



**AFFIRMATION**

29 April – 26 July 2020  
Curated by Gail Harradine

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**A F F I R M A T I O N .**

**FRONT COVER—**

**PAOLA BALLA**  
Wemba Wemba, Gunditjmara  
*The Mok Mok Cooking Show II*, 2016  
Digital pigment print on 188gsm Phototarag  
710 x 960 mm (unframed)

# A F F I

# R M A T

**The Koorie Heritage Trust (KHT) was established to promote the ongoing culture and art-making of Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia. Its vast and varied collections-artworks and objects, photography, oral history recordings and a reference library- continue to expand, flourish and hold important significance.**

As the custodian of a comprehensive and unique photography collection, KHT has established a tradition, and maintains a reputation, for the promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture, history and education. The photography collection boasts an impressive 48,000+ items including original and duplicate copies of historic and contemporary photographs, transparencies, negatives, born-digital images and reference copies of images held by other organisations. Included in this collection are images of Koorie people, cultural heritage sites and significant cultural events. A prominent feature of the collection is over 30,000 images donated to KHT by Lisa Bellea, a Minjungbul/Goernpil/ Noonuccal/Kanak woman. Primarily based in Melbourne, Lisa pursued varied interests as an Indigenous activist, photographer, broadcaster, poet, feminist, academic and performer. Over a period of 25 years, her photographs capture the highs, lows and tension of Indigenous community life.

For many years, photography has provided a medium for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to fulfil a need to express their art, convey a message or capture and record a moment or event. As a result, many themes are present in KHT's photography collection: space, time, history, culture, belonging, storytelling, place, relationships to Country, political perspectives, family and community connections, gender, race,

social positioning, resistance, disruption, loss, healing, appreciation, pride, deconstruction, knowledge, truth, status quo, subversion, myths and reconciliation. These themes continue to resonate and hold currency. For example, social media provides a contemporary platform for the transmission of cultural traditions and behaviour. It facilitates communication between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and their families and communities, including expressions of belonging, identity and pride, relationships to Country, storytelling and other unique perspectives. Photography, therefore, maintains an arc between historical and contemporary expressions of the aforementioned themes, and continues to capture memories. The arc is also present across generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the form of genealogy and family history research, a service provided by KHT for Koorie members of the Stolen Generations. The practical application of KHT's photography collection is integral to enabling connections with and between families, cultures and communities.

Furthermore, photography is an important medium for KHT because it allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to tell their stories, capture their truths, and express themselves through their own lens. In the past, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were studied and

photographed without consent and had their images used in ways that degrade, vilify and remove their agency. Today's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander photographers are reclaiming their agency, shifting the gaze and coming from a place of pride, rather than curiosity or critique. Their ability to capture their own stories and truths is unique and provides an original perspective that cannot be emulated. Photography is a truth medium for truth-telling in exhibitions that KHT is proud to regularly host. Exhibitions provide a narrative, dialogue or commentary, often challenging myths and misconceptions, and providing space for reflection.

As a participant of PHOTO2020, KHT is proud to host Affirmation, a major exhibition that explores truth-telling through a First Nations lens. Affirmation brings together four of Victoria's most exciting multi-disciplinary Indigenous photographers: Paola Balla (Wemba Wemba, Gunditjmara), Deanne Gilson (Wadawurrung), Tashara Roberts (Dja Dja Wurrung, Yorta Yorta and English, German), and Pierra Van Sparkes (Pibbulman). Each artist explores the concept of truth in the context of place, ancestral identity and cultural pride.

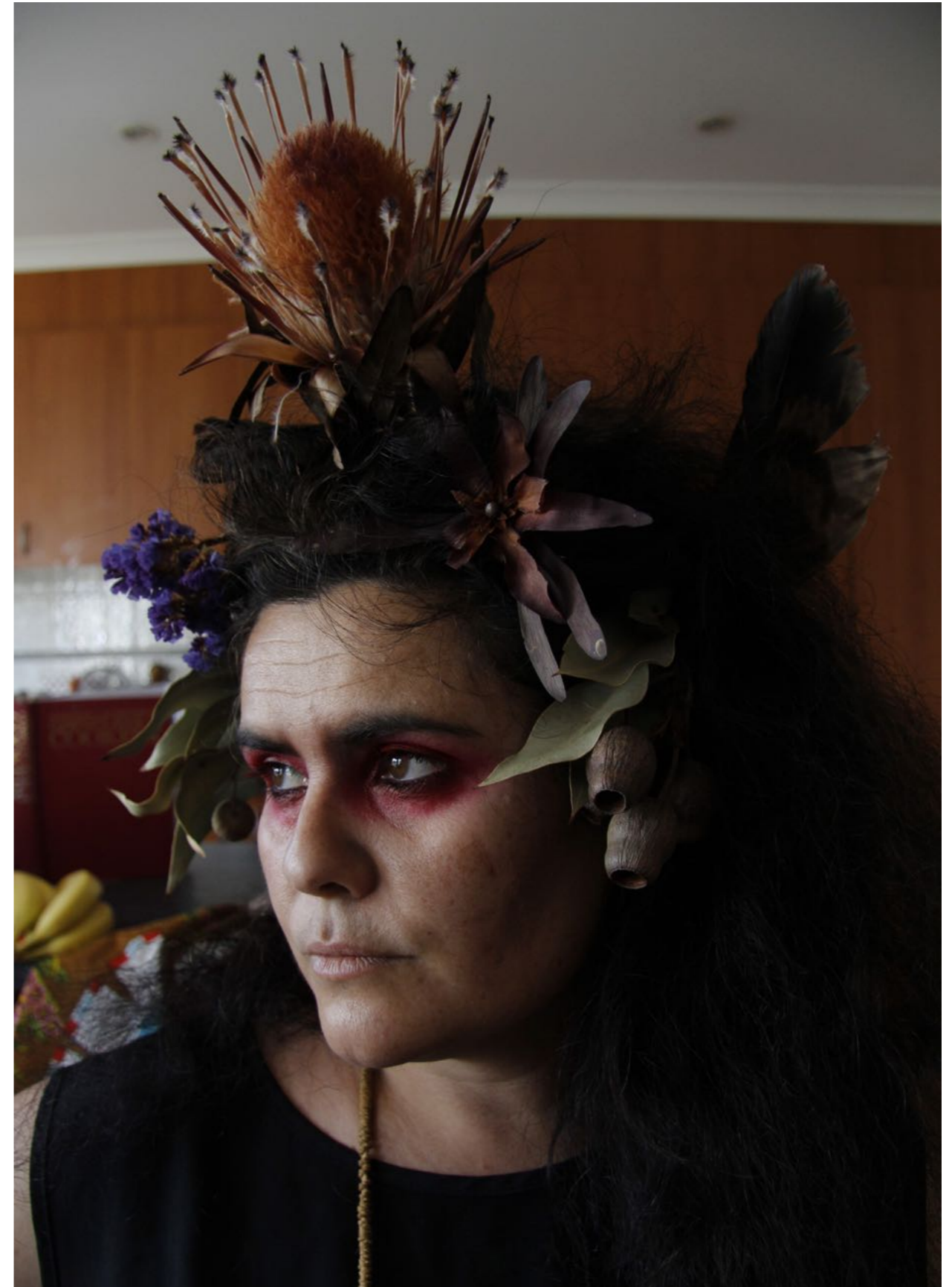
We hope you enjoy Affirmation and PHOTO2020.

