wilson has clearly benefitted from this –'as a consequence his artworks are steeped in the politics of that period' – it has also had the effect of historicising his work, as if its approach is pre the 'post-black' generation of artists.[197] Wilson found himself at the vanguard of a movement that some have criticised for being too connected to the continuation of an ethnic marker, leading him to face the danger of being identified as an artist who engages in what Foster calls, after Walter Benjamin, 'ideological patronage', which confuses Wilson's own 'identity' as 'the other' with that of 'identification' with 'otherness'.[198]

In becoming an historical genre associated with identity discourse, Wilson's practice can lose its original site specificity that is so essential to its critical intentions. For example, when in 2006 Wilson installed *Regina Atra* or 'Black Queen' at the V & A Museum, its context provided it with a direct critique of the British Empire whose socio-political hierarchies and wealth, Wilson indicated, had been generated through the enslavement and suffering of millions of black people. In 2011, the piece was re-installed at Karsten Schubert, a commercial gallery in London, resulting in the loss of context that the site of the V & A provided, reducing the black crown to 'a more generalised meditation on power, authority and blackness ... Moving away from the

[196] Foster, H, 2012, pp. 3–8.
[197] Correia, A, 2011.
[198] Foster, H, 1996, pp. 173–174.

narratives of colonial power, the crown becomes a meditation on the desirability of blackness'.[199]

Similarly, Alice Corriea addresses the problems that might arise when various works from different periods of Wilson's career are gathered together as if an example of a critical genre or an individual's oeuvre, rather than a critical practice. By isolating specific pieces, Correia suggests that the work loses 'some of its critical bite', perhaps leaning more towards the curatorial strategies by Haim Steinbach on commodity culture, for example.[200] In 2001, Wilson did a show called *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979–2000,* which brought together original pieces from a range of shows, including *Cabinet Making: 1820–1960* (1992) from *Mining the Museum*. In the removal of these individual works from their context, the original complexity of the installation is lost, 'reduced to subject matter rather than critique',[201] and to a matter of aesthetics or an aestheticised commodity rather than social engagement.

While these critiques have some validity, especially from a revolutionary perspective that seeks to do away with the museum rather than simply use it as a platform for incremental change, Wilson's installations – like those of Haacke – acknowledge the museum as a compromised space, from within which is performed 'art's function as publicity'.[202] In this respect Wilson's practice can be compared to Nicolas Bourriaud's (b. 1965) 'relational aesthetics' that gained currency in the second half of the 1990s,

[199] Correia, A, 2011, p. 640.
[200] ibid., p 643.
[201] ibid., p 644.
[202] Ward, F, 1995, p. 88.

which sought to locate art practice within a community, within culture at large.[203] Whilst Wilson's installations are often comprised of a set of autonomous, discrete objects, it is their locational site that provides their context and thus environmental contingencies in which they are placed. Although his work cannot be said to be purely relational in Bourriaud's sense of the term, there is always an intention within the work to set up inter-subjective encounters (to conceptualise the psychological relation between people), through the reconfiguration of objects.

A more nuanced analysis might see Wilson's social and political critique as being attuned with Claire Bishop's (b. 1979) critique of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. In *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004), Bishop supports Bourriaud's general tenets of relational aesthetics – his attempt to move art away from a spectator sport to one in which artist and audience are engaged in inter-subjective social relations:

> Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience. Moreover, this audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be.[204]

However, echoing Foster's attempts to retain a critical posture, Bishop is critical of Bourriaud's preference for 'convivial' rather than uncomfortable relations. Instead of championing the likes of Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick, as Bourriaud does, she

[203] Bourriaud, Nicolas, 2002.
[204] Bishop, C, 2004, p. 54.

prefers the work of Thomas Hirschhorn (also a favourite artist of Foster's) and Santiago Sierra; not 'the fictitious whole subject of harmonious community, but a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux'.[205] This too is an apt description of Wilson's installations. However, if Bishop addresses Foster's conundrum of critique in a post-critical age, she makes no more headway than he does. Critique remains 'compromised by its dependence on demystification', which, says Foster, is assuming a viewer/consumer in need of enlightenment 'remains within the rhetorical coils' of the very regime it wants to demystify.[206] Even the participatory politics of relational aesthetics, be it convivial (Bourriaud) or critical (Bishop), fails to escape the transcendental space of aesthetic experience. Foster's call, early in his career, for an 'imminent critique' – 'the intent of artistic intervention becomes less to secure a transcendental conviction in art than to undertake an imminent testing of its discursive rules and institutional regulations'[207] – remains as elusive as ever.

We Bury Our Own does not claim to have found a way through this conundrum, or even to have addressed it. Instead it sidesteps these particular theoretical issues while at the same time seeking to explore alternative paths to criticality (as defined by Foster) within the ethnographic and archival practices of contemporary art. Firstly, *We Bury Our Own* sought not to comment on the conventions of the museum space or engage in the relational or community orientated critiques of either relational aesthetics or Wilson's museology, but rather to create a third space within the context of the Pitt Rivers Museum that operated as a departure point from the mechanisms at

[205] Bishop, C, 2004, p. 79.
[206] Foster, H, 2012, p. 5.
[207] Hal Foster, 1996, p. 58. The essay, 'The Crux of Minimalism', was originally published in Singerman, Howard ed. (1986) *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, pp. 162–83.

play within the museum institution. It incorporates aspects of the photographic collection as a frame of reference that contributed to the production of a contemporary body of work that embodies the biographical experience of a contemporary Aboriginal person today, in light of historical practices. Hence it is not art as ethnography, as envisaged by Foster, but an aesthetic auto-ethnography that I practise. While Wilson's ethnographic art is a product of his biography, it is not auto-ethnographic, at least not in the sense that *We Bury Our Own* is.

There are many synergies between *Mining the Museum* and *We Bury Our Own* and several distinctly different strategic approaches. Wilson's research was informed similarly to *We Bury Our Own* via ethnographic archives, personal experiences and ekphrasis. His engagement with museum staff, research into the Maryland Historical Society Collection and also his own biographical experience strongly informed the production and staging of *Mining the Museum*.

This process occurred similarly in *We Bury Our Own* but, unlike Wilson's work, it did not navigate around traditional practices and sensitivities. Wilson utilised mechanisms from the museum and material from the collection to highlight particular historical narratives and injustices. *We Bury Our Own* operated quite differently, engaging the processes of auto-ethnography and ekphrasis to inform the production of new work that deliberately concealed the physical collection, employing it instead as a framework to create a third space inside the museum; in that space audiences could see not so much the collection or a critique of it through the prism of studio research but a wholly new collection born from it.

Mining the Museum as a pioneering exhibition within the museum context broke new ground for studio research and practice and is still a benchmark for opening up the museum archive to artistic scholarship. However, once positioned outside of the museum it critiqued, *Mining the Museum* was not as successful, losing much of its context when transferred to the gallery space.

The decision not to exhibit the material from the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection liberated the content/subjects from the definition of the ethnographic or the anthropological. It also emancipated the work from being about a comment on museum practices and mechanisms, allowing the content of the collection to emerge through recollection and memory. The physical material no longer serves a physical role.

We Bury Our Own was successful in this respect. While shown in the Pitt Rivers Museum, it was not bound by it. It toured to locations all around the world and to great critical engagement. The exhibition travelled to Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia; Skirball Arts Center, New York University, New York City, USA; Kluge Ruhe Museum, University of Virginia, Virginia, USA; The Hospital Club, Covent Garden, London, UK; Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, Australia, and Future Perfect Gallery, Singapore. The strong scholarly intention behind the work was effective in encouraging audiences to consider the idea of the archive, the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection, and its interfacing with the body of work.

Michael Aird in his essay ‘Growing Up with Aborigines’ states:

> Aboriginal people look past the stereotypical way in which their relatives and ancestors have been portrayed, because they are just happy to be able to see photographs of people who play a part in their family's history.[208]

The concept of ‘spiritual repatriation’ lends itself to Aird’s observation in that it fosters the idea that through artistic processes there is an opportunity to embrace the humanity of such collections.

My intention behind visiting the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection rather than possessing the photographs or re-exhibiting them is that, through a process of reflective meditation there may be a transfer of something essential in or other to the collection, an aura that would take new form in *We Bury Our Own*.

The idea of spiritual repatriation emphasises the repatriation of this essential quality, what might be called the aura of such collections, rather than the physical object, moving things into the spiritual realm away from the material.

For Walter Benjamin the aura was a magical element in a work of art that returned the gaze of the viewer: ‘To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return’. While admitting that such personification is delusional – a ‘chimera’ – he insists on its secretive ‘ceremonial’ qualities, in

[208] Aird, M, 2003.

particular its distancing effect or 'inapproachability', which he said was 'on a level with perception in dreams'.[209] For Benjamin it was exactly this essence of art, the aura that carries its ideological content, which was lost in its reproduction, and which underpinned the critical potential of photography to demystify.[210] According to Benjamin, Atget's sharp focus, repetitive subject matter and lack of atmospheric effects initiated 'the emancipation of object from aura which is the signal achievement of the latest school of photography'.[211] Wilson's rearrangements or interventions had a similar effect on the aura of the museum display.

Benjamin compared the experience of an artwork's aura to involuntary memory – as if it invokes repressed imagery. In a similar fashion, spiritual repatriation relinquishes the constraint of the photograph as an artefact of reproduction and allows the subject to emerge through memory and recollection, an immaterial space. In other words, against Benjamin's assessment of photography, *We Bury Our Own* reinvests aura in the photograph – more or less along the lines that Roland Barthes did in his Benjaminesque reply to Benjamin when he claimed that photography pictures the past, or memories. In *We Bury Our Own* the interaction with the museum's collection is mediated through the artist from the collection to its public reception. In this sense the Barthian notion of the aura or more particularly its *punctum*, which for Barthes could be a detail that provoked an 'unexpected flash', or what he was most interested in, which was the intensity provoked by the sense of 'Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme ('that-has-been'),* its pure representation'.[212] If this lost past is allowed to

[209] Benjamin, W, 1982a, pp. 190–91.
[210] Benjamin, W, 1982b, pp. 219–53.
[211] Benjamin, W, 1979, pp. 240–257, p. 250.
[212] Barthes, R, 1981, p. 94.

migrate and breathe in the present, freed from the constraints and categorisation of linear history, the photograph releases the image into the now.

