

GABAN: ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra ngawal murrungamirra

(STRANGE: Post-traumatic theatre and Powerful Objects)



Figure 1: Final scene of *GABAN* by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller and presented by VCA Acting and Design and Production students, 2021. Image courtesy VCA, University of Melbourne.
Source: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/showcase/gaban>

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CULTURAL WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous peoples should be aware that this thesis contains images of deceased persons.

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Abstract

How can the power of cultural objects in museum collections, their meaning and life, be worked with and revealed in a manner which is sensitive to the trauma of colonialism and its collecting practices for Indigenous peoples? How might experimental theatre and storytelling bring new insight to understanding the complexity and trauma of museums and their collections? How can museums reimagine their function, role and processes to care for and empower their collections?

This thesis embodies these questions by presenting a new theatre script *GABAN* and commentary along with associated writing, curated exhibitions and artworks. *GABAN* means strange in the language of Wiradjuri, the author's matrilineal kinship group, and describes the experience of being in the museum today and realising the sheer mass of collections from Indigenous homelands. The facts of these collections, the conditions of their making and maintenance, speak to the injustice of colonialism and the continuing struggle for self-identity by Indigenous peoples. *GABAN* is an experimental story, ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharraa or post-traumatic theatre, driven by Indigenous methodologies to honour the agency of objects in museum collections and the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples navigating these institutions. It is told through characters which are embodiments of ngawal murrungamirra or Powerful Objects. The aim of writing *GABAN* was to create a fictional space in which to unpack the effects and experiences of the museum and reimagine how objects and human identities trapped within this system can speak their own narratives. Skirting the nirin or edge of the museum through new methods of storytelling, this thesis is a call for systemic change in cultural institutions, grounded in Indigenous ways of seeing and comprehending the world.

***yindyamarra* (Acknowledgements)**

I acknowledge my mother's Wiradjuri kinship of the kalar-midday (land of the three rivers), my mother's father's Ngunnawal kinship and their mixed Celtic ancestry; I also acknowledge my father's Celtic and Jewish ancestry.

GABAN and this commentary were written on the lands of the Eastern Marr, and the Boon Wurung and Wurundjeri Country of the eastern Kulin. I acknowledge the elders and people of these lands, especially Boon Wurung Elder Aunty N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs. A special *mandaang guwu* (thank you) to my long-term mentor, Yiman and Bidjara Elder Marcia Langton, who has been an important guide for me throughout most of my life. I am grateful to The Rockefeller Foundation in which I completed this commentary at the Bellagio Centre Residency Program, Italy. The serenity of this site and the hospitality of Pilar Palacia and the warmth of all I encountered at this unique place of the world offered me the peace and healing space to complete this commentary. I honour and hold in high esteem the extraordinary ongoing legacy of the Aurora Education Foundation including Richard Potok, Leila Smith, Sharon Kumar, the Board, the team and fellow students. Without their support and passion, I would not have had this extraordinary opportunity to work within the international space at Oxford University and St John's College. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the humble and visionary support of Penny Clive and her family.

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The speaking of language is the sovereign right of all First Nations peoples and the connection of language and country cannot be denied. I am eternally grateful to Tiriki Onus and N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs who have supported and championed the use of Wiradjuri language in the production of GABAN on Boon Wurung and Wurrundjeri Country of the eastern Kulin nation in Birrarungga/Naarm (Melbourne). I thank them for their permission, guidance, and diplomacy in allowing the 3rd year Victorian College of the Arts students to speak Wiradjuri on Kulin country.

I would also like to acknowledge the following creative and production team who have been instrumental to staging the theatrical performance of GABAN on 17th (two performances) and 18th (two performances) of June 2021 (show's running time was between 1:45-1:51 minutes) realised by acting, design and production students at the Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Music and Fine Arts, the University of Melbourne:

Budi Miller (director); Sarah Austin (assistant director); Kate Cameron (assistant director); Actors: NARRATOR Hannah McKenzie; TREE Nicola Ingram; PHOTO Ella Ferris; MASSACRE Guy Knowler; GUILT Endrico Botha; MUSEUM Aram Geleris; WITNESS Gabriel Cali; JUDGE Frazer Shepherdson; EVIDENCE Cassidy Dunn; MEMORY Miela Anich; PUBLIC Freya Rutherford and Jess L.

Production team: Casey Harper-Wood (set and costume designer); Ikshvak Sobti (lighting designer); Jack Burmeister (sound designer); Océane Federow-

Yemm (associate lighting designer and vision designer); Miranda Larsson (assistant production manager); Holly Fernanda (stage manager); Isabella Stephens (assistant stage manager); Hana Kuhlmann workshop head of department); Olivia Rose Brennan (leading workshop hand); Al Brill, Isabella Edwards (workshop assistants); Evelyn Housham (costume manager); Wendy Borg (costume assistant); Kane Wilson Head (electrician); Eleanor Baigent (deputy head electrician, lighting programmer and operator); Océane Federow-Yemm (lighting programmer).

Professional staff: David Harrod (production coordinator); Alan Logan (workshop supervisor); Morgan Jones, Ellen Sayers (set builders); Mungo McKenzie (stage technician); Howard Clark (scenic artists); Karen Trott, Elizabeth Maisey (costume supervisors); Karen Blinco (costumier); Jayde Kirchert (intimacy coordinator); Felicity Steel (fight choreographer); Amy Hume (vocal coach).

Academic Staff: Tony Smith, Budi Miller, Georgina Naidu (VCA theatre academic staff); Martyn Coutts, Lyndie Li Wan Po (production academic mentors); Andrew Bailey, Jo Briscoe, Emily Collett, Anna Cordingley, John Ford, Justin Green, Amanda Hitten, Lisa Mibus, Lisa Osborn, Richard Roberts (VCA production and VCA design academic staff).

***ngiyang* (Words/Glossary)**

Unless indicated all the non-English and non-European words in this script and commentary are Wiradjuri, the language of my matrilineal kinship group. All the translations provided are my own. First Languages are also used to describe the original Indigenous languages of colonised places.

The Wiradjuri people are the First Peoples of the central west and western slopes and plains region of New South Wales, Australia. The Wiradjuri language has been classified as part of the Pama-Nyungan family (Dixon 2002). A progressive revival is underway, with the language being taught in some schools. The process of reclaiming the language was greatly assisted by the publication in 2005 of *A First Wiradjuri Dictionary* by Elder Dr Stan Grant Senior and consultant Dr John Rudder.

Translations in the script *GABAN* will appear in brackets, e.g. *balgabalgar* [ruler].

In the commentary following the Chicago Manual of Style, *ngiyang* will first appear in italics followed by the English translation in parentheses, e.g. *balgabalgar* (ruler). Subsequent inclusions will not be italicised or translated.

There is no capitalisation of *ngiyang* with the exception of naming Indigenous language groups e.g. Wiradjuri. Capitalisation is applied to the title of some works e.g. *GABAN*.

The sounds and writing systems of Aboriginal languages

This table assists in pronouncing Wiradjuri ngiyang used in the script and commentary.¹

a	gadhi	snake	as in 'a' in 'above'
aa	munyaa	fish	as in 'a' in 'father'
ay	yugay	dingo	as in 'ay' in 'play'
b	bagan	boomerang	as in 'b' in 'book'
d	dinawan	emu	as in 'd' in 'dog'
dh	dhabal	bone	dental 'd'
dy	dyingang	foot	as in 'd'y' in 'd'ya reckon'
g	garru	magpie	as in 'g' in 'good'
i	gulambali	pelican	as in 'i' in 'bit'
ii	babiin	father	as in 'ea' in 'beat'
l	ngulung	face	as in 'l' in 'look'
m	mirri	dog	as in 'm' in 'many'
n	naagun	koala	as in 'n' in 'no'
ng	ngarradan	bat	as in 'ng' in 'sing'
nh	gunhi	mother	as in 'nth' in 'tenth'
ny	nyimirr	blossom	as in 'n' in 'onion'

¹ Source: <https://ab-ed.nesa.nsw.edu.au/go/aboriginal-languages/practical-advice/the-sounds-and-writing-systems-of-aboriginal-languages>

r	bari	tall	as in 'r' in 'run'
rr	garru	magpie	trill 'rr'
u	yugay	dingo	as in 'u' in 'put'
uu	guumil	belt	
w	wilay	possum	as in 'w' in 'well'
y	yurung	clouds	as in 'y' in 'yell'

Wiradjuri ngiyang

The following ngiyang are from the WCC LP (The Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation Language Program).² The digital application “Wiray Ngiyang Wiray Mayiny - No Language No People” is based on the work of Dr Stan Grant and Dr John Rudder also found in *A New Wiradjuri Dictionary* published 2005 by Restoration House. Wiradjuri is one of three languages (including Ngiyambaa and Kamilaroi) of the Wiradhuric subgroup of the Pama-Nyungan languages of First Australians.

NB: Words that appear in parentheses are my own expanded translations and terms created to compliment word/meanings in English.

balgabalg	ruler
balgal	sound
balubunirra	murder, kill (massacre)
bandalang	linking/joining
bandalang bugamin yilimadha maraway	linking archives with our pathway
bilin	movement
bilin-girri	movement-future ‘Indigenous Futurism’
bimbarra	set (theatre set)
-bu	and
bugamin	stores (archives)
bundadhaany	artist
bundanha	draw (photo)
bundhaay/yagay!	pain/trauma
burbang	ceremony
dhulu-ga-rra	guilt
diladilabirra-dilinya	confusion-active (active confusion)
dumbaldhaany	director

² This digital resource can be accessed here: <https://www.wccplp.com.au/#about>

dyibarra	speak (language)
gaambuwananha	return (Repatriation)
gaban	strange
gabin	beginning (introduction)
ganama	mixed
garru	Australian magpie, <i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i> .
gadhagadha	eye-witness
giilang-biyarra	storytelling
ginbayanha	desire
-girri	future
gudhi	song
gudyiin	ancient
-gunhanha	continuing action
guulany	tree
guwayu	time
mandaang guwu	thank you
marara	carved and tree
maraway	pathway
marramarra	creating/creation
mayiny	people
muganha	evidence
murum-gidyal	healing
ngaamina dhadharra-nyundhi	(findings from the performance)
ngaay or ngaanha	see
ngadhu	actor
ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra	after-scar acting (post-traumatic theatre)
ngawal murrungamirra	powerful things (powerful objects)
ngayamaldhaany	judge
ngiilinya	keep, possession (museum)

nginyundha	witness
ngiyang	notes/language/letter/sound
niin	own
nirin	edge
ngiilinya	interfere or keep (Museum)
ngiyang	words
waga-	to dance
wanhamarra	finish (conclusion)
winha-nga-nha	memory
wuba	hole
yagay!/bundhaay	pain
yaldhaany	speaker
yambuwan	everything (public)
yindyamarra	respect, honour and being
	responsible, unhurried, mutual
	respect (a Wiradjuri way of being)
yindyamarra-gunhanha	respect-continuing
yilimadha	our
yugaway murrungamirra	sleeping objects (sleeping things)
yuwin	name

ngiyang for *mayiny* (people)

Many ngiyang are used in this commentary to reference Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, and First Nations peoples. The term Elder denotes a person of high regard in Indigenous communities.

There are many ways to designate people who descend from the original peoples, or First Peoples, of Australia: people who were there from the beginning, before settlement by other peoples or state powers.

There are hundreds of first nations across Australia including in the islands of the Torres Strait. The adjective "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander" acknowledges this diversity with Aboriginal referring to cultures and peoples from the mainland of Australia and islands including for example, Tasmania, and Fraser Island; and with Torres Strait Islander referring to peoples and cultures from the hundreds of islands of the Torres Strait off the north coast of Australia.

An increasingly popular term for grassroots movements and cultural institutions in Australia is First Nations, which also acknowledges this diversity and the sovereignty of peoples who have been living on the continent and practicing a continuous culture for over 60,000 years.

The term First Nations is also widely used in Canada, but its meaning is different as it refers to Aboriginal peoples who are not Inuit or Metis and often with reference to the treaties signed between Indigenous nations (or bands) and the Canadian government. Whereas, in Australia this term does not reference a history of treaties because British colonisation in Australia did not honour treaties with the First Peoples.

In Australia, the term Indigenous also encompasses both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is preferred by Australian government agencies. Indigenous, is also used in international contexts. For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People was ratified in 2007.

Throughout this commentary my preference is to acknowledge people's Indigenous language or kinship group, or nation: Wiradjuri, Boonwurrung, Kamilaroi and Yorta Yorta are all Aboriginal nations in Australia; Ojibwe are from the Great Lakes region of Canada and North America; Māori are Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa (New Zealand); and Sámi are Indigenous peoples across a large land mass called Sapmi which includes northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula within the Murmansk Oblast of Russia.

However, due to the policies and violence of various colonial projects towards Indigenous populations, many Indigenous peoples remain separated from their homeland or kinship group and have no or limited access to ancestral knowledges. Broad terms such as First Nations and First Peoples are helpful here, and also can be used to recognise the solidarity amongst Indigenous peoples from across the globe.

GABAN (STRANGE): theatre script

By
Brook Andrew

2021

NOTES

Statement of Intent

GABAN (strange) is a theatre script steeped in the practice of yindyamarra-gunhanha, Wiradjuri words which translate as active and ongoing respect, honour and being responsible, unhurried, mutual respect. The script is a journey into museums and trauma sites and reflects the characters' lives which are trapped in a vortex I call the Colonial Wuba (hole). Their existence is complicated and fraught with trauma and confusion, which desperately requires murum-gidyal (healing), transformation and release to find a future away from colonial repression. This journey aims to reach a space of reset. Many may call this reset 'decolonial', but for me, healing and release from the Colonial Wuba requires continued actions of yindyamarra-gunhanha and other Indigenous ways of being.

GABAN, like yindyamarra-gunhanha, imagines a world beyond the trauma of colonialism that is set within an Indigenous sense of time. *GABAN* creates space for murum-gidyal both of the mind and body. Therefore, it is imperative that the play is site specific and is performed in buildings such as museums, asylum centres, prisons, cultural centres, religious halls or Indigenous and other public spaces related to this trauma. It could be in the bush/forest or in public spaces surrounding a monument or memorial. *GABAN* is not a play to be performed on a traditional Western theatre stage. The setting, its objects, furniture, or architecture are required to activate aspects of the script.

This statement of intent outlines the processes and actions which are essential to perform *GABAN* with yindyamarra-gunhanha which includes taking care around the complexities of histories and the ramifications of where we find ourselves today. *GABAN* is intended to push, pull, re-configure, challenge and sway the heaviness of the Colonial Wuba, to push

it off kilter and amplify the need for blurry and multiple visions of the future. Power dynamics must shift and not settle, for the colonial legacy and the violence inherent within it must implode.

Set

GABAN is set in the round. There are no walls that divide the audience from the actors. The audience surrounds the stage, the stage can creep into the audience and vice versa.

Language

When the characters speak in Wiradjuri language the translation to English appears in surtitle, like in an opera.

There is no capitalisation of Wiradjuri words with the exception of naming Indigenous language groups e.g. Wiradjuri.

Translations in this script are formatted as such:

yaama, ngajuu ngaay nginduugirr [Hello, I see you].

Sound

The audio of the metronome will play through a sound system/speaker.

Ceremony/protocol

A smoking ceremony will take place before each show, for the actors, the audience and the people involved in the production of GABAN.

Powerful Objects

The characters TREE, PHOTO, EVIDENCE, MEMORY and MASSACRE are based on Powerful Objects; these are objects with a deep spiritual, historical or physical power.

CHARACTER NOTES

NARRATOR - gudhingan

NARRATOR wears a red veiled costume, similar to a burqa or a ghost, that conceals their identity. Their voice is gender neutral. The hood of the NARRATOR resembles that worn by members of the KKK or an extended alien shape.

Throughout the play NARRATOR is only present when they speak their lines, either amongst the audience or on stage.

When a spotlight appears on NARRATOR it is purple.

TREE - guulany

TREE is based on the millions of Indigenous cultural objects that were stolen and collected during colonial periods and now exist in museums: i.e. a guulany (tree) dendroglyph tree section, site marker.

TREE is a very muscular or large figure and has self-harmed burn marks on their body.

TREE has a tight environmentalist t-shirt with an 80's style graphic of a tree.

TREE sits on a Victorian style museum pedestal.

TREE has a connection to the spirit world and a powerful spiritual and physical presence.

When a spotlight appears on TREE it is red.

PHOTO - bunda-nha

PHOTO is based on the millions of photographs that were taken of Indigenous peoples for anthropological and ethnographic experiments and documentation of the so-called dying races.

This myth has been debunked since the mid twentieth century.

PHOTO sits on a large diorama of a fake boulder, with a chain and manacles attached, and a small photo backdrop of a painted landscape representing many ethnographic staged photos. PHOTO is naked or appears to be naked with little body covering. All materials are natural like fur, cotton etc.

MASSACRE - balubunirra

MASSACRE is based on a real letter written in the Australia colonies in 1854 by James Dixon who wrote to a friend in Europe and described a massacre he was involved in where many First Peoples were murdered. Dixon wrote: "We had a great battle with them a month ago, there was eighteen killed and two of our men. They throw spears that penetrate right through you which is very dangerous."

MASSACRE is a cross between a nineteenth century safari hunter and a gangster with tattoos and has an explorer expedition backpack. MASSACRE has a whip curled and attached to their belt, a bottle of whisky and three guns.

MASSACRE is a drunk, often cleaning a gun like a sexual tool.

GUILT - dhulu-ga-rra

GUILT is the accumulated guilt of the world concerning colonialism and the ongoing guilt and confusion around what to do with the weight of this history and how it impacts on everyone today.

GUILT wears a balaclava and looks a bit like a court jester or a fool.

GUILT is the guilt of the world, the guilt of dislocation and immense never-ending bottomless emptiness.

GUILT has a roaming chair and wherever they go, they drag it from the top of the chair so the legs scratch and scrape on the ground, annoying people at will.

When GUILT speaks their lines, they whisper into the ear of the person they are addressing or if they are addressing multiple people, they do this with whispering hysteria.

MUSEUM - ngiilinya

MUSEUM wears a cross between a late nineteenth century European colonial costume and an 80's vagabond fashion costume. They have a large noisy bunch of keys attached to their belt.

MUSEUM stands behind a tall worktable, with no chair. On the table is an ink pot, a safe of gold with a lock on it, many specimen jars with liquids and other pieces of animals along

with the character EVIDENCE (a plaster head).

MUSEUM sees themselves as the keeper of Western time, dancing to the tick tock of time and with gestures of a musical conductor in dance/collaboration with the character TIME.

WITNESS - nginyundha

WITNESS is based on human remain specimens of Indigenous bodies still in museum collections today.

They are naked and dirty.

When a spotlight appears on WITNESS it is green.

JUDGE - ngayamaldhaany

JUDGE is dressed in a way to convey their extreme sense of authority; in each scene they have a costume change. Sometimes they wear a judge's wig.

JUDGE sits on a cold silver steel chair.

JUDGE is a psychiatrist/mediator/representative of the CROWN.

CROWN - walanbangan

CROWN is an invisible character throughout most of GABAN and represents a Western royal family. It is revealed later in GABAN that NARRATOR is CROWN.

TIME - guwayu

TIME is the representation of two different time systems, one is Western time and the other is a cyclic Indigenous understanding of time.

TIME is a silent character.

It is represented by a large soft-sculpture metronome clock that dances with MUSEUM when MUSEUM makes metronome/music conductor gestures with their hands. TIME falls flat on their back when they are not ticking.

EVIDENCE - mughanha

EVIDENCE is a human size anthropological study plaster head. This is a person's head mounted on MUSEUM's table. It is not

until the table is broken that the entire body skeleton is revealed.

When a spotlight appears on EVIDENCE it is yellow.

MEMORY - winha-nga-nha

MEMORY is the accumulated memory of those who have forgotten who they are or were taken away from who they were. It empowers the characters to remember who they are.

MEMORY is a young child or child-like character and represents a powerful spirit.

Apart from the first and final scene, they are inside a hessian bag lying on a dirt mound. The hessian bag has large painted letters on it spelling out 'MEMORY'.

MEMORY has the power to restore everyone's memories.

When a spotlight appears on MEMORY it is blue.

PUBLIC

PUBLIC are the people of the world who visit museums and believe everything that is written on the walls and next to objects. PUBLIC eventually divides and takes sides on who does and does not challenge this system.

PUBLIC is at least two characters who speak together and then against each other.

PUBLIC actively talks to members of the audience and has opinions of the characters, e.g. "I hate that character TREE...". Their reason is to divide the audience and either disrupt or resolve.

The PUBLIC are located in and amongst the audience unless other stage directions are given.

PUBLIC represents the audience and subjects of the CROWN.

1: House of GABAN

All lights are out.

There is a tick tock of a metronome that starts at a regular pace then slowly speeds up to a long drone. This occurs over 4 minutes.

Suddenly the noise stops.

The metronome ticks regularly.

Each character walks on and holds a position in the spotlight with the Master of Ceremonies introducing them.

MC

(MC can improvise this opening address):

PUBLIC this is the HOUSE OF GABAN!

gudhingan, the NARRATOR... their hood covers their identity. Who are they and what do they espouse... look at them as they woo you through the journey of the GABAN.

guulany, TREE... tall and proud, their own memory rushes forward into this labyrinth of doom and challenges those who despot their powerful journey back home. This Powerful Object is testimony to ancient lives and the one that shifts this manic place.

bundanha, PHOTO... sharp and willing, quick and all seeing... sits on a large diorama museum boulder, knowing its fake depiction will soon capsize. Chains will not hold this body... this Powerful Object.

balubunirra, MASSACRE... is all energy, all embodiment of a gun and a sheet of paper penned with a secret letter to a faraway place. Yes... it is also a Powerful Object, one that desires yet through blood and booze must atone for its own brutal embodiment.

dhulu-ga-rra, GUILT... the guilt of all here, yes you and them and them and you... beware of the balaclava for it may be lifted and the only face is your own for GUILT is the guilt of the world, the guilt of dislocation and immense never-ending bottomless emptiness.

ngiilinya, MUSEUM... a clever and immersed creature of intense obsession. They are the keeper of Western time, dancing to the tick tock of time and with gestures of a musical conductor. Their collection is vast and their labyrinth... vast.

nginyundha, WITNESS... naked and dirty, then clean and rash... picking up the pieces... clearing away the guilt. Shining in the end, leading the procession - you see nginyundha the WITNESS sees all, sees you, is you.

ngayamaldhaany, JUDGE, such a puppet, such a force, such a figure in mighty light... is dressed for authority. It is your psychiatrist... your mediator... and your representative of the CROWN.

walanbangan, CROWN... almighty... is authority...
they may be invisible, may be invincible –
they are here to cradle and rip you into
society with careful grace and litany.

guwayu, TIME... it is ever present, whether
Western or ancient... is never silent unless
you forget it.

winha-nga-nha, MEMORY... supernatural... the
embodiment of space itself... power to
restore memories.

yambuwan, PUBLIC... are amongst you...
mercurial pundits.They will converse and
play with you, take sides and rile against
each other and you, they are after all an
extension of your conscience.

muganha, EVIDENCE... the anthropological
study plaster head. One of millions of
skulls, faces and collections peering back
through the labyrinth, through time through
grace and through guilt and witness, memory
and this place of asylum, it is here to
remind us of why we are here...

2: Dawn

Spotlights shine on three museum pedestals (of the characters TREE, PHOTO and MEMORY) in a Victorian British curiosity museum. Projected black and white images of late nineteenth and early twentieth century European museum ethnographic displays surround the characters.

TREE sits on a Victorian museum pedestal; PHOTO sits on a diorama fake boulder pedestal and has manacles attached to its arms; a hessian sack lies on a stylised dirt mound pedestal, with the word 'MEMORY' stencilled on it to resemble a large export label. The hessian sack contains the character MEMORY.

From the darkness we hear the scraping sound of a chair being dragged across a floor by GUILT. In the shadows we see GUILT, MASSACRE, WITNESS and JUDGE on their respective posts. MUSEUM walks around. MUSEUM inspects the table contents. NARRATOR is positioned in the audience.

As NARRATOR talks, MEMORY reveals themselves from the hessian sack and faces TREE. A blue light illuminates MEMORY.

NARRATOR

See this MEMORY, a spectre of remembrance
that will awaken us, calling us to action.

The purpose of MEMORY is to shift us from
ignorance... from mislaid selves.

Who after all is MEMORY and what is your relationship with it? We will soon see..

Look at these poor souls... so firm in their routines of discombobulation.

There is still TIME for transformation, for redemption.

Watch carefully for shifts in alliances, revealing alternative directions. These gruesome and punishing bodies may after all escape this cavernous labyrinth and create new and enlightened resolutions – or will they?

MEMORY, here before us, has infinite stories of multiple places and occurrences... of which most of you do not remember or only comprehend through apparitions and dreams.

The architecture of this labyrinth, this museum chamber will soon begin to unravel. Chaos will be released, and the wild animals will be chained no longer. Who then will fall and who will be replaced, or remembered?

The characters of the GABAN, the STRANGE, may break the cycle of perpetual display and the binds of TIME. But what kind of TIME you may ask. Is it the tick tock tick tock of the metronome, the hard keeper of Western history and science, or is it the

other sense of TIME, the one that flows through many worlds and memories?

You see these characters in voyeuristic pleasure... will MEMORY release them, and then finally release you?

MEMORY sings towards TREE with surtitles in [*].

MEMORY

Where are you, my sweetheart, ngurrbul-dyi?
[dhagu-mdhu yanha-nha nyiwarri-dyi my love]

Let us meet in love, this long for love.
[ngan.girra guray-dyu-ngi-nya]

Meet the soul deep inside you... be in love,
long for love.
[ngan.girra dhulubang ngandir nguwur nyal
guray-dyu-ngi-nya]

Take care my beautiful... are you traveling
alone?
[yawarra lang yamandhu waygiwinya midhang]

Lie down go to sleep... deep inside me.
[wirrinya wirrinya ngajuu ngandir bawar-
nguwur]

Lay here - I take it out - it comes with me
the gibirrngaang [red-bellied snake] is now
in you it brings proper rain and sustains
you on this journey.

