

Fabricated Country: re-imagining landscape

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Abstract

Faced with fundamental redrawing of human relationships to the global and local environment, a shift in ways of viewing landscape has precipitated. Broad awareness of biodiversity collapse, urbanization, global warming and the advent of genetic engineering and advances in biological technology has inverted many notions and definitions about the word *nature*. This, underlined by a revisited pre-colonial historical narrative, particularly across Australia, sustains landscape and nature as urgent topics that need to be dealt with and re-viewed.

This practice-led research project investigates the intersections of ecological and cultural environments and how this interrelation can be expounded through the act of painting. The investigation is based largely within a local context of Australian visual art and regional terrains, employing a methodology located at the intersection of postcolonial and post-digital frameworks. Within these frameworks the project interrogates and re-interprets actual and combined landscapes. The project elucidates a contemporary re-imagining of landscape enacted through painting.

The final research outcomes are composed of a written dissertation and installation of drawings, painting and spatial work. The work comprising the installation is a direct manifestation of the practice-led research. It is expanded upon in the exegesis section of the dissertation. This set of creative works form part of the argument attending to the central question of my thesis. Combining post-digital and established modes of production, this work seeks to open up a layered space, a visual methodology for re-viewing landscape.

Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters except where indicated in the Preface,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 14446 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, citations, bibliographies and appendices.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Piers Greville', written in a cursive style.

Piers Greville

Preface

Faculty Small Grant Scheme assistance was awarded for this project, specifically for field trips to Gunditjmara in March and September 2018.

The painting *Headwaters*, 2016 (Fig. 11) was completed prior to enrolling in this Master of Fine Art degree. As formed an initial point of inspiration to the enquiry, it is the seminal work of this project. Therefore I have included reference to it in the thesis and in body of creative works.

Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisor Professor Jon Cattapan for his time invested in this research project. His guidance and advice has helped to hone the topic and link my research to a regional context as well as the specifics of my painting practice. Through these ongoing discussions the thesis developed to become far more than originally envisaged.

Thanks to Irene Hanenbergh, my artistic mentor for inspiration, guidance and advice; and the VCA Access program for instigating this mentorship.

I would also like to thank Raafat Ishak for his secondary supervision; Simone Slee, Bernhard Sachs, Tessa Laird and my MFA Cohort for valuable discourse through the development of this thesis.

Thanks to fellow artists: Fiona Lowry and Tim Silver for prompting me to undertake this research degree; Prof. John Walker, N.S. Harsha; Peter Daverington for their valuable one-on-one tutorials.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and ongoing custodians of the country on which I work, the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation; the Gunditjmara people and the Ngarigo people of the high country, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Introduction

I have grown up within a value system of collective nurturing, particularly of the environment we have emerged within. Through visits to national parks to observe and appreciate the difference of a non-urban space, I developed a protective reverence for the ‘natural’ in contrast to my urban dwelling space. This thesis will look at my evolving view of these relationships, the critiques and cultural practice around them. The topic of this research project situates itself around a personal enquiry into the physical and cultural landscape I occupy, and how this interrelation bears out through studio practice.

My thesis, located at the intersection of postcolonial and post-natural framings, interrogates the intersection of a post-digital interpretation of the landscape and a reconsidering of the environment, including its status as cultural artefact. I aim for this contemporary re-thinking to be enacted through painting. When I use the term ‘post-natural’ in this thesis, I do so in terms defined as “The study of the origins, habitats, and evolution of organisms that have been intentionally and heritably altered by humans.”¹

In terms of approaching it through painting, Australian landscape is a moving target, partly in terms of shifting cultural views of it; but also in terms of physical and ecological changes taking place. Painting landscape has had an enduring relationship with this continent, from ancient Indigenous traditions to colonial, modernist and other cultural/philosophical moments.