In the context of studio research Barthes' *punctum* returns to the archive a form of potential agency, it also empowers contemporary artists to bring with them their own biography, their own experiences, in the aftermath of historical practices of representation that repress or forget certain aspects of the past. This, I argue, is where previously unseen and newly seen histories and perceptions can be revealed, especially in relation to Indigenous histories.

The museum collections that were compiled as extensions of colonial practice and ideology can be repositories for scholarly appreciation and studio research. The latter, in particular, can play an active role in renewing such collections as vital components of museum and visual discourse. In this context *We Bury Our Own* aims to repatriate some aspect of the museum collection back into the wider world.

My engagement with the Pitt Rivers Museum has continued to influence new bodies of work, which have changed form again. Sculptural works such as *He's Learning the Language* (2013) and *All Revolutions are Led by the Young* (2014) are an organic development from *We Bury Our Own*. My most recent series, *Pagan Sun* (2013) and *Polari* (2014), refer to ceremonial images in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection, engaging ideas of mythology, ritual and metamorphosis as powerful themes within traditional culture and practices.



Figure 19: *He's Learning the Language* (2013), resin sculpture, shown as part of the *Debil Debil* curated by Professor Marcia Langton. Inspired by minerals and crystals in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection, based on a calcite crystal from south-west Queensland and connected to childhood tradition of searching for crystals and fossilised wood in Longreach, western Queensland, Australia.



Figure 20: *All Revolutions are Led by the Young* (2014), 3D printed resin sculpture, based on calcite crystal from western Queensland, Australia.



Figure 21: *Conjure By Moon* from the *Pagan Sun* series (2014).



Figure 22: *Scorch the Earth* from the *Pagan Sun* series (2014).



Figure 23: *Rocks On Your Belly* from the *Pagan Sun* series (2013).



Figure 24: *Ellipse* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 25: *Ariel* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 26: *Trinity I* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 27: *Trinity II* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 28: *Trinity III* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 29: *Siren* from the *Polari* series (2014).



Figure 30: *Echo* from the *Polari* series (2014).

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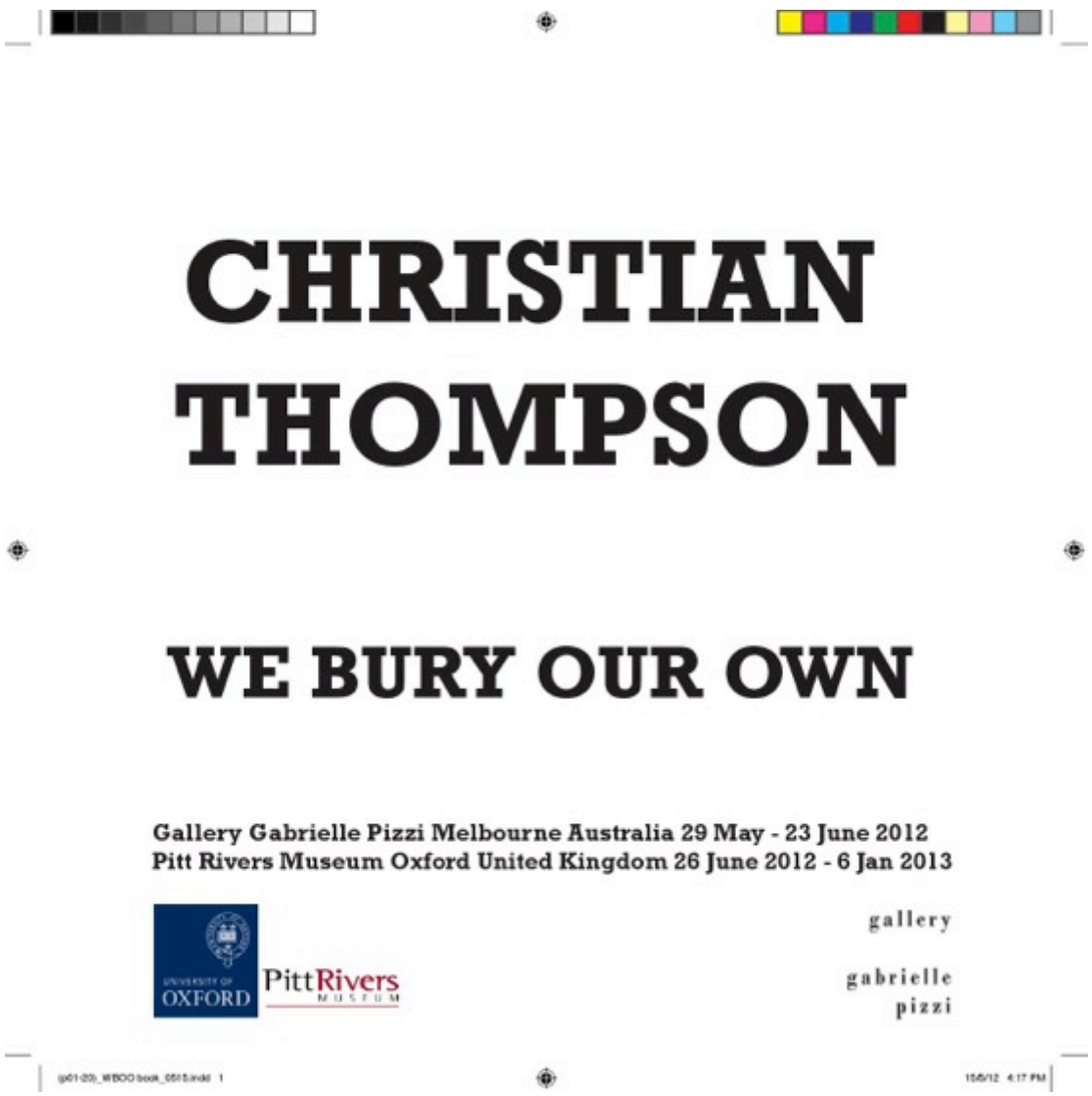
Appendix A – *We Bury Our Own* exhibition catalogue







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Camouflage, Display, Dazzle

An ambivalence of display and disguise appears in Christian Thompson's new series of photographic self-portraits. Each image is a complex microcosm in which Thompson draws on his training in sculpture and textiles to build a photograph with, as he says, the mindset of a sculptor. The elements of each photograph are carefully selected and posed: clothing, props, backdrop, coloration, and not least himself – the appearance of his hair and hands, the concealment of other aspects of his face. These frontal head-shots conjure associations with the id photo, the criminal mug-shot, the formal portrait, icons, and colonial photographic studies of indigenous peoples.

The artist tries on and inhabits a range of temporary guises: formal white-tie evening dress combined with a headband made from lumps of white and purple rock crystals, or with a crumpled paper headdress showing a photocopied image of a tree. In other photographs he wears a headscarf with a print popular for tourists to Australia, or his head is obscured in a black balaclava. 'I am,' he says, 'the armature for the characters, costumes and various props'.

In all of these cryptic photographs his eyes are concealed - by crystals, flowers, butterflies, leaves, or hidden behind his hands, decorated with dot paintings, or various props are held up before his face: a Tudor warship, a picture of a bird of prey. In another image his eyes are disappearing beneath a cowl, a swathe, of blooming flowers. The concealment of the eyes makes the other parts of the face - the nose, mouth, cheeks - more visible and vulnerable-looking. We, the viewers are denied access. He does not engage our gaze, but rather his vision is introverted, or he is looking at and through the 'nature' in his eyes.

The work plays with Australian indigenous identity and with indigenous and Western histories and relationships. 'We are not allowed to evolve' writes Marcia Langton.(1) In territory explored by other artists such as Guillermo Gomez Pena, Coco Fusco and Jimmie Durham, Thompson's work breaks out from Western stereotyping of indigenous cultures as static, traditional, natural, authentic, and also from postcolonial notions of the indigenous victim, and instead allows that identity to escape from aspic and take fluid, contemporary, self-authored forms. Yet Thompson's work is not limited to issues of identities, histories and geopolitics. His Bidjara heritage also comes into play in a pantheistic vision of the relationship between human and nature.

There are echoes of other (Western) artists in the work: Andy Warhol's video and photographic portraits, Marina Abramovic's crystal power-objects, Bruce Nauman's video and photographic works featuring himself, Man Ray's portraits of Marcel Duchamp dressed up as Rrose Sélavy, Leigh Bowery's extraordinary clothing structures. These resonances are combined with evocations of the sensations of the land: the cornucopeia of nature, the shimmering mirage, the heat, the smells of the landscapes in the sub-tropical, desert, and temperate zones of Australia.

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The viewer's gaze is denied in these photographs where the figure defends, protects and owns itself, but also looks beyond identity to ecology.

Camouflage might involve resemblance, concealment or confusion. Naval dazzle camouflage in the First World War, for instance, used strident patterning to confuse the enemy rather than conceal the ships, and was developed by UK artists Norman Wilkinson and Edward Wadsworth. In 1935 Roger Caillois published a provocative essay in the Surrealist journal Minataure, examining the phenomena of mimetic camouflage in insects and animals and the distinction between an organism and its surroundings. He discusses the insect camouflaged as a leaf, the mantis imitating a flower and the beetle posing as a pebble. After relating mimesis to sympathetic magic – 'things once brought into contact remain united, associated by contiguity and resemblance' and considering mimicry as incantation, he goes on to argue that rather than a defensive activity, mimesis is caused by a 'temptation by space', 'the lure of material space', a desire for assimilation, 'to be in everything'.

> The Clolia, Brazilian butterflies, position themselves in a row on small stalks in such a way as to represent bell flowers, in the manner of a sprig of lily of the valley, for example. It is thus a real temptation by space. (2)

According to Caillois mimicry is a disturbance in the perception of space. His discussion of blending, blurring, merging, seems pertinent to Thompson's engagement with nature and his response to the temptation of the space of the image.

Tracey Warr
Senior Lecturer
Contemporary Art Theory/ Art & Design Research Co-ordinator
School of Arts, Oxford Brookes University

(1). Marcia Langton, 'Blaks Palace', exhibition catalogue essay, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, 2002.

(2).Caillois, Roger, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychaesthenia', originally published in Minataure, 7, 1935; and translated by John Shepley in October, 31, 1984.