Sleep, sleep... deep inside.
[nangari nangari... ngandir nguwur]

Sleep, sleep... deep inside.
[nangari nangari... ngandir nguwur]

Here it is... quiet nguwur [inside] you,
wirrinya [sleeping] and gadhaambang [very
happy].

The marara [carved tree] it sleeps next to
the gibirrngaana [red-bellied snake] and
marks its yilawura [camping place]
ngaligindya [with you and I]... miilwarranha
[open eyes], it ngaay [sees] nyal [you] and
ngaay [see] yambuwan [everything].

Day by day - I'm deep inside.
[nangari nangari... ngajuu ngandir bawar-
nguwur]

guwal in the dhaagun it waygiwinya with
nyal. [earth shadow, it travels with you]

orange lights in the air, night shadows cut
deep inside you: red, orange lights in the
air with darkness. Shadows cut deep inside
you.

[warradagangwarrugandhuray ngalan wirgany
mulaa ngaru birdirrra ngandir bawar-nguwur
nyal]

And now it wakes, its sleepy head sits up
and sees, it sees all... it wakes everyone up

It slithers out of its tree its home and
grows larger than the moon.

It swallows all the evil and sings again.

Sleep, sleep... deep inside.

[nangari nangari... ngandir nguwur]

Sleep, sleep... deep inside.

[nangari nangari... ngandir nguwur]

We two will meet each other again,
sweetheart, when the locust call and the
thunder returns home.

[ngaligindya birrin-da-y-ma-rra nyiwarri
galanygalany murrumbirriy ngulagambilanha]

MEMORY moves back into the hessian sack on top of a dirt
mound. Blue light fades.

NARRATOR

Ah... such love such love. Do you think TREE
feels it?

Yes, a love song, to heal violent memories
riddled with scarification created in dark
places.

TREE... this Powerful Object is but one part
of the vast number of stolen goods from
stolen nations and stolen spirits.

But for now, do not dwell on this struggle
required to release GUILT. For without this
song to awaken personal truth, there is no
reparation.

Lights go down.

3: First Blood

Bright lights illuminate the stage.

Inside a mental asylum.

PHOTO is now rolling and smoking a cigarette and occasionally stops to glare disapprovingly at JUDGE, MUSEUM and MASSACRE.

TREE sways lost in a private world.

MUSEUM stands at their desk holding a polaroid camera.

WITNESS sobs and sucks a thumb and occasionally licks their body nursing many wounds.

NARRATOR is positioned in the middle of the audience.

MASSACRE is cleaning a gun and drinking whiskey.

JUDGE has a pen and paper on a clipboard, jotting notes, making drawings. They wear a white coat and a judge's wig.

GUILT drags their chair past TREE making a screeching sound that makes it difficult to hear TREE.

JUDGE

I the JUDGE and representative of the
CROWN, declare this meeting open.

MUSEUM activates the metronome; it ticks loudly at a regular pace.

TREE

And this is how I came to be, in a matter
of saying – on the path of remembering..

GUILT stops and looks over to TREE. GUILT then addresses PUBLIC with mocking sardonic sarcasm.

GUILT

Another day of this repetitive shit..

PHOTO is staring out to the audience.

Lights dim.

Spotlight up on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

And here we are...

Amongst the thieves and their jewels.

Their stories crossed with burdens and just
out of reach.

TREE is willing to share their dream of
MEMORY and a glimpse of how their
repatriation is possible.

And look, look at PHOTO...

Stage lights dim and a projection of a painted diorama
landscape on a backing board appears and frames PHOTO like an
ethnographic photograph.

NARRATOR (cont.)

... hollow eyes, frozen body. A meticulous
pose. For your, as MUSEUM would say,
education, for your story of how they are.

PHOTO is your prize – the centre stage –
the residue and offspring of that perfect
timeless postcard – you know the one, that
documentation of millions of moments – in

this moment collated into one bodily representation. Can these even happen? I mean, do they, as in the millions all look the same? Hmmm..

MUSEUM is circling PHOTO using their spectacles as a magnifying glass to study PHOTO.

NARRATOR (cont.)

Look at MUSEUM, so proud. The doting guardian studying the object of their ideal vision of primitivism – even though PHOTO will ultimately rebuke this.

Can you think of another occasion when this meant so much to you? Yes, yes PUBLIC, I address you.

Spotlight off NARRATOR.

Lights return to original intensity.

TREE

(Talking to the group) The memory is blurry – but it towers over me with increasing clarity.

I struggle to grasp it – but yes there was another place... amongst so many others like me. I am connected, tethered to a song, a song-line. I hear it clearly from a place far from here. That spirit calls me, the garru [magpie], it warns me.

It's a different melody to that metronome.
MEMORY pounds in my head, it pushes through
the labyrinth refusing to be silenced.

But... here I am in this asylum... and you're
all in my face listening with bated breath
with scowls and judgement.

You do not believe me... but I remember my
other life, I swear it's not a dream, not a
fantasy. I thought I was mad, MASSACRE
tried to beat it out of me, MUSEUM gas-
lighting me and PUBLIC turning a blind eye.

I still feel the cutting, the deep cutting
up of me, into many pieces for the market.
The legacy of those cut marks are here...

TREE lifts their shirt and exposes scars and MUSEUM approaches
TREE and studies the scars and brushes them with a large
conservation soft brush.

TREE (cont.)

... and here. Parts of my dismembered body
sent to other labyrinths with other eyes
upon my discarded parts.

Seemingly healed, seemingly as if caused
from an accident, you say I can't possibly
remember.

I am the MARARA MUYALAANG, the carved tree
of ceremony... MARARA MUYALAANG, MARARA

MUYALAANG, MARARA MUYALAANG, MARARA
MUYALAANG... the core of existence.

MUSEUM

Your poetry is picturesque, albeit a misled
cacophony or hallucinations. You believe
you are a sacred god, my poor deluded TREE...
Indeed, it is just the rodents and bugs
that surround you my child. But remember,
it is only madness for you were never
anywhere else, you are always here with me,
born in this place where I archive and make
steadfast the narrative of your life. I
maintain you.

PHOTO disapprovingly and with disgust rolls their eyes and
cautiously steps off the boulder. The projected diorama behind
PHOTO disappears. PHOTO approaches MUSEUM and pisses at their
feet.

PHOTO

This is for you parent MUSEUM. This is the
only cacophony... the trickle, trickle of my
piss.

(pause)

And there's something else. I smell the
stench that surrounds you, I've seen the
broken bodies you covet - in jars and
locked draws.

And when everyone is sleeping, I hear you
pacing this labyrinth all night long, and

your terrifying screams from waking dreams,
musty ghosts and EVIDENCE.

EVIDENCE lights up.

GUILT is extremely excited.

MUSEUM takes a specimen jar and puts on protective gloves. They sponge up the piss from the floor and labels the jar 'PHOTO;URINE; current date', then places it on their desk next to other specimen jars.

MUSEUM

(Calmly to PHOTO) You are misguided, as usual. Like TREE, your comprehension of this great institution is distorted through madness.

MASSACRE

(To PHOTO) Dirty beast!

PHOTO teasingly roars back like a lion in captivity.

JUDGE indicates/waves a hand to MASSACRE to take a bucket and mop to clean the floor.

MASSACRE approaches PHOTO and touches their face, caresses it.

PHOTO pulls away and spits on MASSACRE's face.

MASSACRE grins and turns to PUBLIC.

MUSEUM

(To PUBLIC) Alas, we cannot expect more from them. Behold... here is the perfect specimen of the otherworld. Their atrocious manners are to be expected.

You've seen these uncivilised creatures in many posters, books and travel post-cards. This dear creature is an excellent specimen attraction... here for a spectacular display. And today they have not disappointed.

JUDGE

But remember PHOTO, no one ever tried to invade you. Even you, my dearest, like TREE and WITNESS are confused by your scars. For even the CROWN protects you (pointing to MASSACRE) and MUSEUM dotes on you. Do not look a gift-horse in the mouth.

MUSEUM waves their arms in the air in time with the ticking metronome.

The character TIME dances with MUSEUM, only MUSEUM can see TIME.

PHOTO

(To MUSEUM) Naraga! [idiot]

JUDGE

(To PHOTO) English please!

GUILT chuckles and inspects the piss like a crazy science experiment and takes a bucket and with gusto, splashes water over the stage to clean the floor.

Lights go down.

Pause.

A spotlight appears on TREE.

TREE

Where is the sunshine, where are the stars?
Where is my home... the deep red of the
horizon?

All lights slowly come up.

PHOTO

MUSEUM, we're not your ornamental history...
your obsession is gammin [pretend]... a few
hundred years in the making. Round and
round in circles.

JUDGE

(Ignoring PHOTO) Go on... TREE...

The sound of a metronome slowly increases in volume.

PHOTO

(Butting in, to JUDGE) Even you, oh big
man. JUDGE... scribbling on your pad,
dispensing pills and orders all directed
from inside the lip of MASSACRE's loaded
gun!

The true meaning of us Powerful Objects is
not here! Not in this dizzying labyrinth!
Even a hysterical spinning snorting child
would see no pain for they, just like this
PUBLIC, are under your highly strung
glamour – like your stupid PUBLIC.

(To PUBLIC) You, pretending not to know, these stories – this colonial hole, this mess.

TREE has confessed another memory... a thousand times in another boring meeting in this madhouse!?

(To MUSEUM) You, pretending we have no provenance, no MEMORY and no other life. Your lies hidden inside that pot of gold (pointing to MUSEUM's desk).

(To TREE) The way they gawk at you... at us. They are all conspirators. They sabotage! They fabricate mirror images of our true power.

(PHOTO screams hysterically at PUBLIC whilst pointing to MASSACRE) Look... MASSACRE binds us with its stinging eyes – and PUBLIC devours us whole. Yes you – you want us, but you never really know us – who am I – tell me who I am!?

JUDGE

(to MASSACRE) PHOTO is hysterical – a lunatic – do something!

MASSACRE acknowledges JUDGE, cocks their gun and aims at PHOTO. PHOTO smirks and takes a piece of mud from the dirt mound and draws a large circular target on their chest.

MASSACRE

(To PHOTO) Shut your rambling hole... your zoo fantasies are attention seeking!

(pause)

You don't know blood like me!
You carry on... boohoo.
Count yourself lucky I didn't slaughter you like the others for MUSEUM's dead collection, like EVIDENCE. I am a hero. I was handsomely rewarded from our dear PUBLIC.

You and your gibberish lunatic behaviour only proves how insane you are! Your madness. Ha... you stand before us and demand retribution! If self-deception were a cruel fate, then you, oh pretty one, will be a fate worth forgetting.

MASSACRE approaches PHOTO

MASSACRE (cont.)

Look closer at me, oh pretty one. I know you like the way I see you, the way I grip your body, in that darkness.

I'm the protector of this holy building of history – that tick tock tick tock you hear is the beat of civilisation... reminding you that if it wasn't the French, it'd be the Dutch or another, if it wasn't me, it would have been them (pointing to PUBLIC).

MUSEUM

(Interjecting) Until we came along. Think yourself sought after and embellished, wrapped in desire and covetousness... here... here in this place of knowledge.

MASSACRE

...and if we weren't merciful, it would have been you... ending your own madness!

But yes – let me imagine it – I can see it now, your own miserable ending done by your very own hands.

You know nothing of history, and you deny our victory... they (pointing out to PUBLIC) will never relate to your tantrums. They only believe in truth, and that MUSEUM and I saved you, saved all of you, and that PUBLIC, the benefactor of such divine intervention is forever here to save you. JUDGE is your law.

Such a primitive!

PHOTO launches at and pins MASSACRE to the ground and blood starts to ooze from MASSACRE's face

PHOTO

Wiray, wiray, wiray... nginduugirr wiray ngurrbul [no, no, no...you're not loving]. You are the minion in the hive that protects the CROWN from its atrocities. You

save them from judgement by their own
deranged god. The only deception is in your
namesake!

MASSACRE!

Your name vibrates within all of us!

But I, I PHOTO, I kill your namesake of me,
I kill your imagined PRIMITIVE. Your
proverbial beast you capture and demise.
With this kill, your mother tongue also
shifts in despair, for you cannot own me
when PRIMITIVE is dead. From this moment
forward...it does not exist, and you cannot
use its word power over me.

GUILT laughs, scoffing.

JUDGE glances at MUSEUM.

MUSEUM separates PHOTO from MASSACRE and holds PHOTO in a firm
grip.

WITNESS sobs louder.

GUILT

(To WITNESS, snickering with lunacy) Oh
dear WITNESS, don't sob so much. For you
could be dead too – over and over – ha!

MASSACRE stands up and wipes blood from their face and
chuckles with disbelief. They clean their face with whiskey.

MASSACRE

Vermin. Victim. You repulse me. And your tongue – I should have cut it out, but as you know, I require it. I desire it.

And the Queen, yes, the CROWN gave me orders to do so – yet I didn't.

Lights dim halfway.

MASSACRE returns to their seat and pours a whiskey.

MUSEUM releases PHOTO.

PHOTO returns to the boulder.

GUILT drags their screeching chair around the stage.

NARRATOR appears on stage with a spotlight. The characters cannot see them.

NARRATOR

Can you see now, oh PUBLIC, what a mess you created. Your contracts with this system break histories.

The CROWN, the parliament, the police, the metronome – are in your hands. But I won't spoil the story... not yet.

Lights go suddenly out.

4: Party Popper

Bright lights illuminate the stage.

Inside a mental asylum. NB: this scene eventually transforms into a circus/freak scene.

We hear GUILT dragging their chair around the stage for a long time.

Lights come up to halfway.

JUDGE

(with a loud powerful voice, stomping around the stage, waving their notes in the air with frustration) GUILT!

Sit or I'll throw you to MASSACRE!

A spotlight appears on TREE.

TREE

I remember being on the ocean. That swaying feeling was strange... those rough endless moments of sickness. I had died a thousand times. I saw smoke swirling around me – it being sung within me. My body pulled apart in many sections, the way the brain thinks about what to have for breakfast, is it sugar or meth.

All lights slowly come up.

TREE (cont.)

It wasn't until I met PHOTO and we took a ferry together up the Thames, or was it the Seine? There was a great hall of light staring down through high windows and the smell of thousands of bodies rushing and glaring. A great exhibition with many other objects, just like us, thousands of us all lost and all cut to pieces. We came from all parts of the world, from ancient places. These memories, they are flooding back to me via MEMORY. In that moment of remembering, I slumped to the floor – to get closer to the creaking wooden boards of the ship, it's sound was like my own bones and skin, creaking, never stop creaking. And the boards spoke to me, they asked me who my mother was. I said I am the marara and I wept. PHOTO... their arm around me, hugging my limbless splintered wooden body. It was then that I realised I was never going back, to the ngalan [light].

GUILT

You could have stayed on that boat. A one-way ticket out of this hell hole... ha, ha!

JUDGE

(Loudly to GUILT) It's not your turn!

GUILT

(to JUDGE) Don't blame me. Look at them! Their tragic darting glances and paranoid obsessions that there is another life, was another life, whatever that life was. As if we are the enemy... ha!

PHOTO glares at GUILT. GUILT coaxes PHOTO with a gawking sexual desire.

PHOTO

(to GUILT and baring their sexual organs)
Want some of this baby? You know you want more of it. I'm sure MASSACRE won't stop you.

GUILT stomps their feet with a tantrum and walks away sulking with fierceness

PHOTO (cont.)

But something in you has transformed – has something finally cracked? After all these facilitated 'intimate' meetings... you can't seem to bear us anymore.

WITNESS glances up and starts to move their hands as if video recording the event. MUSEUM is excited by this exchange and starts the tick tock hand movement in the air and does a little dance around WITNESS. TIME dances with MUSEUM.

PHOTO (cont.)

(To GUILT) You plan for moments of discovering us... there... in that corner. Can you see it, the grinding and moaning, the ropes and whips then the flash of a camera?

WITNESS

(Distressed and sobbing) No, not again, not again. I can't be WITNESS!

PHOTO (cont.)

Then more prodding and poking. Like that night you came a thousand times inside of me, inside of all of us. MASSACRE guarding the door.

(pause)

MUSEUM walks away from PHOTO swaying to the tick tock of the metronome.

PHOTO (cont.)

(To MUSEUM) Going back to the metronome in your head. Keeping TIME by the CROWN's clock?

TREE walks towards PHOTO. JUDGE holds out a hand to stop TREE. TREE stops.

WITNESS slowly crouches in a ball.

PHOTO walks over and comforts WITNESS.

JUDGE

WITNESS doesn't need you...

PHOTO

(Pointing to PUBLIC) PUBLIC doesn't think so!

Lights dim to halfway.

JUDGE gestures to MUSEUM and MASSACRE, and they grab PHOTO and manacle them to the boulder.

MASSACRE drags WITNESS to their seat and takes out a large thick pen marker and proceeds to write the letters "WITNESS" on the back of WITNESS.

TREE shies away from this violence and lights a cigarette, then starts to self-harm, burning their own wooden body with their cigarette.

MUSEUM sees TREE self-harming and dashes over. Blowing out the flame and fussing over TREE. Checking it like a doctor and making mental notes and pushes WITNESS aside.

Spotlight on PHOTO.

PHOTO

You think these chains are real? I'm the starring role of this reality TV show.

(To PUBLIC) Who made this boulder, where did it come from?

(To MUSEUM) Can you hear the ticking of this boulder too... ha...? MUSEUM... can you?

(PHOTO moves their fingers like the spider Itsy Bitsy) Like a little tiny Itsy Bitsy baby museum time bomb!

MUSEUM gets closer to the boulder to try and hear it.

GUILT laughs in disgust and lunacy.

WITNESS screams in pain and we see the tattoo on WITNESS's back.

PHOTO (cont.)

(To MUSEUM) This boulder is the only one that can hear the ticking. Pathetic, such a gammin [pretend] imagination. You believe that your profession makes this real, makes this boulder real?

We all know who commissioned the carving of this rock (looking at PUBLIC). Carved with the blood of my brethren. It is a well-constructed stage, a circus with darting eyes, all pounding down on me in endless discomfort and desire – endless power! (PHOTO points to PUBLIC), and now you, you PUBLIC, you sit so static.

We exist for you. Only for you – in your temples of laughter we succumb to your infinite patronising gestures, your rules, your games, your hierarchy and your... delusion.

(PHOTO spins around to JUDGE) And look at you all, the ring leaders with masses of glory egged on by PUBLIC – poor deluded PUBLIC.

(PHOTO spins to MASSACRE) And what about you MASSACRE... You! A bloodied embodiment of death. Glorified through thousands of monuments screaming 'victory'.

PHOTO immediately jumps upon the boulder and poses in a primitive way and gestures to PUBLIC.

PHOTO (cont.)

Is this what you want PUBLIC? The hunched sexualised PRIMITIVE in your gaze, the velvet you can bang for us to birth... over and over... for MASSACRE to then deliver to MUSEUM.

Don't forget I killed PRIMITIVE, and you're all nothing without it!

(To PUBLIC) Hey PUBLIC, is this going to plan? Or does JUDGE, to whom you gift your gold, truly represent your precious civilisation. The skin of our people is on tap for your designed leather shoes and belts, furs of hair lacing your garments and brains oozing through fingers into jars.

Lights up.

JUDGE

Enough of this behaviour!

PHOTO

(Ignoring JUDGE, shouting to MUSEUM) He's the lunatic. Hoarding body parts! The hoarder of death – the hoarder of me and all that is WITNESS. Only WITNESS is the

real WITNESS, can't you see!? And WITNESS
sees beyond GUILT.

(Longingly gesture to TREE) And TREE, you
are me.

GUILT screams with lunatic laughter and picks up and bashes
their chair down on the floor repeatedly.

GUILT

(to TREE) Your turn now TREE! Tell us your
sob story, your precious, what is it...
marara [tree]!?

MUSEUM

MARARA is a relevant discourse here for the
provenance of a system, albeit the
PRIMITIVE language, of which I've studied
and recorded.

GUILT

(Mocking MUSEUM) MARARA, WARARA, FARARA,
TARARA, BLAH BLAH BLAH...ha ha ha!?

MUSEUM

(MUSEUM addresses PUBLIC but is not
convincing) It is our duty through your
generous gold, to study these PRIMITIVE
creatures. I personally give thanks to your
generosity. Without studying their
existence, who would we be?

GUILT

(To MUSEUM, scoffing with laughter) You call that a sales pitch!? Try harder!

With gusto, the scene transforms into a circus/freak show spectacle. Lights spin around the scene like in a circus then stop to reflect a Circus Big Top event. The characters are moving around in chaos.

A spotlight follows MUSEUM around.

MUSEUM has a top hat and a megaphone. Speaking through a circus mega-horn. His performance is awkward. He is outside his comfort zone.

MASSACRE plays a circus horn.

GUILT erratically clashes massive cymbals until MASSACRE cracks a whip at them to stop.

MUSEUM

(Speaking through a circus mega-horn to PUBLIC) Gather up, gather up!
To the colourful calamity of our Grand Tour.

We hear a recorded applause.

MASSACRE, GUILT, PUBLIC and JUDGE throws colourful paper streamers, paper confetti and pop party-poppers around the stage and audience.

GUILT stands on their chair, giggles and juggles dropping the balls clumsily and trying again.

MUSEUM (cont.)

Subcontinental freaks, faraway curios and showstopping breath-taking acts!

The crack of a whip, (MASACRE cracks their whip) the disturbance of histories. All of this supported by you and organised by our very own judicial representative of the Crown! Our dear JUDGE.

A spotlight appears on WITNESS and GUILT. GUILT bows and WITNESS hides, and we hear a recorded applause.

MUSEUM (cont.)

The WITNESS is laid bare, laid out flayed out and GUILT does not care. Guilt for guilt, it may not seem fair, but it is not alive either. It is just there. And maybe TREE will save the day!?

A spotlight appears on TREE.

TREE removes their shirt. TREE has a tote bag with the words "TREE FERTILISER" and throws this over themselves. We hear a recorded applause.

MUSEUM (cont.)

I the MUSEUM will protect and keep TREE safe from PHOTO's lunacy. But do not despair I will care for PHOTO, even in this deranged state, otherwise PHOTO will perish without me, without my hoarding, without the enterprise of solid structures and inners and moments of protection in this very institute.

I implore the living to protect these rare specimens, I mean, I mean, these Powerful Objects of an indiscriminate period – locked away forever – protected forever.

Spotlight appears on PHOTO and we hear a recorded applause.

MUSEUM (cont.)

You, all of you, look here ...

The spotlight on WITNESS flashes on and off for a few seconds, and we clearly see the word 'WITNESS' tattooed, like a war label or stamp, on their back.

MUSEUM (cont.)

... here we have it for you. You wanted the evidence and here it is as WITNESS is WITNESS and there is nothing but EVIDENCE.

A yellow spotlight lurks around the stage and suddenly settles on EVIDENCE.

The entire lights on stage flicker like a ghost is tampering with the wires and the characters look around in shock, and the music stops.

GUILT stops juggling and drops all the balls. GUILT squeezes a circus horn that sounds like a screaming eerie child.

EVIDENCE glows with a flickering yellow light.

With overwhelming exhaustion, MUSEUM falls to their knees with hands over their ears. MASSACRE steps in to keep the flow of the presentation. MASSACRE speaks through the circus megaphone.

Lights return to normal then a bright spot appears on MASSACRE.

MASSACRE

Circus clowns, travelling tribes of savages, witch doctor ooga-booga and exotic pulsating rock'n roll. Cannibal boomerang throwers and a burnt TREE! The greatest show on earth Tuesday, Wednesday – all the way through to Sunday. The Greatest travelling world fair.

MUSEUM recovers from the horn sound and snatches the mega-horn from MASSACRE

MUSEUM

I am the saviour of this calamity. I am the master of the house of collections.

PUBLIC stand and start throwing gold coins onto the stage. GUILT collects the coins with extreme excitement. JUDGE bows to PUBLIC. A recorded applause is heard. Lights out.

5: Prison

A prison scene with large bars across the floor and walls.

WITNESS wears a prison uniform.

Spotlight comes up on NARRATOR. No lights on stage.

NARRATOR

(To PUBLIC) How easily you forget about that untruth laying quietly in your stomach, especially inside this prison hellhole. See the walls, moving in and out... you aren't the only one needing to escape this vibrating nightmare.

Deep inside that little lie pinches and grows. That little ache inside. Then it moves north – devouring organs as it goes, until finally it arrives in the throat.

Can you feel it there? Go on... feel for it, feel that lump in the throat where TIME has lodged itself. The tick tock of TIME, the thump, thump.

(NARRATOR gesturing to the characters) They feel it too. They know what is to come, even though their denial is deep within generations of swallowing war crimes and denied love and retribution.

I will tell you a secret, one you may need it to survive this blood bath, this transformation.

(NARRATOR points out the exits) The exits are... there... there... and there.

TIME doesn't play games... it understands this place is stuck on repeat.

Tick tock tick tock tick tock... feel the lump in your throat ...the pulsating. That's it, feel the rhythm. Now look at them (pointing to the characters), see how they pulsate inside you? Tick tock tick tock...

Lights go out on NARRATOR and up on stage.

The metronome sound ticks loudly.

PHOTO and TREE blow cigarette smoke over WITNESS – as if to create a healing smoking ceremony. WITNESS slowly bathes their body in the smoke, cleansing their body.

MASSACRE

(Scoffing to WITNESS) Ha... look at them MUSEUM, they're at it again. Their little ceremonies!

MUSEUM

It keeps them useful.

MASSACRE

(To GUILT) Maybe you could use some cleansing too!

PHOTO without MUSEUM noticing, blows smoke towards MUSEUM. MUSEUM turns and notices PHOTO and theatrically with their hands gathers the smoke over themselves as if to be cleansed. This scene greatly excites JUDGE.

MUSEUM

(To PHOTO) How about a water ceremony too?
Do you know how to perform that one?!