**Tom Mosby, CEO.**

# I O N .

# PAOLA BALLA

**In her photograph, artist and Wemba Wemba and Gunditjmara woman Paola Balla sits on a chair in a garden. She wears a black dress, pink makeup around her eyes, and a dried native bouquet headdress, to which she had added Paterson's curse, a pretty herb that in the Australian context is so named because it is an invasive weed. She is playing Mok Mok, an old hag known across Indigenous clans for stealing children and killing and chopping up old men.**







**“Mok Mok used to thrill me as well as frighten me because I thought, ‘What a powerful woman’. She was a superhero to me.”**

Growing up in a matriarchal family with strong artistic inclinations, Balla learned the legend of Mok Mok, who today in her art serves in part as a commentary about male violence against women. Before she was born, Balla’s family had relocated to Echuca in northern Victoria, which is Yorta Yorta Country, because in 1941 her great-grandparents left Moonahcullah mission in Wemba Wemba Country in protest about how they were being treated by the mission manager.

Balla first learned of Mok Mok through mother, Margie Tang, and her late grandmother, Rosie Goodall Egan’s teachings. Then she read about Mok Mok in the late Yorta Yorta-Wiradjuri woman Margaret Liliarda Tucker’s autobiography *If Everyone Cared*, a story of maintaining dignity in the face of oppression. Nan Rosie kept the book in her collection and it was gifted to her artist granddaughter after Rosie passed away.

Rosie had been forced out of school aged 12 to endure years in domestic servitude and working in laundries for a pittance, but continued her education through reading, encouraging her grandchild Paola also to read. As an adult, Balla has enacted a version of Mok Mok in a series that subverts the Western art of photography which in the past used its gaze to classify and objectify Indigenous people.

“My mum and nan would take us back to Moonahcullah, on the Edward River, for Easter, Christmas, camping, family gatherings,” Balla recalls today from her home in inner-western Melbourne. “We would get told these stories around the campfire. The stories always had meaning, which you understood better as you got older: they were to protect you from wandering away from the camp. They are about responsibility to each other.

“Mok Mok used to thrill me as well as frighten me because I thought, ‘What a powerful woman’. She was a superhero to me. Because I was experiencing trans-generational traumas passed on to me, through sexual violence, through white perpetrators deliberately targeting Aboriginal children, I would escape





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with the thought that here was an entity who could punish the perpetrator.”

In addition to photography, found objects and sculpture are central to Balla’s art practice. She knows the language spoken by Wemba Wemba people, keeping her connected to the culture she passes on to her own two children, although growing up her heroes included the US African-American actor Lisa Bonet and Swedish-born music icon Neneh Cherry, in part a reflection of the lack of visible Indigenous role models in the Australian media at large.

As Balla explored her art, she discovered those role models, including photographer Tracey Moffatt—the first Indigenous artist to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale—and Destiny Deacon, a retrospective of whose work is showing this year at the National Gallery of Victoria.

But her confidence in the self-determination of art practice has at times been countered by elements of non-Indigenous Australia. Balla wrote in the literary magazine *The Lifted Brow*: “Every time an Aboriginal woman triumphs in education, gets a degree, supports a family, births a child, writes a book, releases an album, some fuckery of white Australian stupid hateful bullshit takes up valuable oxygen; for example, black face on repeat.”

Healing, resistance and repair are daily acts for Balla as an artist. Going into the Mok Mok character “was a way to heal myself and try to find the fearlessness I needed for my PhD work”. As the inaugural Lisa Bellair Indigenous Research Scholar at Victoria University’s Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Centre, Balla’s academic research has lent her art practice the ballast of intellectual and historical enrichment.

“I believe a lot of Aboriginal women artists are also biographical artists in that they’re documenting our lived experiences through their works,” she says. “Because a lot of Aboriginal women have to deal with issues that Aboriginal men don’t, particularly

around sexual violence and the damages of patriarchy, I was looking in my PhD at bodies of work as revealing and holding that Aboriginal women’s standpoint.”

Nan Rosie’s example of painting and poetry were important to Balla becoming an artist. “She showed me that creativity is very important to your wellbeing and to your cultural expression. The first curators I ever knew were my mother and grandmother and aunties; they were so particular in how they decorated their homes. I learned that curate really means to care.

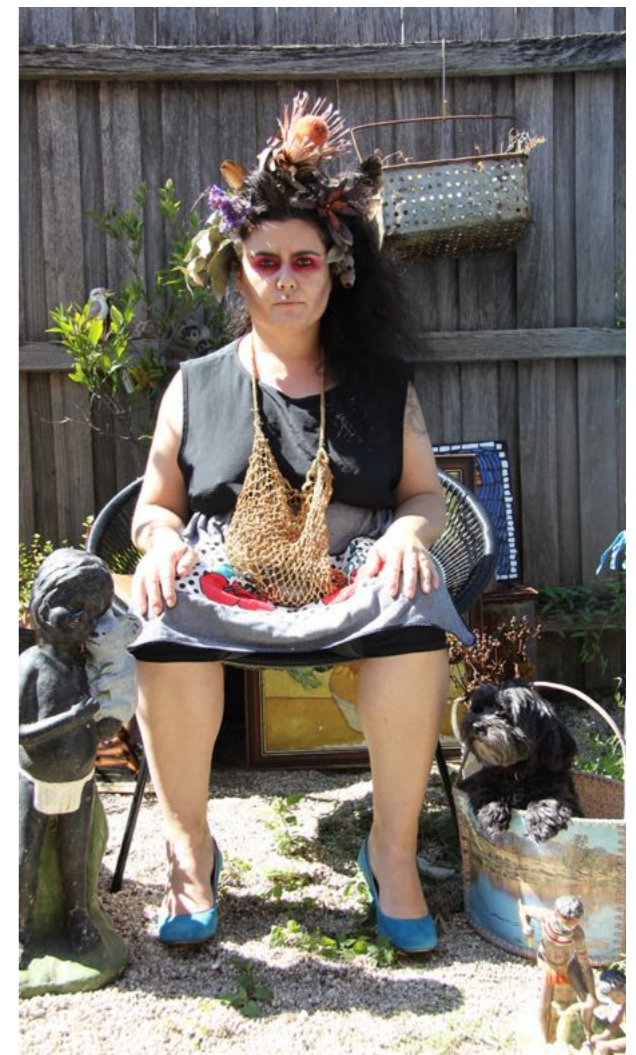
“Nan placed artefacts made by her uncle, who was an expert basket weaver and a carver, in her house. She also collected those kitsch Aboriginal velvet paintings, and she showed me how you could respond to things and place them politically. She was a self-taught landscape painter and poet. She got published; my mum would submit my nan’s poetry.