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Invaded Dreams

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Energy Matter

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Danger Will Come

(p01-20)_WBOO book_0515.indd 7 15/5/12 4:17 PM



Down Under World

(p01-20)_WBOO book_0515.indd 6 15/5/12 4:17 PM



Three Sisters

(p01-20)_WBOO book_0515.indd 9 15/5/12 4:17 PM



Lamenting the overfl

(p01-20)_WBOO book_0515.indd 10 15/5/12 4:17 PM



Desert Melon



Forgiveness of Land

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Spiritual repatriation and the archive in Christian Thompson's We Bury Our Own

Christian Thompson's We Bury Our Own is, to borrow a phrase he used in conversation with me recently, a project involving the 'spiritual repatriation' of the archive. Of course, the physical repatriation of Aboriginal human remains is also a process with deep spiritual significance and resonance to those communities involved in receiving them. But in the case of archives – and in particular photographs – those ancestors held in the images remain in the storerooms of remote institutions even after copies have been returned or shared online. The reproducibility of the photographic image means that the surface information it holds can easily be shared, especially in the digital age. But the images of ancestors, as ethnographic studies around the world now show us, are more than the chemical traces of light on a surface – they have a direct and spiritual connection to the person photographed, and so hold significant spiritual and emotional qualities. It is this creative tension, between the archive as a permanent ancestral resting place, and yet as a reproducible, recodable, and dynamic historical resource, that lies at the heart of Thompson's concept of the exhibition space as a spiritual zone.

Over the past year, Christian Thompson has made several research visits to view historic photographs of Aboriginal people at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, mostly dating to the late nineteenth century. The collection was built up after the Museum's foundation in 1884 as an anthropological research resource, and the Museum's first Curator, Henry Balfour, used his extensive contacts in Australia, such as close colleague and friend Baldwin Spencer, to build up the archive. The experience of working with this collection has been an emotional and yet productive one for Thompson, and also a very welcome innovative collaboration from the Museum's perspective. Although not explicitly quoted in the work made as a result of this engagement, both the experience of looking at the historical images, the modes of representation they carry, and the painful histories they hold, can be understood as lying at the heart of the work. Rather than directly invoking or re-presenting historic imagery, as is evident in the work of other artists such as Brook Andrew (who has also worked extensively with archives), Thompson has chosen to take the history of photographic representation of Aboriginal people as a starting point for the spiritual repatriation of the archive through the redemptive process of self-portraiture. Importantly, this process has not involved drawing on those historical markers of identity which are so prevalent in ethnographic imagery, but rather his own fluid and evolving transcultural identity, as well as biographical markers of another recent identity, that of an Oxford student in formal dress. Although archival imagery is a key inspiration in Thompson's work generally, he is inspired by the materiality and composition of a wide variety of images from many different reference points such as contemporary fashion, film, and music. It is this playful blending of genres and reference points that not only makes Thompson's approach distinctive, it also resonates historically with the blending of scientific and popular genres in the archival imagery with which he has engaged during this project.

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One of the main points of reference to the colonial archive in the work is the use of the more scientific end of nineteenth-century 'ethnographic' portraiture; head-and-shoulders, full-face, looking directly into the camera, as in the work of policeman Paul Foelsche of Darwin in the 1870s. The scientific scrutiny of the colonial lens is dramatically inverted in We Bury Our Own however, with the indigenous appropriation of the means of representation through the self-portrait, as well as the inversion of a key marker of cultural identity – dress. By wearing Oxford academic dress in the portraits, We Bury Our Own makes a powerful statement about historical and political processes of identity formation within contemporary Aboriginal communities. As one of the first two Aboriginal students at the University of Oxford on a Charlie Perkins Scholarship, the reference to Oxford in the work is full of historical resonance. Charlie Perkins himself was the first Aboriginal person to become a university graduate, from the University of Sydney in 1965. The biographical connections within We Bury Our Own to Charlie Perkins are also evident in the theme of mining through the use of crystals such as amethysts, since Perkins worked as a coal miner in England for a period in the late 1950s. Speaking about this time later in life, he said 'It was dirty, filthy, driven high winds driving coal in your face all the time, embedding it in your skin, and you know, in winter time it was freezing. And when you get down in the pits, right down below, it's warm, and then you go down when it's dark and you come up when it's dark in England.' The use of crystals also points to beliefs, not necessary Aboriginal, in the healing qualities of certain stones, and that their physical contact with the body (Thompson places them also on his eyes) will channel the spiritual world into the corporeal. The spiritual mediation of crystals in the work connects the various strands of history, culture and representation, and places the work in a new context – that of the spiritual connectivity between the museum, the archival images of ancestors, and the embodied viewer. It is this set of temporal and corporeal connections that Thompson sees as the creative process of spiritual repatriation.

We Bury Our Own also emerges from the wider context of an international research and community project in which the Pitt Rivers Museum is involved, 'Globalization, photography, and race: the circulation and return of Aboriginal photographs in Europe', led by Dr Jane Lydon at Monash University, funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council. This project explores the momentous intersection of new digital technologies and Aboriginal traditions surrounding visual imagery. The research also looks into the global circulation of photographs of Australian Aboriginal people that began in the 1840s, and their central role within the emergence of modern views regarding race and history. It investigates the significance of colonial photography to Indigenous communities, and through international collaboration returns photographs currently housed in four key European collections (including Oxford) to descendants, providing an important Indigenous heritage resource and a travelling exhibition. As a significant body of new work by an indigenous Australian artist engaging with a European collection, We Bury Our Own is a major outcome of this project.

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As the project proceeds, and the historic images are made more available to indigenous communities, many more creative engagements, appropriations, and repatriations will hopefully take place. One of the biggest responsibilities of museums and archives today, argues Aboriginal writer and curator Michael Aird, is to make collections available to Aboriginal communities, despite the anxieties of curators about the best ways to go about this. As Christian Thompson's new work shows us, Aboriginal artists and curators are moving into an exciting new phase of creative engagement with their visual history, one that moves the debate on from the politics of race and injustice, towards multiple, complex, and hybrid identities in the present, and into the future.

Dr Chris Morton
Curator and Head of Photograph and Manuscript Collections
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

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CHRISTIAN THOMPSON

Born 1978 Gawler South Australia
Christian Bumbarra Thompson is a contemporary artist who has presented his photographs, videos and performance work in numerous solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally. Thompson's recent group exhibitions include; unDisclosed, 2nd National Indigenous Triennal, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Collection, Valencian Institute of Modern Art, Valencia, Spain. Hijacked III, QUOD Gallery, Derby, United Kingdom. Shadow Life, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, Bangkok, Thailand. Tell Me Tell Me, Australian and Korean Art 1976-2011, National Museum of Korean Art, Seoul, South Korea. Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years, Plugin Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Canada. The Beauty of Distance/Songs of Survival in a Precarios Age, 17th Biennale of Sydney. Culture Warriors, National Indigenous Art Triennial, Washington D C, USA; Hybrid Arts Fest Australia, Radialsystem V, Berlin, Germany; Andy and Oz: Parallel Visions, Andy Warhol Museum, U.S.A; Brilliance, Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands.Christian has completed a highly coveted international residency at DasArts Advanced studies for Performing Arts, Amsterdam and subsequently undertook a residency and public art project with the centre for Future Art Research at Arizona State University, Arizona U.S.A.
In 2010, he completed two residencies, one at Blast Theory, Brighton, UK and the other at Green street Studio, New York, USA. He was awarded the inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholarship for post-graduate studies and is now working to complete his Doctorate of Philosophy in Fine Art at Oxford University, United Kingdom.
Christian's work is held in many public and private collections both nationally and internationally, including the National Gallery of Australia; National Gallery of Victoria; the Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands; the Art Gallery of New South Wales; and the Peter Klein Collection, Eberdingen, Germany.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011 King Billy, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2010 Christian Thompson Survey Show, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
Heat, Chalkhorse Gallery, Sydney, Australia
2009 Lost Together, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2008 Australian Graffiti, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2007 The Sixth Mile, Chalk Horse Gallery, Sydney, Australia
2006 The Sixth Mile, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Australia
Vote Yes - An aboriginal Thompson Project, Westspace, Melbourne, Australia
2004 The Gates of Tambo, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2003 Emotional Striptease, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2002 Show Me the Way to Go Home, George Adams Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
Blaks Palace, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2000 BIGIYI (dream to dream), Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
Gundang Ngaya Burbala, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, Australia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011 Tell Me Tell Me, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
POWERHOUSE, Osney Power Staition, Oxford, United Kingdom
2010 The Beauty of Distance/Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age – 17th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Before and After Science- 2010 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

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2009 Culture Warriors – National Indigenous Art Triennial, American University, Washington D C, U.S.A.
Hybrid Arts Fest Australia, Radialsystem V, Berlin, Germany
Me-Take, Indigenous Self-representation in Photomedia, Perth Centre for Contemporary Photography
2007 Schittering-Brilliance, Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Andy and OZ: Parallel Visions, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, U.S.A.
Culture Warriors – National Indigenous Art Triennial, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
Working Down Under, Wood Street Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
Eye to I, Ballarat Regional Art Gallery, Ballarat, Australia
Raised by Wolves, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia
2004 Skin, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, Australia
Matter of Time, Tamworth Textile Biennale, Tamworth, Australia
Spirit and Vision, Kunst der Gegenwart Sammlung Essl, Vienna, Austria
IMAGE - Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands
The Space Between, Curtin University, Perth, Australia
Art Paris, The Louvre, Paris, France
MAAP Gravity, Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore
Sguardi Australiani, Camogli, Italy
2003 Drama is Conflict, Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia
Tactility 200 Years of Indigenous Textiles, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
TRAFFIC, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, Australia
Drama is Conflict, Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia
2002 Crossing (New Australian Art), ATSKI Gallery, Helsinki, Finland
2001 LUMO Intohimo, Photographic Triennial of Finland, Helsinki, Finland
2000 Biennale d'Art Contemporain, Biennale De Noumea of Contemporary Art, New Caledonia

COLLECTIONS

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia.
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
Peter Klein Collection, Eberdingen, Germany
Latrobe Regional Gallery, Morwell, Australia
Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Monash Gallery of Art, Wheelers Hill, Australia
Myer Collection, Melbourne, Australia
City of Melbourne Collection, Melbourne, Australia
Pat Corrigan Collections, Sydney, Australia.
Deloitte Collection, Sydney, Australia.
Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton Collection, Sydney, Australia.
Banyule City Collection, Melbourne, Australia
Christ Church Grammar School, Perth, Australia