Australian art has played an important role in environmental activism, and vice-versa. Arthur Streeton’s 1939 painting *Silvan Reservoir and Donna Buang AD 2000*, for example, is a speculative fiction.² It is a future projection of a degraded real landscape subjected to deforestation. Streeton at the time of painting this was a dissenting voice in local politics. Writing a regular column in Melbourne’s *Argus* newspaper, he regularly protested the clear-felling of eastern Victorian forests, and campaigned for their protection.³ This early connection between a conservation movement and painting in Australia forms part of a long line of eco-political images, which also famously includes *Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, 1979* by Peter Dombrovskis,⁴ an iconic image which, used for its sublime beauty in a campaign to protect the Franklin River from a dam project, became a catalyst for major political change in Australia in the 1980s. The relationship between environmental politics and art extended globally. Around the same time that German artist Joseph Beuys co-founded *Die Grünen* (the German Greens Party),⁵

1. “About,” *Center for PostNatural History*, access date 28 March 2017, <http://www.postnatural.org/About>

2. Arthur Streeton, “*Silvan Reservoir and Donna Buang AD 2000*”, 1939 in Arthur Streeton, 1867-1943, Geoffrey Smith (Melbourne: National Gallery of Australia, 1995), painting.

3. Arthur Streeton, “*Ruin In The Ranges*” *Argus*, January 30 1932

4. Peter Dombrovskis, “*Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend*,” in *Journeys into the wild : The Photography of Peter Dombrovskis / Bob Brown*, Bob Brown (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2017), 2, Photograph.

5. “Joseph Beuys hat die Grünen geprägt,” Claudia Roth, *Die Grünen*, January 21, 2011, <https://www.gruene.de/presse/joseph-beuys-hat-die-gruenen-gepraegt.html>

an emergent Australian Green politics was seen as exemplar by Petra Kelly, another founder of the German Greens Party.⁶

The studio practice makes particular reference to terrains in which I have been physically present, that also embody the particular narratives discussed herein. I will be examining these topics largely through the context of Australian visual art. In my research I use the practice of painting as a vessel for ideas – into which narratives are put and transported and the history of painting bears heavily on its content.

In the first chapter I seek to contextualise my practice. I will review key contemporary thought and discourse I have chosen as relevant to this: contemporary Australian Indigenous writer and historian Bruce Pascoe; intersectional feminist writer Kali Myers; contemporary thinkers Slavoj Žižek and Donna Haraway; and artists Gordon Bennett, Joan Ross, Nicholas Mangan, Bea Maddock, and Geoff Lowe. These artists and writers are important markers in the landscape before me. I chose to study these practitioners' works based on the resonance they have had with me and my thinking on these urgent issues.

In order to analyse the subject and explore the themes and issues in my work, my second chapter will seek to answer the central thesis question:

How is the 'idea' of our environment thought of through painting, and how does this relate to the inherently problematic constructs of *nature* and *landscape*?

Within this question I will be examining two specific trains of thought, which are best summarised as attendant questions: What replaces a nature-culture binary in the theoretical foundations with which we view ourselves and our environment? And: can a critical view of the landscape contribute to reconciliation? The word reconciliation is used here as between colonisers and indigenous peoples.

In the third chapter I will discuss the research as it has been led by my practice in the studio. In the form of an exegesis it will look at the works produced, as well as the thought processes, discoveries, revelations and further questions raised in the making of the work. I will also return to the questions posed here, to seek answers in the paintings.

Overall, this research aims to develop a visual framework to explore values of ecological and cultural heritage and to evolve my own artist's position. I aim ultimately to gain visual metaphors for awareness of a more complex relationship with ecology. Underpinned by these textual arguments, the practice-led research will put a case for painting remaining an inherently political act.

6. Stewart Jackson, "The Australian Greens: Between movement and electoral professional party" (Ph.D., University of Sydney, July 2011), 16

1. Literature review: markers in the landscape

The following textual works and artists represent prominent ideas I have chosen in order to contextualise my painting practice, in terms of re-imagining landscape. Examining the works and their relevance to my research, my hope is to reveal specific connections to my practice. Initially, two texts that have crucially motivated me to look further into the marks of Indigenous culture in an Australian cultural and physical landscape are Bruce Pascoe's 2014 book *Dark Emu*⁷ and Kali Meyers' *Colonial Landscapes*⁸ essay. Following those two writers, is an analysis of key contemporary thinkers, Slavoj Žižek and Donna Haraway, who critique old ideas of nature. All three progress the views of the environment beyond a romantic view of nature as Other, to compelling positions which either collapse distinctions, reframe relationships or begin to see entirely new structures emerge. I will then analyse the work of six recent or contemporary artists, as they pertain to the research: Gordon Bennett, the late Australian Indigenous artist and a selection of his politically charged late works with particular reference to landscape; Sydney contemporary artist Joan Ross recycles imagery from colonial paintings and contemporary trash culture, offering up an aesthetic for the anthropocene. Melbourne contemporary artist Nicholas Mangan, whose materiality driven work looks at economies and politics of resource; the late Bea Maddock, whose 1990s work inverts an inland gaze; Geoff Lowe, whose paintings of Tower Hill in the 1980s embody ideas around the 'constructed world' of its cultural landscape.