“They were and are really strong women. Mum was performing in drag around Echuca in the 1980s as an Italian male character. She was also a shearer’s cook, and became one of the first deadly standup comics in Melbourne.”

About once a year while growing up, Balla would spend time in Melbourne’s Footscray, where she was born, with her father, a Calabrian migrant, and his family. “I’ve had the racism of being an Aboriginal woman, but also being called a ‘wog’ and a ‘dago’ at school, and then an ‘Abo’ and a ‘coon’ on any other day. I was one of only about four Aboriginal-Italian kids in a Victorian country town, and it really put you in a particular position.”

Balla laughs: “Racial dialogue wasn’t very evolved, so I really had to articulate who I was.” Affirmation had assumed critical importance early in her life: “Art and the expression of it became incredibly important vehicles to start talking.”

**“Art and the expression of it became incredibly important vehicles to start talking.”**







# DEANNE GILSON

**James Cook stands proud and tall on the central shield of Wadawurrung artist Deanne Gilson's display, but it is not one of pride or belonging to Country Gilson expresses in her art; rather, it is the haughty arrogance of the coloniser.**

Words by Claire G. Coleman



It is not the Lieutenant Cook who mapped the east coast of Australia and, legend has it, claimed that place for the British Crown. Instead, this is a statue of Cook the mythical Captain who 'discovered' Australia; the Cook who in the minds of some circumnavigated the continent (he never did) and arrived in 1788 with the first colonisers (he was by then already dead for 9 years).

Gilson's statuesque Cook parallels the statues of mythological personages and creatures in European classical culture; those stone-faced gods, heroes and kings. Cook is our Hercules, whose legendary journeys are mythical. The Captain Cook mythologised in Australia is perhaps as real as the statue photographed and photo-montaged by Gilson. Australia is a country that does not clearly remember its history, but instead creates mythical heroes for a false identity. That fake Cook, the mythical Cook whose stony face is presented as a substitute for remembrance of the past, is whom Gilson's display represents.

It is not Cook, the stone man standing tall and strong in the middle of the work, foregrounded and imposing on Country, looming out of the display, who really matters. It is not Cook, displayed on a shield, we care about but the historiological landscape in which the work exists. It is the Aboriginal women—artist Deanne Gilson, her mother (also a renowned artist), and Queen Mary from Coranderrk mission—who carry the strength of Country in their bones. It is the Aboriginal women who are compelling, who hold the gaze and teach us what Country really wants; for it is Aboriginal women who so often carry the soul of Country and culture.

It is on women that the whitefella's hammer fell hardest and it was on the shoulders of women that the responsibility of maintaining culture so often sat.

The smaller surrounding shields expose the commodification of Country, of culture and artefacts, even of Aboriginal women. This sort of commodification eats away at what it values; you cannot sell something and keep it too. Nothing is untouched by the ravages of colonisation; this is what those shields teach us—everything is







**We are forced to face what colonisation means for Aboriginal women, for their landscapes and their culture, even for the food items they relied on.**



for sale and everything has been changed and destroyed. Cook is the centre and the looming force of all these changes, the legend of Captain Cook presides over everything.

We learn from Gilson's work that colonisation understands the cost of everything but the value of nothing.

In this installation, Cook is the Bandit, the Pirate, a recurring character, a rogue; attributes that Indigenous art loves to hate. Surrounding Cook on his shield is the booty he has looted: Aboriginal women, artefacts, Country itself. The surrounding shields continue the story, that of colonisation as theft. This man, Cook the Rogue, is perhaps as well known to Indigenous people