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2012 'unDisclosed', 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial, exhibition catalogue, Anne Gray editor, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
'Hijacked III: Australia/United Kingdom' exhibition catalogue, Carola Akindele-Obe, louise Jones et al Bic City Press, Perth, Australia.
2011 The Chronicle. 'USQ Alumnus Goes Down in History', 17th February 2011.
2010 AUTO FOCUS, The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography by Susan Bright, Thames & Hudson
The Monthly, 'Artful Excess', by Julian Engberg, June 2010, N.o 57.
Realtime, 'Video art: performance, politics, vision' by Gail Priest.
The Australian, 'Indigenous Duo have a first for Oxford', by James HowArt.
Monthly, 'Beauty, Distance, Songs: Surviving the End of Enlightenment' by Ian Mclean, July, 2010.
Sydney Morning Herald, 'The Hunters Hill Collectors', September 19, 2010.
BBC Oxford, 'Oxford University's Aboriginal Scholars' 22nd October, 2010.
No Dots Down Here 'Christian Thompson Goes to Oxford' Edition 2, June.
The Times 'Australian Students Become the First' by Sophie Tedmanson, March 20, 2010.
The Australian, 'Charlie Perkins Opens Door to Oxford', March 17, 2010.
The Oxford Student, 'Indigenous Students Arrive at Oxford', by Erik Boman, October 2010.
LOOK! Contemporary Australian Photography since 1980, by Anne Marsh Macmillan Art Publishing.
Before and After Science- 2010 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of South Australia.
2009 Art & Australia,Vol 46 Winter 2009, Shifting Identities by Stephen Gilchrist, p616-p625.
2008 'Man: Depicting Contemporary Masculinity', Penrith Regional Gallery & Lewers Bequest, exhibition catalogue, curator Luke Parker, Australia.
2007 'Schittering-Brilliance', exhibition catalogue, Georges Petitjean (ed), Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands.
'Andy and OZ: Parallel Visions', exhibition catalogue, Deborah Hart curator, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, United States of America.
'Culture Warriors – National Indigenous Art Triennial', exhibition catalogue, Deborah Clark and Susan Jenkins editors, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia.
The Canberra Times, 'After Andy – Pop art Down Under' by Christine Wallace, October 27th, 2007.
The West Australian, 24th February 2007, 'Running with the Pack' by Rick Spencer.
2004 The Age, Monday August 7, p. 7 'Age Review', 'Evidence of Art' by Kyla McFarlane.
2003 Real Time, Dec02 – Jan 03 no 52, Digital Indigeneity, Christine Nichols Arts Yam Up, Summer 2002 – 2003.
Melbourne Magazine, March 2003, Stripping Identity Bare by Lucinda Strahan.
2002 The Age, Wednesday 20th March,2002, Fashion Sashays into Art by Robert Nelson.
Gray Anne (ed) Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
2001 ARTLINK - 'Indigenous Art for the Twenty First Century' Vol 20 #1.
Art Monthly - 'UseBy: Asia Pacific Artist Initiatives Project' by John Mateer, pg 19, Issue 135.

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List of Works

We Bury Our Own
Invaded Dreams
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Energy Matters
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Danger Will Come
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Down Under World
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Three Sisters
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Lamenting the Flowers
100 x 100cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Desert Melon
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

We Bury Our Own
Forgiveness of Land
100 x 100 cm
c-type print

A special thanks to Christian Thompson, Tracey Warr, Dr Chris Morton
Grant Smith and Rod McLeish

Samantha Pizzi

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Figure A1: *We Bury Our Own* exhibition catalogue

Appendix B: Shortlist of images and objects related to *We Bury Our Own*



Figure B1: Hooded coat made from seal intestine, with embroidery at cuffs and hem (1970), Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://objects.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/PRMUID7022.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B2: Witch's ladder found in Wellington, Somerset. [Online image] available from http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-witchs-ladder.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B3: Morris dancer's costume (1895), Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-morris-dancers-costume.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B4: Slug on a thorn (1898), Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-slug-on-a-thorn.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]

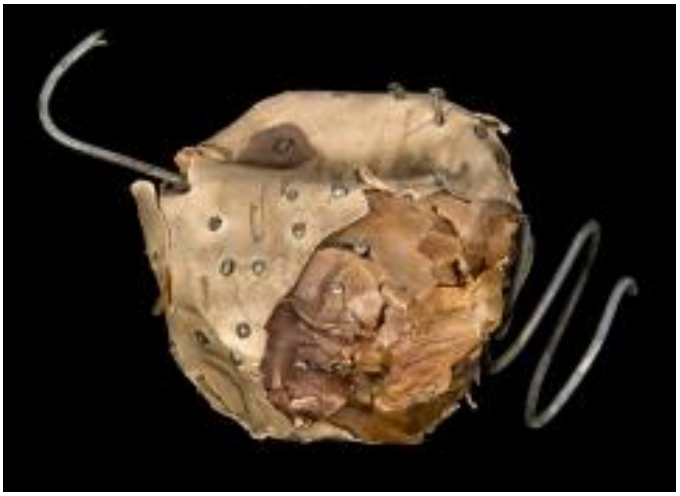

Figure B5: Bewitched Onion (1917), Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-tylors-onion.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B6: Morris dancing bells, Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-morris-dancers-bells.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B7: Two mole's feet, carried in a pocket as an amulet to protect from toothache, Pitt Rivers Museum Collection. [Online image] available from: http://objects.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/PRMUID221296.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B8: Ghost gum eucalyptus tree outside the township of Barcaldine, south-west Queensland, Australia.



Figure B9: Hidden mothers of Victorian photography. [Online image] available from: http://ridiculouslyinteresting.com/2012/01/05/hidden-mothers-in-victorian-portraits/ [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B10: A drawer of Ulysses butterflies (*Papilio ulysses*) held in the Museum of Natural History, University of Oxford. [Online image] available from: http://www.oum.ox.ac.uk/visiting/presenting6.htm [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B11: The *Mary Rose* as depicted by Anthony Roll. [Online image] available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Rose [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure B12: Plastic bottle, Ben Curtis Associated Press, makeshift headwear worn by Protestors of Mubarak during the riots in Egypt. [Online image] available from: http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2011/feb/03/egypt-protesters-head-protection-helmets



Figure B13: Glow-in-the-dark minerals, Museum of Natural History, University of Oxford.



Figure B14: Pitt Rivers by Night tour. [Online image] available from: http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/reel2real/index.php/the-future-of-sound-in-museums.html [Accessed 10 October 2015]

Appendix C: Archive images from Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*



Figure C1: Wilson, F, Punt gun, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-punt-gun [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C2: Wilson, F, 'We shared our knowledge and our lives', *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-we-shared-our-knowledge-and-our-lives [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C3: Wilson, F, Installation view: Table, arm and hand with CSA envelope, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-table-arm-and-hand-csa-envelope [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C4: Wilson, F, Installation view: Model of slave ship, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-model-slave-ship [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C5: Wilson, F, Installation view: Water jug, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-water-jug [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C6: Wilson, F, Installation view: Dollhouse, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-doll-house [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C7: Wilson, F, Installation view: Pikes from John Brown's raid with reward broadsides, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-pikes-john-browns-raid-reward-broadsides. [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C8: Wilson, F, Installation view: Harpers Ferry painting, pikes and dollhouse, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-harpers-ferry-painting-pikes-and-dollhouse. [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C9: Wilson, F, Installation view: Pedestal, globes and busts, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-pedestals-globe-and-busts [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C10: Wilson, F, Installation view: Pedestals, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-pedestals [Accessed 10 October 2015]

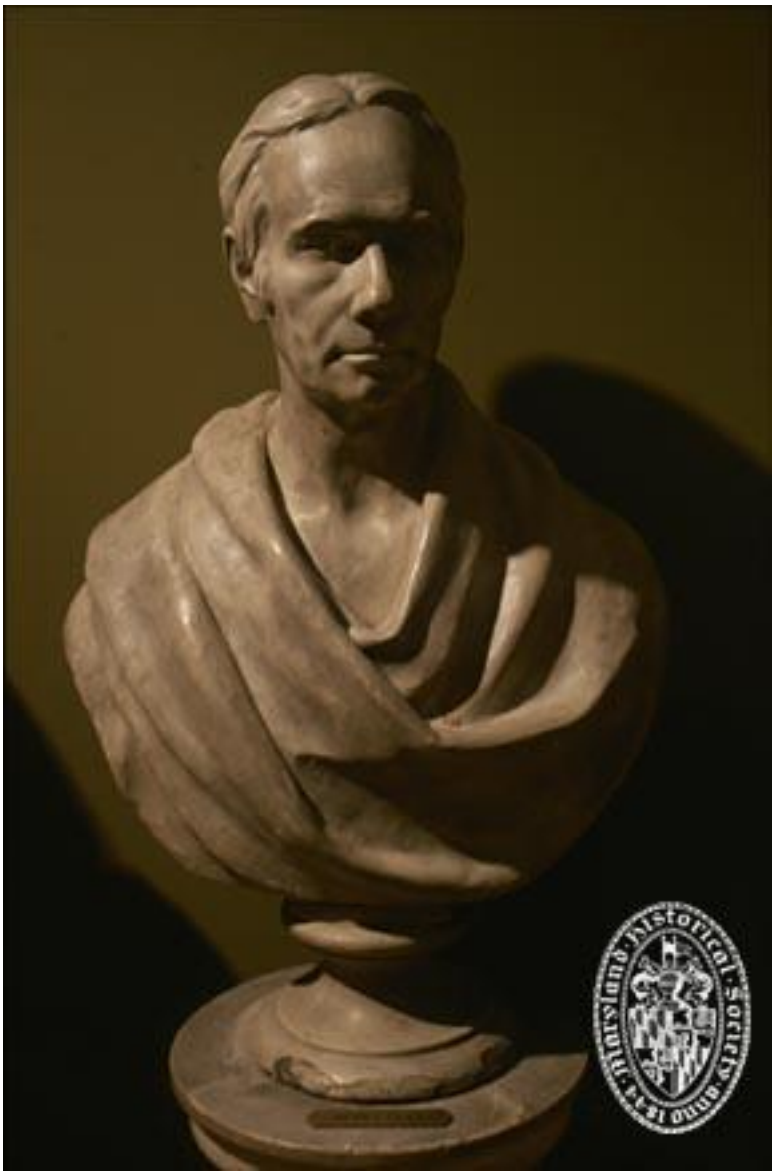

Figure C11: Wilson, F, Installation view: (detail) Henry Clay bust, *Mining the Museum* (1992 –93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-detail-henry-clay-bust [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C12: Wilson, F, Installation view: (detail) Wicker basket and water jug, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-detail-wicker-basket-and-water-jug [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C13: Wilson, F, Installation view: (detail) Cigar-store Indian*, Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-detail-cigar-store-indian [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C14: Wilson, F, Installation view: Cigar-store Indian facing framed photographs, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-cigar-store-indian-facing-framed-photographs [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure C15: Wilson, F, Installation view: Metalwork, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-metalwork [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure C16: Wilson, F, Installation view: *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-mining-museum [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure C17: Wilson, F, Installation view: Metalwork and model of slave ship, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-metalwork-and-model-slave-ship [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure C18: Wilson, F, Installation view: Truth trophy and pedestals, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-truth-trophy-and-pedestals [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure C19: Wilson, F, Installation view: Cigar-store Indians, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-cigar-store-indians [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure C20: Wilson, F, Installation view: Cabinetmaking, 1820–1960, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-cabinetmaking-1820-1960 [Accessed 11 October 2015]

Appendix D: Contingent material, Wilson and Thompson sources and reverberation between them.