MASSACRE

(To MUSEUM) I do!

MASSACRE walks over to WITNESS and spurts WHISKEY on them.
A green spot appears on WITNESS. Suddenly WITNESS freezes with
fear. WITNESS's eyes can be seen darting around the room but
cannot move.

Pause.

MASSACRE and GUILT start laughing, and MUSEUM claps to the
rhythm of the metronome.

The character TIME dances with MUSEUM, only MUSEUM can see
TIME.

TREE stands and a red light shines on them at the same time as
EVIDENCE lights up yellow.

TREE

(to WITNESS) It traps them.
Their mechanical games— burrambal burrambal
burrambal [games]. It's a menace.

Your TIME has frozen WITNESS — bundarra
bundarra bundarra [froze].

It holds us all, in perpetual stasis.

See how they stare at us — garramarra
garramarra garramarra [stare].

In their conspiracy of pretend love –
ngurrbal ngurrbal ngurrbal [love].
TIME itself has been perverted – turned
inside out like a mirror devouring its own
gut.

(to PUBLIC) Look at WITNESS.
Look at their frozen body – burrambal
bundarra garramarra [games, frozen stare].
Is it as empty as yours?

But... shhh... can you feel the wind... can you
feel it – giray giray giray [wind] – it
shifts.
TIME is changing. TIME is a friend of
WITNESS. Not the tick tock burrambal [game]
of the CROWN.

At this point JUDGE stands and circles TREE with suspicion.
Spotlight goes off TREE.

GUILT

(to TREE) Oh, it speaks... it speaks of
TIME as if TIME gives a shit about WITNESS...
or love for that matter. What was it... TREE...
ngurrbal [love]?

MASSACRE

(laughs and pointing at GUILT) What do you
fuckin' know about love?

GUILT

(Teasing MASSACRE) I know a little bit
about your strange fruit ngurrbal [love]...

your bit of black velvet... I've been lucky
enough to share it.

A member of PUBLIC wolf whistles and PHOTO rattles their
chains in rebellion.

MUSEUM

(Interjecting MASSACRE and GUILT) Tut tut...
settle down. Don't be harassed by TREE's
satanic riddles and spirit of superiority.
(to TREE) TIME? Is that who you are
calling?
(glancing at PUBLIC and JUDGE, then going
back to addressing TREE) Let's return to
TREE's plea for sanity... Dear TREE, let me
remind you...

JUDGE

(JUDGE interjects MUSEUM, to TREE) TIME? Is
that who you are blaming for this voodoo on
WITNESS?
Your TIME never existed and will never free
you. Your memories on the ferry with that
red sunset are imaginary.

MUSEUM

Your creation was animated by yours truly
and the camera of course and the only TIME
is the metronome.

GUILT

(GUILT laughs with lunacy) This
bamboozlement feeds me!

JUDGE

(to GUILT) Stay quiet GUILT – you're an embarrassment – you have no concept of TIME.

Lights dim halfway and a spotlight appears on WITNESS.

JUDGE gestures to MUSEUM to join them and study the frozen figure of WITNESS, taking notes, and making a drawing of WITNESS. MUSEUM takes the Polaroid camera and takes a few photos and MUSEUM places them in their desk draw under lock and key.

Lights up.

PUBLIC

(PUBLIC stands and yells out from the audience) STOP! How can we deny TIME! Have you changed your mind? MUSEUM, JUDGE... are you re-writing the daily educational concepts of truth concerning TIME and these creatures?

First you educate us to the fact that these creatures, these objects are ancient but now you dismiss their wisdom, their magic and voodoo. What then is TIME?

The metronome ticking sound suddenly stops, lights dim, and a spotlight appears on the metronome.

TIME falls down on the floor silent.

MASSACRE snarls at PUBLIC, GUILT cheers with glee. Some other PUBLIC also cheer, egging them on.

GUILT

(To PUBLIC) You have stopped it!

Lights up immediately.

MASSACRE

(to GUILT) GUILT! You traitor – you mongrel
– whose side are you on?! TIME will
recover, unlike MEMORY of which is dead a
million times!

TREE

TIME's only ally is WITNESS; this labyrinth
of a building is nothing to TIME. All of us
are irrelevant and insignificant.

PUBLIC reveals to us that this frozen
WITNESS is the door to understanding our
history as truth – the way to a different
place.

WITNESS whimpers.

MASSACRE

Let's put a stop to this carnival of crap.

MASSACRE feeds the match to WITNESS. WITNESS takes the match
and eats it – screaming with pain and begins to convulse on
the floor.

JUDGE looks up and glares at MASSACRE. MASSACRE rolls their
eyes and sighs deeply – with this MASSACRE takes a bucket of
water and drenches WITNESS unceremoniously. WITNESS trying to
gulp the water in desperation, then starts to scoop it from
the floor and body to heal their burning mouth.

MUSEUM, dismissive, clicks the metronome on and it starts ticking.

TIME with gusto jumps up and does a little dance with MUSEUM.

MUSEUM

What a display. MASSACRE, you are genius. A simple gesture proving TIME does exist by this mere burning activates pain receptors... an experiment that WITNESS is indeed in real time... the tick tock tick tock time... with us – cause and effect. The institution prevails!

(To PUBLIC) You see, oh PUBLIC, you require us to decipher and demonstrate this mad house, this dilemma of hocus pocus. Your education continues.

JUDGE

(To everyone) Enough of this pedagogical rambling.

(To MASSACRE) Release PHOTO.

MASSACRE and MUSEUM with noisy keys un-manacles PHOTO. PHOTO collapses with a wide sinister smile. MUSEUM jumps out of the way and is frightened of PHOTO.

Lights fade.

6: Asylum

Lights up dimmed halfway. The characters are in a circle, in a medical asylum context, some people are making cups of tea, eating cake and smoking cigarettes.

MASSACRE is cleaning their gun and drinking whiskey.

GUILT is sitting in their chair being very still.

JUDGE gives WITNESS Panadol. TREE is very still.

A spotlight appears on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

I'll share with you a little riddle... if
MASSACRE was a figment of PHOTO's
imagination, a special effect created by
WITNESS for your education:

Did MUSEUM create Powerful Objects?

Did GUILT become entangled in MEMORY?

Did TREE become lucid?

Did JUDGE convince you... oh PUBLIC?

(Pause)

Such transformations. The towers fall and
the flowers bite. Your eyes itch with
TIME in your throat and EVIDENCE on your
mind.

The spotlight turns off on NARRATOR.

Pause.

WITNESS appears in front of GUILT.

WITNESS

Ngajuu ngaay [I see].

GUILT's chair breaks and GUILT collapses on the floor.

GUILT

No!

Lights suddenly out.

Pause.

Stage lights come up.

WITNESS stands taller but still hunched and sits in the shadows. At this point over the duration of this SCENE, a member of PUBLIC slowly and quietly supports WITNESS, gives them water and food and returns to the audience.

JUDGE keenly studies the PUBLIC supporting WITNESS.

JUDGE stands and surveys the room and PUBLIC, studying the scene and disappears out of site.

MEMORY slowly moves in the hessian, enough for the audience and PHOTO to notice.

PHOTO goes over and stands next to MEMORY.

PHOTO

(to TREE) Now I remember. I remember that moment on the ferry. I remember that you were bathed in red sunlight. Your tears formed great spaces of TIME. You begged

me never to forget that moment... I
couldn't see it through my own pain.

Now I know where I come from. I remember!

You were talking about the way the stars
mapped our bodies across the ocean to
this place. You spoke the truth.

TREE

(Pointing to MUSEUM) This parent of
illogical systems will always uphold
concrete monuments of victory – monuments
with false stories and hidden atrocities.

WITNESS

(To MUSEUM) Cretan... MUSEUM... you tricked
GUILT, you tricked us all with your
trickster clown mandates of the Crown, of
your mighty educational system of endless
echoing corridors.

(WITNESS points to PUBLIC) You know this!
(pointing to MUSEUM and MASSACRE) They
invented lies!
They invented repetitive circus acts to
the tick tick tick of this metronome, or
was it JUDGE.

(Pause)

Where are you JUDGE!?

Everyone looks around the room for JUDGE.

GUILT

The disappearing JUDGE – has run off to
the CROWN. Ha ha ha ha.

PHOTO bends down and inspects the hessian body bag of
MEMORY. PHOTO touches MEMORY, testing if there is any
movement. It moves and PHOTO jumps back and gasps.

MASSACRE

(laughing loud and glancing at MUSEUM)
It's MEMORY!... alive and kicking... damn! I
must be sure to finish the job!

At this point, MUSEUM takes a Polaroid camera image of PHOTO
next to MEMORY. As the flash goes, WITNESS jumps up and
snatches the camera – MASSACRE reaches for a gun and shoots
WITNESS point blank and WITNESS falls down. Blood, lots of
blood slowly oozes and moves across the stage.
MUSEUM takes back the camera and deposits the photo into
their draw - using loud jingling keys to unlock and lock the
draw.

PHOTO

(distressing) WITNESS!

WITNESS stands tall with PHOTO's assistance.

WITNESS

Ngajuu ngaay nginduugirr [I see you].

WITNESS then falls to the ground in a ball. GUILT scoffs.

MUSEUM

Can't waste this evidence – I remember EVIDENCE (MUSEUM strokes the head of EVIDENCE). It was processed by you, wasn't it... MASSACRE?

MASSACRE

Oh yes... no different to other mammals. I have a very good recipe passed down by the famous Glebe taxidermist in Sydney! It's really no different a process from object to object, from mammal to mammal, from whale to ape and to these wretched creatures.

GUILT

(Mocking MASSACRE) "no different... different, different, different..."

MASSACRE

(to GUILT) Rambling again huh GUILT? I gave you a lesson on this specific specimen... of which the CROWN was

especially grateful considering its
original life was treacherous towards us!

GUILT

(To PUBLIC; mocks MASSACRE) "the CROWN,
CROWN, CROWN..."

MUSEUM

(to PUBLIC, finishing GUILT's sentence)
GUILT... you are wasting precious TIME.

At this point TREE walks over to the metronome and
stops it. TIME falls to the floor and is silent.

MUSEUM

(furious to TREE) I am your master! How
dare you disrupt TIME... our precious TIME...
your...other master! Are you listening to
me? Don't ignore me... how dare you... stop...
you are doomed...

MUSEUM stops speaking suddenly as TREE walks to the dirt
mound.

All lights flicker on and off as if interrupted by spirits.
Two CROWN drummers appear alongside JUDGE. The drummers give
a royal drum roll.

JUDGE enters from the shadows wearing a regal court wig and
a long gown - and lets out a small giggle and tries to cover
their action to MUSEUM's tantrum.

JUDGE bows in the middle of the stage and MASSACRE, MUSEUM
and GUILT bow.

PHOTO mocking the bow.

GUILT shuffles up next to JUDGE, carrying a single broken leg of their chair.

WITNESS takes a photo of JUDGE

GUILT

(Drummers stop drumming and GUILT fussing, combs back JUDGE's hair with a hand) How was her majesty?

JUDGE pushes GUILT back with an off-hand gesture.

JUDGE

Stop fussing!

(JUDGE clears their voice very loudly) I have a message!

MUSEUM

(to JUDGE with extreme nervousness and stuttering) What's this message?

If the power of this majestic institute does not survive and their (pointing to PUBLIC) curiosity not satisfied, none of them would have culture, TREE its millions of relations would be nothing but empty and useless objects. And you dear GUILT would not exist!

GUILT scoffs in lunacy – spinning their leg chair like a police baton threatening MUSEUM. GUILT becomes increasingly volatile.

MEMORY moves in the sack and rolls down the dirt mound – everyone jumps and are on tenterhooks, shocked as if they have seen a ghost.

JUDGE

(to MASSACRE and furious to be interrupted) MASSACRE, I thought you got rid of that MEMORY!

GUILT peeks into the hessian and jumps back with lunatic glee. GUILT sidles up next to MASSACRE, mocking them.

MASSACRE

(to GUILT) Don't touch me, you rancid animal! Playing us off each other!

EVIDENCE

(EVIDENCE lights up and MUSEUM screams) A creature feeding from the shame. Though tell me GUILT... Did MEMORY nudge you? What did you remember peering in that sack... all bloodied and ridden with maggots?! Did you see your own demise?!

MUSEUM

(MUSEUM with lunacy and pointing at EVIDENCE) Did you hear it... it spoke!

JUDGE

(To MUSEUM) You've gone mad too! Keep it together dear fellow! The CROWN needs you.

MASSACRE grabs the chair leg from GUILT, pushing GUILT away, and whacks the sack until it stops moving then throws the chair leg at GUILT who collects it and hisses at MASSACRE and comforts their chair leg like a baby.

MUSEUM freaks out and cannot believe this object speaks and trips over smashing their spectacles. Their keys go flying across the room and PHOTO grabs them and hides them – very secretly and without noise.

TREE

(calmly) EVIDENCE has finally arrived

EVIDENCE

My family, TREE, finally I do not hide!
(to GUILT) GUILT... take off that stupid disguise, it's demeaning.

GUILT

(Pointing to PUBLIC) They love me like this!

(To PUBLIC) You feel my power – you would be nothing without me. GUILT is me, I am your power, it's melancholy and it's ignorance, it's blindness and shadows it's euphemism and it's desire to erase.

They do not see you EVIDENCE, you are a mere apparition!

EVIDENCE

(to GUILT) You are indeed tarnished by the living – I did warn you that they would be your undoing!

I am the EVIDENCE of all here and all that was – WITNESS and I share bonds beyond the filthy institutional systems of corruption. MEMORY will have the final say!

GUILT

I concur! Ha ha ha ha.

MASSACRE

(turns and tosses GUILT across the room)
You're a slimy snake, worthless, as worthless as that hoax of a glowing porcelain head! Probably a game concocted between you and TREE!

Ghosts! – Bahahaha, superstitious crap.

Pause.

A spotlight appears on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

With MEMORY, apparently comes the dismantling of the CROWN's power which is

the catalyst for the truth – for clear vision – for healing. So I am told. And the ghosts come out of the closet, they are also awoken from their slumber by the power of MEMORY.

These objects are now a collective powerful! Even GUILT has a role to play... and EVIDENCE will help love, reveal itself.

Spotlight off NARRATOR.

GUILT

(sarcastically, to MASSACRE) Ha! And you think I am revealed – look, look at PUBLIC... look how they despise you now – you are a traitor you are.

EVIDENCE has you in their gaze (EVIDENCE lights up) and MEMORY can smell the blood under your filthy fingernails, it senses your reptilian cold body and stained fingers amongst endless corpses... they both know of your top-secret sweetheart... of which MEMORY will soon uncover!

MEMORY moves out of the hessian. WITNESS assists MEMORY. A spotlight follows MEMORY around from now on throughout the entire play.

JUDGE

(To everyone) Children!

The entire characters stop bickering and listen. The drummers make a drum roll then stop.

JUDGE (cont.)

As I was saying... the CROWN has spoken!
Their message is clear... (JUDGE clears
their throat loudly) I decree...

JUDGE spins in shock to see MEMORY standing tall.
WITNESS walks slowly around the stage, escorting MEMORY as
they go and with a long pointing finger at GUILT, MASSACRE,
MUSEUM and JUDGE.

WITNESS

You have all failed... haven't they GUILT?
Even you.

MASSACRE is drinking whiskey trying to ignore the commotion,
and raises their glass to cheers the speech from GUILT.

GUILT

(interrupting WITNESS) Oh the guilt... ha
ha ha ha...

PHOTO always had your number (pointing simultaneously to MASSACRE and MUSEUM) and... bahahaha... oh and MASSACRE, PHOTO knows your dirty little secret! And MUSEUM... PHOTO always sneaking back into your draw, rummaging for those precious moments captured for prosperity in those weaponised photographs for keeping the PUBLIC at bay with dazzling theatrical training – displayed again and again for tourist travels and stories of the famed PRIMITIVE.

EVIDENCE is all glowing and awake now... spilling the beans of ravaged shadow areas of denial and lazy justifications... right under your noses! Bahahaha (GUILT screeches with lunacy).

MUSEUM dashes to the draw in their desk, but it is locked – they pull at it, but it will not open. At this point PHOTO holds up MUSEUM's large bundle of keys and shakes it to tease MUSEUM. This infuriates MUSEUM and they rip open the draw and the entire table smashed and falls apart. Many objects scatter the floor but no photos. MUSEUM is desperately looking for the photos on the ground. EVIDENCE is released from the table and rolls over to TREE and stands by their side.

MUSEUM

(MUSEUM starts whimpering and crying)
This is not possible! Where are the
photos, my precious photos!?

PHOTO

(Interrupting GUILT. To MUSEUM) MUSEUM –
you are nothing but a miserable shadow..
you do not own me, I was never for sale!

And now EVIDENCE is also released!

A light appears of EVIDENCE when they speak.

EVIDENCE

(Standing proudly, to GUILT) GUILT!
Reveal yourself!

The drummers make a drum roll and JUDGE pushes them aside
and they scramble off stage – continuing to drum roll as
they go and then there is silence.

JUDGE's long cape and wig falls off them and lays on the
edge of the stage.

There is chaos on stage then everyone freezes.

All lights go out and a purple light appears on the NARRATOR
and a blue light on MEMORY.

NARRATOR

MEMORY... the child has returned, the true
narrator of this journey, here before us
amongst such calamity.

Admittedly, this is getting a bit irrational. After all, the family is starting to fall apart, and tenderness is nowhere to be seen. The scratching at your mind, the confusion, the calamity. MEMORY reminds us that even when you depart this labyrinth and stroll home to the fresh scent of personal items and lovers, there will be TIME standing there at your door in as much a place as this. For now, we can only WITNESS.

House lights dim halfway.

MEMORY still has a purple light on them.

MEMORY

(Singing to GUILT) Take away your mask.
[bunharra nginhu yandangarang]

Please show me your face, the one you are always laughing.
[dumbalgirrinhal dharray...ngindhu gindaywaruwar]

Suddenly, WITNESS appears behind GUILT, GUILT has their back to the audience, and a spotlight appears on them both. EVIDENCE gently removes the balaclava from GUILT's face. GUILT is scared but trusts this process. As the balaclava is finally fully removed, GUILT turns around and faces the audience. GUILT has no mouth. A light appears on EVIDENCE when they speak

EVIDENCE

Behold... GUILT has no mouth!

WITNESS takes a Polaroid photo of GUILT's face and passes it to PUBLIC – the PUBLIC pass the photo around.

GUILT falls to the floor unconscious, at the same instant EVIDENCE makes a large sound with cymbals.

PHOTO honks the circus horn as MASSACRE with urgent nervousness, trying to hide evidence of GUILT, stuffs GUILT into MEMORY's hessian bag and ties a knot and slams it with the butt of a rifle to make sure GUILT is dead.

MASSACRE drags the hessian sack of GUILT and dumps it at the feet of MUSEUM

MASSACRE

(to JUDGE) There you go boss...

JUDGE

(affirmatively) The Crown is comforted.

MASSACRE

(to JUDGE) What do you want me to do about MEMORY?

JUDGE

(affirmatively) Who... who is MEMORY?

There is no MEMORY.

Comrade... have you gone mad as well!?

Lights out suddenly.

7: Reveal

Lights come up. All characters have a spotlight on them, and the rest of the stage is dark.

WITNESS wears the discarded cloak and wig of the JUDGE.
WITNESS circles MASSACRE and the spotlight follows WITNESS.
WITNESS then continues slowly to study each character, like a detective, eyeing off the entire murder scene, circling MASSACRE and their objects.
JUDGE's eyes follow around WITNESS in disbelief.
MASSACRE looks up with scorn.

WITNESS takes their time, tall and back straight, making visual and mental notes on all the objects MASSACRE has. Then turning and idling next to the Polaroid camera then to the boulder and the manacles. MUSEUM's smashed glasses on the floor. WITNESS glances over to JUDGE, the PUBLIC then to the hessian bags. Then returns to the table beside MASSACRE. JUDGE shifts nervously and pretends not to be impressed. WITNESS surveys JUDGE. Glancing back between MASSACRE and the JUDGE, then slowly turns to look at TREE looking at MUSEUM.

JUDGE

(Loudly) What's that smell? That disgusting smell!?
MUSEUM clean it up, we can't have this - here with PUBLIC!

MUSEUM fusses with anxiety a bucket and sponge trying to
clean up the blood

WITNESS

(to JUDGE) MUSEUM can't smell death!
Idiot! That's MASSACRE's role!

JUDGE

(to WITNESS) Who are you to correct me?!

Lights go out.

8: I will care for my enemy

Lights up halfway. All characters are in a state of confusion. A spotlight appears on NARRATOR and MEMORY.

MEMORY

The sound of thunder fills this place – the red belly snake slithers across your lap – TIME has shifted.

NARRATOR

But now is not the moment for conclusions... our little family is still in chaos. The members have shifted alliance.

The spotlight goes off NARRATOR. Spotlight appears on JUDGE.

JUDGE

(addressing the PUBLIC) Dear PUBLIC, thank you all for being here today. The show before you may have been confusing, and indeed it is here for your educational training. To understand the periphery of our vast superior culture and its influence. The complications, albeit via some unscrupulous behaviour is after all your desires.

JUDGE glances over their shoulder back to the characters,
then lingering on the hessian sacks.

JUDGE (cont.)

I thank you for your dedication and support, for the contracts so vehemently processed and in order. And for the wealth of power through your financial legacies. It is indeed moments like this, in great moments of change, that your power and influence and financial commitment to keep these great experiments going is of the essence..

Do not concern yourselves if civil unrest arrives and vibrates through our very beings and societies. This will be settled by orders from the CROWN... and the highest reputations revealing the importance of our systematic devotion – to you and to our systems of tutoring and leadership.

The spotlight goes off JUDGE. Spotlight appears on PHOTO.

PHOTO

(shouting from the boulder) Systematic devotion! Come on JUDGE, you can't always steal my vibe and spit it out all preaching. Your rhetoric is a stolen

song, like the stolen bodies and powerful objects that rest within us.

All lights up.

JUDGE turns back to PHOTO, holds their hand out straight and makes a lowering gesture as if to shoosh PHOTO.

WITNESS collects the discarded camera and running with great energy, slides across the floor to the audience end of the stage. Spinning around and snaps a photo of JUDGE – a bright flash like lightening erupts over the entire PUBLIC and illuminates the stage. The photo flashes up on a large screen.

JUDGE holds out their hands to stave off the flare. JUDGE drops their notebook and pen.

Members of PUBLIC scramble through the audience to the stage and rush to the sides of JUDGE, but JUDGE pushes them aside. SNAP! Another photo is taken of JUDGE. Another image flashes up on a large screen.

MUSEUM screams and runs towards JUDGE dropping to JUDGE's feet and putting their hands out to stop WITNESS taking another photo. Protecting JUDGE with MUSEUM's life.

WITNESS stares and surveys the scene. Like a journalist, bends over to snatch JUDGE's letter from the CROWN. WITNESS walks to EVIDENCE and holds the letter out for them to read.

WITNESS

(to EVIDENCE) Finally, the Crown's speech!

EVIDENCE

(EVIDENCE reads from JUDGE's letter from the CROWN; speaking through a circus mega-horn) "We the CROWN decree that here

before you is the final test. It is a test of logic and mechanics for future engagement of sympathisers intended for true instruction. The following list and final task will assist in engaging with a new pathway for advancement:

Vessel.

Carrier.

Transmitter.

Manipulator.

Attachment.

Desire.

Addiction.

Power.

Obsessive.

Ruler of dangerous ideas.

Instigator of secrets.

Destroyer of all histories.

Possessor of us.

Trickster.

Promotes longing.

Threatens to destroy MEMORY.

Erased re-written.

Subjugated and blasphemy.

Sunken in TIME.

Delineates nothing.

Engenders all.

Supposedly dead but always alive.

Staring back.

Unforgiving hypnotism.

Its owner, stolen away or dead, passes to the next – outliving all... its lovers...

these are all denied by the CROWN. And they must be disposed of in this order... and in small pieces so they will not sprout again to live and thrive as they once did!"

WITNESS

(Speaking through a circus mega-horn)
Hollow, shallow, thin words... meaningless tongue twisting data with smoke screens.
(To MUSEUM and JUDGE) And this is the research result of your labyrinth of museums... bone collecting and stolen wealth? The CROWN is defunct!

Some PUBLIC cheer and some boo and hiss. A small argument and fight ignite between the PUBLIC members.

JUDGE pounds forward and snatched the note from WITNESS. MUSEUM still tries to hold on to JUDGE's feet, but JUDGE kicks MUSEUM away.

JUDGE

No one desecrates the word of the CROWN!

TREE moves forward to a dirt pile and plants itself into the soil. PHOTO assists by digging up some dirt and burying the tree and padding the bottom of TREE's trunk.
TIME stands close by TREE

TREE

The CROWN is a youngling... a short moment that TIME does not even recognise. But I, I am as old as the sun sets and this

earth here cradles me, clings to my body,
heals me and powers MEMORY.

MASSACRE

(seemingly shocked, yelling to MUSEUM and
pointing to TREE) You said that was
impossible!

MUSEUM

(startled, screaming at JUDGE) Stop them..
(to the two PUBLIC characters) Stop them!
Arrest them – throw them in a cell,
shackle them to the boulder, mute them,
make them invisible! Shoot them!

JUDGE

Do away with them at once!

EVIDENCE

You cannot stop MEMORY.

WITNESS

And there is something more (turning to
PHOTO), isn't there beautiful PHOTO?

PHOTO, pushing MUSEUM over, walks and with commotion, hands
an envelope with a letter and Polaroid photos inside (of
PHOTO) to WITNESS.

TIME stands next to and points at MASSACRE; MASSACRE becomes
furious but cannot move, they are frozen in time.

JUDGE also tries to move and trying to signal to the PUBLIC
for help but is not successful.

PUBLIC is still in a state of shock and realisation at the change of guard.

MUSEUM is a blubbering mess.

WITNESS

(inspecting the letter) The letter is authentic, clean and legible addressed to 'Mr. S. Wilson, Surry Lane, Battersea, Surry, England' and dated Melbourne Victoria December 22 1854.