Bruce Pascoe

Bruce Pascoe is a writer, historian, Aboriginal language researcher and farmer from the Bunurong clan in the Eastern Kulin Nation. He has written several books on Indigenous Australian history. Pascoe's revisionary text, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds, Agriculture or Accident* (2014) peels back the 'Terra Nullius' version of Australia's historical narrative.⁹ It reveals established pre-colonial, continent-wide functioning systems of agriculture, trade, diplomacy and economics. The extent to which the continent was socially organised is argued to be deliberately played-down in Australia's historical narrative and education. Pascoe confronts the subtleties in language employed to perpetuate an ongoing notion of 'Terra Nullius'.

In challenging these colonial misconceptions about Aboriginal culture on the Australian continent, *Dark Emu* does much toward decolonising the national historical narrative. In exposing the colonial rejection of a history of agriculture, it raises arguments of nature versus culture in terms specific to notions of 'Australian wilderness'. As such, an important aspect of *Dark Emu* to this research is its location at the intersection of postcolonial and *post-natural* narratives. With this book a much longer narrative arc of Australian history is asserted and possible future pathways for the continent are floated. Bruce Pascoe leaves open positive visions for the future, based on traditional Aboriginal philosophical views of the land. Pascoe outlines these possible lessons in negotiating future

7. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014)

8. Myers, Kali. "Colonial Landscapes: From Historical Trauma to Mythic History," *Melbourne Historical Journal* Vol 41, No 1 (2013): 45-64.

9. Ibid

changes in our environment.¹⁰ They also require a rearrangement of chairs in the mind with regards to western constructs of traditional land ownership and use.

Within *Dark Emu*, Pascoe uses the Budj Bim eel traps of Gunditjmara country as one of many illustrations of this vast interweaving culturally formed terrain. The eel traps have been instrumental in revising the eurocentric blind-spot to the civilisation and the culture that existed prior to colonisation.¹¹ This has drawn me to explore Gunditjmara country and surrounds, including Koroit Gundidj area which includes the extinct volcanic crater known as Tower Hill.

Pascoe's work has been of particular importance in thinking through my works based on Tower Hill (for example *Tower Hill token*, 2018, Fig. 10) and of subverting notions of wilderness in the Kosciuszko works (for example *Cadaver II*, 2018).

Kali Myers

Kali Myers is an Australian intersectional feminist writer of essays and fiction.¹² Myers' work has appeared in *The Monthly*, *Overland*, *Transportation Press* and a number of scholarly publications

If *Dark Emu* uncovers overlooked cultural practice and marks upon the land, Kali Myers' 2013 essay *Colonial Landscapes: from Historical Trauma to Mythic History 1850 – 2013* discusses a parallel omission of Indigenous culture from mainstream Australian culture.¹³

In *Colonial Landscapes* Myers puts forward that the colonial policy of 'Terra Nullius' effected a long-lasting framing of mainstream Australian art to the exclusion of Aboriginal art, leading to an overlooking of Indigenous culture within self-conscious euro-centric Australian art circles.

This essay presents a case for greater inclusion of Indigenous culture in mainstream Australian culture, and points to a long and continuing history of widespread institutional dismissal of Australian Indigenous art. Myers frames an ongoing colonial dominance as a kind of cultural hegemony, exerting control over the landscape, and locates this throughout institutions across the arts in the academic, commercial and media fields, and on to the political institutions.

This text testifies the importance of bringing Indigenous art practices to the centre of Australian art discourse. It demonstrates their critical importance in considering the land through art. Myers suggests a way beyond this hegemony as destabilising the unequal relationships but viewing the overlapping, entangled cultures as the field for research thinking.

10. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014) 149

11. McNiven, Ian J. 2017, "The detective work behind the Budj Bim eel traps World Heritage bid" *The Conversation*, accessed June 6, 2018 <http://theconversation.com/the-detective-work-behind-the-budj-bim-eel-traps-world-heritage-bid-71800>

12. Kali Myers @pickwickian36 twitter profile, <https://twitter.com/pickwickian36> . Accessed October 26, 2018

13. Myers, Kali. 2013. "Colonial Landscapes: From Historical Trauma to Mythic History," *Melbourne Historical Journal* Vol 41 (1): 45-64.