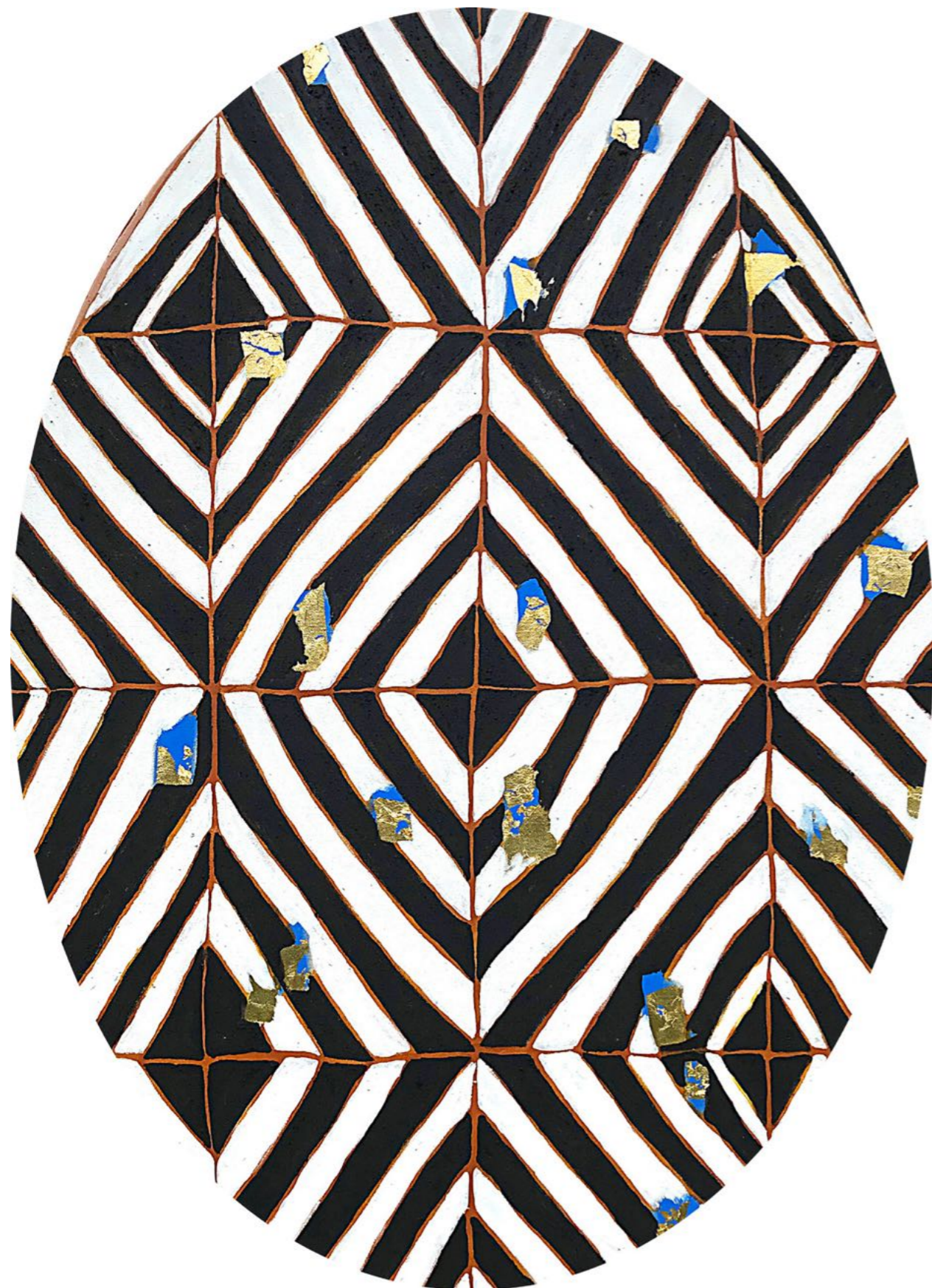


as historical personage of Cook, obsessed by many. Perhaps neither is the real man.

In Gilson's art, the golden stars of murnong are particularly compelling. These daisy-like flowers, common when whitefellas arrived on the continent but now rare, provide firm proof of Aboriginal cultivation and farming in the south-east of the continent. In Gilson's works, they could be considered to represent many things: Aboriginal farming, the women who farmed them, the soul of Country. Cultivated for their swollen roots they are a starchy food that earned the common name, in English, of 'yam daisy'.

Pretending Aboriginal people didn't have a form of agriculture before whitefellas arrived is another





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theft, in addition to the theft of history and the massacring of truth.

Of all the contemptible acts witnessed on Gilson's Country, the setting of sheep on the murnong was among the most damaging. Sheep graze differently than native animals, such as Kangaroo, eating plants down to the ground and eating the growing tip out of a plant. When sheep consumed the leaves of a murnong they crunched deep enough to kill the plant completely. A once common plant, and a starch staple of the Kulin nation, was rendered near extinct. Lack of access to Country to cultivate the precious plant dealt a final, near fatal, blow.

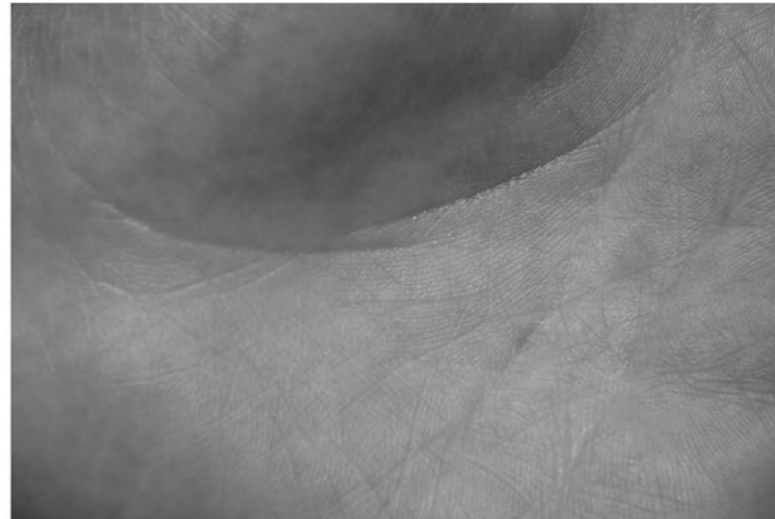
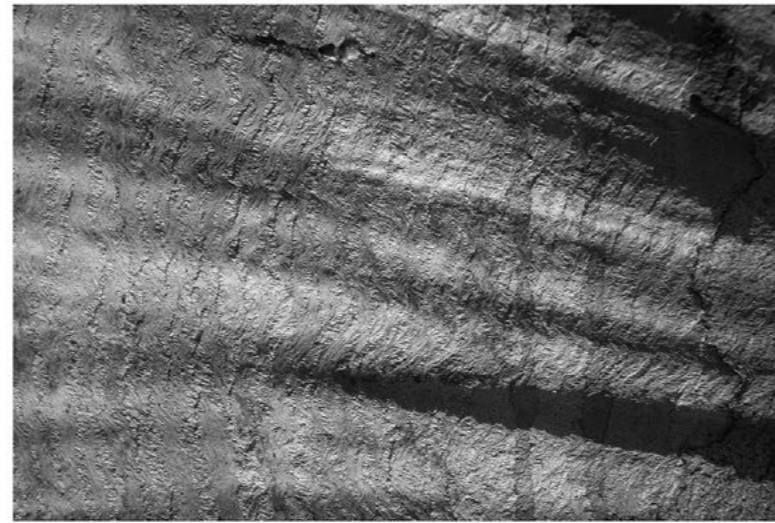
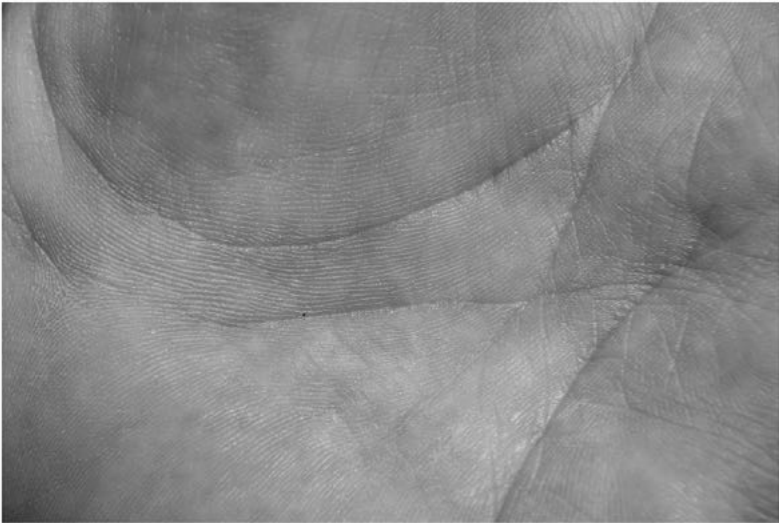
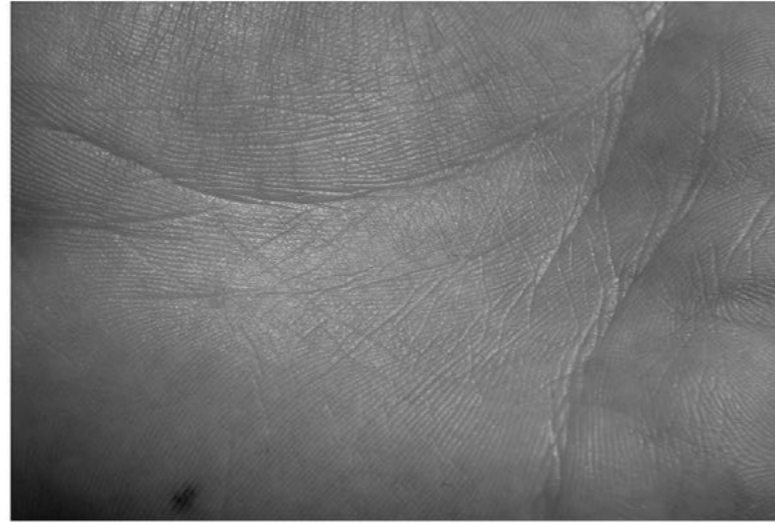
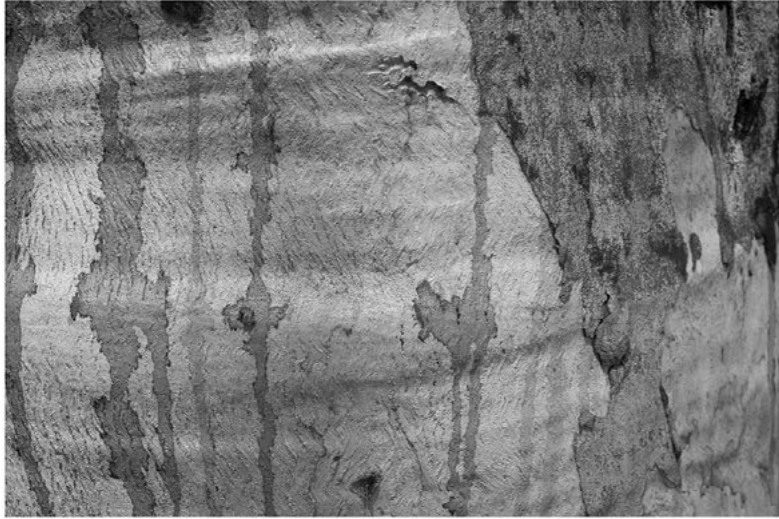
Murnong is sacred among the fauna of Gilson's Country because it is a piece of women's culture and an important food item. Removal of murnong was a serious blow to cultural survival in Kulin Country, but perhaps the return of murnong as a food item will provide a path to salvation of Country and culture.

