

JOHN MAWURNDJUL AM

JONATHAN JONES

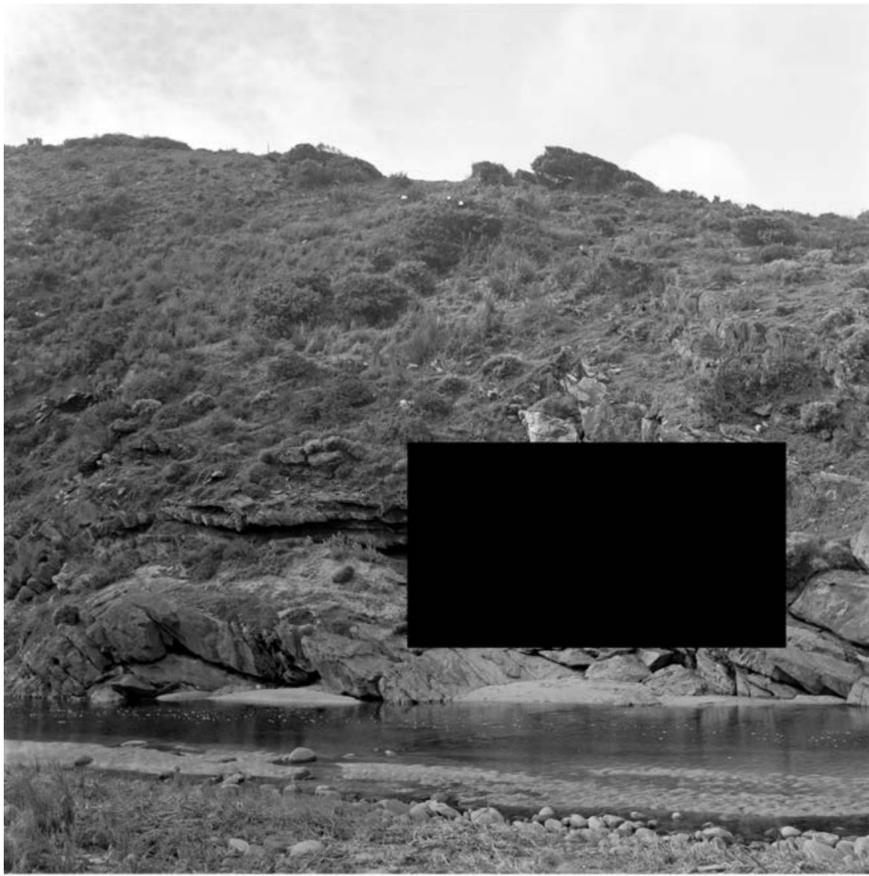
Thancoupie, *Peetharee story - Dugong & Emu*, 1980. Hand built earthenware, slip and oxide decoration on incised designs, 30 x 30 x 30cm. Collection of Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, purchase. Photograph: David Roma



DR THANCOUPIE GLORIA FLETCHER AO

VOID

CURATED BY
EMILY MCDANIEL



JAMES TYLOR

James Tylor, *(Erased Scenes) From an Untouched Landscape #8*, (detail), 2014. Boat Harbour Creek, South Australia, Kurna/Ramindjeri Land. Inkjet print on hahnemuhle paper with hole removed to a black velvet void, 60 x 60cm (framed). Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery.

MABEL JULI



Mabel Juli, *Garnkiny Ngaranggarni*, 2006. Natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 180 x 120cm. Courtesy the artist and Warmun Art Centre.

DANIÈLE HROMEK

JOSEPHINE WURRKIDJ

JENNIFER WURRKIDJ

ANDY SNELGAR

Hayley Millar-Baker, *Meeyn Meerreeng (Country at Night)* (detail), 2017. 71 granitic and volcanic rocks, acrylic, varnish, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery.



HAYLEY MILLAR-BAKER

Void

These artworks are important because the earth is important. She is our mother.

I hope you don't think that is a truism or platitude and certainly not a motherhood statement.

In the world today we are so ready to condemn anything that contains sentiment or feeling, ruthless when it comes to considering layers above or beneath the concrete. But the world is on its knees. We hear that 30% of Australia's reef fish disappeared in the last ten years and we barely murmur.

These images and objects are not to be glanced at, one more demand on our crowded attention, they are to be looked at, considered, absorbed.

They are of country, our shared country.

We share this country now. All of us. It is too late to pretend that the past theft of land can be completely reversed, we are all in it together now. If there are problems they are our problems if there are solutions they will come from us. We can't wait for Canberra. August 2018 should have told us where that energy and excitement is concentrated.

Care for the mother is up to us and these artists care. Consider their visions carefully because they can be trusted, for they are talking about their mother, their home.

We have been wanting to talk with you for a very long time. We wanted to invite you into the country not for you to trample us and treat the land as roughly as it has been treated. We wanted to tell you the story of the land, the land where you now eat and sleep, we wanted you to know her lore and learn how to respect her, look after her welfare, ensure that there is a beach and grass and clean water for your grandchildren as we have done for one hundred and twenty thousand years.

We live in an age where a great deal is possible. So much has gone wrong, so many lives crushed, so much land wasted, poisoned, despoiled, but can you hear a different drum?

Let us use this momentum of communication and let us begin with this exhibition, let us consider these stories about your homeland. Whoever you are.

Bruce Pascoe

25 September –
16 November 2018

The void is a politicised space that cannot be defined as simply an absence or a presence. It is the space between distinct worldviews, which implicates our ways of seeing, understanding and knowing. As a spatial notion, the void holds misconceptions of vacuity and emptiness; a mark of the unseen, the unknown or the undefined. In *Void*, this notion stands in opposition to the reality of each artist's understanding; that the void is always occupied by meaning and contains personal, historical and ancestral significance.

