

ON THIS SITE

The past is never fully gone. It is absorbed into the present and the future. It stays to shape what we are and what we do – Sir William Deane, Governor-General of Australia, Inaugural Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, August 1996.

On This Site is the beginning of a statement that evokes notions of land, history, memory, possession, dispossession and perhaps most obviously, the frontier. In *The Road to Botany Bay* Paul Carter discusses the frontier as a place of communication – while it can be a place of violence it is also within this clash that conversation can occur.

Curated by Kate Blackmore and Sian McIntyre, On This Site features works by Australian artists from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, offering anti-colonial cultural critiques and provocative new ways to read dominant productions of Australian national identity. With this exhibition, Blackmore and McIntyre hope to contribute to the discussion on decolonisation from a non-Indigenous perspective, creating a space for self-questioning and unsettlement. Held in conjunction with Reconciliation Week, On This Site will also attempt to generate a renewed dialogue around the meaning and relevance of reconciliation in Australia.

Artists: Karla Dickens, Ishmael Marika, Claudia Nicholson, Christopher Pease, Joan Ross, Salote Tawale, Garry Trinh.

Curators: Kate Blackmore and Siân McIntyre

Christopher Pease's works *Nobel Savage 1& 2* and *Open Plan Living* immediately suggest formal European portraits and landscapes. Sitting in perfect poise on introduced beasts and surrounded by rabbits, the figures in *Nobel Savage 1 and 2* are at odds with the flattened landscape they are painted within. This landscape has been colonised. These figures have been displaced. *Open Plan Living* shows a European vision of Australian bushland, with humpies, smoke and dark figures in the background. Here, Pease imposes a floorplan of a two bedroom apartment on the surface of the painting, questioning value, gentrification, development and the colonial gaze.

Garry Trinh's *Welcome Home* series similarly addresses notions of home and place in the landscape. This series was the result of Trinh's walks around his local neighbourhood. He noticed that since September 2001 the Western Sydney suburb he grew up in had changed from a diverse and open neighbourhood to a closed off suburb with "fear induced architecture". These brick fortresses, with their turfed front lawns and tightly marked parameters, sit in the landscape as bleak monuments to the great Australian dream.

In contrast to Trinh's series, Ishmael Marika's video works *Galka* and *Wanga Watangumirri Dharuk* reflect a deep cultural connection to the landscape. Marika is a Yolngu filmmaker who began working with the form as a way to document his culture through the community initiative, The Mulka Project. *Galka* is a dark spirit from Yolngu mythology and the film follows a young boy as he wanders off into the bush alone and experiences a chilling encounter. *Wanga Watangumirri Dharuk* is a short documentary about the impact of mining in North-East Arnhem Land, told from the perspective of the Traditional Owners.

Salote Tawale was born in Suva, Fiji Islands and grew up in suburban Melbourne. Like Marika, Tawale's work offers alternative perspectives to Western cultural values in an attempt to reclaim or protect a sense of identity. In *Sometimes you make me nervous and then i know we are supposed to sit together for a long time*, Tawale aggressively eats a selection of fruit whilst staring unapologetically down the lens at the viewer. In this installation, Tawale takes ownership of Western representations of the 'barbaric' and 'other' and explores the notion of the 'exotic' through presenting herself as a deity.

Karla Dickens is a Wiradjuri artist who created *5 Guardians* in collaboration with "homeless and socially challenged individuals in Northern New South Wales". Using materials such as rusting fence wire, teeth and woven copper, these masks bear traces of Hannibal Lecter, triggering a

reaction of abject horror. The forms speak of silenced, tortured and dangerous figures; yet, Dickens suggests that these masks speak of the creator's desire for self-protection and camouflage rather than aggression or deception.

Joan Ross's works *I wanted to discover this for you*, *Helping with the king tide* and *The claiming of things* directly address the nature of settling and colonising. The pristine landscape of a John Glover painting acts as the backdrop to Ross's video *The claiming of things*. Gradually, this landscape is invaded by fluorescent fences, Settlers with spray cans, electric road signs and giant cupcakes. Ross's use of recognisable contemporary objects, sounds, visual cues and humour in both her video and print works provide the viewer with a space from which to contemplate the process of habitation and colonisation in Australia.

Claudia Nicholson similarly references contemporary and historical aesthetics in her ceramic work. Born in Colombia and adopted and raised in Australia, Nicholson occupies an ambivalent position between Latino, Amerindian and Australian cultures. The works presented here reference traditional pre-Columbian ceramics with contemporary additions like diamantes, counterfeit brand logos (Adidad) with gold hoops and text. Her works are vessels, with native Australian flowers arranged inside several of the pieces. In this way, Nicholson responds to her Colombian heritage, the nature of contemporary values and identity in Latin America and also her place as an Australian. On the side of one of her works, Nicholson has placed B4 US in gold text. This simple statement, presented in Chola aesthetic works to remind the viewer of the ever present history within the contemporary, and the history that informs our understanding of belonging.