Murnong is one of the stronger themes in Gilson's work: it is the face of Country, the face of Mother Earth and the face of ancestors; its scattering on the ground is contrasted with Gilson as warrior murnong gatherer; it connects her to Queen Mary of Coranderrk. It is a murnong flower being crushed under that petrified whitefella's—Cook the Stone-foot. That daisy-like plant is the true gold of Country; its yellow flowers are the strength and life of the people. The search for the gold dug up in Wadawurrung Country, shiny metal not that different in colour to the flowers, was a factor in the destruction of Country and people.

It's time to find the real gold, the murnong found in the hearts of the people.

Gilson's display challenges us to question myths of Australia: the myths of colonisation, and the myths that underlie all of Australia's fake history. We are forced to face what colonisation means for Aboriginal women, for their landscapes and their culture, even for the food items they relied on. Colonisation, represented by the statue of Cook, has attempted to take over and overwhelm the women of the land; but they survive, for as long as the land survives Indigenous people will prosper.





# TASHARA ROBERTS

**There is an extraordinary array of Indigenous species growing in the living lands around Victoria. For Traditional Owners who spend their lives amid their ancestors, trees are relatives; they are family.**

Words by Andrew Stephens

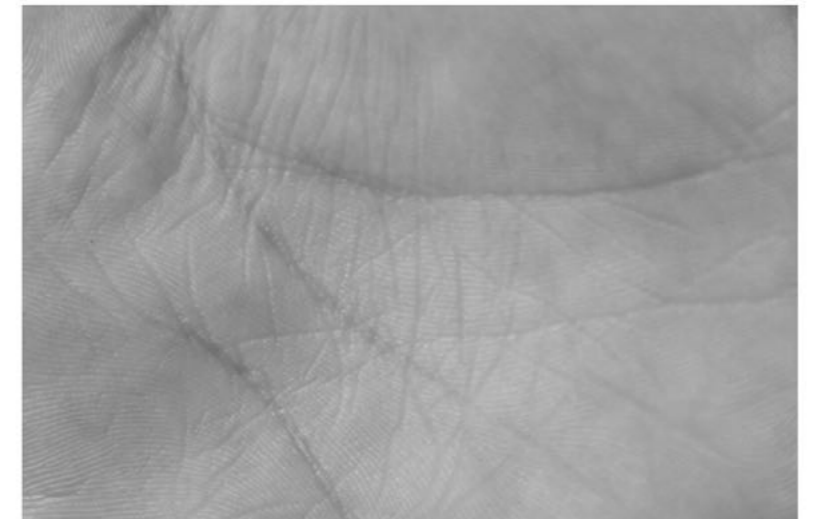


Among these trees are white, grey, red, black and yellow box. There are ironbarks, mallees, ballarts, paperbarks, palms and more, many known by older names in the lexicon of various clans whose languages are still spoken to varying degrees: some are still being used in their entirety and have fluent speakers, while others are being reinvigorated.

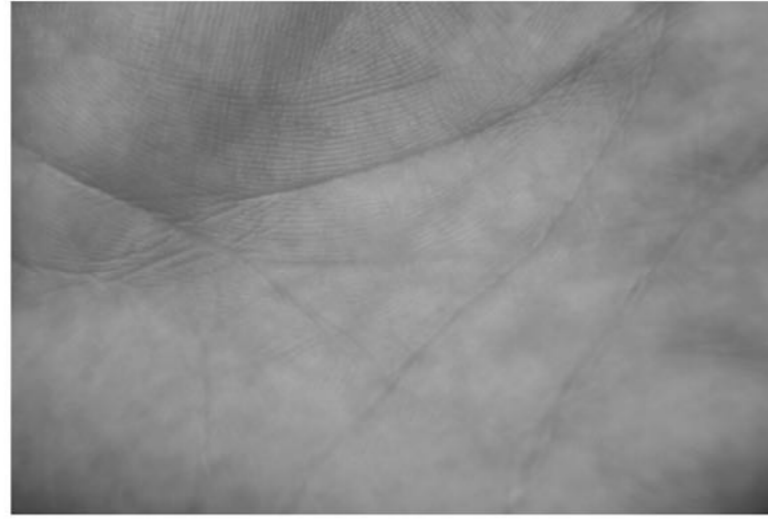
Like Country, with deep interconnections between the material and non-material, the trees have many parts: root, branch, leaf, blossom, moisture. The bark, though, is what we first see, and there is immense variety in bark textures: rough, smooth, stringy or fibrous. And the colours, too, consist of a broad palette: bark that is black, grey, white, golden-yellow or red.