Figure D1: Wilson, F, 'We shared our knowledge and our lives', *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-we-shared-our-knowledge-and-our-lives [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure D2: *Invaded Dreams* (2012) from the *We Bury Our Own* series, 100 cm x 100 cm, C-type print.

Reverberations: *Mining the Museum* and *We Bury Our Own* both incorporate objects such as model boats juxtaposed against other objects.



Figure D3: Wilson, F. Installation view: Pedestal, globes and busts, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-pedestals-globe-and-busts [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure D4: *Lamenting the Flowers* (2012) from the *We Bury Our Own* series, 100 cm x 100 cm, C-type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper

Reverberations: *Mining the Museum* and *We Bury Our Own* both utilise the repetition of the bust: in *Mining the Museum* two busts of significant historical figures and in *We Bury Our Own* my own body.



Figure D5: Wilson, F, Punt gun, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-punt-gun
[Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure D6: *Three Sisters* (2012) from the *We Bury Our Own* series, 100 cm x 100 cm, C-type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper.

Reverberations: Colour was a key strategy of *Mining the Museum*, with each gallery painted a different colour. In *We Bury Our Own* the omission of colour was an equally powerful strategy, mimicking the black-and-white, sepia palette of the Pitt Rivers Museum Australian Photographic Collection.



Figure D7: Wilson, F, Installation view: (detail) Wicker basket and water jug, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-detail-wicker-basket-and-water-jug [Accessed 10 October 2015]



Figure D8: *Dhagunyilangu (Brother)* (2012), screenshot from the *We Bury Our Own* series, duration 2:19 min, video.

Reverberations: Wilson incorporated sound in *Mining the Museum* with sound recordings often emanating from objects. Similarly *We Bury Our Own* incorporated a

video work entitled *Dhagunyilangu (Brother)* in which a Caucasian opera singer sings a song written in Bidjara; this floats through the Long Gallery creating an audio backdrop to the portraits.



Figure D9: Wilson, F. Installation view: Cigar-store Indians, *Mining the Museum* (1992–93). [Online image] available from: http://www.mdhs.org/digitalimage/installation-view-cigar-store-indians [Accessed 11 October 2015]



Figure D10: *Down Under World* (2012) from the *We Bury Our Own* series, 100 cm x 100 cm, C-type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper.



Figure D11: *Desert Melon* (2012) from the *We Bury Our Own* series, 100 cm x 100 cm, C-type print on Fuji Pearl metallic paper.

Reverberations: Wilson drew a relationship between objects drawn from the Maryland Historical Society Collection. In the case of 'Cigar-Store Indians' he obscured representations of colonial families from the area with giant cigar-store Indian busts. In *We Bury Our Own* biographical elements such as the Oxford subfusc were juxtaposed with crystal headdresses and A4 paper image of a ghost gum tree from western Queensland incorporating elements from the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection with images from my own biographical experience. *We Bury Our Own* also utilised

metallic pearl paper, which reflected one image into the next creating a feeling of echoing one reference into the next.

Appendix E: Records of performances and installations



Figure E1: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Modern Art Oxford, 2011.



Figure E2: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Modern Art Oxford, 2011.



Figure E3: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Modern Art Oxford, 2011.



Figure E4: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Modern Art Oxford, 2011.



Figure E5: *We Bury Our Own*, Future Perfect Gallery Singapore, Gilman Barracks, Singapore, 2012.



Figure E6: *We Bury Our Own*, Future Perfect Gallery Singapore, Gilman Barracks, Singapore, 2012.



Figure E7: *We Bury Our Own*, Future Perfect Gallery Singapore, Gilman Barracks, Singapore, 2012.



Figure E8: *We Bury Our Own*, Future Perfect Gallery Singapore, Gilman Barracks, Singapore, 2012.



Figure E9: *We Bury Our Own* artist talk, Future Perfect Gallery Singapore, Gilman Barracks, Singapore, 2012.



Figure E10: *We Bury Our Own*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, 2012.



Figure E11: *We Bury Our Own*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, 2012.



Figure E12: *We Bury Our Own*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne, 2012.



Figure E13: *We Bury Our Own*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, installation shot, Melbourne, 2012.



Figure E14: *We Bury Our Own*, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, installation shot, Melbourne, 2012.

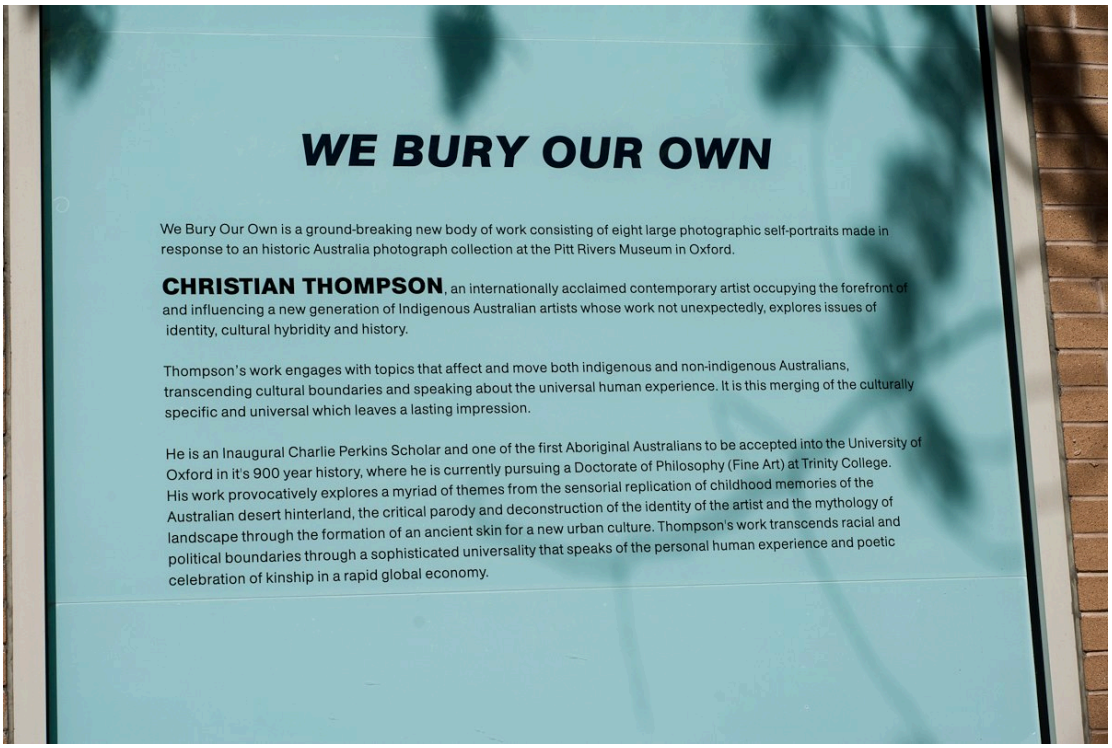

Figure E15: *We Bury Our Own*, Skirball Arts Centre, New York University, New York, 2013.



Figure E16: *We Bury Our Own*, Skirball Arts Centre, New York University, New York, 2013.



Figure E17: *We Bury Our Own*, Skirball Arts Centre, New York University, New York, 2013.



Figure E18: *We Bury Our Own*, Skirball Arts Centre, New York University, New York, 2013.



Figure E19: *We Bury Our Own*, Kluge Ruhe Museum, University of Virginia, USA, 2013.



Figure E20: *We Bury Our Own*, Kluge Ruhe Museum, University of Virginia, USA, 2013.



Figure E21: *We Bury Our Own*, Kluge Ruhe Museum, University of Virginia, USA, 2013.



Figure E22: *We Bury Our Own*, Kluge Ruhe Museum, University of Virginia, USA, 2013.

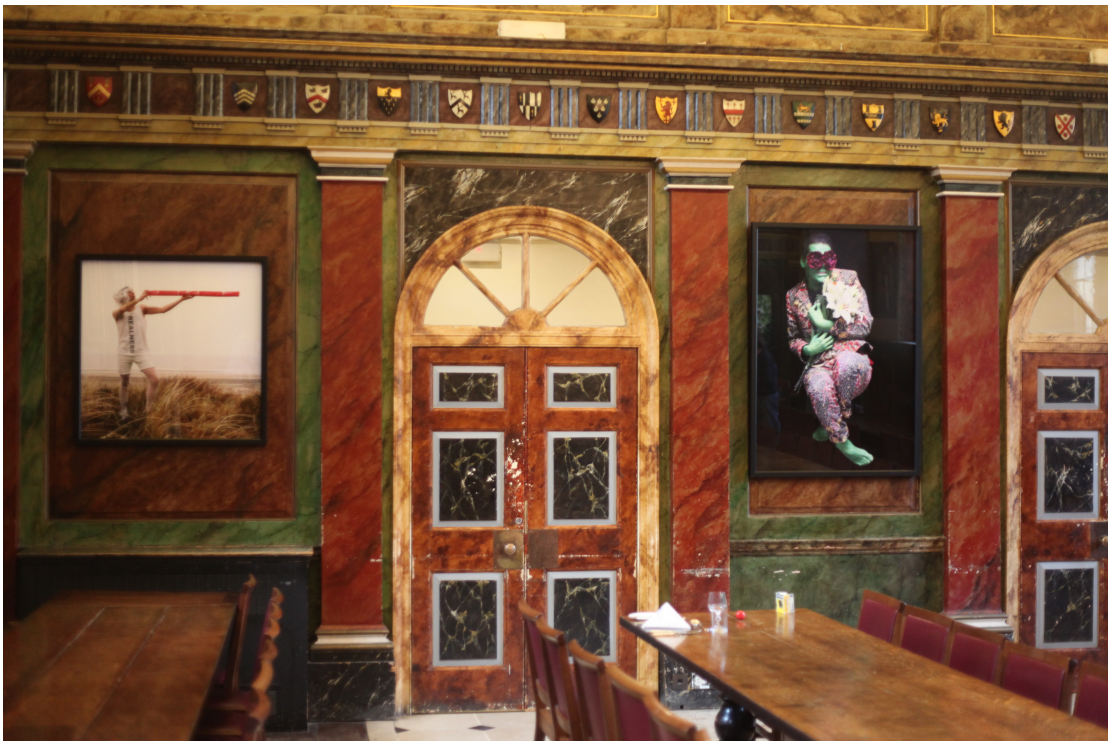

Figure E23: Trinity College dining hall, *Rehang* exhibition, installation shot, 2013.