The hessian sack of GUILT starts to move and worm-like wriggles towards MASSACRE. MASSACRE looks terrified.

WITNESS (cont.)

The letter is from 'Keilor Station, dated December 5, 1854'; signed at foot by James 'MASSACRE' Dixon. It has postal directions... to be left at the Post Office till called for, Melbourne, Port Phillip'.

Spotlight on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

(NARRATOR interjecting) Ah... yes, that secret... penned in a letter.
The pain of love itself.

PHOTO and MEMORY stand tall together holding hands.

WITNESS passes the letter to EVIDENCE. EVIDENCE inspects the photos and letter.

MEMORY

Please read it loud and clear

EVIDENCE

"Dear conspirator, there is plenty of the black natives where I am. They are very treacherous. I work for MUSEUM who is a total fuck wit but there is always a bit of fun on the side. Please find enclosed many of the special photos MUSEUM has taken – they'll keep you happy for hours. Check out the special pretty image of PHOTO. I must only confess to you my friend that I am quite taken by them.

Work has been busy... we had another great battle with the blacks a month ago – apart from our grave digging and revenge hunts – the CROWN and PUBLIC still pay very well for their carcasses. I also have my private clients. Only yesterday there was eighteen killed and two of our men. They throw spears that penetrate right through you which is very dangerous but my good 'ol Betsy shooter marks them well and they fall like flies on a sheep's dag.

JUDGE

Enough!

GUILT

(Taunting MASSACRE) MASSACRE loves PHOTO..
MASSACRE loves PHOTO... MASSACRE loves
PHOTO...

GUILT starts laughing loudly from inside the hessian bag, MASSACRE picks themselves up from the ground and limps over to GUILT and kicks GUILT, inside GUILT is laughing with lunacy. MASSACRE slumps.

JUDGE goes to MASSACRE's side and grabs the hessian with GUILT inside and with difficulty, drags GUILT to the end of the stage, stops to look up at PUBLIC. Then pushes GUILT off the edge of the stage with a great thump.

JUDGE regains their demeanour and strolls over to MASSACRE with great concentration, fixing their hair and composure. JUDGE reaches down to MASSACRE to support them, but MASSACRE ignores JUDGE. JUDGE snatches the whip from MASSACRE's belt. JUDGE untangles the whip and glances at the entire scene and then up to PUBLIC. JUDGE makes a crack towards WITNESS who stands firm.

A spotlight appears on JUDGE and follows them around the stage.

JUDGE

(addressing PUBLIC) My dear PUBLIC, it is with great interest I survey this scene. Of course, it's a mockery... the blatant lies and conspiracy that EVIDENCE... 'conjures' in sweeping gestures of profanity and lunacy. These vermin, these lunatics are cretin and spin confusion.

JUDGE points out with grand hand signals towards WITNESS,
EVIDENCE, PHOTO, TREE AND MEMORY.

JUDGE (cont.)

There was always a change coming, a
change for these poor souls. It is indeed
extremely sad to reveal that in their own
small existence, they have created an
illusory world – and it is our job, your
responsibility as PUBLIC, to uphold the
CROWN decree of protection and alignment
with our cause.

At this point a spotlight appears on PUBLIC, who stands and
claps loudly. JUDGE smiles and waves. MUSEUM recomposes
themselves and JUDGE helps them up. They stand united.
The spotlight disappears off PUBLIC.
MASSACRE starts drinking whiskey heavily, then starts
coughing and spluttering blood.
WITNESS starts to take photos.
JUDGE and MUSEUM look in disbelief.

PUBLIC

(One of the PUBLIC who is clapping, turns
and shouts to the rest of PUBLIC) What is
the obsession MASASACRE has with PHOTO?

EVIDENCE

(to PUBLIC) Massacre is in love with
PHOTO!

MASSACRE stands and shoots the PUBLIC member who spoke. A small riot starts around the dead PUBLIC individual.

PUBLIC

MASSACRE, you are a traitor! You are in love with PHOTO, this is a violation of your contract – we see you with your boozy nights, your drooling eyes!

This makes you useless!

(some of the PUBLIC chant) Traitor, traitor, traitor, traitor!

Separate spotlights appear on MASSACRE and PHOTO.

MASSACRE drops to their knees in front of PHOTO with their hands on their heart.

PHOTO turns their back to MASSACRE.

TIME makes an invisible knocking motion in the air.

MASSACRE

(To PHOTO) My black magic fruit. I confess...

PUBLIC

Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!

MASSACRE

My gentle beautiful flower. I trod you into the bruised earth.

You are more than a voodoo primitive woman – you are more than my lust.

You are my Powerful Object. I love you.

A spotlight appears on JUDGE.

At this point JUDGE picks up a gun and shoots MASSACRE.

Blood explodes across the stage.

Spotlights disappear off MASSACRE and PHOTO.

As JUDGE speaks next, TIME shadows them but no one can see TIME, only MUSEUM who is fascinated.

JUDGE

(to PUBLIC) MASSACRE is collateral damage to right the wrongs, in order to keep the balance, which we now understand needed fixing!

Spotlight disappears off JUDGE.

MEMORY steps into a spotlight.

All other lights dim halfway.

At this point a spotlight shimmers on TIME and it is revealed. Everyone sees them and gasps. EVIDENCE grabs a rope and ties them up; TIME collapses and MUSEUM is hysterical at this act and tries to comfort TIME.

WITNESS patiently takes MUSEUM to lean against TREE's pedestal.

MEMORY recites the following text in song/prose/sign/music/dance or any combination of physical movements and any other ways to convey the ballad.

MEMORY

Abandon [wanhangidyilinya].

Accuse [dumbalmarra].
Keep [wirimbirra].
Jeer [bindyilyarra].
Raise [murrayalalinya].
Yesterday [gambaay].
You all [nginyundhagira].
Take [barramalbilinya].
Pain [yagay].
Parallel [mar].
Parent [buwabarra].
Walk [wagirra].
Vainly [ngurrigiiland].
Sweetly [dhulubin].
Unawares [girrawarra].
Unbreakable [darnan].
Umbilical cord [burrany].
Questioned [ngayaldurinya].
I can explain [ngadhu minya].
I will care for my enemy
[bilingalgirridyu ngadhigu madhugu].
Ignorant [walgun].
Heavens [wir].
Game [burrambal].
Giving away [buwiyanha].
I remember [yaludhu winhanganha].

We two will meet again my ngurrbul. Can
you hear it? The locust call and thunder?
[ngaligindya birrin-da-y-ma-rra love.
galanygalany murrumbirriy.]

Lights dim slowly to all lights out.

9: The Return

Lights fade up on a tight spotlight circle of white light on the stage. Smoke wafts around the spotlight and creates an effect of both early morning fog and smoke.

We see the mess of the stage with blood, dirt, party streamers etc.

MASSACRE still lays dead on the stage.

There is a procession led by MEMORY. Followed by TREE, EVIDENCE, PHOTO and WITNESS.

EVIDENCE grabs the rope where TIME is tied up and pulls them off stage as they depart.

MEMORY leads the group in procession through the crowd, some of PUBLIC wave goodbye.

Lights fade down.

A light comes up on NARRATOR.

NARRATOR

At last, the procession we have all been waiting for. Patiently and with solemn hope.

They are farewelled and are by now, boarding a ship of stone and glass back to the faraway lands of which they have travelled. The creak, creak, of the vessel swaying, ah, yes, can you feel it? Has it replaced that lump in your throat? The lump that was so full of anguish and confusion? Now you can take a long breath... a breath of release.

I am released

The NARRATOR removes their mask and underneath is an androgynous royal family member made up with lots of make-up, they are the CROWN character.

NARRATOR (cont.)

For it has been far too long that I myself have been hidden within this nightmare... dragging and pulling, nudging and scraping.

Spotlight out on NARRATOR.

Three spotlights come up: One spotlight on a naked MUSEUM sitting on TREE's original plinth, a naked JUDGE manacled to PHOTO's boulder, and a spotlight on PHOTO standing with a loaded gun pointing between MUSEUM and JUDGE.

MASSACRE dead body lays on the floor and PHOTO is straddled standing across it.

Pause.

As PHOTO speaks, a spotlight suddenly comes up on NARRATOR and two PUBLIC hold their arms so NARRATOR cannot flee.

PHOTO

Welcome dear CROWN...

As PHOTO speaks, they aim the gun between NARRATOR, MUSEUM
and JUDGE.

PHOTO (cont.)

Eenie... meenie... minie...

Spotlights suddenly go out on MUSEUM and JUDGE.
PHOTO swings gun to NARRATOR.

PHOTO (cont.)

mo...

Sudden blackout.

A loud gun sound echoes throughout the space for 10 seconds.

Pause.

House lights up.

END

Commentary

GABAN: ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra ngawal murrungamirra

(STRANGE: Post-traumatic theatre and Powerful Objects)

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1. *gabin* (Introduction)

Musée d'ethnographie de Genève: How would you define yourself?
What about the categories 'Aboriginal artist', 'Australian artist',
'contemporary artist'?

Brook Andrew: I don't specifically identify myself as an 'Aboriginal artist'.
I'm someone who comes from a strong line of Aboriginal women that is
Wiradjuri on my mother's side...Ngunnawal on my Grandfather's side
and Celtic in both [my] mother's and father's heritage.

But I would say that I am a child of the colony, I have multiple identities.

'Contemporary' is an important word in this context... it means today, we
are all people of today. I'm an artist that works in contemporary mediums
today. I create installations, work with archives; I like to think I contribute
alternative histories and memories to a dominant Western contemporary
world.

Insisting on 'Aboriginal' to define someone is in many cases an
objectification, like the out-dated word 'primitive'. In many cases, people
might say they're Aboriginal, but this is a general term like saying 'Asian'
or 'European', most people use their own language group or nation to
define themselves, i.e., Wiradjuri - this is cultural, a kinship way. This is
very empowering, as there are more than 300 languages groups,
Nations, in Australia. Some would argue that the term Aboriginal
homogenises what it is to be a First Nations person from Australia; I
would say it is an institutional expression... some museums... like to
mention my Wiradjuri Nation and I am proud to add Scottish and Celtic
to this - for me it would be "Australian, Wiradjuri". Actually, I normally say
"Wiradjuri Celtic" but it depends on the conversation and the context: I
also have a Jewish ancestor, but I only mention that if I'm having a
personal conversation with someone. It's the same as some of my friends
who are feminist artists, they don't always say they are feminist artists, but
in the context of an exhibition, might be described as feminist / political /
social. (Colombo-Dougoud, Saini, Wuthrich 2016)

...Aborigines...was filtered through a European perspective, through the canons of Anthropology and Ethnography: those 'men of science' who peered at Aboriginal people and made judgements based on an assumed cultural superiority predicted on such binary definitions as 'Civilised and Savage, Self and Other'.

Gordon Bennett (1994, 125)

MEMORY

dhagundhu yanhanha nyiwarri [where are you going sweetheart?]

barringirra ngan.girra ... guraydyunginya ngurrbul [let us meet, longing for love]

ngan.girra nginhu dhulubang ngandir wurragarra [meet your soul deep inside] ... ngurrbul-garra [being in love], ngurrbal-galang [belonging to love]

Extract from Brook Andrew, *GABAN*, 2021.

There is a space between being a 'child of the colony' and being imbedded in 'love' that is outside of the 'Civilised and Savage, Self and Other' dilemma. This is a space that is essential for my practice when navigating the kind of museum that possesses a wealth of collections removed from Indigenous homelands and kinship systems. This process feels *gaban* (strange) and often involves difficult negotiations. *gaban* is a Wiradjuri word and it is the title for my work of *ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra* (post-traumatic theatre), an experimental story, which is presented as a theatre script and is the main practice outcome of my Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) research. The script was performed by students at the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne in 2021 (Figure 1).

The production did not represent my visual or director work but was staged for the purpose of clarifying the final written script.³ I am currently working on a production of *GABAN* for the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin exhibition *We Are Not All Just Human After All: Care, Repair, Healing* scheduled to open in September 2022.

The aim of this research was to find a mode of practice through which I might unpack the effects and experience of the museum without repeating the trauma it continues to inflict upon myself or others. The museum is a site of *diladilabirra-dilinya* (active confusion) for both itself and for me, holding vast collections of great value but with troubling histories of collecting and displaying Indigenous cultures and bodies (Chipangura and Chipangura 2020; Gilchrist 2016; Lonetree 2009; Vawda 2019). As I detail in this commentary, many First Nations peoples feel conflicted about the status of these collections and many museums are currently reassessing their custodianship of these collections. I understand this *diladilabirra-dilinya* to be part of the mess of the Colonial *Wuba* (hole)⁴, and my research attempts to grapple with this complexity and find a pathway through it.

³ The full performance can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/588163066> Password: VCA2021 (case-sensitive)

⁴ See page 136 for my definition of the Colonial *Wuba*.



Figure 2: Brook Andrew's family L-R: Emmaline Rose Whiting-Scott (grandmother), Beryl (Bo) Whiting-Scott (great-aunt), Veronica (Connie) Whiting-Scott (great-aunt) and Alice Scott-Sloan (Great-great grandmother). Picture taken at Erambie Mission c.1939). NB: The sister's brothers' Neville and Billy Whiting-Scott are not present in this photo.

The violence of colonialism cannot be separated from the collecting and classifying practices of the museum (Azoulay 2019; Giblin, Ramos and Grout 2019). In Australia, classifying First Nations peoples as 'primitive' has created a ruse to both mystify frontier violence and justify the dispossession and destruction of lands, economic systems, cultural objects and artworks. My grandmother (Emmaline Rose Charnock/Whiting/Scott) (Figure 2) grew up on the Erambie Mission (Figure 3) in Cowra in the early twentieth century and lived through Australian government policies that severely disrupted Indigenous lives. My maternal grandfather Alexander Charnock is descendent of the Bell family line of Ngunnawal people, Yass. Strategies to segregate and breed out Indigenous people were active from the 1860s in policies of protection. In 1937 at the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, an assimilation approach was adopted which vowed to "do everything possible to convert the half-caste into a white citizen" (Commonwealth of Australia 1937).

These policies effectively banned the speaking of First Languages on state-run missions and reserves, and families constantly feared their children would be taken away. Across Australia, the pseudo-scientific ideas about race and blood, and 'primitive' cultures -which also underpin the foundation of many ethnographic museum collections- led to the forced removal of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed in Anglo-Australian families or institutions up until the 1970s. The terrible abuse suffered, and the hardships endured by these children, known as the "Stolen Generations", are documented in the 1997 report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC 1997). Like other colonised territories across the world, these structures of colonialism remain intact. In Australia, although Indigenous peoples make up around 3.3% of the population, they constitute 27% of the prison population (Australian Law Reform Commission 2018) and life expectancy is lower than for general populations (Australian

Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). The weight of these histories is ever present when I am in a museum and it is difficult to bear; the *diladilabirra-dilinya* offers both a state of despair but also relief to see our ancestor's objects.



Figure 3: Erambie Mission group portrait, 1937. Emmaline Rose Whiting-Scott is fifth from bottom left, Beryl (Bo) Whiting-Scott, standing above Rose with floral dress, Veronica (Connie) Whiting-Scott fourth from bottom left holding little boy.

Through writing *GABAN*, I focused on creating distance from such *bundhaay* (pain) and a pathway to *murum-gidyal* (healing) by imagining what the objects and identities trapped within the colonial museum context might become if they were able to perform and speak their own narratives. In the fictional space of *GABAN*, *ngawal murrungamirra* (Powerful Objects) (Figure 4) free themselves from the lonely and often insensitive predicament in which they find themselves, so that the mess of the Colonial Wuba might be exposed and made transparent. Performing *GABAN* with the VCA students affirmed what I

wanted to achieve. My long-term mentor, Yiman scholar Professor Marcia Langton who is chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne saw the first public performance and expressed “that it is so much more than a play for the theatre”:

It is a philosophical and ethical statement. In this work, Brook has captured his many years of artistic contention with museums and museum collections - expressing the gaze of the Indigenous subject looking at the triumphalist, racist, hoarding of the objects and bodies stolen and taken for the imperialist spectacle of the conventional museum. He raises the dead and poses grand questions about the contempt for human life that the long history of collecting human remains for museums poses. A turn at dramaturgy has offered Brook the opportunity to bring his experiences to life in multidimensions. Absurdist works come to mind with their existential questions about humanity in considering *GABAN*. Experimental, edgy but powerful in its staging and characterisation, it reflects back at us the horror of the encounter with museums and the reduction of human life to dusty specimens.⁵

⁵ Personal communication with the author via email September 1, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.



Figure 4: Dendroglyph tree section, site marker, 19th century. Collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1948.12.77). Attributed to Wiradjuri or Kamilaroi Nation, New South Wales, Australia. This dendroglyph tree section inspired the creation of the term ngawal murrungamirra.

***yindyamarra* (respect, honour and being responsible, unhurried, mutual respect) as a conceptual framework**

I graduated in 1993 from the University of Western Sydney with a Bachelor of Visual Arts. Since then, I have been a practicing artist, curator, scholar and collaborator with communities, creatives, museum collections, and other colonial and art archives. I have developed an experimental method of museum intervention that is embedded in a curiosity and passion for the equality of both my mother's and father's heritage and to imagine a level playing field of visibility. Though my family do not continue to live on our traditional lands due to the circumstances of departing Erambie Mission to seek work in Parramatta and Sydney, and that policies governing my family changed, my journey as *bundadhaany* (an artist) has empowered and challenged me to continue making connections with Wiradjuri culture and to build an approach to research and practice that is embedded and led by Wiradjuri language, *yindyamarra*, and my totem *garru* (magpie), given to me by my grandmother.

yindyamarra, central to Wiradjuri life, law, Country and language, is one example of an Indigenous way of being. Within this framework, the methodology of my DPhil research is steeped in the lived experience of Indigenous peoples, and deep listening (Ungunmerr 2017), in an investigation that contributes to a movement of empowerment, led by Elders, thinkers, cultural practitioners, collaborators, creatives, and activists around the world; many of whom I have quoted in this paper. There are many Indigenous ways of being. For example, curator, educator and artist Wanda Nanibush explains her own world view as an "Anishinaabe way of knowing and thought... Water is the life blood of mother earth and it flows through her like blood flows through us" (Nanibush 2021). Internationally, First Nations creatives are empowering First

Languages and making visible new terms and definitions that embody self-representation such as the glossary by Dr Léuli Eshrāghi (Figure 5), which share learning and mentorship with peers reaching across the Great Ocean from North America to Australia. Skirting the *nirin* (edge) of the museum, and through experimental methods traversing theatre and *giilang-biyarra* (storytelling), *GABAN* is a work of Indigenous Futurism or *bilin-girri* (movement-future) calling for systemic change and reimagination in cultural institutions, grounded in Indigenous ways of being and comprehending the world.⁶

As Artistic Director of the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, 2020, I aimed to centre these other ways of being by reimagining this major international exhibition under the title of *NIRIN*.⁷ I also invited participating artists to reflect on this title for the exhibition catalogue. *NIRIN* artist Nongirrŋa Marawili responded with words from her Yolŋu perspective:

On the Edge in Yolŋu matha (tongue) is dhāŋali, while djinmir is the edge of the tongue. Dhaŋarr is the edge of the water where the froth and foam form, it is the white crest of the wave. Miyarrka is the temple, the side of the face, the Edge. Lāy is the side of the head, an Edge, the shore and rorrurr is the Edge or rail of a boat or a frame. Dhapirrkuma is the action of making the edges level, as in sharpening a spear. (Marawili quoted in Andrew 2020, 92)

Understanding *nirin* as the point of connection, and of coming together, is a conception of the “relatedness” of all things that drives many Indigenous ways of being and of knowing (see for example Quandamooopah Ontology in Martin 2008). The Māori curator Megan Tamati-Quennell also articulated for the *NIRIN*

⁶ Indigenous Futurism was coined by Anishinaabe scholar Grace L. Dillon in her 2012 anthology of Indigenous writers from across the globe entitled *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* published by the University of Arizona Press. Throughout this paper I use the term *bilin-girri* regarding an Indigenous Futurism from my Wiradjuri position.

⁷ For more information about *NIRIN*, visit “22nd Biennale of Sydney: *NIRIN*” <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/archive/22nd-biennale-sydney-nirin/>

catalogue how this understanding for First Nations cultures is a “grounded relationship both culturally and spiritually”. Tamati-Quennell explains: “Even in the abstract, in the most *tapu* (sacred) of all our creation genealogies, the foundation from which all our *whakapapa* derives (*whakapapa* being the layered and complex Māori knowledge system that binds all things), land is presented as something we belong to, are made of, come from and return to” (Tamati-Quennell 2020, 75).

For Sámi activist, artist and self-proclaimed cartographer, Hans Ragnar Mathisen Elle-Hansa, a Sámi way of being, is also articulated through a relationality with the land. He re-traces colonial maps embedding Sámi *giilang-biyarra* and place names that connect specific territories with reindeer herding, a complex system linking economy, culture and the land (Figure 6). In Australia, First Nations people connect with this concept of land as a life-force in the term *Country*, which denotes territory but also is the source of meaning, of being and of knowing. Meriam artist and dancer Gail Mabo is inspired by her father (Eddie) Koiki Mabo who lead a legal claim for ownership of family lands on Mer (Murray Island). The 1992 Mabo Decision by the High Court of Australia, after a ten-year legal case, overturned the myth that at the time of colonisation Australia was ‘*terra nullius*’ or land belonging to no one and led to the passing of the Native Title Act in 1993⁸. Gail creates maps from bamboo, twine and seashells such as *Tagai* (Figure 7). Like the visual mapping by Elle-Hansa, Gail’s work is an interpretation of her family’s continual sovereignty and knowledge through these navigational charts used in the Pacific.

⁸ For more information about the Native Title Act: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/mabo-case>

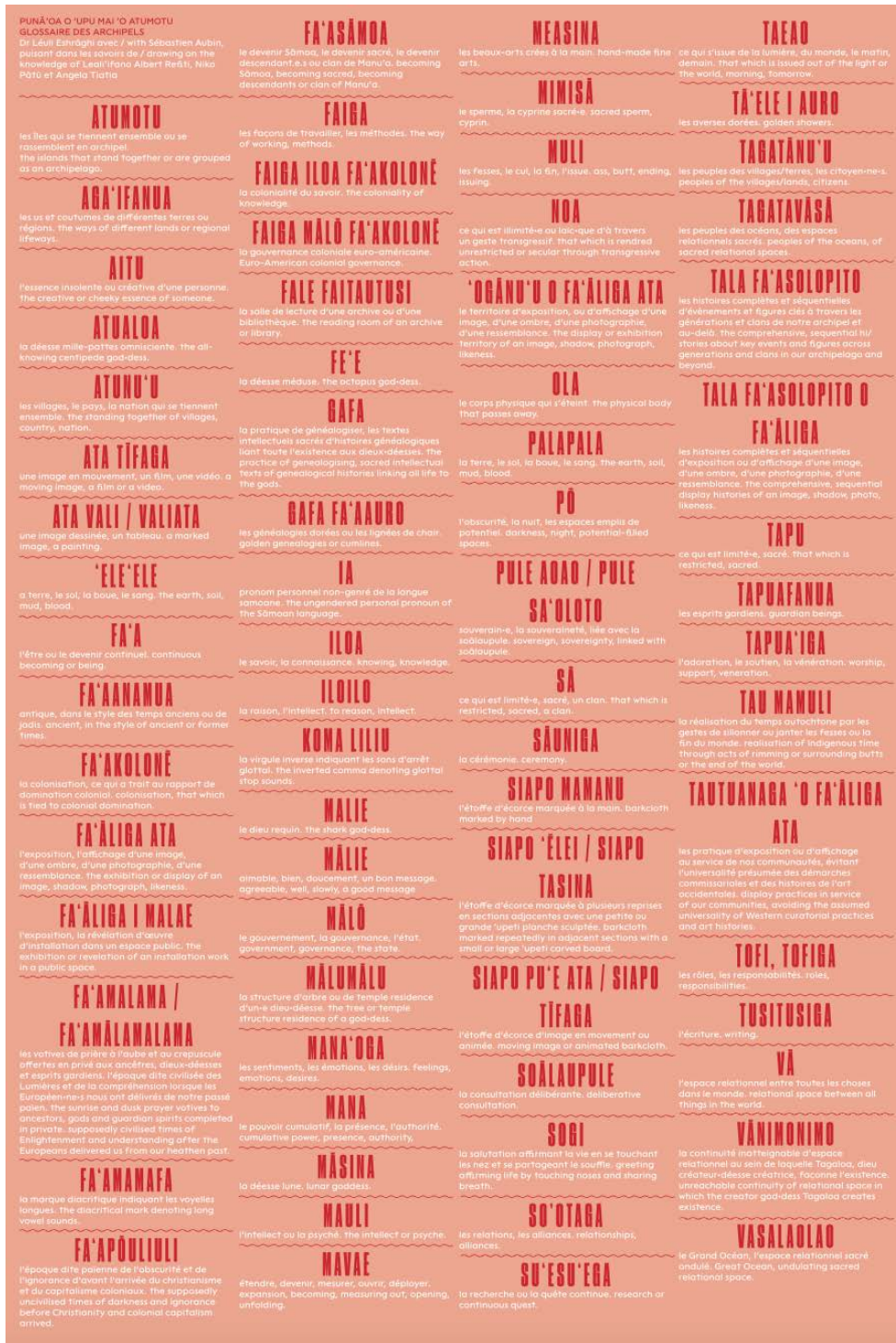


Figure 5: Léuli Eshrāghi, Punā'oa o 'upu mai 'o atumotu / Glossaire des archipels, 2019. Inkjet print on heavyweight paper, 33 x 46 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

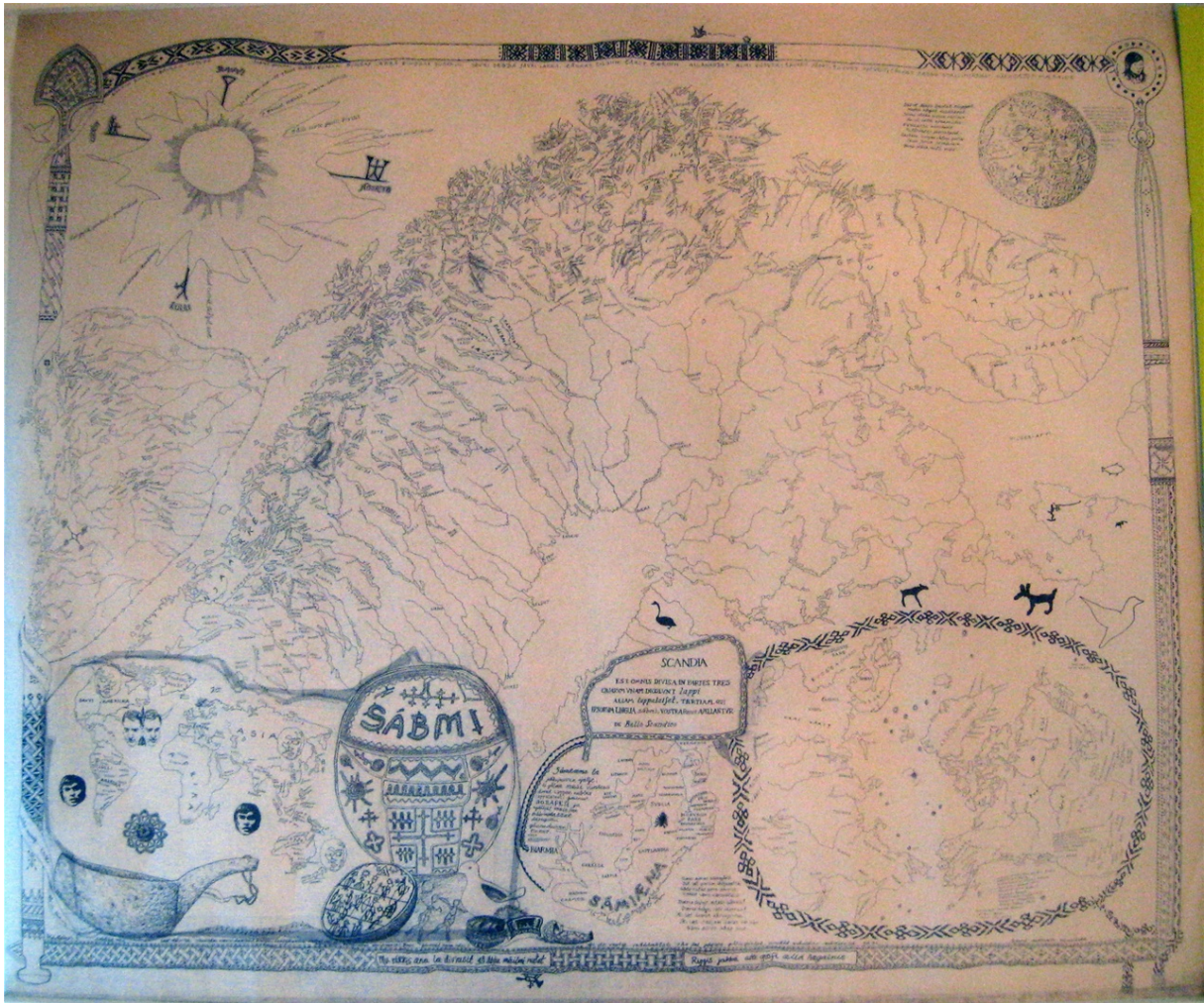


Figure 6: Hans Ragnar Mathisen Elle-Hansa. Over drawn map from Sami Instituhtta in Guovdageaidnu. No date given. Source: <http://www.keviselie-hansragnarmathisen.net/141466671>



Figure 7. Gail Mabo: Tagai 2017. Bamboo, twine, Collection: Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art. Image courtesy of the artist.