It is this skin which is used to identify trees, along with their leaves, height, habit and blossoms. In truth, the being of these trees is of more significance than their physical properties. This being-ness makes them inseparable from the lived experience on Country where, as artist Tashara Roberts expresses it, “their skin is our skin, their blood our blood, their pain is our pain; and their loss is our loss”.

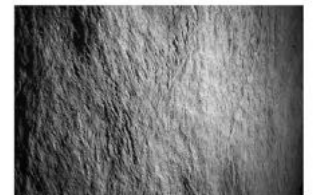
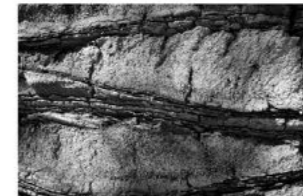
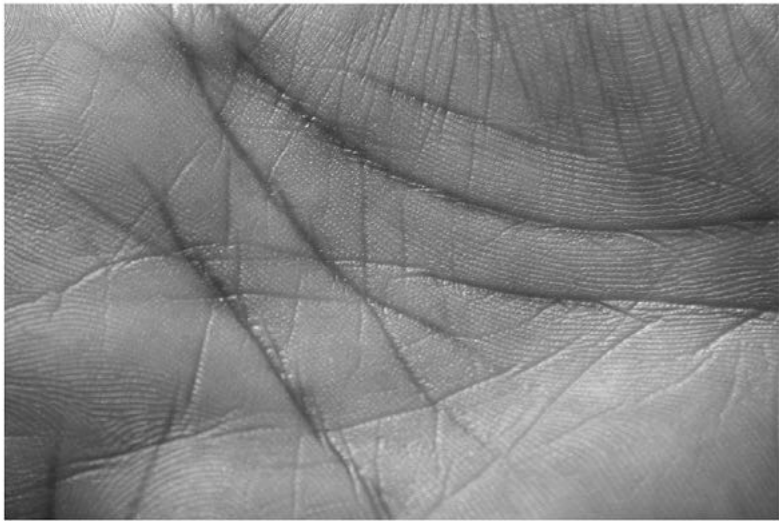
As part of her practice, Roberts documents barks, using her camera in close proximity. The beautiful, richly textured images she produces are captured on the Country of her birth (Wurundjeri) and on her ancestral homelands (Dja Dja Wurrung Country and Yorta Yorta Country). She inspects the bark of the trees, of many Indigenous varieties; she feels their spirits; she records their appearance. Roberts juxtaposes these photos with images of human skin—the skin of other Indigenous descendants—also taken within intimate range. She presents these evocative photographs in sets of six and as our gaze travels from bark to skin and back again, we might wonder: is there any difference between bark and skin? In documenting these different barks and skins, Roberts guides us beyond surface where meanings and symbols run deep. As with skin or bark, we find there is a wealth of interest below the outermost layer when we allow ourselves to ‘see’ by using something within us that is more intuitive.



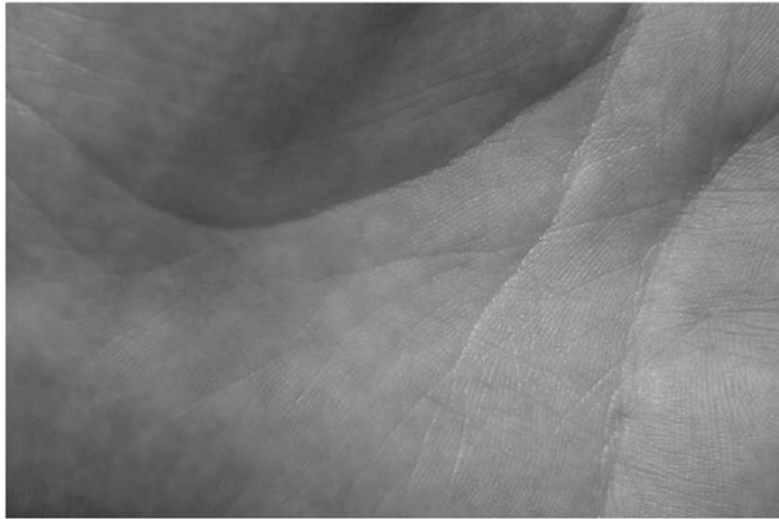
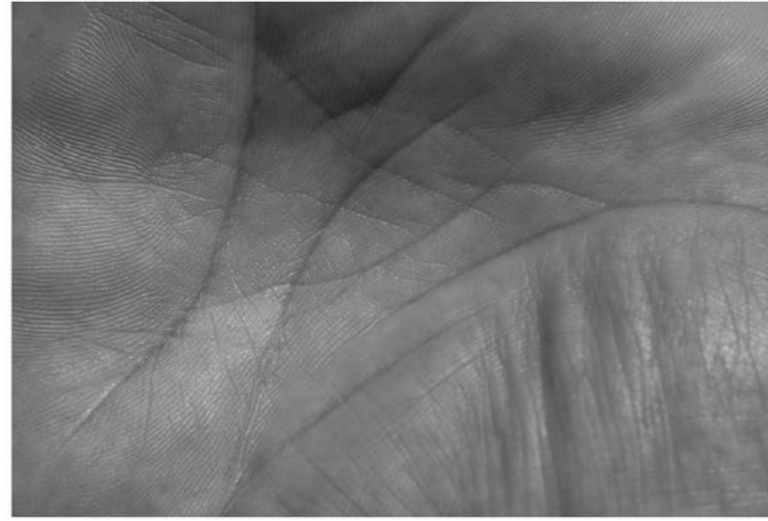




**'their skin is our  
skin, their blood  
our blood, their  
pain is our pain;  
and their loss  
is our loss'**







Roberts is a Bendigo-based contemporary artist who works with photography, video, mixed media, installation, sculpture, painting and music. Born and raised on Wurundjeri Country in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Roberts is of Dja Dja Wurrung, Yorta Yorta, English and German descent. She spends much time on Country where she lives in the bush of the Dja Dja Wurrung. She also does much work with Aboriginal people and learning about her culture. Roberts speaks of being compelled to touch the leaves and bark of trees as part of connecting to Country. “I would tell other Aboriginal people about this and ask, ‘Is that what you experience too?’ And I was constantly told ‘Yes’.” She wonders, too, if ancestors might have touched the trees she places her hands and heart upon.

And so Roberts refers to two Dja Dja Wurrung words she has learnt. One is Gapila, which refers to the ability to know through touch. Gapila is a component of Nyernila, which refers to ‘deep listening’ through all the senses, listening with the whole body. “I am mindful that I am on my Country and connected to my ancestors. I am walking where my people have walked since time immemorial and they are still with me. This guides my actions.”