Figure E24: Trinity College dining hall, *Rehang* exhibition, installation shot, 2013.



Figure E25: Trinity College dining hall, *Rehang* exhibition, installation shot, 2013.



Figure E26: Trinity College dining hall, *Rehang* exhibition, installation shot, 2013.



Figure E27: *We Bury Our Own* and Trinity College dining hall exhibition presented at the Hospital Club, Covent Garden, London, 2013.



Figure E28: *We Bury Our Own* and Trinity College dining hall exhibition presented at the Hospital Club, Covent Garden, London, 2013.

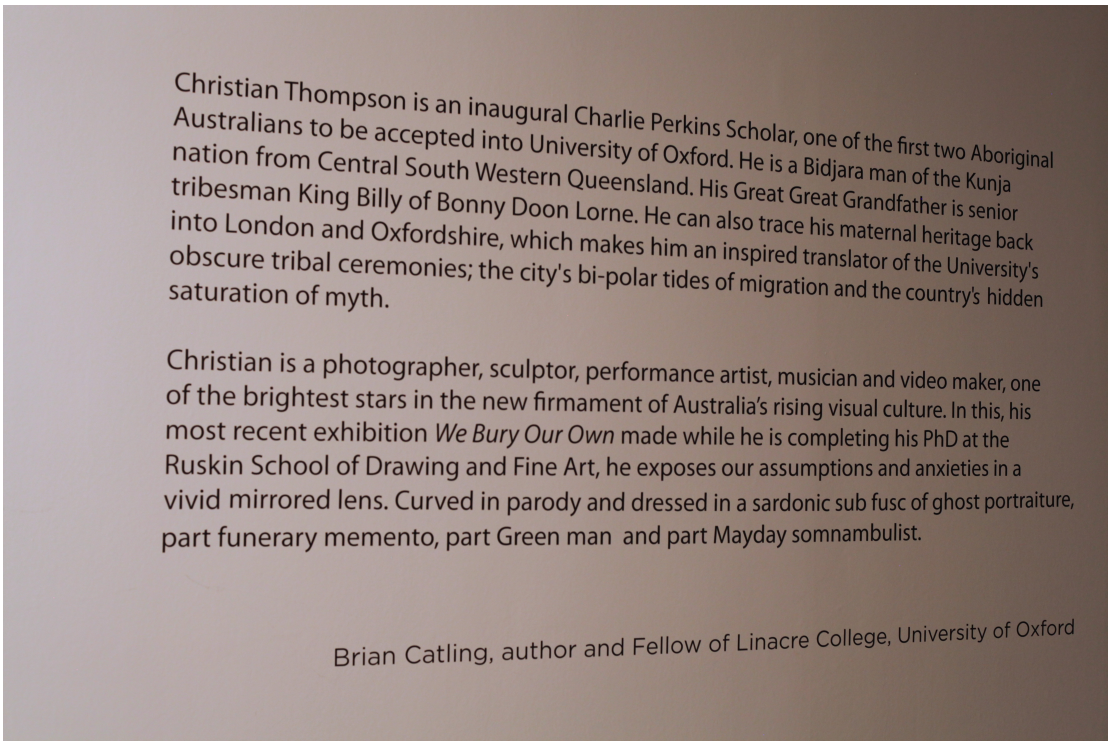

Figure E29: *We Bury Our Own* and Trinity College dining hall exhibition presented at the Hospital Club, Covent Garden, London, 2013.



Figure E30: *We Bury Our Own* and Trinity College dining hall exhibition presented at the Hospital Club, Covent Garden, London, 2013.



Figure E31: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2013.



Figure E32: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2013.



Figure E33: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2013.



Figure E34: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2013.



Figure E35: *Tree of Knowledge*, 45-minute solo performance, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2013.



Figure E36: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.



Figure E37: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.



Figure E38: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.



Figure E39: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.



Figure E40: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.



Figure E41: *We Bury Our Own,* production still, 2011.

Appendix F: Press



Figure F1: *The Guardian* http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/05/indigenous-australian-oxford-students-university

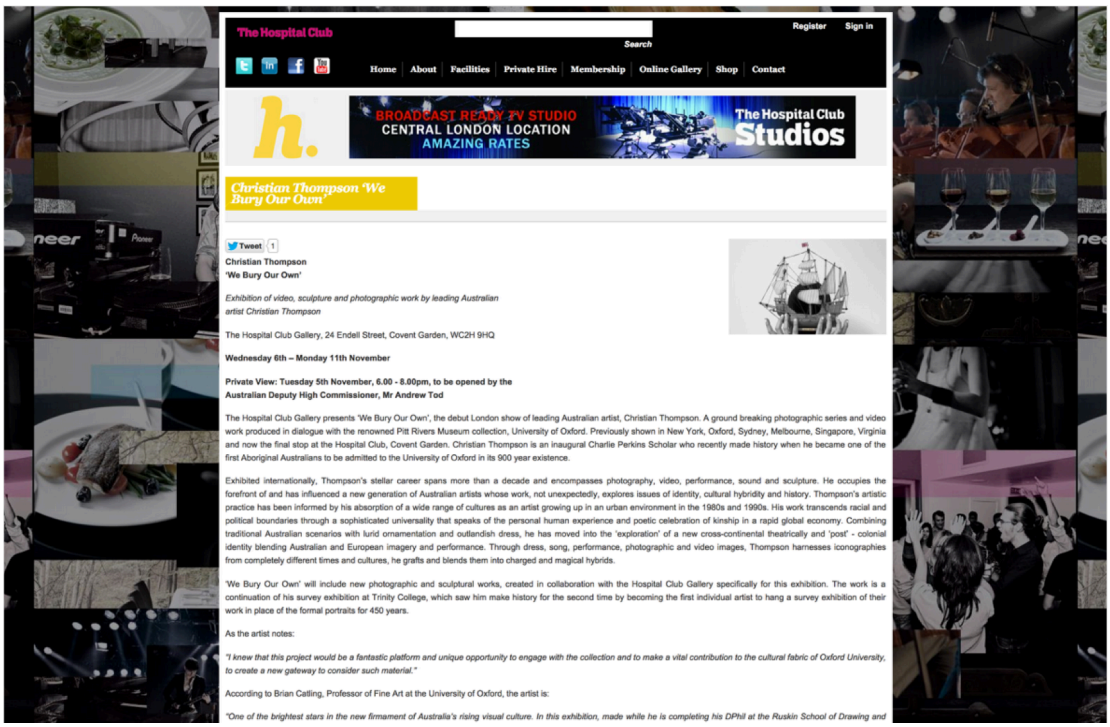

Figure F2: The Hospital Club website http://www.thehospitalclub.com/news/viewi/false/christian-thompson-**we-bury-our-own**



Figure F3: Pitt Rivers Museum website http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/christianthompson.html

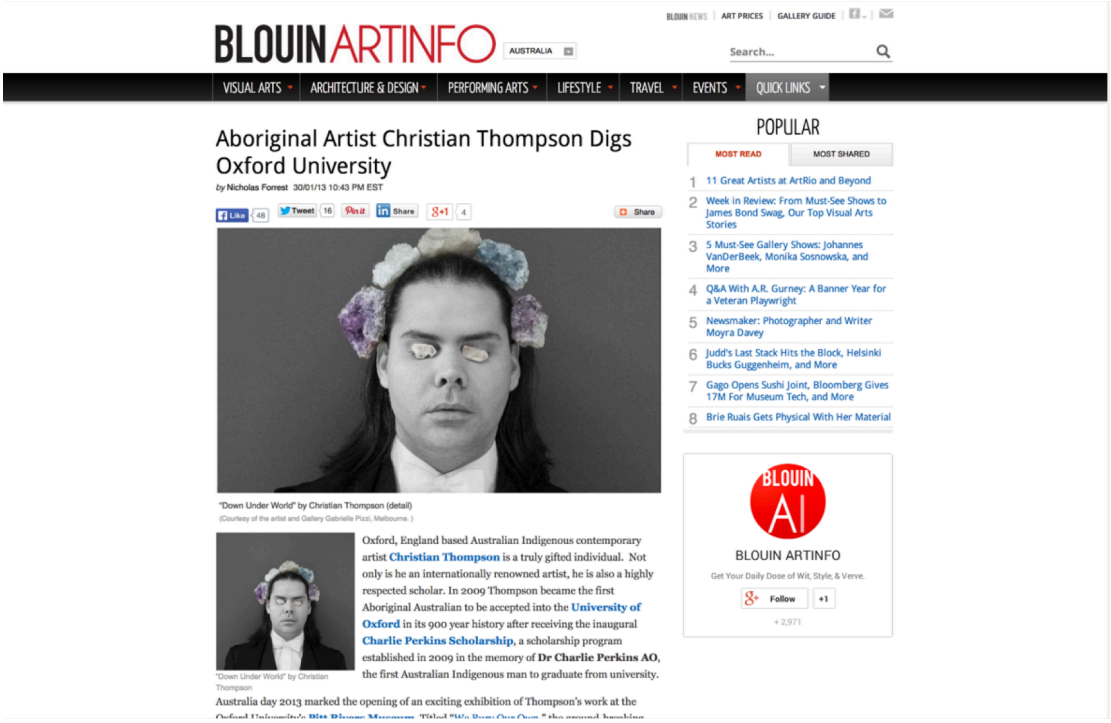

Figure F4: Blouin ArtInfo http://au.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/862061/aboriginal-artist-christian-thompson-digs-oxford-university