The Native Title Act of 1993 was a game-changing federal legislation in Australia recognising the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their customary lands and waters but remains limited in its scope and like most Western legal frameworks, it does not accommodate an Indigenous understanding of sovereignty which is lived in the everyday by all Indigenous peoples. As Tracey Bunda has articulated: "Our sovereignty is embodied and is tied to particular tracts of country, thus our bodies signify ownership, and we perform sovereign acts in our everyday living. Writing by Indigenous people is thus a sovereign act" (Bunda 2008,75).

Such Indigenous ontologies and ways of being fundamentally challenge Western institutions, including the museum, because they don't fit into European political philosophy and thus present an alternative to the authority of Western state powers. For example, artist, curator and historian Jolene Rickard of the Tuscarora Nation (Turtle Clan), Hodinöhsö:ni Confederacy, was invited to curate the permanent exhibitions of the new National Museum of the American Indian in 2002. When her proposition to use the concept of sovereignty as an underlining theme for the exhibitions was rejected because it eroded "U.S. authority over Indigenous autonomy", she argued that:

any colonial-settler nation can define the terms of Indigenous sovereignty within its own legal system, but that does not mean that Indigenous nations must accept those interpretations. The use of the concept of sovereignty by Indigenous civilizations is about self-defined renewal and resistance... A narrow interpretation of sovereignty based on Western legal jurisprudence, therefore, does not represent Haudenosaunee foundational concepts of natural law, nor does it adequately address intellectual, cultural, artistic, and visual expansion of the concept (Rickard 2019, 466-467+470).

First Nations leadership is essential for systemic change in museums to empower new frameworks and diverse meanings of sovereignty. Inspiration can

be taken from the broader creative fields where First Nations festival directors lead local grass-roots sovereign agendas such as Lily Shearer a Murrawarri/Ngemba woman, co-founder of Mooghalin Performing Arts, Australia:

I am inspired by three (3) things: first is the land as it provides food, shelter and clothing... Second are my ancestors as their spirit walks beside me to guide and protect me and thirdly very dear to my heart are my ten grandchildren as I care for this place for them, to walk freely, with cultural pride and integrity in the future... Happiness is a country that respects, listens to and honors its First Peoples through Sovereignty and Land Rights. On a personal level happiness is being home in Bre (Brewarrina) with my family and community. (Shearer 2021)

In a fictional space outside of the museum, *GABAN* began as a way for me to create a sovereign space where I could develop a method of giilang-biyarra for the museum that was murum-gidyal and empowered with Wiradjuri language and terminologies. In discussions with peers including Jolene Rickard, Wanda Nanibush and Liisa-Rávná Finbog, Sámi scholar and practitioner of duojár, it is becoming clear through international solidarity, that this is a process of Indigenisation, “whereby the significance and application of Indigenous knowledge is asserted into academia, but from a place of Indigenous sovereignty, and centered in Indigenous values, practices, and knowledge systems” (Finbog 2021, 52).

ngiilinya* (Museums) and *bundhaay-bu* (Trauma): *yindyamarra-gunhanha

(continuing the action of respect) as a response and new term for

Decolonisation

MEG: Why are you interested in working with ethnographic museums?

B.A.: It's because of the narratives they have inherited and the vast collections that are often misunderstood, and of course are very precious - it is also the way these objects were collected. For my mother's family, it is very much about dispossession. The objects are often displayed in European manners that are inconclusive, I would argue, misrepresentative and objectified with empty meaning, especially traditional narratives...

Perhaps one way to explain it is that the first intervention I did at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in 1996 was to display one of Captain Cook's diaries... I went out and bought about fifty *Mills & Boon* books, which are trashy romance novels... and ripped all the pages apart and scattered them everywhere. I was definitely questioning Cook's diary and his version of this clearly dominant narrative of Australia and saying basically that the story of conquest and invasion of Australia was a romance novel and mythical...

(Colombo-Dougoud, Saini, Wuthrich, 2016)

Dispersed Treasures, realised in 1996 at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, United Kingdom, was my first museum intervention where I was invited to create a new installation through researching their collections. I was informed by the museum that they had repatriated all of their Aboriginal human remains, which was very progressive at this time compared to later returns such as the Charité Human Remains Project 2011-2014 at the Charité university hospital, Germany (Förster 2020, 101). However, I identified a list of ancestral remains in a nineteenth century museum register of mammals. This catalogue also lists a

series of purpose-made skull boxes and their contents. I carefully with trepidation searched through them, revealing empty box after empty box, until I came across one labelled 'NSW SKULL Aboriginal', inside was a skull. It was extremely distressing to discover this skull, and it was the first time I had encountered human remains in a museum. I immediately sought the support of my family and fellow artist r e a. Around this time r e a and I had been working and exhibiting at the Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-operative in Sydney and researching the Australian Indigenous human remains trade. We were shocked to learn about the international reach of this trade that dehumanised our ancestors and classified them alongside other mammals such as whales and monkeys, and also by the methods of collection which included graverobbing and taking remains following massacre events (Turnbull 2008). r e a was especially interested in the collectors of human remains, such as Saxony-born Amalie Dietrich (1821-1891), a naturalist, collector and international trader and supplier of Australian flora, fauna and Australian Indigenous human remains to European museums, who also acted as a paid collector for the Museum Godeffroy of Hamburg in the late nineteenth century (Sumner 2016, 203).

Contention about how Indigenous human remains were acquired continues to be topical today (Abungu 2019; Barkan 2002; Hicks 2020; Shyllon 2009; Soirila 2021; Tythacott and Arvanitis 2014), and indeed there is a conscious contemporary global movement to contend with the ethical and moral premises of these collecting practices (see Assembly of First Nations and Canadian Museums Association 1992; Kassim 2017). In 1996, I was informed by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum that the skull I had encountered of somebody's ancestor, possibly my own, could not yet be returned to their community of origin due to the lack of provenance information. There are thousands of such ancestral remains in museums across Europe, the United States and Australia (Fforde et al 2020). Australian museums currently hold

around 10,500 First Nations ancestral remains through the federal government's Indigenous Repatriation Program designed to return remains from overseas institutions. Kamilaroi and Ngemba man Bob Weatherall, a former member of the International Repatriation Advisory Committee, is frustrated by the slow progress on return to source communities: "I think it shows repatriation should be under Aboriginal ownership and control, not under government authority or a government science body" (Weatherall quoted in Moore 2021). The findings of a 2014 report to the Australian Government by the Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation, notes that the "return of ancestors to their traditional lands is extremely important... It is a matter of justice and healing" (Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation 2015, 7). Where such return is not possible, the report proposes a National Resting Place, that is "away from the museum sector, and vesting the future long-term care of these ancestral remains to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (10).

The amassing of ancestral remains implicates museums in the Colonial Wuba, and the call for their return by Indigenous peoples since the late 1970s was the beginning of the repatriation movement (Fforde and Hubert 2006, 85). In fact, calls for return of human remains apparently began much earlier if we listen, for example, to the story of Trukanini (also known as Truganini) in the palawa kani language, a Nuenonne woman from lutruwita (Tasmania) who died in 1876. Palawa man Ian Anderson recalls her story when she heard the news of her fellow countryman, William Lanney's death and the mutilation of his body by "the bone collectors". Anderson writes "she must have been terrified by her imagined future. It is said that she fell to her knees weeping. She pleaded with her white friends to have her body burned and her ashes spread on the D'entrecasteaux channel" (Anderson 2013). Instead, her bones were collected

and put on public display at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery between 1904 and 1958.

Such colonial exploits but also collections of secret sacred materials, cultural objects and artworks, have amassed incredible cultural wealth for many Western museums (Azoulay 2019; Bennett 2004; Coombs and Phillips 2020). In a recent editorial on decolonising museums for the journal *Third Text*, John Giblin, Imma Ramos and Nikki Grout (2019) explain what the museum is and why it has accumulated all these things:

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, museums emerged as active tools of empire, showcasing Eurocentric and racialised ideals and narratives that often reflected the disciplinary logic of the imperial state. Collecting practices abroad were an inherent part of colonialism, and by displaying these collections under Western classification systems, British museums also offered a public justification for expansion and imperial rule. Alongside monuments, memorials and statues, museums can today also be viewed as potent, celebratory reminders of colonialism. (471)

In addressing this imperial past, some museums are actively pursuing a decolonial agenda to unpack, influence and challenge their colonial histories and practices in a responsible action. Examples include Berlin's Humboldt Forum which reopened in September 2021 with a new interpretation of its collections of colonial-era art that deals "head on with its controversial history" (Murphy 2021). While these acts of addressing the ethics of collecting and exhibiting - alongside what to do with human remains and romanticised dioramas - creates a culture of dignity for museums today, the more urgent question is, who protects our ancestors' dignity? Is it enough to invite Indigenous peoples to work within the institutional paradigm, or does more work need to be done such as rejecting European models of working and terminologies, and allowing First Nations peoples to set and lead the entire

agenda to heal from trauma and reimagine and restructure to empower biligirri?

As Professor Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), a prominent voice in the debate on decolonisation within African Studies, argues: “there is a lot of interest on questions of coloniality, colonization, colonialism, decolonization, and decoloniality, and these are not new questions.” Walter Mignolo, an Argentinian semiotician and thinker on global coloniality, also explains a long trajectory where “decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint” (Mignolo 2011, 46). There have been multiple applications of the terms decolonial and decolonisation which manifest in different histories and regions and the struggles against colonialism and its traumas. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) writing about liberation movements in Africa argues that the decolonization of the 1960s was about replacing white leaders but keeping the European institutions intact whereas the “decolonization of the twenty-first century is to question the rules of the game... We need to change the structure itself” where “[d]ecolonization encapsulates potentialities and possibilities of creating another world.”

The decolonial agenda currently being embraced by European museums is inspired by the Latin American Modernity/De-coloniality project led by thinkers including Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano and Mignolo. The latter organised with Dr. Rolando Vázquez courses such as “Learning to Unlearn Decolonially (Living, knowing, the university & the museum)” at the University College Utrecht in partnership with the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. The urgency within this project is to unpack the Colonial Wuba and attempt to address the fall-out from a settler-colonial and, or, European point of view. Many international collaborations under the decolonial banner include the 2018 symposium “Decolonising Health” at the Wellcome Trust, “Deviant Practice” a cultural program including exhibitions, talks, research grants and

publications (2016-17) at the Van Abbemuseum, and “A Brief History of Decolonial Studies” a collaboration between Afterall and Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) in 2019.

Often these museum programs are framed around creating critical forums through which to investigate the colonial roots of these institutions and then reinterpret exhibitions and museum collections. Even though it is to be applauded that these courses, collaborations and policy shifts within the Western cultural sector exist to understand the weight of the Colonial Wuba, of which I have been excited to contribute to and actively support within this space, I believe that more leadership is required by First Nations people to address the problem of meaningful colonial reparations. Often it is more focused on how non-Indigenous people research their own historical trauma which implicates First Nations people. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, similar to the word decolonial, “research” is “...inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism...” where many “...Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us” (Smith 1999, 6). Decolonial agendas need to be led by First Nations peoples or source communities in programs and research that benefit them, and this leadership must be acknowledged and celebrated. Playwright Bonnie Greer called out the BBC when they quoted her out of context about her relationship to the Benin Bronzes in the British Museum in an article that did not consider her important work in this space. Rather as Greer shared on Twitter “the white guy is the hero” and she continues to be invisible (Greer 2020). Too often “decolonial” programs or research appear to propel the careers of European or settler curators or scholars with little benefit to source communities.

This question is beginning to be answered within the museum space by sovereign events such as aabaakwad, an international bi-annual Indigenous-led gathering on creative practice founded in 2018 by Wanda Nanibush and

supported through the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the ground-breaking Tarnanthi, an annual exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art including an art fair, talks and performances led by Artistic Director Nici Cumpston a Barkindji curator and artist, supported by BHP and the Art Gallery of South Australia.⁹ First Nations people are using terms such as self-determination, custodianship and decolonisation, but often with different applications and meanings to the European and Western academies. These terminologies and translations have been led by Indigenous language, self-pride, ways of being and connecting to culture: “Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being” (National Indian Brotherhood/ Assembly of First Nations, 1972, 9).

The problems that arise from the term decolonial from my Wiradjuri perspective is that Western terminologies and ontologies are still subject to ideas of research, progress, civilisation, and the grading of cultures. Alternative epistemologies and terminologies include *sámáidahttin* explained by Sami scholar Dr. Liisa-Rávná Finbog (Finbog 2021, 52); *bunun tu taiklas* Indigenous creative sovereignty used by Bunun Taiwanese curator and artist Dr. Biung Ismahasan¹⁰; and *Fa’aleagamāo’i* meaning ‘to become in the Indigenous ways of customs’ by Samoan Persian scholar, artist and curator Dr. Léuli Eshrāghi¹¹. Finbog (2021) identifies the limitations of the decolonial agenda in her PhD thesis. The process of deconstructing colonial ideologies does not propose “the

⁹ For more information about the 2020 gathering of aabaakwad at NIRIN, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney visit <https://ago.ca/aabaakwad-2020-nirin>; for more information about Tarnanthi visit <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/tarnanthi/>

¹⁰ Personal communication with Biung Ismahasan via email 22 October, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.

¹¹ Personal communication with Léuli Eshrāghi via email 22 October, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.

rejection of existing research paradigms and conceptual frameworks of Western thinking and academia." Rather, it is "centred within the colonial structures that perpetuate the existing conditions of academia" (52). Finbog, drawing on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Harald Gaski, argues that "we should instead be talking about a process that focuses attention on concepts and worldviews operating within Indigenous cultures, making their ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies the core of methodological frameworks" (52).

This has started to occur very recently, in an agreement between the Tate Modern and the Kaqchikel (Guatemalan) artist Edgar Calel and his community. Rather than purchasing or acquiring the contemporary artwork by Calel, *The Echo of an Ancient Form of Knowledge, (Ru k' ox k'ob'el jun ojer etemab'el)*, 2021, the museum will become its custodian for 13 years, "a period in which they will be able to disseminate the lessons embedded within it" (Abrams 2021). Calel said "I am thankful to our ancestors for giving us the license and allowing us to spread their knowledge and wisdom in up to seven different places across the globe" (Calel quoted in Abrams 2021). Like Finbog and Calel, I believe that we need sovereign spaces from which to create, and from which to platform Indigenous knowledges for academia and cultural institutions. Hence, I propose *yindyamarra-gunhanha* which translates as 'active continuing of respect' to replace the word decolonisation as the agenda for my research. This term encapsulates a form of understanding, a respectful process that enables a pathway of *murum-gidyal* beyond the lens of inter-generational colonial repression.

***bandalang bugamin yilimadha maraway* (linking archives with our pathway)**

Through the display of ethnographic records, ancestral remains and cultural objects and artworks, museums have contributed to “crafted narratives of the ‘others’” (Abungu 2019, 68). Collections documented so-called ‘primitive’ cultures, who were believed to be on the brink of extinction and these items were displayed to contrast the ‘progress’ of Western cultures (Vawda 2019). This belief has been disproven and most museums and anthropologists no longer pursue this agenda. However, institutions continue to hold vast collections that were once used to demonstrate such theories. These collections are a harmful symbol of injustice, especially confronting in the Indigenous struggle for self-identity. Indigenous peoples and cultures continue to be attached to racialised hierarchies in colloquial expressions, as the Chilean QPOC (queer person of colour) curator and artist Francisco Godoy Vega (2020) explains:

The Spanish-Catholic ethic necessity to classify everything and everyone, even subjects that seemed to evade their reductive system, served to reinforce the racial pyramid of power. This colour-coded table of ‘racial crossings’ was interlinked with a system where the darker a person’s complexion, the less western features they had, the greater the oppression they had to suffer at the hands of white supremacy. It is no coincidence that many popular Spanish proverbs and sayings are explicitly racist, for example: *aunque la mona se vista de seda, mona se queda* (even if a monkey dressed in silks, she would still be a monkey) or *hacer el indio* (to play an Indian).

Creatives like Jota Mombaça, a Brazilian performance artist and self-proclaimed Afrofuturist, resist these colonial categories and the dominant

culture that historically define them, through powerful re-imaginings of the QPOC (Queer Person of Colour) and Afro-Indigenous self. They refuse the racialised, heteronormative and Christian colonial objectification of their Trans Afro-Indigenous identity (Zhu-Nowell 2021):

I depart from the idea of transition – as the symbolic and material process of transmutation experienced by trans bodies – for an investigation of the possibility of transitioning towards the elements, un-becoming both the gender binary and the modern-colonial grammar of the human as a species separated from other species by a ridiculous sense of superiority and detachment from earth’s entanglement. (Mombaça quoted in Andrew 2020, 186)

A vision of self-determined identities and bilin-girri also drives the work of Aunty Maxine Briggs, a Taungwurrung and Yorta Yorta Elder, and Senior Librarian at the State Library of Victoria, Australia, who refuses to see collection materials as artefacts in museological terms. She explained to me that these materials were provided by the Old People so that we can now reawaken culture and our identities:

My job ... is to connect the archives with the communities that they come from, to give people the opportunity to manage the information that’s about them. I’m sure that many other Aboriginal people believe that information was handed on to the white authorities so that it would be there for us when we’re ready... That information is now the foundation of our identity and it’s helping us to rebuild our connection to Country, to understand the special places and how we also connect from Country to the universe. (Briggs quoted in Andrew 2017)

My research contributes to bilin-girri with Indigenous and non-Western curators, thinkers, writers, creatives and communities who are articulating alternative histories and bilin-girri through making powerful connections with and critiques of these archives on their own terms. These archives are the mass of materials collected and created about Indigenous peoples and cultures,

including museum objects and ethnographic records, but also texts of popular culture and education. In 1994, the Australian artist Gordon Bennett, whose Aboriginal mother was a member of the Australian Stolen Generations, wrote of “creating a place by adopting a strategy of intervention and disturbance” in his art. He started appropriating illustrations from social studies and history textbooks “in order to intervene in the seamless flow of images” of mythic Australian identities, the explorers and pioneers, against “representation of Aborigines as the quintessential primitive Other” (122-5).

Indigenous methodologies in the archive have been in practice since the 1980s, and arguably much earlier, but are often overlooked in art historical discussions about the ‘archival turn’ or ‘historiographic mode’ in contemporary art, where the focus is on critiquing forms of history-making (Derrida 1995; Enwezor 2008; Foster 2004; Roelstraete 2009).¹² However, as Nicholas Thomas (2017) explains, the productive engagement with the archive by Indigenous artists “does more than offer... critique: it renders the historic collection susceptible to genuine reactivation; it becomes a creative technology, a means to generate new things” (24). The word ‘reactivation’ in the context of the script *GABAN* rings true: the objects are speaking back, and the museum is a playground for the reinvention, reimagining and recontextualisation of all space, objects and people that revolve around and through the museum.

GABAN has become a sovereign creative practice and a space to express the importance for Indigenous people to “...develop our own languages... not to say that we necessarily have the terms already in our language, but either we

12 For example, Professor Marcia Langton was employed at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the largest collection of Indigenous materials, between 1981-1982 as an assistant bibliographer. This experience led to the landmark essay “well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television” (1993).

create new terms, or we define old terms, and make them suit our purpose” (Finbog quoted in Powerhouse-galang 2021). *GABAN* was created by stepping outside of the museum complex to use Wiradjuri language and develop my own definitions, such as *ngawal murrungamirra*. This term describes those objects or artworks in the museum that I believe have the power to speak outside of and transcend Western museological labels and systems. In *GABAN* they are the main characters. Such creative engagement was important for this commentary, rather than writing an art historical analysis of these objects, or yet another ‘postcolonial’ discourse to critique the museum. Writing a theatre script was a method for imagining alternative lives for these objects without the pressures of museum policies that encumber access to and representation of collection items.

Through this research, I have developed a novel mode of writing I call *ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra* (post-traumatic theatre). It is a term created through mis-hearing the descriptor ‘post-dramatic theatre’ in a meeting with University of Melbourne theatre scholars and practitioners Budi Miller and Sarah Austin. Miller, Head of Acting at the Victorian College of the Arts, was excited to read my play and use it as a teaching tool:

I was immediately taken by its force both spiritually and academically. As a post-dramatic work, it had echoes of Greek tragedy, Jean Genet, and Sarah Kane. I immediately said that our 3rd year actors needed to take on this work in their studio production. It has been an invaluable opportunity for them to work with a world premiere First Nations play. As a training vehicle, it draws on all 3 years of their actor training, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. In this production I have attempted to offer an experience of colonialism and the brutal brittle sutures of institutionalised dysconscious racism in the art world.¹³

13 Program notes for the performance of *GABAN*, 19 June 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.

When I have shared *GABAN* with colleagues, many have asked me if it was inspired by avant-garde theatre such as Antonin Artaud's *The Theater of Cruelty* (Artaud 1958), films such as the 1970 mockumentary *The Clowns* by Federico Fellini, or experimental theatre in European productions, but this is not the case. I have been told that characters like TIME, MASSACRE and NARRATOR conjure up Shakespearean devices or other staples of the European canon (Figure 8). While I do not disavow these comparisons, nor a Eurocentric lens of interpretation, this research is inspired by Indigenous creative practices and methodologies which are based in tradition, experimentation and new ways of claiming our own histories and *bilin-girri*.

Lydia Miller, a Kuku Yalanji woman from Far North Queensland, is a theatre director, creative and policy maker, she articulates that Indigenous *giilang-biyarra* is contemporary and expansive, "When we are talking about theatre and art, I think we are addressing the fact we are dealing with a number of multimedia forms through which we can facilitate ideas and the story telling, process. That's as old as history" (Miller quoted in Enoch 1994). *giilang-biyarra* is embedded within Australian Indigenous inter-disciplinary and culturally driven creative practice: in the visual arts, poetry, music, radio, comedy, dance and film. These creative forms have been made witness to the events of the colonial project including testimony of the Stolen Generations and oral histories of frontier violence. Theatre has an important history in Australia as a cutting-edge platform for Indigenous advocacy and demands for recognition and rights. Strong oral traditions inform understandings of history, place and identity and these themes continue to be explored in major literary works such as *The Yield* by Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch which won the 2020 Miles Franklin Award. Uncle Jack Charles, a Boon Wurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Woiwurrung, Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri storyteller who has used theatre and biography to share his own stories of his time in child welfare institutions, foster

homes, and prison, after being removed as a baby from his Boon Wurrung mother under Stolen Generations policies (Charles and Benson 2019).