Across Australia’s many Indigenous clans, bark has also had significant use as a resource. There are canoes, used for both inland water crossings and sea voyages. There are coolamons and tarnooks (bowls) made from bark. Paperbark is peeled off to make water containers, mats and liners for baby baskets. Barks of some species of Acacia have also been used to provide fibre to make bags and mats. In addition, Dianella and Cumbungi are harvested for string, Stringybark for rope, and Lomandra for baskets. Of course, bark painting has had a long tradition, receiving much attention from artists and curators during the past century in particular, and even in the political arena with the famed bark petition sent to the Australian Parliament in 1963.

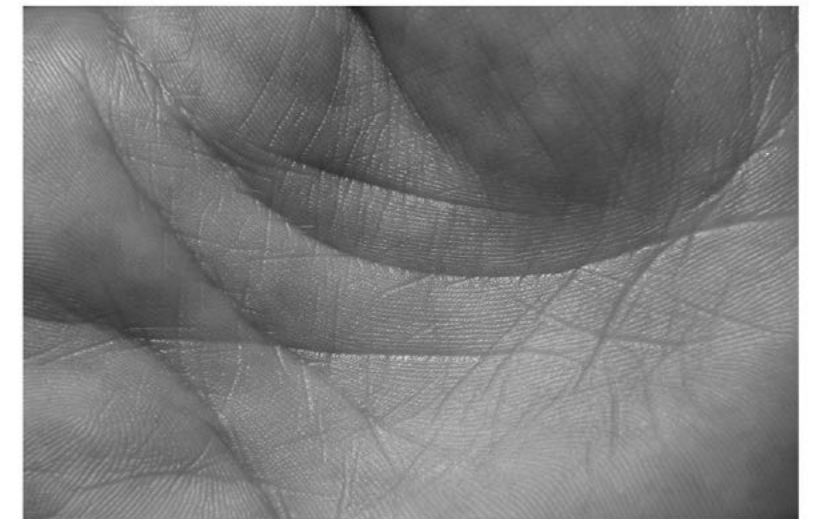
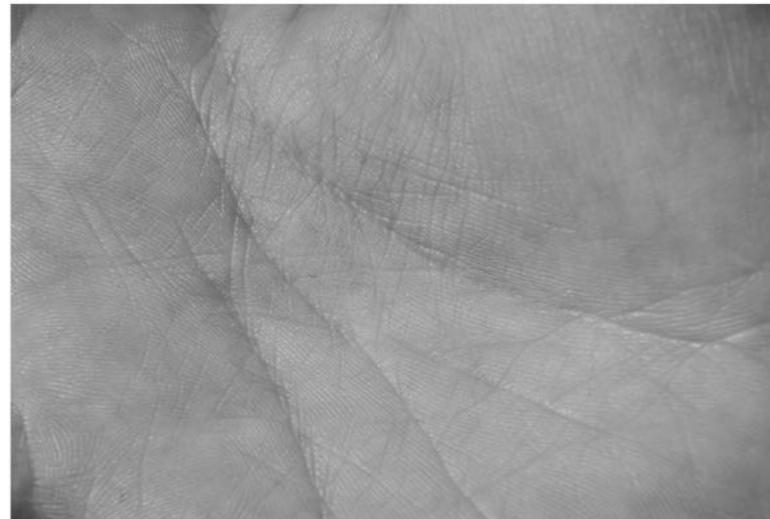
The land in Roberts’ vicinity includes six state and national parks. It must be noted, though,



that less than 17 per cent of the box-ironbark forest vegetation that thrived across Victoria when Europeans arrived remains, some of it in the regions around Roberts' home. This has probably reduced even further in the wake of the 2019-20 bushfires that ravaged parts of Australia. Even so, it is in those parks that we might see the trees Roberts adores and connects with in greatest abundance. These many trees are in Kooyoora State Park, Wehla Conservation Reserve, Greater Bendigo National Park and Kara Kara National Park. In particular, Roberts also visits the former Whipstick State Park (now part of Greater Bendigo National Park), and can be found at the Loddon River, and Barooga, Ulupna and Barmah along the Dungala (the Murray River) on Yorta Yorta Country.

These places, and all the land in-between, are sacred and rich in Indigenous Cultural Heritage, and Tashara Roberts finds herself disturbed when cleaning up litter, seeing trees cut for firewood or observing the land damaged in some way. "The Indigenous way is not only to live harmoniously with Country, but to see it as an extension of ourselves. We have a reciprocal relationship with Country: as Country sustains us, so too must we care for country. But it is more than that, Country is also tied up in our kinship systems, our cultural practices, our rituals, our ceremony, our lore and our religious practices. Everything comes from and goes back to Country." Her extraordinarily beautiful images of bark and skin draw us deeply in to that harmony.

**'The Indigenous way is not only to live harmoniously with Country, but to see it as an extension of ourselves'**





# PIERRA VAN SPARKES

**Pierra Van Sparkes (Pibbulman) is a photographer, video and digital media artist. Additionally, she is growing her practice as a curator, collaborating recently with Indiah Money (Wiradjuri) on the show A Sight For Sore Eyes at Blak Dot Gallery for Midsumma Festival.**

Words by Maddee Clark







**Microaggressions are defined as subtle, slight, often well-intentioned, verbal or non-verbal, environmental or institutional expressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia.**

Over the last few years, Pierra has developed a critical activist practice, situating herself as a Pibbulman artist working on Kulin country, and interrogating, in her own words, “the mythscapes that inform notions of Indigenous authenticity, settler-colonial supremacy and the modes in which they manifest.”

I have been following Pierra’s work since I first saw it in 2017. Pierra’s photography and digital work once appeared on a walkway on the University of Melbourne campus, where I work. The works selected put a critical perspective on terra nullius, a foundational un-truth of the settler colonial state, at the front and centre. It was powerful to see this work on campus, given the university’s

historical truth problems. In 2017, after decades of agitation and anger in the on-campus Blak student community, the university removed the name of a famous eugenicist from one of its buildings. Some names still remain but there has been a shift in campus culture, mainly due to the work of Blak students organising around the issue. After so many years of dead, racist white men’s names embossed on buildings, having Pierra’s work on a main campus building gave a staunch and subtle reminder that everything here is not OK. One of her works, Blackfulla Bingo, provides an uncomfortable insight into the microaggressions Aboriginal people in university classrooms experience.







Microaggressions are defined as subtle, slight, often well-intentioned, verbal or non-verbal, environmental or institutional expressions of racism, sexism, and homophobia. They are the normalised expression of racism in everyday interpersonal encounters. In a critical mass, or a classroom environment, they can overwhelm the recipient with the feeling that they do not belong or that they are abnormal. In this context of constant racist gaslighting which Aboriginal women are subjected to in the colony, truth-telling is powerful. Truth-telling is an important part of decolonial work, locally and globally. Truth-telling is direct address. It is anger and action. Truth-telling is threatening. We can look to the so-called history wars, which are always ongoing, for evidence of how truth-tellers are punished, threatened and ridiculed for telling the truth.