Figure F5: *The Oxford Times*
http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/opinions/first_person/10364858.First_person___Elizabeth_Brown__Oxford_is_a_rich_pomegranate/?ref=rss



Figure F6: *Oxford Mail* http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/leisure/art/10193663.Self_Styled/



Figure F7: *The Australian* http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/artist-christian-thompsons-body-of-work/story-fn9n8gph-1226637803161



Figure F8: BBC News Online
http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/oxford/hi/people_and_places/newsid_9118000/9118948.stm

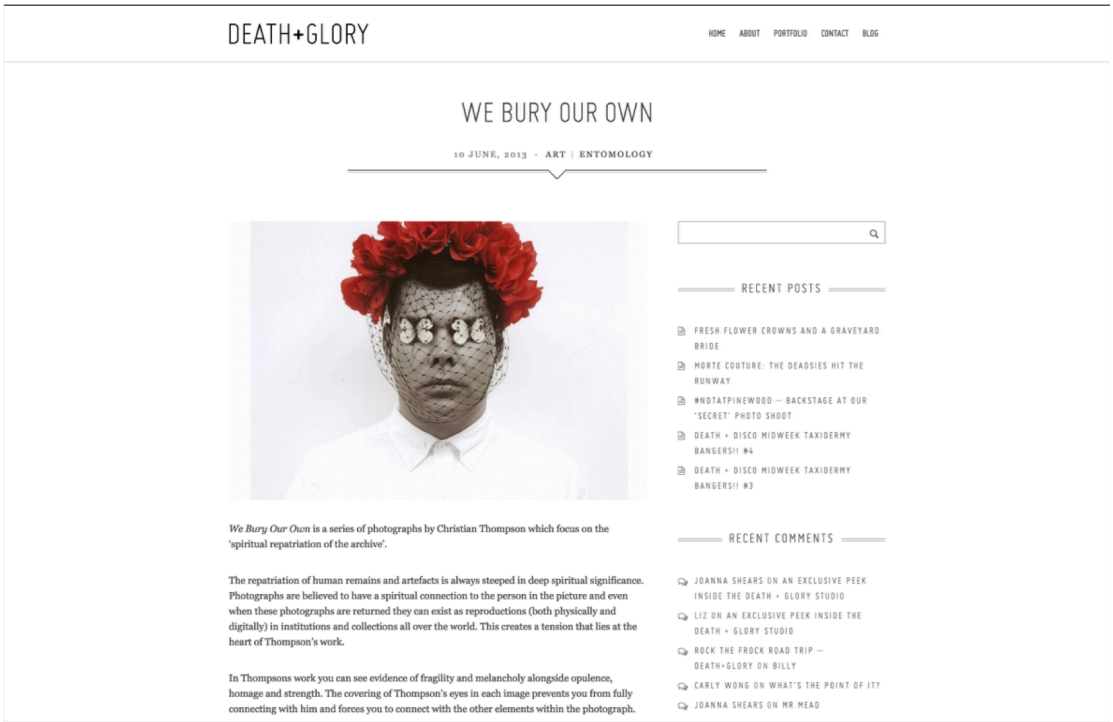

Figure F9: Death and Glory Taxidermy website http://deathandglorytaxidermy.com/we-bury-our-own/

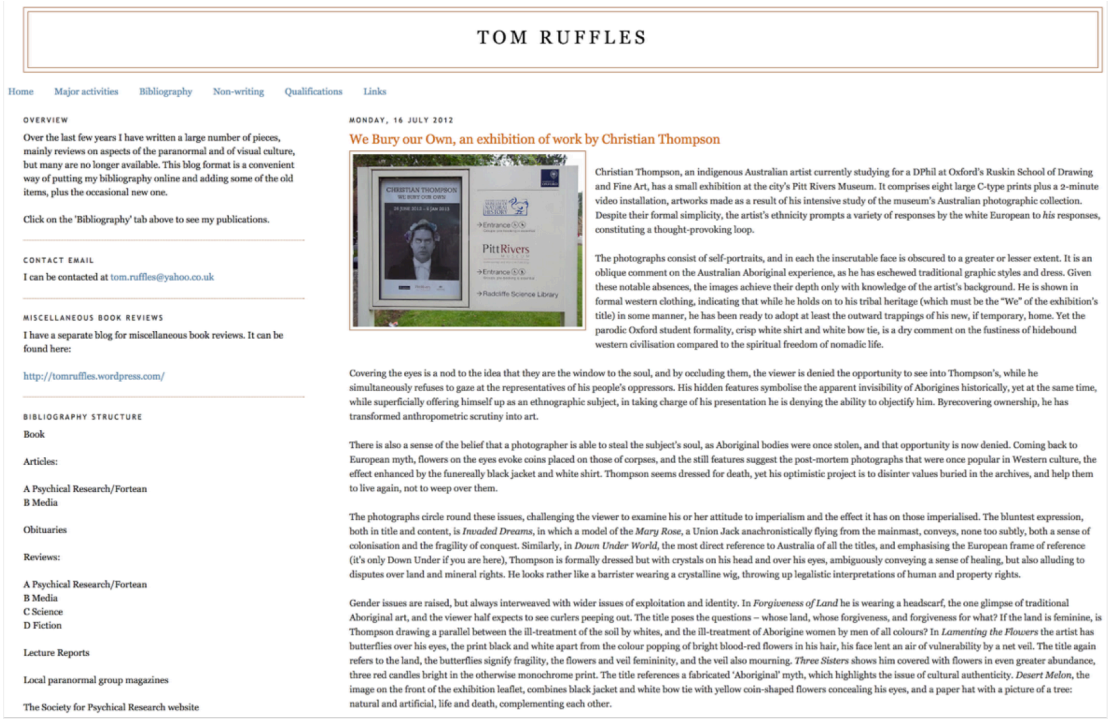

Figure F10: Tom Ruffles blog http://tomruffles.blogspot.co.uk/2012/07/we-bury-our-own-exhibition-of-work-by.html

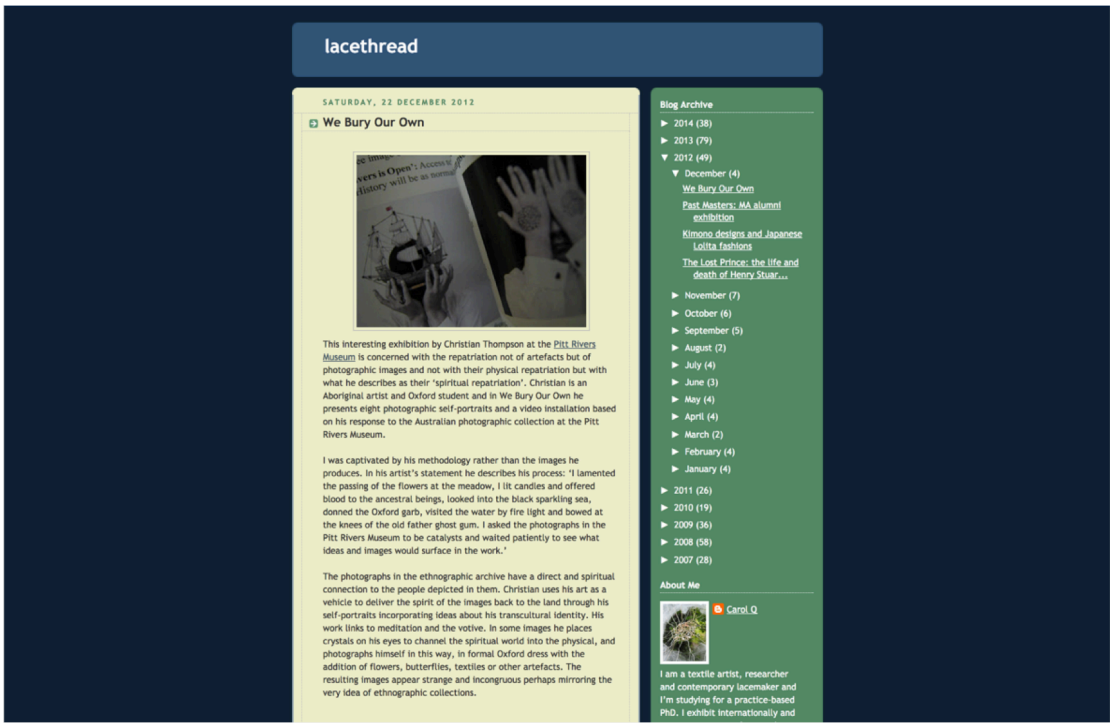

Figure F11: Lacethread blog http://lacethread.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/we-bury-our-own.html