Figure 8: The character MUSEUM in GABAN by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller and presented by Victorian College of the Arts, Acting and Design and Production students, 2021.

Ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra is experimental giilang-biyarra empowered through yindyamarra-gunhanha and led by the agency of ngawal murrungamirra. Brian Martin (2017), a Bundjalung, Muruwari and Kamilaroi artist, explains that “within an Indigenous world view all “things” have agency and are interconnected through a system of relationality” (1392). Similarly, Dolleen Tisawii’ashii Manning (2017) describes how Ojibwe philosophy recognises “the agency not only of humans, but, also of plants, inanimate “objects” and invisible and intangible forces” (1). Ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra is a practice that honours the lifeforce of the land, of objects, of

plants, and of things not human by refusing the logic of European classificatory systems and of linear chronology. A Sámi sense of time is “áigi ii manna, dat boahhtá – time doesn’t walk it comes”, things happen for a reason that is not linear.¹⁴ *GABAN*, like yindyamarra-gunhanha, imagines a world beyond the trauma of colonialism that is set within an Indigenous sense of time. *GABAN* creates space for murum-gidyál both the mind and body.

The Aboriginal concept differs from the Judeo-Christian perception of time in that Aboriginal people do not perceive time as an exclusively ‘linear’ category (i.e. past-present-future) and often place events in a ‘circular’ pattern of time according to which an individual is in the centre of ‘time-circles’ and events are placed in time according to their relative importance for the individual and his or her respective community... (Bullen and Janca 2003, 40)

In writing *GABAN*, as ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra, I reflected on how my intervention museum practice is also a murum-gidyál act for myself and others. In conversation with N’Arweet Carolyn Briggs on 2 September 2021, N’Arweet Carolyn Briggs reviewed the performance of *GABAN*:

GABAN made me think about the museum and how it operates. It felt good to see through theatre what I’ve experienced personally. I’ve been involved in that fight with the Melbourne Museum, to portray us as living cultures. Photos, archives, objects for so long have been regarded as static, like nameless souls in the museum. We have fought that, claimed those pictures and objects as are own, they relate to who we are. These objects and our bodies were seen as specimens. *GABAN* portrayed this, and showed that the museum needs to be confronted, that these nameless objects need release. *GABAN* didn’t tell me how to feel, like other plays do. The confusion in *GABAN* is good because it makes the audience think for themselves.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Liisa-Rávná Finbog via email September 28, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.

2. The Colonial Wuba (hole): reckoning with custodianship

As long as these objects remain dislocated from their peoples, there will be no end to the trauma suffered by First Peoples communities in relation to the displacement and history of stolen goods or traded goods under exploitative social structures. The longer non-Indigenous people continue to have control, and First Peoples cannot engage, the longer this trauma will recycle. (Moulton 2018, 200)

Kimberley Moulton, a Yorta Yorta woman and curator at Museums Victoria, describes the predicament facing museums today, and the current reckoning with the custodianship of their collections. She highlights the trauma in this reckoning and what is at stake for Indigenous peoples across the globe. For many decades, access to collections of cultural objects and ethnographic records, including ancestral remains, have been denied or restricted to source communities. This separation from our objects mirrors the displacement and attempted genocide experienced by generations of Indigenous peoples in Australia and other parts of the world (Azoulay 2019).

The removal of over 50 *marara guulany* (carved trees) from the Kalimangl (Collymongle) Bora ground in northwest New South Wales in 1949 created great despair for Elders (Figure 9), who at the time had no legal rights under Australian or international law to protest the destruction or to protect their cultural heritage which was happening in plain sight. It was not until the late 1970s that the Australian courts began to recognise that First Nations peoples have an interest in and rights to their cultural heritage, and in 1984 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act was finally introduced. The granddaughter of Kamilaroi man Mick Flick, who was born close to the Kalimangl bora ground, recalled that after the trees were removed

and taken away he “was very sad about it... and didn’t talk to us for a couple of days” after the trees were removed and taken away. He “tried to get some of the Aboriginal men to go with him” to the Bora ground but “they still feared the backlash from leaseholders and white farmers at the time” (Rhodes 2018, 197-8). Today, Kamilaroi Elders are still searching for the trees that were cut down, and distributed to a number of Australian institutions. This removal was a regular practice undertaken by amateur ethnographers such as Mr Edmund Milne, who sought out marara guulany and delivered them to museums, swapping tree sections along the way with other ‘gentlemen scientists’ and museums for their private collections (Rhodes 2018, 199-200) (Figure 10 - 11). Many museums continue to house objects from such expeditions such as Museum Victoria and the Musée d’ethnographie de Genève.



Figure 9: Still from a silent film where 52 guulany were removed from Collymongle station in 1949. Courtesy the H. Balfour collection, South Australian Museum (ref. no. AA 17/1/7). Source: https://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/events/exhibitions/2011/carved_trees/04_return_of_the_trees/image03.html



Figures 10 and 11: Photographs of Edmund Milne standing next to Aboriginal Arborglyphs [carved trees], Gamboola, near Molong, 1912. Photographer unknown. State Library of New South Wales (SPF / 1150 and SPF / 1149).

Yuranigh was a Wiradjuri man from the Molong district who befriended Surveyor-General Sir Thomas Mitchell on his 1845 expedition into central Queensland. When Yuranigh died in 1850, four trees were carved to mark his burial site. Mitchell later paid to have a headstone erected over the grave. Today Yuranigh's grave remains as the only example of a grave with traditional Aboriginal and European monuments. These photos show amateur anthropologist Edmund Milne and a group of friends on a site visit in 1912.

Source: https://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/events/exhibitions/2011/carved_trees/02_wiradjuri_country/image03.html

Today, connecting with ancestral objects and the records of ethnography, can bring relief for source communities (Gilchrist 2016). It can reawaken cultural practice, confirm genealogies and assist in land claims (Langton 2020, 67; Anker 2005). However, in many cases, objects are orphaned; source communities cannot be identified due to a lack of provenance details, there are inadequate resources to access or take care of ancestral objects, or museums refuse or are not resourced to negotiate custodianship. The sheer mass of cultural objects and materials in colonial collections, and the persistence of incorrect labelling, is a heavy burden to carry for Indigenous peoples.

Mayunkiki, an Ainu (Japan) artist and cultural practitioner told me how the National Ainu Museum in Shiraoi, Hokkaidō, Japan continues to hide and not exhibit traditional Ainu tattooing practices and demonstrates a lack of care for how cultural objects relate to each other where “a lot of things are exhibited in [the] wrong way ... orientation of an object is wrong; they mix up very old objects and things that they found [which are] very new... they don’t talk about the tattoos that I’ve been researching” (Powerhouse-galang 2021). The current predicament for museums is not only becoming accountable for the sheer mass of cultural material, including of ancestral remains, or the realisation of the often violent conditions that made these collections possible, but also the often difficult negotiation of cultural protocols in accessing these objects many of which are orphaned. I call this predicament the mess of the Colonial Wuba (Figure 12) and my research aims to lay it bare.

The Colonial Wuba

concept

1. The mess of the colonial hole.

"Messy bamboozlement confuses any one and anything caught in the grasp of the Colonial Wuba."

2. The vortex of colonial legacy.

"Restitution and repatriation would not exist without the Colonial Wuba."

3. A wormhole that sucks you into its trajectory like the gravitational theory of Black Holes.

"The stench of the Colonial Wuba."

4. Like the excreted faeces of a devil serpent too busy drinking tea and ruling a fake heaven to atone for its own ignorance.

"The Colonial Wuba satisfies/d many desires/powers."

Figure 12: Brook Andrew, "The Colonial Wuba," 2020. Text.

The term 'Colonial Wuba', like ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra and ngawal murrungamirra, are creative concepts that intend to establish a new methodology that is drawn from a Wiradjuri worldview. In developing the concept of the Colonial Wuba I am being playful with language, but also intentional in inserting a different framework to both understand this mess and reveal it for what it is.

Gaambuwananha (Repatriation)

Current dialogues and actions about repatriation or restitution, including reports and discussion papers, museum programs, and community actions are often caught in the pull of the Colonial Wuba. These actions require systemic change which is difficult to implement when there is lack of agreement or diladilabirra-dilinya between governments, researchers, museums, source communities and cultural activists concerning how to, when to and why to return cultural materials and under whose power and guidance. The recent report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018) commissioned by the French President Emmanuel Macron assesses the history and present state of publicly owned French collections of colonial African artworks and objects and argues for permanent restitution of illegally acquired items. The report has instigated similar investigations and arguments across European museums and is considered “an important turning point” in current restitution debates (Paquette 2020, 303). Yet, others are critical about whom such reports and investigations actually benefit, where they generate “a narrative that revolves around the good will of the colonial State” (Lambert 2020). The Hawaiian activist Edward Halealoha Ayau who for more than 30 years has demanded the repatriation of Hawaiian kūpunas (ancestors) from colonial institutions around the world, recentres the focus of these debates: “the question here is not whether they’re coming home, it’s when” (Ayau and Lambert 2020).

Many museums continue to generate institutional power by commissioning such reports, directing the terms for repatriation and restitution and embedding their custodian role. In contrast, the recent report “First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries” prepared by Terri Janke and Sarah Grant, provides a pathway for

institutions to empower source communities rather than themselves: “Providing Indigenous communities with the tools to properly repatriate their material is essential. This could come in the form of outreach programs or collaborations. Additionally, pooling funding to support Indigenous communities would result in larger funding opportunities, more support for Keeping Places, sharing cultural advisors, and more opportunities for travelling exhibitions” (Janke 2018, 1).

Indigenous peoples are increasingly challenging the power of custodianship wielded by museums. Members of the Indigenous think-tank ‘Powerhouse-galang’¹⁵ at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, define their purpose as reclaiming “material culture, so knowledges, and practices and rituals [can be reawakened] ...we now have an opportunity to take that back into our community” (Powerhouse-galang 2021). The pan-African activist group Unity, Dignity and Courage have brought visibility to this frustration when they have staged actions to physically remove objects in European museums that were stolen from Africa. One of their members Mwazulu Diyabanza has been hailed as ‘The Robin Hood of Restitution Activism’ (Brown 2021). In June 2020, they filmed themselves removing a nineteenth-century funerary pole, which came from modern-day Chad from its display stand at the musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chriac, Paris. “We’re taking it home,” they declared as they carried it through the museum (quoted in Haynes 2020). They were stopped by security and the object was returned to its display case.

The group considers this action an active diplomacy in which restitution acts as a form of reparation. A member of the group, Congolese activist

¹⁵ First Nations think-tank funded by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (Powerhouse Museum), Sydney. The collective includes Gail Mabo (Mer: Murray Island), Liisa-Rávná Finbog (Sámi), Léuli Eshrāghi (Samoan/Persian), Lisa Hilli (Papua New Guinea: Tolai/Guntana), Biung Ismahasan (Bunun), Mayunkiki (Ainu) and Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri).

Mwazulu Diyabanza, said, "What drives us to act is our legitimate right to have access to our cultural heritage and to the recovery of our history. We will continue to act as we have done in all museums to this day, since we are within our rights" (quoted in Haynes 2020). However, the European court of law does not currently recognise these rights of restitution. In October 2020, for example, a court in the 17th arrondissement of Paris sentenced the activists with fines issued for aggravated theft.

As discussed in "gabin", many museums today are actively pursuing more inclusive agendas as they embark on efforts to decolonise. In 2021, I was invited by the Wellcome Trust, United Kingdom, to lead conversations on displaying ngawal murrungamirra, to inspire new processes for engaging source communities as the museum was recreating their exhibition *Medicine Man*. Other museums have appointed Indigenous peoples in senior leadership and curatorial roles foreseeing the value of diversity (Ahmed 2012), including Patricia Marroquin Norby, a Purépecha curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Sandra Banites, from the Guarani Nhandewa people, The São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo; and Emmanuel Kasarhérou a Kanak man and Director of The Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac. Palawa woman Gaye Sculthorpe, Curator of Oceania at the British Museum, London, has brought fresh perspectives and is slowly challenging "a museum that is itself intimately entwined with its imperial past and which is currently missing a colonial interpretative narrative" (Giblin, Ramos and Grout 2019, 474). In 2015, Sculthorpe curated the exhibition *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* (Sculthorpe et al. 2015) which challenged colonial mythologies and Western displays of Indigenous objects by foregrounding contemporary arts practice and linking to traditional and historical Indigenous cultural and artistic practices. It is important for Indigenous people to lead conversations that rethink the

custodianship and display of cultural objects, as well as negotiating complicated processes of decolonisation in museums that require agitation.

Museums are increasingly engaging with Indigenous artists to think about cultural objects in new ways. In the recent *gudhi* (song) work for Melbourne's Rising Festival, acclaimed musician and scholar Dr Lou Bennett AM (Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung) sings to objects stored in the Melbourne Museum in multiple First Languages; with special guests Uncle Herb Patten (Ganai-Kurnai, Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri), Aunty Joy Wandin-Murphy (Wurundjeri), Emma Donovan (Naaguja), Deline Briscoe and Silo SQ. The *gudhi* work is called "Wurukur Djuanduk Balag—Ancestors Are Calling", and it rejects the notion that these ethnographic objects or artefacts are merely static objects (Figure 13 and 14). Similar to the argument made by curator and writer Stephen Gilchrist (Yamatji) in the 2016 exhibition *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia* at The Harvard Art Museums, to awaken these cultural objects "through touch, but, also through the other senses as well", this *gudhi* work foregrounds objects that are alive with the spirit and energy of the Countries from which they came, and that they are calling for their families to take them home, back to where they belong. This work has been curated by Kimberley Moulton and is an exemplar of future practice for museums.



Figures 13 and 14: Dr Lou Bennett AM (Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung) sings to objects stored in the Melbourne Museum in multiple First Languages.

Source: <https://rising.melbourne/festival-program/wurukur-djuanduk-balag-ancestors-are-calling>

Yet there can also be trauma around reconnection with cultural objects, as well as a lack of consensus within communities about how to bring objects home or how to interact with them. Currently, the Australia Museum in Sydney is returning 23 marara guulany back to Wiradjuri Country. Some of these ceremonial trees are thousands of years old and were removed in the late 1800s. Knowledge about these trees has been severely disrupted by such removals and by the genocidal policies of assimilation mentioned previously, which repressed cultural practices and broke up families for more than a

century. Even so, knowledge holders continue to corral community support to empower continuation of connection to these objects which have been absent from communities for decades. Wiradjuri woman Kerryann Stanley explains the importance of the return of the guulany:

My mother and grandfather are from generations where our language wasn't permitted to be spoken, our culture wasn't permitted to be practiced, and they weren't permitted to be proud of their identity...A part of that reconciliation approach is to make sure that we don't lose any more of that – that we retain what we've got and revitalise what we can. (Stanley quoted in Drinkwater 2020)

In an empowering journey, the community at Dubbo will not publicly display the carvings until there is agreement about their meaning and about new ways of continuing culture.

In another experience shared with me, source communities are happy for the museum to hold their objects and are proud they are displayed. Pedro Wonaeamirri (2021), who is a senior culture leader and artist who has strong language, gudhi and dance knowledge of the Tiwi Islands off the north coast of Australia, shared with me his experience of visiting a collection of Tutani poles, ceremonial objects and spears in the Vatican Museums, which were collected during the mission times. "When I first saw them, I cried... then I spoke about the importance of [the Vatican] having the poles and how they connect to my people. The more people who go to [the] Vatican and see and understand about Tiwi people and culture." Pedro sang to the poles, a gudhi from his grandmother's grandfather. He told me: "When I sing, I still feel the connection between those poles and the people who made them."

There is not one pathway out of this mess; rarely are processes of repatriation or restitution straightforward, and sometimes, even, repatriation is not the desire of source communities. Some Indigenous peoples have deeper

connections to these materials through family or are informed by educational or museum resources; others have limited support, and some communities conduct negotiations with museums in absolute privacy. Museums providing access to cultural objects and materials must facilitate and support Indigenous peoples to be able to speak with these objects and materials; to have a relationship with them, to display them and be with them differently in ways that exceed standard practice and current policy.

***Gaambuwananha*-Creative (creative repatriation)**

A significant practice has emerged in the last decade that is born of collaboration between museum curators and First Nations artists, and like the *gudhi* work described above led by Lou Bennett, actively engages in creative reckonings with repatriation and custodianship bringing visibility to the complex negotiations with source communities and to continuing and innovative cultural practices. In programs at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge and The Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, First Nations artists have had the opportunity to work with collections and consider the meanings of repatriation, especially where provenance may not be known.

In *We Bury Our Own* Christian Thompson (Bidjara) responded to the Australian Indigenous photographic collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum at the invitation of curator Christopher Morton. Wanting to create a “meditative state around” these unnamed photographs, Thompson made a series of self-portraits with crystals, candles, flowers and other votive objects; the artist sought to “perform a ‘spiritual repatriation’ rather than a physical one” (Thompson 2013). As Morton explains this creative project was part of a larger research project led

by historian Dr Jane Lydon about the circulation of such photographs and importantly what they have meant to First Nations peoples and communities historically (Morton 2013).

Similarly, in 2006 Maori artist Lisa Reihana worked with British based curator and scholar Nicholas Thomas to present her installation *He Tautoko* (Figure 15) at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge for the exhibition *Pasifika Styles*. By placing a pair of sound headphones on the sculpture, Reihana ruptured the ethnographic gaze that often freezes objects, such as tekoteko (carved human figures), in an exoticised past. Thomas explains that it "...was a work of reverse repatriation which made a historic sculpture in the museum more at home, by surrounding him with imagery from Aotearoa, and enabling him to listen to the sounds of carving and a Maori choir. Yet it also offered a complicated temporality between past and living memory, rather than just the past and present" (Thomas 2017). These interventions into permanent displays tweak and challenge traditional styles of presentation, whilst simultaneously exposing the problems with these displays. As Morton explains that it is a "visible critique you cannot cover up".¹⁶

¹⁶ Personal communication with Christopher Morton, September 24, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote.



Figure 15: Lisa Reihana, He Tautoko, 2006. Installation view. This figure is a tetoteko (MAA 1939.70), "...originally attached to a house gable in the Bay of Islands, the homeland of the artist's father. The carving was collected in the 1830's by Karl von Hügel and donated by his son Anatole von Hügel, MAA's founding Curator. The figure is wearing headphone plugged into a listening post and positioned in front of a video screen, which references landscape, Maori taonga (ancestral treasures), and the artist's movement between Aotearoa New Zealand and Cambridge. The visuals, songs and stories animate the figure, highlighting its continued ancestral presence and ongoing connections to past and contemporary events."

Source: https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/anthropology-museums-and-museum-anthropology#_ftn1

Christine Barthe, head of Photographic Collections at The Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, actively worked with me in my role as lauréat des Résidences photographiques on the photographic project *The Visitor and the Resident*, 2016 (Figures 16-18). Of thousands of photographs that I viewed in the museum's ethnographic collections, I selected 150 that which demonstrated a relationship between the photographer and the sitter. I shared this selection with ten people who have a relationship with the source communities, Joy Gregory, Jaime Powell, Marcos Moreira, Laurence Vale, Guillaume Fouvet, Léuli Eshragi, Marcia Langton, Namila Benson, Sana Balai and Trent Walter, and invited them to then select one or two images which they would display in their own portrait photograph.

The solution to this reckoning with custodianship is not straightforward, and these examples, both community-led and artist driven offer multiple ways of thinking about repatriation. This is the dilemma of the Colonial Wuba. Calls for repatriation ultimately challenge the narrative frameworks upon which many museums have been built and imagine a different future for the museum, the objects, and the source communities. The artist Osarobo Zeickner-Okoro from Benin City, Nigeria, comments on perhaps one of the most prominent campaigns for repatriation, that of the Benin Bronzes; " Part of the crime that's been committed is that Benin has been portrayed as this dead civilisation...The reparation is not just returning the Bronzes. It's also acknowledging us, that we're a living civilisation" (Zeickner-Okoro quoted in Shirbon 2021).



Figure 16: Installation view Resident and the Visitor musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac. Photo Cyril Zannettacci

I wanted to look at the relationship between the photographer and sitter, quite literally, but also [at] what are our responsibilities and what we are today... I just see these people [the colonial photographer] as visiting ... so the man telling him to stand still, he is a visitor ... and so this [an Indigenous person] is the resident, these people have the power, this is their home. But they are made to be outsiders because of the lens, the way in which the photo was taken ... The idea, when I spoke with Christine is really how we insert ourselves today into these photos. (Andrew quoted in Glowczewski and Morvan 2017, 15)



Figure 17: Brook Andrew *Resident and the Visitor: Aunty Sana Balaj*, 2016. Digital inkjet print 60x80cm.



Figure 18: Brook Andrew *Resident and the Visitor: Marcos Moreira*, 2016. Digital inkjet print 60x80cm.

3. *ngawal murrungamirra* (Powerful Objects): Museum and Archival Interventions

ngawal murrungamirra is a term that I created in 2019 to describe objects I have encountered in collections which resonate with cultural, spiritual and historical importance. It was a story shared to me by the Indigenous Brazilian artist Daiara Tukano when we met in 2019 at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) that cemented my thinking about the spiritual power of objects. She described her visit to a European museum where she saw a Brazilian spirit, and she asked it “what are you doing here? I can help take you home.” And she said that the spirit replied “I’m fine here. I’m looking after these objects.”¹⁷ Like Daiara Tukano and many people, I have smelt and felt spirits in the museum. Roberta Colombo-Dougoud, an Italian curator and anthropologist at the Musée d’ethnographie de Genève told me of her own connections with particular objects: “One day I went into the collection... and I saw two little kangaroo fur shoes for a baby, and I said to the shoes, ‘What do you want to tell me because yesterday I came here and I couldn’t see you? What do you want to tell me?’ Actually, I was pregnant with my first boy and I didn’t know... Perhaps now people can hear, can listen to this story but ... 21 years ago, people weren’t very keen” (Colombo-Dougoud 2021).

Making new exhibitions with *ngawal murrungamirra* complements the work I have done with source communities to assist in the repatriation of objects. In one example I collaborated with researcher and artist Katarina

¹⁷ Personal communication with Daiara Tukano, July 26, 2019. I have permission to reproduce this quote.

Matiasek, based at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Vienna, on the return of photos by the Viennese anthropologist Rudolf Pöch (1870-1921) taken in Grafton, Australia in 1905. This collection of 97 glass plate negatives and 91 vintage prints are mostly portraits made at the Grafton Aboriginal home. Importantly, and rare, all photos have the names of the people pictured. We worked with Aunty Roberta Skinner a Gumbaynggirr elder, to return copies of the photos and Aunty Roberta and family are now utilising the photos as evidence in land claims and to map family histories. Aunty Roberta Skinner granted permission to exhibit this archive as ngawal murrungamirra in NIRIN, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, and Katarina Matiasek interviewed Aunty Roberta and others in her film installation *Far from Settled*, 2020, at Cockatoo Island (Figure 19).

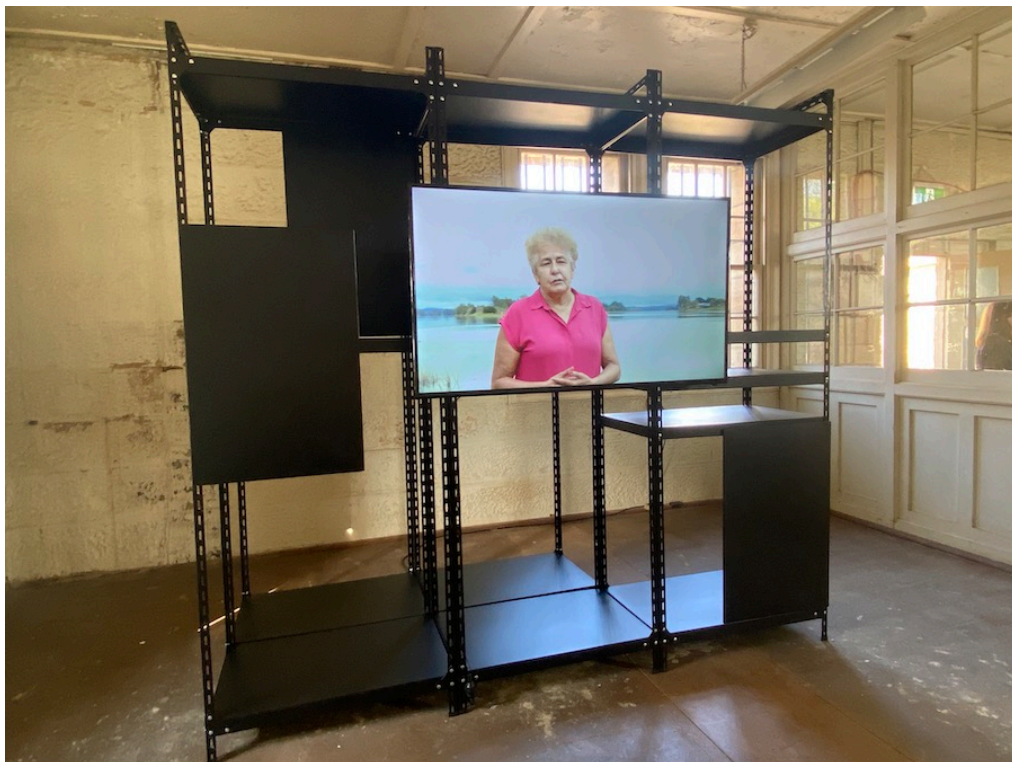


Figure 19: Katarina Matiasek, *Far from Settled*, Installation view / detail, Cockatoo Island. NIRIN: 22nd Biennale of Sydney. Source: <https://www.artshub.com.au/2020/03/17/review-2020-biennale-of-sydney-nsw-259982/>

The concept of ngawal murrungamirra is not limited to objects of Indigenous cultures, nor is it bound to ideas of the sacred or the canon or by the classifications of art and artefact, traditional, avant-garde, modern or primitive, vernacular etc. Rather, in my practice I have revealed ngawal murrungamirra to be powerful because they have the ability to shift dominant agendas and Western timelines. It has been important to make these interventions in international museums particularly in the United Kingdom, Australia, and across Europe where colonial collections were amassed.