Kurna artist **James Tylor's** practice examines concepts around cultural identity in Australian contemporary society and social history. Tylor's series, (*Deleted scenes*) *From an untouched landscape* and (*Erased scenes*) *From an untouched landscape*, position the void as a visual and metaphorical emblem of censorship, erasure and control. The artist intervenes upon the surface of the landscape photograph, removing select aspects through incision and replacing them with a literal void – representative of the erasure of Indigenous peoples in the Australian landscape.

Ngemba artist **Andy Snelgar** is descended from a long line of carvers and was first taught 25 years ago under the instruction of his uncle, recognised and respected elder Paul Gordon. Each object speaks of lore and ceremony and is a testament to the resilience and continuity of cultural practices. His mark making creates a visual positive/negative relationship between the carved and uncarved surfaces. As he etches into the timber the material void is filled with the knowledge and history of the ancestors that have come before him.

In *dhawin-dyuray (axe-having)* by Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist **Jonathan Jones**, language is the vital conduit between the landscape and the knowledge held within it. In intimate microscopic detail, the film traces the serrated edge of a stone tool, evoking a topography reminiscent of the Country it came from. This object was made by a Wiradjuri Ancestor, using stone collected from Wiradjuri Country and collected in the present day by Jones. In Wiradjuri language, *dhawin-dyuray* describes a stone for making an axe and translates to 'axe-having'; the axe is held within Country, waiting to be worked by the maker. When these objects are unearthed in this way, the void they leave behind speaks of an activated knowledge.

Hayley Millar-Baker's *Meeyn Meerreeng* ('Black Country' in Gunditjmarra language) powerfully traces divergent notions of visibility. Growing up off Country (Gunditjmarra) Millar-Baker uses her birth Country (Wathaurong) to nurture a cultural connection. The eruption of Budj Bim (commonly known by its colonised name Mount Eccles) resourced Millar-Baker's ancestral country with granitic and volcanic rock formations, providing her ancestors safe passage and refuge during early colonial settlement. For Millar-Baker, these formations speak to her own feelings of connection to and disconnection from Country. The artist has carefully washed and cleansed 71 rocks, before painting them black and varnishing them to conceal their identity and protect their stories within colonial spaces.

I pay our deepest respect to the traditional owners of the lands this exhibition is presented upon, the Eora nation, and we acknowledge their continuous connection to this country. I would like to sincerely thank all the artists for their contribution to this exhibition, as well as Maningrida Arts & Culture, Warmun Arts Centre, Vivien Anderson Gallery and Bruce Pascoe for his powerful words and insights into the void. I would like to acknowledge the support of Museums & Galleries of NSW and Bathurst Regional Art Gallery toward the realisation of this exhibition and its tour.

UTS
Gallery

Budawang and Yuin artist and designer **Danièle Hromek** uses design as a speculative tool to interrogate possible futures. In *Untitled (Eisenman by hand, speculative design)* Hromek responds to a series of prototype houses by architect Peter Eisenman. Eisenman's radical and influential designs are characterised by their conceptual foundations; often they are 'thought' rather than 'built'. In this work Hromek simply asks, 'what if I rendered this conceptual space?'. In that process of careful rendering, Hromek makes room for her own Indigenous understandings of space within the voids of architectural history.

The late Thaynakwith artist **Dr Thancoupie Gloria Fletcher AO** (Thancoupie) was a senior custodian of an immense body of knowledge including the use of traditional medicines and foods, language, song, stories and lore. She used her art as a medium to educate both her own people and others about her culture. Thancoupie expressed these ancestral narratives by graphically carving into the exterior of her partially enclosed vessels, which she referred to as 'story pots'. Her story pots maintain a small opening and an internal void, which poetically and evocatively, we can speculate, contain and preserve her knowledge for future generations.

Western astronomy has traditionally drawn focus to the stars that illuminate the night sky. In contrast, this field of knowledge for First Nations peoples often draws meaning from the negative space between constellations. Senior Gija artist **Mabel Juli** is renowned for her minimalist paintings dominated by strong iconographic forms suspended in space. By using natural pigments, the dense black she uses seems to absorb light, making the white clay forms shine even brighter. The important Ngarranggarni narratives she paints express restricted love, kinship and the origins of mortality as told by the night sky.

The sculptures of Kuninjku artists **Jennifer Wurrkidj** and **Josephine Wurrkidj** depict the reclusive Mimih spirits who reside within the crevices and voids between rocky escarpments in Western Arnhem Land. It is through these narrow passages that they enter their own lands, which lay beyond bounds for the living. The Mimih predate human existence and are acknowledged as having taught humans to hunt, sing, dance and make art. They are so slim that even the slightest breeze is fatal. Each slight irregular figure is shaped by the void they inhabit, so that their bodies come to describe the rough and rugged interior of their homelands.

Renowned Kuninjku artist **John Mawurndjul AM's** *Mardayin Design at Milmilngkan* depicts an abstracted and geometric representation of a ceremonial site. The deeper ceremonial information contained within this work is purposefully withheld. In the broader context of the exhibition this work emphasises that the void often contains knowledge that is intentionally placed beyond the limits of an individual's knowing.

The void is a complex space of exclusion and inclusion, definition and deliberate ambiguity. But as these artists demonstrate, the void is always lived upon, navigated and known even as it remains unseen, unknown and undefined.

Emily McDaniel
Curator

12–6pm Monday to Friday

12–4pm Saturday

UTS Gallery

University of Technology Sydney

Level 4, Building 5, 702 Harris Street

Ultimo NSW 2007

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