Have you ever seen a work of art that made you feel like you were normal? Have you ever read a book, seen a film, or simply watched a stranger walking in public, in a way that makes you feel safer, less remarkable, less alone? For those who experience the majority of their life feeling represented and part of the dominant culture, it is hard to explain the feeling of wellbeing that comes from something as simple as feeling recognised in your truth. The most apt description is that it feels like a small act of homecoming. It is a rare and precious feeling. Truth-telling plays a vital role in any healing process. This is the same in intimate and interpersonal contexts, as well as when we address collective and national scales of violence. Without truth-telling—full, complete truth-telling—there can never be healing in our country. When speaking our individual and collective truths as Indigenous peoples, and as all people living under repression and occupation of our lands, hearts and minds are recognised as a necessary part of our recovery.

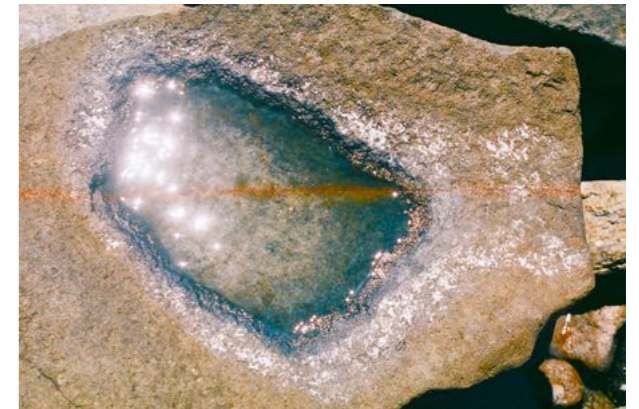
We cannot ever diminish the role of our artists in decolonising ourselves, our communities, our peoplehood, our country. We cannot forget ourselves, the dimensions of our people. Our art is our strength. I often refer to Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work *Talkin' up*

to the White Woman. In her discussion of Aboriginal women's life-writing, Moreton-Robinson (Quandamooka) makes the point that while some consider the storytelling of Aboriginal women to be apolitical, it presents to readers an undeniable subjectivity. To categorise women's storytelling practices as apolitical is to deny the power of story altogether, a grave oversight. Palyku writer Ambelin Kwaymullina has also emphasised the importance of truth-telling in shaping the world, noting that it is not colonial law which structures reality (top-down, authoritative and punitive) but story.

Photography is an interesting case study in truth, lies and subterfuge. It has been positioned as a neutral, objective documentary form, and the camera constructed as a truth-telling device. In the early colonial context, photography was important to the development of racist eugenics theories about Aboriginal inferiority. It was used as a representational weapon against Aboriginal people, servicing the interests of racial scientists, anthropologists, and the broader European market looking to learn about a culture thought to be rapidly disappearing. From the very beginning of the emergence of this market, however, subversions of power were happening on the Blak side of the camera. The residents of Coranderrk station were reported to have begun demanding high fees from visiting white photographers, who were interested in collecting photographs of residents to sell to buyers both local and overseas, and actively constructed the composition of the photographs in order to control what was represented about them to the outside world.

Claiming and defending her agency as a Blak queer woman is vital to Pierra's photographic practice. While her work is sharply critical of colonial epistemologies, and often ironic when responding to racism and colonisation, Pierra's works also honour beauty and humour. Her photographs show a deep love for Country, allowing us to see land with clear eyes. It is this ability to hold anger, laughter and love together which gives her work, and the work of all Aboriginal women who write and create, unique depth.

**Truth-telling is an important part of decolonial work, locally and globally. Truth-telling is direct address. It is anger and action. Truth-telling is threatening.**





# ARTIST BIOS



## PAOLA BALLA

Paola Balla is an artist, curator, writer, and lecturer. She is a Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmara woman. She is a PhD Candidate at Victoria University where she is the inaugural Lisa Belleair Indigenous Research Scholar (2016-2020). Her practice led research situates the ways Aboriginal women artists and activists/protectors disrupt artistic terra nullius by speaking back and 'blak' to patriarchal and colonial narratives. Her work is informed by matriarchy, family, Country, and the lived experiences and relationality of Koorie identity.



## DEANNE GILSON

Deanne Gilson is a proud Wadawurrung woman of Aboriginal and Australian/English descent. An award-winning multi-media visual artist, with a practice spanning thirty-five years, Deanne is also the daughter of Aunty Marlene Gilson, a painter, with her own award-winning art practice.

Currently undertaking a PhD looking at the objectification of Aboriginal women by the male colonial gaze and how this has affected Aboriginal women and what was known as traditional women's business. Deanne's recent artworks look at the colonial disruption of loss of family, culture, language and traditional women's practices and how this continues to impact Aboriginal women today. Creating contemporary art that assists in healing, disrupting and challenging the gaze, through a reflective process. Highlighting and bring traditional marks alongside contemporary ones, women's business and linking this to the practice of ceremony.

Deanne Gilson is represented by William Mora Galleries.



## TASHARA ROBERTS

Tashara Roberts is a contemporary Indigenous conceptual artist whose practice includes photography, moving image, installation, mixed media, painting, sculpture and jewellery. She has completed a certificate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Art and a Bachelor of Creative Arts.

Her work is sometimes subversive and politically charged; she uses visual culture to explore cultural and societal issues. Her multi-disciplinary practice often explores her Aboriginal heritage and/or shows the viewer what it is like looking at the world through her eyes.

Tashara works full-time in Indigenous education and engagement and is involved in a range of community work and creative initiatives.



## PIERRA VAN SPARKES

Pierra Van Sparkes is a Kulin country based Pibbulman Noongar artist. Her work is inspired by the shared history, feelings and encounters that shape lived experiences of Aboriginality amidst manifold blak identities. Working with photography, video projection and digital media, she interrogates the mythscapes that inform notions of Indigenous authenticity, settler-colonial supremacy and the modes in which they manifest.

Alongside her recent curatorial debut with *A Sight for Sore Eyes*, Blak Dot Gallery (2020), her work has featured in shows including *dis rupt*, Hamer Hall (2019); *Taking it Blak*, Centre for Contemporary Photography (2019); *Current*, The Substation (2019); *Blak to the Future*, Footscray Community Arts Centre (2018); *BBQ: Blak, Beautiful and Queer*, (In) Visible (2018); *Hitched*, Wyndham Art Gallery (2019); and the *Koorie Art Show*, Koorie Heritage Trust (2016/17), taking home the 2016 RMIT University Award and the 2017 Moogji Club People's Choice Award.



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