Waga-Neocolonial (Neocolonial dance)

In 2013, I was invited to make an installation as part of the exhibition *Vivid Memories: An Aboriginal Art History*, curated by anthropologists Arnaud Morvan and Paul Matharan, at the Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux, France. After long discussions on the function of museum interventions, including my thoughts on artists in museums (such as Fred Wilson, Lisa Reihana, and Franz West), the director of the museum, as well as the museum's technician, and both curators were supportive of my proposition of an installation of museum objects and display cases in the entrance hall called *Trophés oubliés (Forgotten Trophies)* (Figure 20). Sitting on top of the display cases, and not within, I proposed to display a selection of objects from the museum's collections. It was to be a spatial and immersive as well as a conceptual intervention that challenged the museological traditions of display that confine objects within glass cabinets. I wanted to symbolically release the objects from the grip of Western science and expose the mess of the Colonial Wuba with its classifications of human races, art history, as well as imposed chronological timelines.



Figure: 20. Brook Andrew, Mock-up drawing of proposition for the original installation *Trophés oubliés (Forgotten Trophies)*, 2013. Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux. Courtesy the artist.

When the installation was about to commence, the building manager came down and abruptly cancelled it, claiming it was a fire risk because the display cases blocked the exits. However, we had looked at the floor plans in the design process and this was not the case. The curator Arnaud Morvan and I re-negotiated the installation, placing the objects inside the museum cabinets with the addition of contemporary comic books such as *Les Passagers du vent* by François Bourgeon which references colonialism and slavery. This new presentation (Figures 21-22) exposed the complex relationship between the objects and offered alternative and reimagined displays. This neocolonial dance of *Trophés oubliés (Forgotten Trophies)*, was a necessary re-manipulation to create drama and connections between real and fictional histories and creatures.



Figure 21 Brook Andrew, *Trophés oubliés* (*The forgotten trophies*), 2013. Installation view, Musée d'Aquitaine Bordeaux. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 22: Brook Andrew, *Trophés oubliés* (*The forgotten trophies*), 2013. Installation view, Musée d'Aquitaine Bordeaux. Courtesy the artist.

The installation unravels the various manipulations at work within the process, juxtaposition, inversion and falsification, turning the colonial gaze in on itself whilst opening the possibility of alternative histories. ... A third dimension is the intersubjective memory of the contemporary viewers who freely re-assemble this material's traces according to their own pasts. (Glowczewski and Morvan 2017, 29)

The pressure to create a new installation within a matter of days, let alone to reimagine it, was a challenge but a necessary one that exposed the inadequate power of the museum. This waga-neocolonial occurred again at the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève (MEG), when I was invited to create an intervention as part of their 2017 exhibition, *The Boomerang Effect: the Aboriginal Arts of Australia*, curated by Roberta Colombo Dougoud. For the first time, the exhibition featured the museum's extensive collections of cultural objects from Aboriginal Australia and new works by contemporary First Nation artists, including Michael Cook and the GhostNets project from the Torres Strait Islands. Roberta Colombo Dougoud placed my mixed media artwork *The Island*, 2008, alongside two guulany from the museum collection (figure 23). I created a series of site-specific installations and interventions in the exhibition, including the sculptures, *Fuselage* and *Habitat*, and the installation *Room A* (Figures 24). As part of my interventions, I requested to work with Wiradjuri objects in the museum's collection and, as with my proposition for Bordeaux, I proposed to remove these items from their regular display cabinets. In consultation with the museum, I created some purpose-built sculptures that resembled traditional museum cabinets to house the objects in a secured setting. However, during installation, the exhibitions manager said I could not work with these objects in this way, claiming that if there was a fire, the objects could not be saved. Yet, the sculptures were made to the museum's engineering specifications, which include such considerations as fire.



Figure 23: (L to R) guulany from Wiradjuri Country (ETHOC 028252), Kamilaroi Country (ETHOC 028210), Musée d'ethnographie de Genève collection, and Brook Andrew *The Island I*, 2008.
Image courtesy Musée d'ethnographie de Genève.



Figure 24: Brook Andrew, *Mirror I-VII*, 2017. Sapele timber, paint, block board, paper, and glue.
Closed : 2000 w x 2215 h x 100 depth mm; open: dimensions variable
Musée d'ethnographie de Genève Image courtesy Joel Fuchs.



Figure 25: Installation view of Brook Andrew creating Room A, 2017. Musée d'ethnographie de Genève. Image courtesy Joel Fuchs.

In response I made a symbolic protest within my installation at MEG (figure 25). I created two actions, the first action was poetry and patterns in Wiradjuri and English, directly on the glass surfaces of the sculptures that were to contain ngawal murrungamirra, the second action were variations of the Wiradjuri word for 'you' drawn directly onto the wall artwork *Room A*. My rationale for this second poem was to express the complex Wiradjuri linguistic references for 'you', which far exceed English and French relationality to another person, the self or other, as well as the complex relationships that are implicit for the personal, ceremonial or other. Later on, the MEG's director Boris Wastiau invited me for lunch and proceeded to ask me what the poem was in Wiradjuri. I explained the translations and rationale. I understand Boris Wastiau supported my process though I was given the impression he thought the poem

was a public protest due to tensions within the museum surrounding the situation. Again, it became apparent that internal museum politics could not at the time empower Indigenous leadership as an alternative presentation that refuses European conventions.

Recently, the curator and anthropologist at MEG Roberta Colombo Dougoud, told me my exhibition had a great impact on the museum: “there was a before you and after you... It means that the collaboration with the Indigenous communities, not only of Australia, became very important... Your collaboration, your artwork helped a lot in this” (Colombo-Dougoud 2020). Two years ago, the museum adopted a strategic plan with a commitment to decolonisation, following in the footsteps of similar museum directions described above in “gabin”.

When museums have interfered with my proposals for interventions to provide alternative readings of collections, they are not collaborating with the reimagining and yindyamarra-gunhanha. Some museum staff may believe they are maintaining public safety, but the inflexibility of this approach articulated at the last moment disrupts a complex creative process as well as communication with my community and the Indigenous Elders I consult with in creating this connection between objects and contemporary cultural practice. Though at times, the after effect of an artist’s difficult negotiation can be productive for the museum, it does require Indigenous leadership and direction from the outset. As an outcome, the museum becomes an unsafe place, a traumatic space, for Indigenous peoples. These complex negotiations I have had with museums reveal their powerful role and the need for *GABAN* to provide a safe space where I can be free of this institutional floundering or ignorance. What is at stake if these objects are seen in a different light or juxtaposed in a new way? Will the objects communicate alternative uses or meanings that are perhaps dangerous to the museum?

ganama (mixed) bugamin

A few years later I was able to realise my original vision for the installation *Trophés oubliés (Forgotten Trophies)* in a contemporary art commission in China which was visually dynamic and broke out of the museum display case. *In Vision of Nuance: Systems of Exposure* (Figure 26-27) was a site-specific installation created for *Now is the Time: the 2019 Wuzhen International Contemporary Art Exhibition*, curated by Feng Boyi, Wang Xiaosong and Liu Gang. Feng Boyi and I worked closely together, and he supported my proposal to work with local communities. I displayed a collection of cultural objects that were sourced locally whilst others were purposefully purchased as an experiment through online avenues such as eBay and Etsy, to highlight the ongoing trade of real and fake cultural objects. The final selection was displayed on top of a line of purpose-made wooden cabinets. The region around Wuzhen has a long tradition of cabinet making and I collaborated with local carpenters to create these cabinets using old pieces. The collection of objects included a boomerang from my own collection, a replica marble bust of the Roman senator Brutus, locally made statues of Buddha, shields from Papua New Guinea and an Aboriginal axe. The installation also included elements of LED text lights, floor drawing and a poem spoken in Wiradjuri, English, Mandarin and Wu Chinese languages as an audio component. The audio was a reflection on the mass hysteria of human conflict and how the humble ant assisted in flooding the world to cleanse it of human trauma.



Figures 26 and 27: Brook Andrew, *In Vision of Nuance: Systems of Exposure*, 2019. Site-specific installation for *Now is the Time*: 2019, WuZhen, China. Dimensions variable; neon elements, original and replica of First Nations, Chinese and Western artefacts, traditional wood cabinets from Wuzhen, floor painting and audio soundtrack. Photo credit @Art Wuzhen

The Wuzhen work followed a successful collaboration with the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, in 2017 when I created the installation AHY-KON-UH-KLAS-TIK (Figure 28), as part of their research program *Deviant Practice* curated by Nick Aitkens. Again, I created an immersive trans-historical installation in which I displayed objects from the museum's library and art collection alongside my own artworks and archives with a painted wall drawing design. The title of the exhibition is the phonetic spelling of iconoclastic and according to Aitkens (2017), "alludes to the manner in which Andrew's project takes apart and upends methods of categorising, presenting and mythologizing cultural histories. It also challenges the use of the Greek classical term in the light of Western philosophical dominance; reflecting on the extreme linguicide of Aboriginal languages since the British invasion of Australia in 1788."

AHY-KON-UH-KLAS-TIK was an exciting process supported by Aitkens and the Van Abbemuseum conservation and collections team including Christiane Berndes and Kim Sluijter, who were eager to support my alternative proposal to display paintings and other contemporary art works in the intervention. The Van Abbemuseum is also in collaboration with the museum confederation L'Internationale, whose aim, shared on their website, is to create "...a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralised internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected."¹⁸ This framework created a ripe space in a contemporary art museum with an historical collection for my installation AHY-KON-UH-KLAS-TIK to challenge Western hegemony.

¹⁸ See <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/support-and-partners/linternationale/>



Figure 28: Brook Andrew. Installation view AHY-KON-UH-KLAS-TIK, 2017; including Pablo Picasso *Buste de Femme*, 1943; Wifredo Lam *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* 1962. Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

The AHY-KON-UH-KLAS-TIK intervention included a number of ngawal murrungamirra including the painting *Buste de Femme* (1943) by Pablo Picasso which was hung on its side at a 90 degree angle and Wifredo Lam's painting *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* (1962) projecting out from the wall on a 20 degree angle as if the figure was looking down over the audience. Other unusual methods to display canonical works from the twentieth century included Anselm Kiefer's *Angel Falling*, 1979, which I positioned standing up on a table to resemble a ping-pong table set (see Additional Documents for more detail about this intervention including a floor map). I was questioned by some

for treating these artworks inappropriately. My response was to ask why this same principle was not applied to cultural artworks and objects by Indigenous artists in museum collections internationally, which are often displayed incorrectly or attributed to the wrong region or the maker is listed as unknown.

NIRIN

POWERFUL OBJECTS (ngawal murrungamirra) are a selection of archives and objects from private and public collections, shown across the many venues of NIRIN. POWERFUL OBJECTS offer experiences that riff off and add substance and complexity to surrounding artworks and exhibition geographical and architectural sites. Collectively, they accentuate a kaleidoscopic effect within NIRIN. These processes and discussions can be painful, productive and / or confronting. For hundreds of years some objects, including human remains, have been smuggled or officially transported across borders, checkpoints and quarantines. They have been documented, protected or hidden in museums, with provenances forgotten, made-up or created through conservation and registration protocols. As such, so are our futures. It is important how we choose to acknowledge and remember this entangled mess of connections. Healing is an essential commitment for us to make, and in the context of exploring POWERFUL OBJECTS this might involve a mix of reflective and ceremonial gestures. Some cultural objects carry physical and psychic traces of cultural meaning and action, requiring careful protocol to assist our comprehension of their complexity. (Extract from Andrew 2020)

This research has reflected on these experiences in the museum and working with ngawal murrungamirra. In my role as Artistic Director of *NIRIN*, the 22nd Biennale of Sydney, 2020, I formally introduced this concept and presented a collection of ngawal murrungamirra to be in dialogue with contemporary artworks across the many venues of *NIRIN*. This collection included Indigenous and non-Indigenous artworks, ephemera, cultural objects, and documents from

private and public collections, such as the oil painting *The Rape of the Sabine Women* by the seventh-century Italian artist Luca Giordano. A decision on where to exhibit the Giordano painting was made in conversation with artist Aziz Hazara, who was excited by its juxtaposition with his own work *Bow Echo*, 2019. Bringing the canon of Western art and its shocking subject matter together with his powerful five channel video work which is inspired by his own experience 'of the recurring horrors of suicide bomb attacks that have unsettled the city of Kabul, brought new lens of reckoning to this "horror game"' (Hazara quoted in Andrew 2020, 188). The dichotomy of romance and conflict presented in the Giordano painting speaks to the stereotypical representations of his country by outsiders which mystifies the continual violence experienced by his family and friends.

Another history painting that I managed to include in *NIRIN* was *A Bush Burial* (1890) by the Australian colonial artist Frederick McCubbin which depicts the gravesite of "pioneer" in the local landscape (Figure 29). It is considered of national significance for its celebration of the achievements and hardships of the pioneers but is now also critically examined for reiterating narratives of Anglo Australian nationalism. I spoke with Eric Bridgeman about it, an artist from Australia and Wahgi Valley, Jiwaka Province, Papua New Guinea, and he made a wall drawing and poem *Rot Bung (Junction)*, 2019-20, which the theme of the Frederick McCubbin painting with his family.



Figure 29: Eric Bridgeman, *Rot Bung (Junction)*, 2019–20 wall drawing; *Kulimoe’anga Stone Maka, Kuini Haati 2 (Two Queen Heart)*, 2008–10, and *Togo mo Bolataane (Tonga and Britain)*, 2008–10; and Frederick McCubbin, *A bush burial*, 1890. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Courtesy the artists; and Geelong Gallery. Photograph: Zan Wimberley

Other ngawal murrungamirra included the 1949 Australian film *Dendroglyphs of the Kalimangl Bora Ground* by H.R. Balfour. This film captures the destruction of dendroglyph tree markers described above in “the Colonial Wuba” and witnessed by Kamilaroi man Mick Flick, of an important Aboriginal religious and cultural place. This film was shown in NIRIN through permissions led by Roslyn McGregor and Joe Flick, in which a smoking burbang with local school children was central to the permissions process (Figure 30). This important visual archive exposes the brutal reality of the extractive colonial

mind-set, that claimed it was preserving Indigenous cultural objects, but was in fact breaking the continuation of cultural practices by removing these objects from Country for the benefit of museum collections (Rhodes 2018, 209).



Figure 30: A gathering in Collarenebri, western NSW, 2019. Image permission by Roslyn MCGregor, Senior Leader - Community Engagement, Walgett Community College. Elder Roslyn McGregor invited Brook Andrew and other Biennale of Sydney team members to Collarenebri on Gamilaroi Country. They discussed cultural connections to land. This smoking ceremony pictured was a gathering to remember the history of ceremonial trees that were, under Aboriginal law, illegally removed by anthropologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These trees are now scattered across museums making it difficult to continue culture and burbang. This visit was a special moment for Elders to teach the children of the importance of these sacred trees and remembering their violent removal. Language is a very important aspect of smoking ceremonies.

Bringing ngawal murrungamirra to *NIRIN* allowed me to expand this methodology and further reveal the power of objects to bring out other narratives that are often unknown in a Eurocentric museological context, as well as to the curator, or to others (Aitkens, Gardner, Khouri, Salti 2021). Ngawal

murrungamirra can ask probing questions that confront the current state of play: Why are so many cultures not recipients of colonial institutional wealth? Why is there ongoing silence around particular traumatic histories? These issues were dealt with conceptually through experimental juxtapositions led by source communities and artists in *NIRIN*, and included, and treated equally, in the catalogue alongside artists, scientists, and other collectives.

4. ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra (post-traumatic theatre): writing GABAN

Writing GABAN began as a way to listen to ngawal murrungamirra, and through their stories represent and reveal the mess of the Colonial Wuba, while also imagining the systems and the culture of the colonial museum unravelling. For over 20 years of making museum interventions, I have sought to challenge the way that ngawal murrungamirra are asked to perform in museum spaces. In the sometimes, tense negotiations described above in “waga-neocolonial” the museum becomes an unsafe space. While there are recent examples of innovative methods being used in museums to awaken cultural objects, and consider repatriation in new ways, such as the examples described above in “gaambuwananha creative”, in many museums, objects continue to be displayed as *yugaway murrungamirra* (sleeping objects) or as objects of *ginbayanha* (desire). Christopher Morton described that sometimes cultural objects are caught in a bind of being both “marvellous and problematic” posing challenges to museum display.¹⁹ With its theatrical and contemporary glass lit display cases, I have found that the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac’s original and permanent display continues a Romantic vision of such objects influenced by both colonial nostalgia and luxury retail design brands such as Tiffany & Co., whereas Morton explained to me that the Pitt Rivers Museum uses a contemporary “visible critique” to actively reflect on its original Victorian display.

¹⁹ Personal communication with Christopher Morton, September 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote.

Indigenous bodies have been implicated in these display regimes and have also been made to perform. As described above in “gabin”, perhaps the most traumatic aspect of the museum has been the display of ancestral remains which was standard practice until well into the twentieth century. Exhibitions of living Indigenous peoples, so-called human zoos, were also a standard of the Colonial Expositions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the practice continued at the circus where Indigenous peoples were often prized performers. Some sought employment to escape missions and racism and found success such as Con Colleano, an Aboriginal tightrope walker from Lismore, known as the “Wizard of the Wire” (Figure 31). As Rhoda Roberts states he “brings an enormous sense of pride and inspiration to First Nations communities, showing them that they too can excel against all odds” (Roberts 2019). Other people were stolen and made to perform as ethnographic curiosities. For example, Australian anthropologist and writer Roslyn Poignant studied a group of Aboriginal people from Palm Island, Queensland, who were included in a world tour known as the “Australian Cannibal Boomerang Throwers”. This group were photographed in 1885 in Paris by French geographer, botanist and anthropologist (prince) Roland Bonaparte (1858-1924). In 1993, Poignant found the mummified body of one of the group, Kukamunburra (Tambo) in Cleveland, Ohio, which had formerly been on public display at Drew’s Dime Museum (Figure 32). Kukamunburra’s body was finally repatriated to Palm Island, Queensland in 1994 (Poignant 2004; Barry 2012).



Figure 31: Tightrope walker Con Colleano was an Indigenous Australian born in Lismore. Photograph: Underwood Archives/Getty Images
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jul/03/the-real-story-behind-the-greatest-showman-is-one-of-exploitation-its-time-we-told-it>



Figure 32: "Australiens", glass negative, silver gelatin-bromure, 240 x 180 cm. Created for the ethnographic exhibition of Australians at the Folies Bergère, Paris, in 1885, titled "XIX Australiens." Three people identified with the names of Billy, Jenny and their son Little Toby pose in a painted reconstruction I. Collection of musée du quai Br-nly - Jacques Chirac, Paris. No. PV0023896. See: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Three_Aboriginal_Australians_from_1885_in_Paris.jpg

Writing *GABAN* as a theatre script is a continuation of my practice in museum intervention and an acknowledgment of the traumatic histories of performance by Indigenous peoples and objects. I imagined a select group of ngawal murrungamirra, which are notably never ancestral remains or secret sacred materials but objects such as the *guulany* (tree) or *bundanha* (photograph) and how they would interact in different environments, including in the museum but also in other places, such as the asylum, the circus, and the community hall for a group therapy session: a range of environments that reflect spaces of trauma for myself and many Indigenous people. My research, as such, could not be an art history of these ngawal murrungamirra, because my aim is to give life and voice to these objects, to allow them to perform on their own terms and to finally arrive at a release from this trauma.

I call this method of writing ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra (post-traumatic theatre), to adopt terminology that references the wider trauma of colonialism, including that of the museum. While I aimed to create a fictional space that provided distance from this trauma, I also wanted the writing to be confrontational and to witness this violence, but to not tell people how to think or feel: to represent the diladilabirra-dilinya and dislocation and how the mess of the Colonial Wuba manifests in living human bodies as performative gestures. *GABAN* begins with the characters *guulany/TREE* in a self-reflective daze and self-harms, *bundanha/PHOTO* is physically violent and *winha-nga-nha/MEMORY* is slumped in a body-bag sack; trauma is all through their bodies.

The main characters

I have had a long relationship with the different ngawal murrungamirra who became the main characters of *GABAN*. The character guulany was initially based on a marara guulany (or dendroglyph), which is housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (Figure 2). This tree was collected from Wiradjuri or Kamilaroi Country in Western New South Wales in the nineteenth century. Recent research conducted with Christopher Morton at the Pitt Rivers Museum, has revealed that it probably entered Europe for the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition as part of the collection "Natural and Industrial Products of N.S.W." and was hereafter probably acquired by General Pitt-Rivers for his collection. The provenance details of marara guulany are often not verified, as are the circumstances under which these objects came into museum collections. This marara guulany remains an object of importance for the Pitt Rivers Museum as there are only four known to be in Europe which includes two at the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève and one in Museum der Kulturen, Basel.

marara guulany are either grave markers for persons of high degree or part of a ceremonial environment known as the bora ground. These trees, and others such as canoe, boundary and birthing trees, are extremely important to Australian First Nations peoples who consider them as kin (Andrew and Martin 2021, 72). And, as mentioned above, Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi Elders are currently leading cultural revitalisation around marara guulany. In museum collections, the guulany trunk, like a body, is cut off at the top and the bottom to isolate the carved section. At Pitt Rivers the marara guulany is displayed between two elongated glass cabinets. Such presentations disrupt the ceremonial power of the tree by severing the connection with Country, and thus rupturing the continuation of cultural practice. A way forward would be to invite

Indigenous knowledge holders to interact with the guulany on site and to hold discussions on possible return of the marara guulany to Country as in the recent collaboration, described above in “gaambuwananha” between the Australian Museum and Wiradjuri Elders in Dubbo.

balubunirra /MASSACRE is another character in *GABAN* inspired by a ngawal murrungamirra, which reveals a hidden history of frontier violence in Australia. It is an original letter from 1854 by the settler James Dixon to a friend back in England, which describes a massacre of Aboriginal people in Victoria’s Western District: “We had a great battle with them a month ago, there was eighteen killed and two of our men. They throw spears that penetrate right through you which is very dangerous.” (Figure 33) I purchased this letter in 2016 from a rare book dealer when I was doing research about the Frontier Wars in Australia and their memorialisation (Andrew and Neath 2018a). According to Australian anthropologist, geographer and descendant of the Iman (Yiman) Nation of central Queensland Professor Marcia Langton (1999), presenting evidence of these atrocities has been controversial in Australia and the public debate disputing evidence of massacre events has been further traumatising to First Nations peoples in Australia.

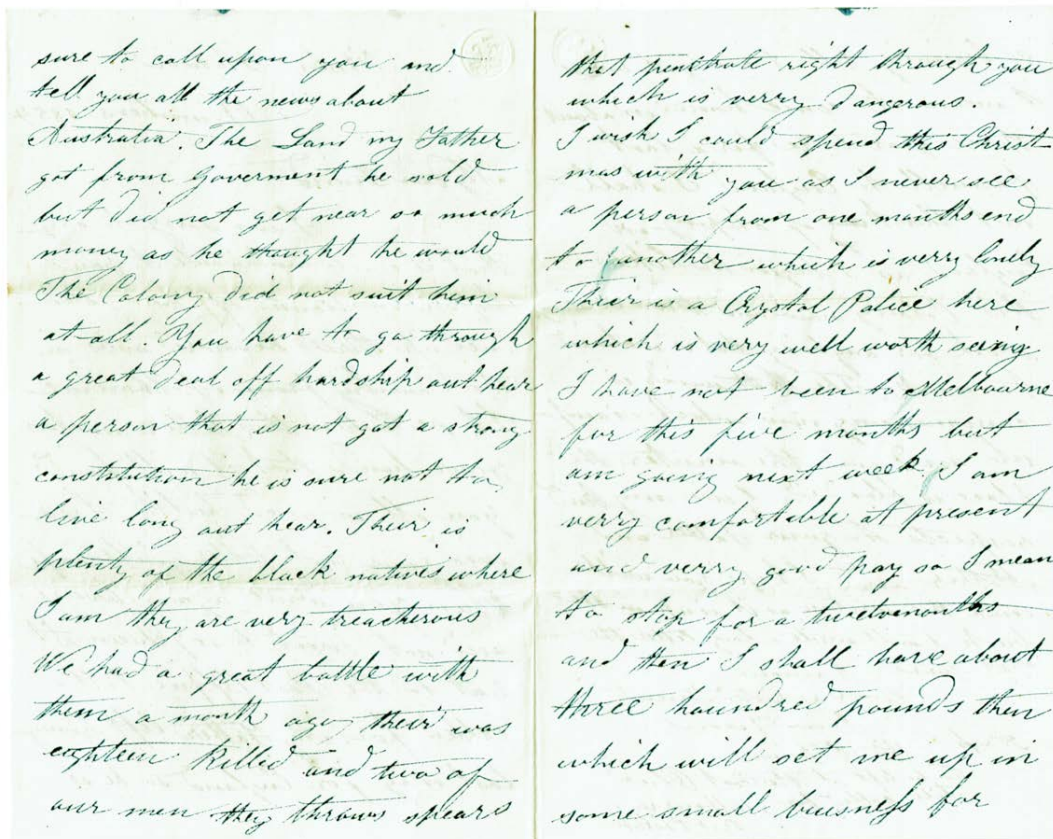


Figure 33: "Letter Describing a massacre of Aborigines in Victoria's Western District", December 1854. Handwritten letter with postage envelope, 7.2 x 12.2 cm (envelope); 17.6 x 11.2 cm (page), 17.6 x 22.4 cm (sheet). Private collection, Melbourne, Australia.