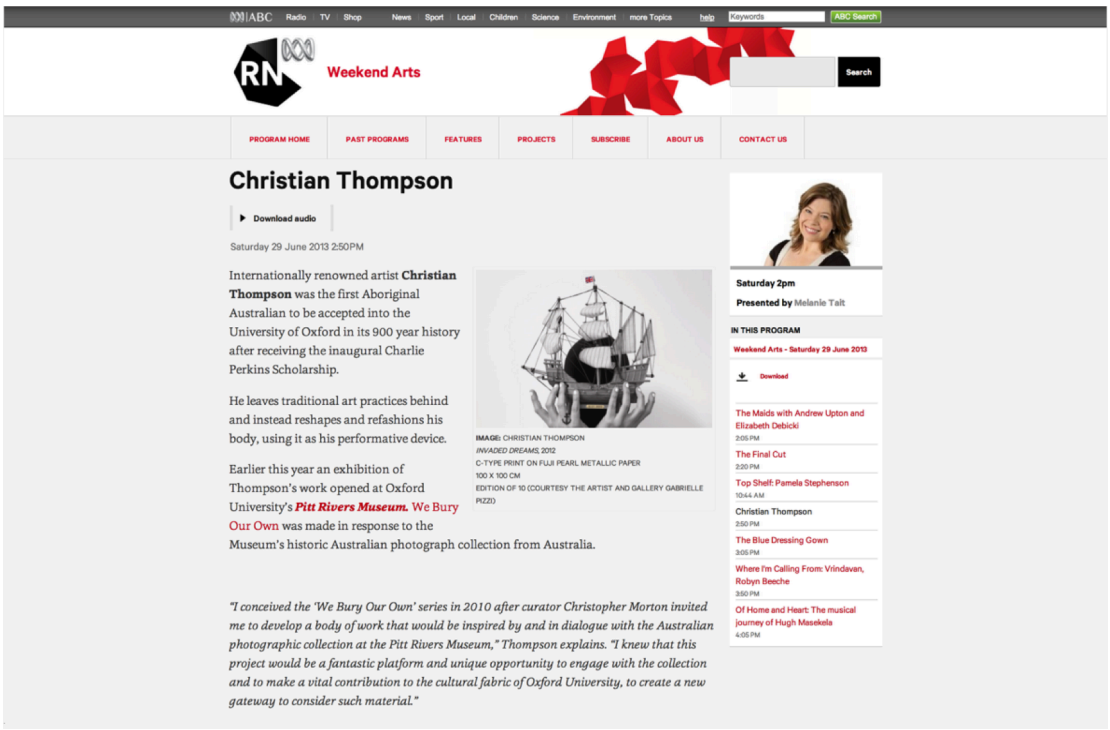

Figure F12: ABC online, Weekend Arts
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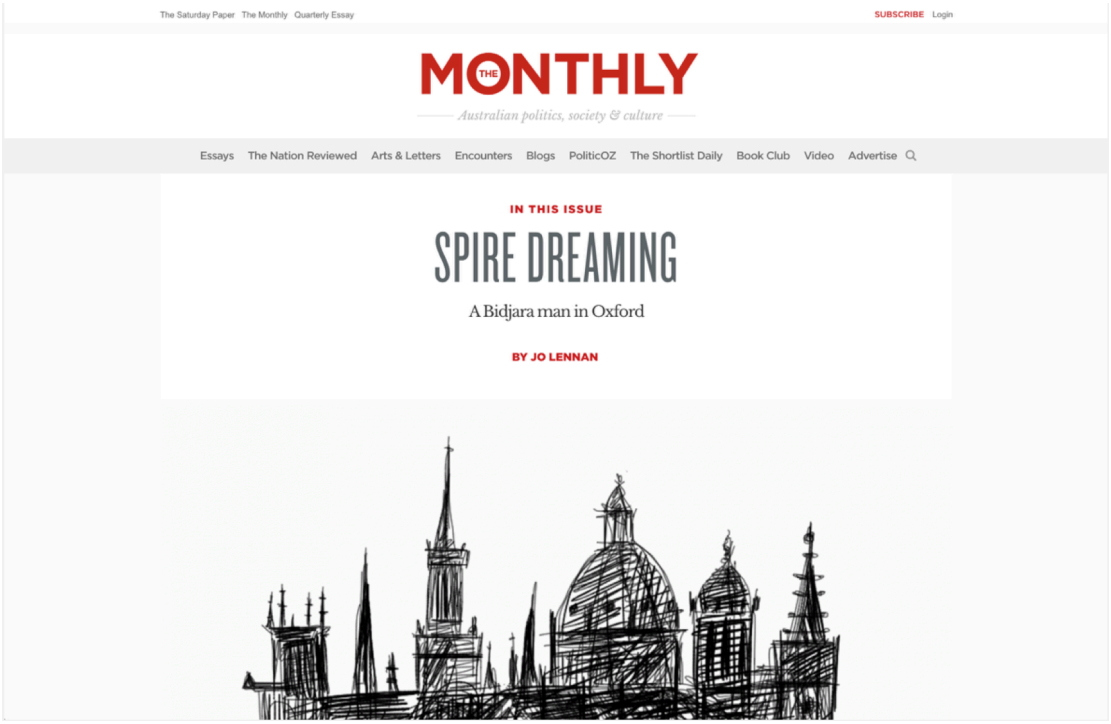

Figure F13: *The Monthly* https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/december/1360282103/jo-lennan/spire-dreaming



Figure F14: *Cherwell* http://www.cherwell.org/news/uk/2013/02/07/students-artwork-exhibited-in-trinitys-dining-hall



Figure F15: *Oxford Mail* 2
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Figure F16: *The Sydney Morning Herald* http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/indigenous-artists-tap-soul-of-their-homelands-20140704-zsvh7.html



Figure F17: *Oxford Mail* 3
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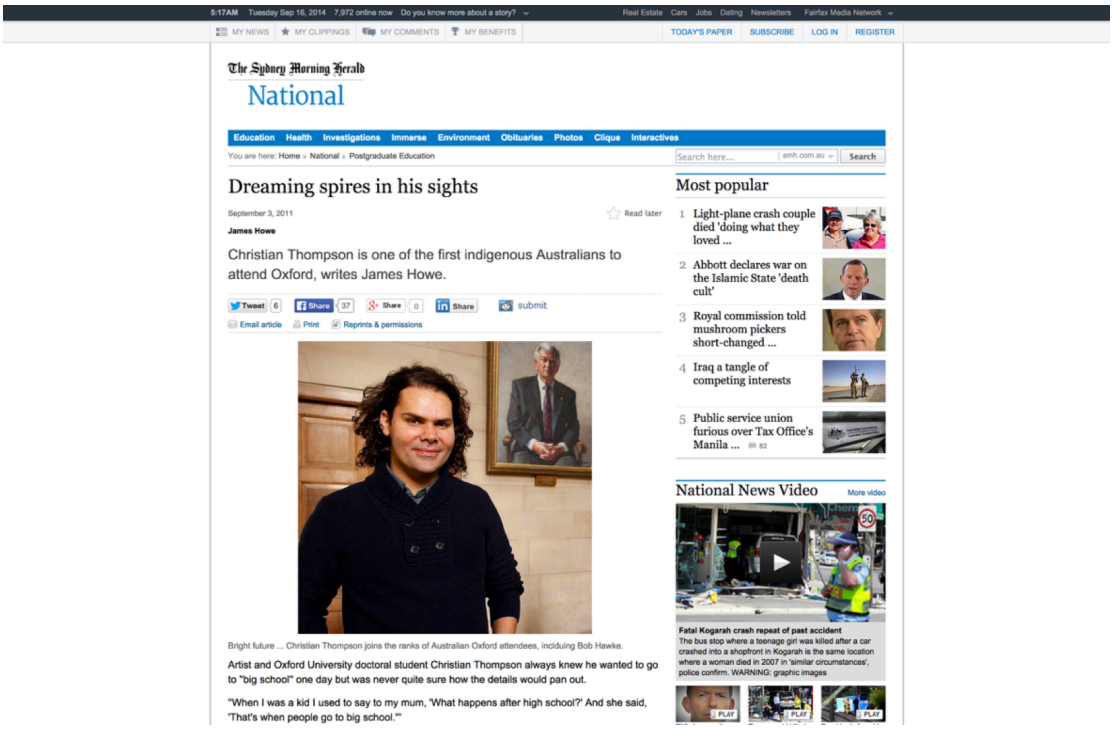

Figure F18: *The Sydney Morning Herald* 2 http://www.smh.com.au/national/postgraduate-education/dreaming-spires-in-his-sights-20110901-1jnmf.html



Figure F19: University of Oxford Annual Review 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdKVb4_e1EI

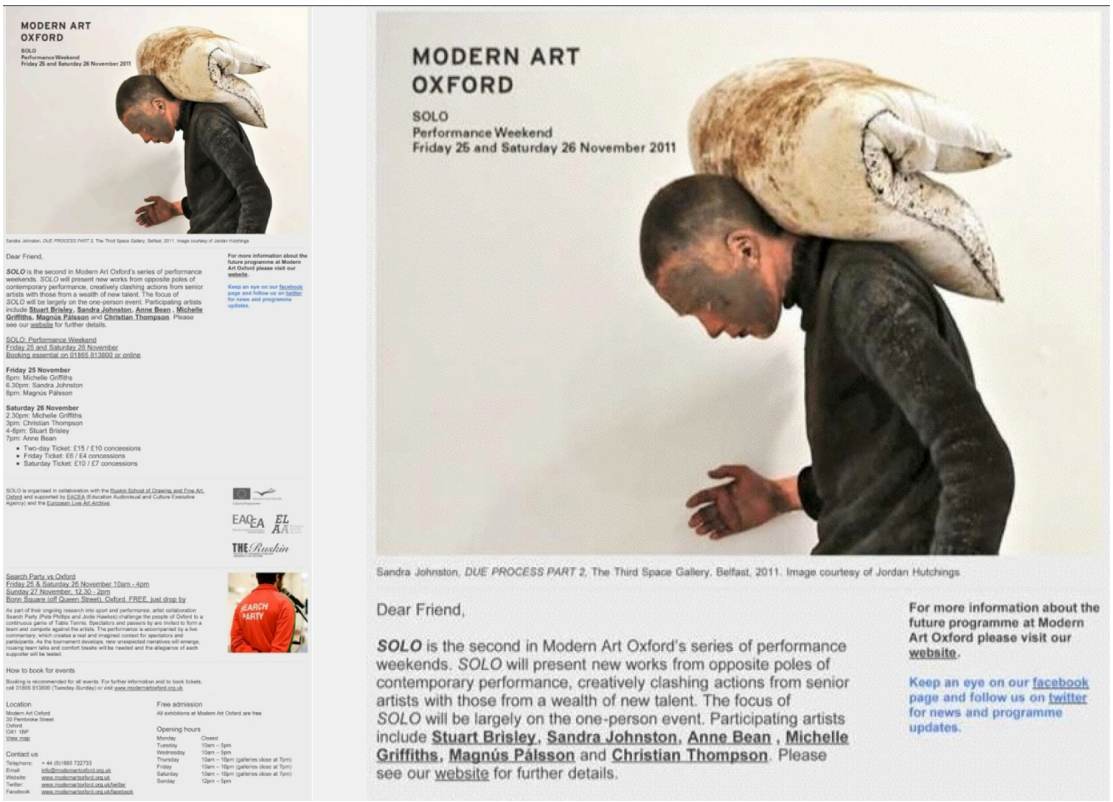

Figure F20: *SOLO* exhibition, Modern Art Oxford, 2011.



Figure F21: *We Bury Our Own* documentary
https://vimeo.com/44050317



Figure F22: Christian Thompson at Trinity College Hall documentary
https://vimeo.com/129158251

Appendix G: Web references archive CD-ROM

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