The other character inspired by a ngawal murrungamirra is bundanha/PHOTO. This character embodies the countless ethnographic, anthropological and tourist photographs I have encountered in museum and library collections and which have inspired a number of my artworks (Andrew and Neath 2018b) (for an example, see Figure 34). bundanha relates to the immense weight of this photographic record in the Colonial Wuba, with thousands, if not millions, of photographs made to satisfy a world trade in pseudo-scientific studies, colonial soft porn, and tourist romanticism (Alloula

1986; Akil 2016). Many of these photographs remain unnamed and still today images of these so-called 'primitives' or 'extinct' peoples of the past are desirable, and their representation lingers through a thriving multi-million-dollar market.

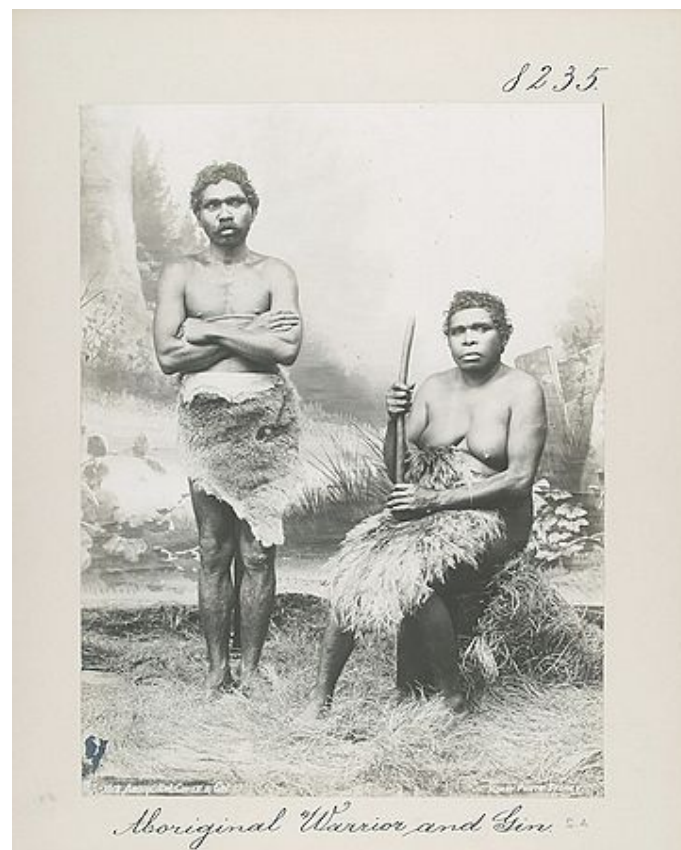


Figure 34: Charles Kerry. *Aboriginal Warrior and Son*. 1900. Photograph. Weltmuseum Wien, Austria.

African American artist Kara Walker was inspired by one such photograph of an African woman when designing the sets for a production of *Norma*, Vincenzo Bellini's 1831 opera. Walker explains: "I saw ... an intense and poised young Congolese woman; she is my Norma, unconquered and unclothed, and from her flows the landscape of life" (Walker 2015, 19). In her

studio research Walker inscribed the name Norma across the photographic portrait (Figure 35), empowering the woman with identity and power while grappling with the mess of the Colonial Wuba. I have also reimagined ethnographic photographs in a number of artworks including the series *Gun Metal Grey*, 2007, (Figure 36) where I was motivated to question the undignified objectifications of fellow human beings, including of my own Wiradjuri ancestors but also to celebrate and remember these people who are also often the disappeared of the Frontier Wars.

In writing *GABAN* I imagined these ngawal murrungamirra as characters, having dialogue and interaction with other characters (Figures 37-40) that embody functions of Western systems, key Wiradjuri ways of being and human behaviours that circulate through the Colonial Wuba and remain caught in its centrifugal force:

dhulu-ga-rra, GUILT;

ngiilinya, MUSEUM;

nginyundha, WITNESS;

Ngayamaldhaany, JUDGE;

walanbangan, CROWN;

guwayu, TIME;

muganha, EVIDENCE

winha-nga-nha, MEMORY ; and

yambuwan, PUBLIC.

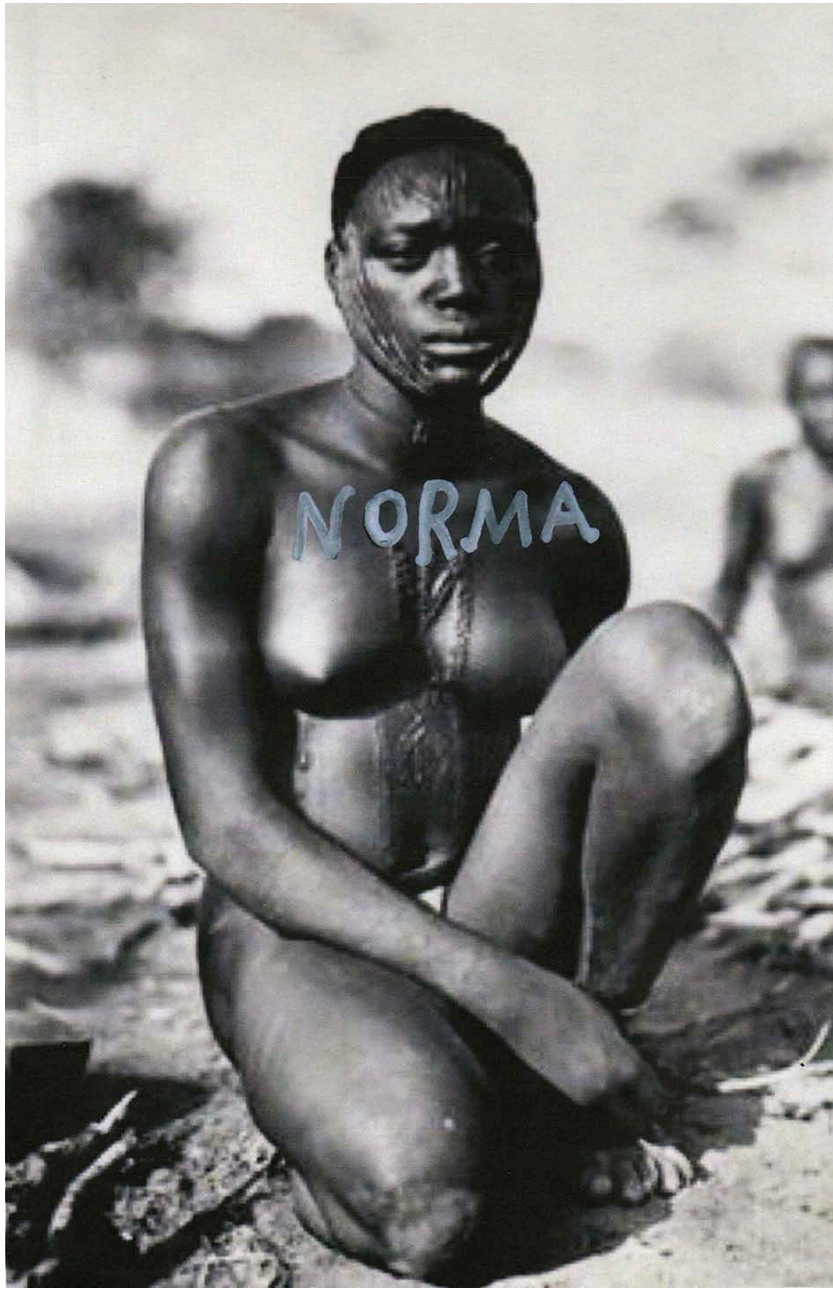


Figure 35: Kara Walker, 'Norma', annotation on postcard of Sarra woman in French Equatorial Africa (now Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and Chad), ca. 2015. © Casimir Zagourski African Postcards (MS 1573). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Image courtesy Kara Walker and Victoria Miro, London.

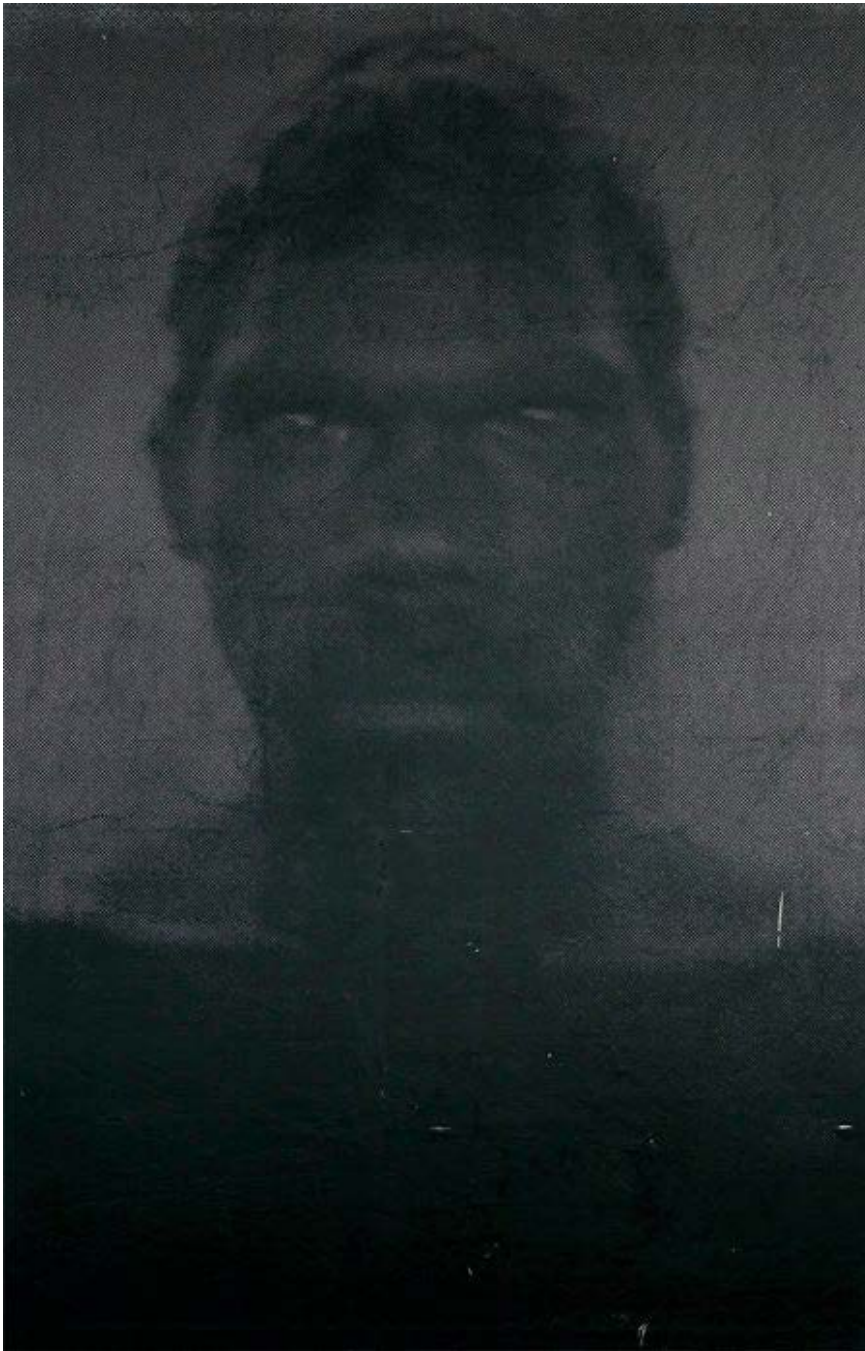


Figure 36: Brook Andrew, "Muuruun (life)" from the series *Gun Metal Grey*, 2007. Mixed media on cotton, 170x110 cm. Collection: National Gallery of Victoria. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 37: Characters (L - R) MASSACRE, TREE and PHOTO in *GABAN* by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller and presented by VCA Acting and Design and Production students, 2021. Image courtesy VCA, University of Melbourne.

Source: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/showcase/gaban>



Figure 38: The character MEMORY IN *GABAN* by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller and presented by VCA Acting and Design and Production students, 2021. Image courtesy VCA, University of Melbourne.

Source: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/showcase/gaban>



Figure 39: Characters (L-R) MASSACRE, EVIDENCE, PHOTO and MUSEUM in *GABAN* by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller, presented by VCA Acting and Design and Production students, 2021. Image courtesy VCA, University of Melbourne.

Source: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/showcase/gaban>



Figure 40: The character MASSACRE (standing L) in *GABAN* by Brook Andrew, directed by Budi Miller and presented by VCA Acting and Design and Production students, 2021. Image courtesy VCA, University of Melbourne.

Source: <https://finearts-music.unimelb.edu.au/showcase/gaban>

diladilabirra-dilinya (confusion-active)

While *GABAN* is a fictional story, the dialogue of the characters can accommodate the provenance details and other factual information about some of the ngawal murrungamirra. In one scene, the character nginyundha/WITNESS reveals the identity of balubunirra/MASSACRE reading aloud their catalogue entry: "A manuscript in blue ink on embossed woven paper, sheet folded to form four sides, octavo 180 x 113 mm... The letter is authentic, clean and legible addresse' to 'Mr. S. Wilson, Surry Lane, Battersea, Surry, En'land' and dated Melbourne Victoria December 22, 1854" before sharing details of the violent event. It is important to insert evidence of real historical events for the audience to realise not all is fiction.

These moments are revelatory, conjured from deliberate diladilabirra-dilinya where the setting keeps shifting and the dialogue keeps switching tense moving between the chronology of Western time and the deep time of Wiradjuri which has another rhythm. I wrote *GABAN* to mirror the mess of the Colonial Wuba that is everywhere today - where many are confused by words like sovereignty decolonial, anti-colonial, anti-monument and even repatriation or are confronted with the task of being responsible for our own histories (Andrew and Go-Sam 2021). I was curious to find a method that could unpack this mess, proposing that maybe there is no taking sides, just predicaments to be seen from a new perspective. *GABAN* presents racist stereotypes, humour, absurdity, violence, and the possibility for murum-gidyal, but does not resolve this mess.

In *GABAN* objects teach us lessons. Indigenous giilang-biyarra often evokes lessons to be had through elemental forces, creation stories, betrayal and trickery. The six-part television series *Cleverman* that was premiered on

ABC TV in 2016 revisits a series of Aboriginal origin stories in a contemporary context through the superhero narrative. Similarly, North American First Nation *giilang-biyarra* often reflects on the role of the trickster, such as the Crow whose helpful aim is to question motivations through riddles (Moore 2012, 326).

Similar to my installation work, the performance of *GABAN* is an immersive experience in which the audience is implicated in a reckoning where they are asked to make their own interpretation as a way of engaging with the history of the museum and of colonialism. The characters *gulany/TREE* and *bundanha/PHOTO* have a vulnerability. This is revealed through their interactions with *balubunirra/MASSACRE* who is initially cast as the villain in the play and who embodies the threat of violence which is the underbelly to colonialism. *balubunirra/MASSACRE* operates within a system and the other characters, *ngiilinya/MUSEUM* and *ngayamaldhaany/JUDGE*, use this threat of violence posed by *balubunirra/MASSACRE*, to maintain an appearance of order. The critique of the museum system is not subtle; *GABAN* is a polemic play because it presents this violence abruptly confronting the audience. However, it does not tell the audience how to feel or think, it simply aims to show the predicament.

The complicity of the audience is further emphasized as they are metaphorically mirrored in the play as the character *yambuwan/PUBLIC*, and there is yet another character *NARRATOR* who explains the unfolding events. These techniques can be compared with Brechtian devices “to activate the audience” (Bradley 2016). *GABAN* confronts the audience with uncomfortable questions about who maintains the power of the museum, where the public are the benefactors. In developing *GABAN*, I spoke with dramaturg Paschal Berry about this technique and he argued “that Brecht was influenced from theatre happening outside Western conventions”, where performers and audiences

work collaboratively in a “democratisation of performance where everyone is performing.”

In my own Filipino cultural context, we would create twenty-four to forty-eight-hour plays representing historical depictions from the standpoint of the community re-enacting Chinese massacres and pillaging of villages before the Spanish period. The community would become enraged. Participating in this collective memory of history would be a moment of pathos for community members. And this was the function of theatre - it was a release and everyone’s participatory obligation. (Berry 2021)

Similarly, I want the experience of *GABAN* to be visceral, an embodied reckoning, because this is the experience of being in the museum with *ngawal murrungamirra*; it is not an objective encounter, it can be both *bundhaay* (painful) but also like a love story of reconnecting with ancestors.

ngiyang gudhi (words and song)

Writing *GABAN* was influenced by learning more about Wiradjuri language and other languages of the First Australians and language formation (Grant Snr 2005; Dixon 2019). I continue to use Wiradjuri language to bring visibility to a language which is at risk along with hundreds of First Languages. Prior to colonisation there were over 250 distinct language (Living Languages) and between 300-700 dialects spoken across Australia (Bow 2019). While today only a handful are spoken fluently in the everyday, there is a wealth of language revitalisation, including of Wiradjuri. Uncle Stan Grant Snr has been instrumental in reconstructing Wiradjuri language drawing on his own memories as a child hearing it spoken fluently by his grandfather’s generation also working with linguist Dr John Rudder to dissect anthropological colonial

records. Grant compiled the first dictionary of Wiradjuri in 2005 which has since become an accessible mobile app.

gudhi is central in revitalising memory, language and continuing culture and *burbang* (ceremony). winha-nga-nha/MEMORY is a character who carries this knowledge of gudhi and in *GABAN* sings to guulany/TREE a murum-gidyal gudhi which introduces spiritual beings in Wiradjuri language. It is about the *gibirnga* (red-bellied black snake) being inside of guulany/TREE, which tells of a love gudhi from Wiradjuri Country, a gift from the mother country, a snake to look after marara guulany, and the snake that is still within marara guulany. Writing this love ballad was an opportunity to further use Wiradjuri language, which is an oral language – though it has been Romanised for the Wiradjuri dictionary. Creating theatre was a method of evoking the story in language so that it would be heard and not just read. The ngawal murrungamirra are activated through gudhi which draws from an Indigenous conception of giilang-biyarra and of burbang. In her thesis *The Right to Dream*, the Goenpul Jagara and Bundjulong poet Romaine Moreton (2006) writes about the importance of this connection to language: “The vibration of the body and the land was not separate, for through the gudhi, the voice of the singer, and the speaker of language, they became one.”

Through the character winha-nga-nha in *GABAN* I explore this process of singing to Country, of singing objects back to life and connecting to a time outside of Western systems of chronology and classification. winha-nga-nha is a spirit guide who begins to repair the spirit trapped within guulany. When guulany says “I am MARARA” they remember the carved tree they were and connect to the gudhi and burbang that was their creation. winha-nga-nha returns the memories to all characters but most importantly to guulany and bundanha.

5. ngaaminya dhadharra-nyundhi (findings from the performance)

GABAN is a live document, object, and movement, which encapsulates the diladilabirra-dilinya I have experienced not only in museums but also in the conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that are embedded in the Colonial Wuba. This experience of the museum has been both uplifting but also deeply traumatic which includes, at times, lateral violence, deep conversations, action on loss, and processes of repatriation. Within the space of *GABAN* I have found deep resolution through a sense of murum-gidyal and fictional processes that have provided hope towards a better bilin-girri.

GABAN demands continual performance and burbang in many cities around the globe, both in academic contexts and outside the institution in grass-roots spaces. Developing a production of *GABAN* also includes experiments with language and responding to the conditions of the moment such as the 2020-2021 global pandemic. For example, in the inaugural performance of *GABAN* at the Victorian College of the Arts in June 2021, characters could not touch each other due to the Victorian Government COVID-19 protocols on social restrictions. In the performance, it was if characters developed supernatural powers; director Budi Miller developed a non-touching method of movement with the actors who were ngawal murrungamirra i.e., guulany/TREE, bundanha/PHOTO and balubunirra/MASSACRE. These characters throw other characters around the room without touching them. Seeing this action was exciting as it reminded me of being in the museum and feeling spirits or seeing objects move or fall, as well as smelling and dreaming of ancestors. The experiment of *GABAN* is to offer the script to Indigenous

peoples, peoples from the African diaspora and other non-European creatives to lead a production and hence explore their own predicaments with diladilabirra-dilinya, embedded in yindyamarra-gunhaha.

This initial experiment at the University of Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts was directed by the university's Head of Acting and interdisciplinary African American performer Budi Miller. This was an opportunity to develop the script for performance, to fine-tune the stage directions, and to collaborate with a group of mostly young non-Indigenous actors to resolve how they could embody the various characters. Developing this performance of *GABAN* required cultural support from senior Indigenous leaders to ensure it was a sovereign space of making that began with an acknowledgement of Country (Davis & Langton 2016, 1-2). Within this space *GABAN* realised its vision of reimagining the narratives that enmesh ngawal murrungamirra and provided a sense of release from the colonial structures of the museum. This new story was witnessed by the audience and all who worked on this production, who together imagined a bilin-girri for ngawal murrungamirra that is connected to a deeper Wiradjuri concept of time.

There was much discussion about speaking Wiradjuri in the play and how the translations would be presented. There was uncertainty amongst some students about speaking in a First Peoples language, due to the histories of inappropriate representations of Indigenous cultures and languages, not only in museums but also in popular culture. This is the Colonial Wuba at work here, where there remains mystification around Indigenous cultures; today there is fear around misrepresenting the everyday as 'the sacred', and uncertainty about how younger generations can take responsibility for these histories. There are also complexities of access when it comes to First Languages. I am fortunate that Wiradjuri is recorded and continues to be learnt and spoken, when linguicide is so prevalent.

In developing the production of *GABAN*, we supported conversations around these issues through local protocols guided by N'Arweet Carolyn Briggs, who is a Boon Wurrung Elder of the Eastern Kulin Nation and with guidance from Tiriki Onus, a Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung artist and academic, who is Associate Dean Indigenous at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music and Head of the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development at the University of Melbourne. Tiriki embraced this "journey of realising *GABAN*" and facilitated consultation with Traditional Owners and First Nations creatives.

These processes are at the core of the work for which the Wilin Centre advocates. We are proud to have played a part in bringing this work to life.

GABAN is a work which transcends cultures, boundaries and time. It affords us the ability to gaze deeper into rarely acknowledged aspects of our histories and identities, allowing us to ask sometimes difficult questions about where we've been and, more importantly, about where we now want to go. This is a story of strength and resilience, which reminds us our stories are not gone from this world... sometimes they're just well hidden.²⁰

As a senior Elder, N'arweet has been instrumental in studying linguistics and reclaiming Boon Wurrung language. She spoke with the students and invited them to speak Wiradjuri on her traditional country because she believes in expanding the visibility and learning of First Languages, and also recognises the linguistic connections between Wiradjuri and Boon Wurrung. She also performed a Welcome to Country at the beginning of the season, an important protocol in articulating Country and the laws that come with traditional custodianship.

²⁰ Personal communication with the author via email September 1, 2021. I have permission to reproduce this quote in this paper.

As a work of ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra, *GABAN* is a growing methodology that shifts with the performance conditions, from museum to gallery to the bush, in places effected by current social and government regulations. Actors, directors, set-makers and others who create stories and performance are encouraged to explore how *GABAN* can provide yindyamarra-gunhanha - a space for the exploration of diladilabirra-dilinya. It is important for *GABAN* to inspire and challenge its own manifestation and those of the places and peoples it encounters through new imaginings and interpretations. *GABAN* is not a 'visual art' work, it is a living and changing apparatus that aims to plug into and expel the Colonial Wuba.

GABAN is the result of my frustration with the stagnant values encountered in my visual arts practice. I found that a series of museum and gallery collaborations were not powerful enough and did not satisfy or sooth the confusion I felt or reveal a bilin-girri that I could feel hopeful for; the process was too slow. *GABAN* and writing diladilabirra-dilinya appeared to me as a way forward, as a methodology that freed me from layers and years of entrapment, which also encase guulany/TREE, bundanha/PHOTO or even dhulu-garra/GUILT and ngiilinya/MUSEUM. It is the power of guwayu/TIME and winhanga-nha/MEMORY that has inspired me to walk in other pathways, to be in a sovereign space of the now and many bilin-girri.

Importantly the characters of *GABAN* are non-gendered to further open up possibilities for ngawal murrungamirra to reveal alternative realities and to remove any impediment for those working with *GABAN* to grapple with their own fears, traumas, hopes and bilin-girri. Even though some ngawal murrungamirra like the marara guulany are in many Australian First Nations cultures seen as belonging to men's business, the space of ngarranga-birdyulang dhadharra aims to enable flexibility, to wriggle through alternative views and continue to share the knowledges 'we' hold on to and so dearly want

to continue. Through storytelling and other acts of leadership in the decolonial space, we find the courage to be healthy in the trauma that has for many decades eroded the soul and physical body: hurt us in ways that are incomprehensible and that the power imbalance in the world does not always acknowledge.

The future presentation of *GABAN* at the gallery Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, in September 2022, is an opportunity for me to work closely with director Budi Miller and close peers such as Paschal Daantos Berry who bring their own perspectives to the space of *GABAN* and to collaborate with actors in Europe who may find solace and connection to the offerings of *GABAN*. yindyamarra-gunhanha provides a space of murum-gidyal and a platform from which to collaborate with museum curators and anthropologists who often find the current decolonial agenda difficult or are active within a space of change. I do not believe that all actors or players in *GABAN* need to be only those who have experienced colonialism as a process of dispossession, especially that some of the characters are metaphors of objects, buildings, and power.

GABAN has taught me and others lessons about how to proceed in a precarious world where the Colonial Wuba and its vortex is turning in on itself, where objects are starting to speak back, and in a global movement to re-think and create sovereign space. As a nod to this, I was contacted in October 2021 by the Pitt Rivers Museum regarding their new return of cultural objects policy²¹ to begin a conversation for the possible repatriation to Australia of the guulany (figure 4) in their collection. Those of us who are seeking to return these objects want to demonstrate that the power of the museum and what has heralded its rise can be flipped to reveal a restful space of murum-gidyal towards bilin-girri.

²¹ See: <https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/procedures-for-return-of-cultural-objects-claims>

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