Slavoj Žižek

Slavoj Žižek is a contemporary philosopher, working across many subjects including political theory, film criticism, psychoanalysis, Marxism and theology.

In this book, *Looking Awry*, Žižek analyses the work of philosopher Jacques Lacan, illustrating examples of how his ‘high-brow’ philosophical ideas, can be read when seen ‘awry’ through ‘low-brow’ popular culture examples.¹⁴ Arguments put forth by Žižek in this book also support a fundamental reorganisation of thought around the environmental crisis.¹⁵

In a section of *Looking Awry* entitled *Nature Does Not Exist*, Žižek provides an illustration of Lacan’s work, focussing on three main approaches to the real as described by Lacan. He applies these three approaches people have to the reality of the current environmental crisis, which he admits is a radical crisis: ‘What is at stake is our most unquestionable presuppositions, the very horizon of our meaning, our everyday understanding of ‘nature’ as a regular, rhythmic process.’¹⁶ The three approaches are: firstly, the predominant reaction of: ‘I know very well, but just the same... [I am] not really prepared to integrate it into my symbolic universe’; secondly, the obsessional, feverishly working all the time so that it does not come to light that ‘the Other [nature] does not exist’; and thirdly a response that this is some divine punishment for our treatment of ‘nature as a stack of disposable objects and materials, not as a partner in dialogue or the foundation of our being.’

Therefore, according to Žižek, a *Lacanian* approach to the ecological crisis would be ‘Simply that we must learn to accept the real of the ecological crisis in its senseless actuality, without charging it with some message or meaning.’¹⁷ It is helpful in removing a higher order or divine retribution from the narrative, and remaining focussed on confronting that this crisis is the result of our actions helps to place us in the picture.

Confronting the real, he points to the ‘fissure’ in an image which can become apparent or even erupt allowing an ‘awry look’ into the real. The fissure referred to can be in the punctum of the image, the foreground tear which occurs, for which Žižek provides an example in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*,¹⁸ when an aerial view suddenly reveals itself to literally be a bird’s-eye-view as the birds enter the frame in close-up.

In a 2016 lecture Žižek refers to ‘Spaceship-Earth’ (a phrase dating back at least to social theorist and economist Henry George in 1879¹⁹) in contending that ‘we can no longer accept the side effects of consuming resources as collateral damage to our environment.’²⁰ He argues the necessity of a fundamentally new way of relating to our environment, a permanent state of negotiation with the environment as a collaborative commons. This he links to gift giving in ancient societies. It bears some parallels to Australian Indigenous societies’

14. Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1991)

15. Ibid: 31-35

16. Ibid: 31.4.6

17. Ibid: 32.3.1

18. Hitchcock, Alfred, dir. 1963. *The Birds*. Film. Universal Pictures, Alfred Hitchcock Productions.

19. George, Henry. *Progress and Poverty*[2] (1879). From book IV, chapter 2:173

20. “Is there a post-human god?,” March 2, 2016, *Slavoj Žižek – Collected Recordings*, Lecture at UCLA, Los Angeles, podcast audio, 11:36, <http://zizekpodcast.com/2017/03/18/ziz158-is-there-a-post-human-god-02-03-2017/>

trade systems and to organization of territory and resources, as explored by Bruce Pascoe. However, Žižek postulates an economic accounting of the entirety of nature as total commodification, and so argues for the collaborative commons view of the environment.²¹ I aim to depict this idea of total commodification or accountancy in the critical representation of terrain sliced off from its environment, and its reconstruction along data-constructed networks and nodes.

Donna Haraway

Žižek's sentiments build a case for collapsing distinctions which lead to distance between ourselves and our environment. Donna Haraway is a thinker who calls explicitly for such collapses.

Donna Haraway is a contemporary academic and writer of many important texts on the subjects of feminism, technology and ecofeminism. In 1985, Haraway authored the text *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century*,²² crucial in dissecting notions of nature-culture binaries.

In Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*²³ nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for the appropriation or incorporation by the Other. The 'Cyborg', rather than insisting upon 'identifying', as it has no identity, creates coalitions based upon 'affinity'.²⁴

In *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway holds that boundaries between human, animal, machine and the non physical are all either 'thoroughly breached', 'leaky' or 'very imprecise'.²⁵ It is an underpinning idea of the manifesto that by doing away with the separation implied in these categories/identities, we can eliminate a harmful distance, enabling an affinity within the relationship.

The binary of human and non-human animal has been popularly debunked in scientific communities at least since Darwin's theories of evolution rose to prominence, as evolutionary theory has, as Haraway puts it '...reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle'.²⁶

On the boundary between human and machine, Haraway points out that 'Intense pleasure in skill, *machine skill*, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment.' It is in this embodiment and even celebration of the attributes of machines that fields of study such as biomechanics are applied, for example to athletes to achieve better performance: 'The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment.'²⁷ As mentioned further in Chapter 3, pp. 35-36, aspects of such *machine skill* were investigated in the making of *Raft*, 2018, as well investigations into these modes in the drawings enacting a machine-plotted approach to drawing reflected in low-res polygon geometries, such as *Mount Digital drawing*, 2018, also mentioned in Chapter 3, p. 30.

21. Ibid: @ 10:40

22. Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: 2000), 291-324

23. Ibid: 295

24. Ibid: 295

25. Ibid: 293-294

26. Ibid: 293

27. Ibid: 315

The third collapsing binary is between the physical and the non-physical. Since the manifesto was first published in 1985, the ubiquity of software, social networks, apps, information warfare, virtual reality, of the non-physical in all these new forms has emerged. That Haraway's 'Cyborgs are ether, quintessence'²⁸ forecasts AI, but it also points to the non-tangible digitised landscape and experience.

The collapsing of these distinctions is evident in Taranaki which I will discuss further in this thesis. Taranaki has been granted a status under New Zealand law²⁹ referred to as environmental personhood. This legal construct, while bearing similarities to corporate law,³⁰ has philosophical roots in Māori culture as evident in the Māori saying from Whanganui: 'Ko au te awa. Ko te awa ko au' (I am the river. The river is me).³¹

As a possible pathway of reconciliation between humanity and its environment, Haraway puts forth a doing away of fear 'of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.'³² Through this deep shift in the possibilities of being, I have found it possible to view landscape from a more empathic standpoint and critically explore the edges of old boundaries.

Gordon Bennett

Gordon Bennett's perspective and the urgency of his political stance is witness to an incredibly binary-led prevailing atmosphere. However, Bennett's critique of the colonial space looks beyond romantic ideals of the Other – self dichotomy, to focus on the violence of demarcation, problematics of territory, anthropology and ethnography. In this space, Bennett takes an enmeshed view of the Australian space, a non-binary narrative. According to Ian Mclean he is '...mainly concerned to picture the structure of (post)colonial conspiracies: which is that nothing escapes the other'.³³

Bennett draws on a large pictorial vocabulary in his work, weaving together distinct visual languages. The visceral swirls representing desert terrain in *Triptych: Requiem, Of Grandeur, Empire*, 1989 (Fig. 1), are the painterly rendering of a photograph of dissected bowels;³⁴ the dots and symbols refer to western desert paintings. A visual phrase he often returned to was the perspective grid device, used in *Triptych: Requiem, Of Grandeur, Empire*, 1989 (Fig. 1) representing the western cultural canon. In a 2001 exhibition at Sherman Galleries, *Notes to Basquiat: Modern Art*.³⁵ Adding layers to this language, as Ian Mclean wrote in a 2001 catalogue essay, Bennett '...tilts the frame of Pollock's

28. Ibid: 294

29. "Te Urewera Act 2014" *New Zealand Legislation*, last modified October 19, 2018, <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2014/0051/latest/DLM6183705.html>

30. Gwendolyn J. Gordon, "Environmental Personhood" *Columbia Journal of Environmental Law* 43, 1 (2018) 51-52

31. Young, David, "Whanganui tribes," TeAra, accessed 17 Aug 2018, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/whanganui-tribes/print>

32. Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: 2000), 295

33. Ian Mclean, "Conspiracy Theory: Pollock, Basquiat, Bennett," Sherman Galleries Goodhope, accessed 4 October 2018 http://www.shermangalleries.com.au/artists_exhib/artists/bennett2/essay.html

34. Ian Mclean and Gordon Bennett, *The Art of Gordon Bennett* (Roseville East: Craftsman House, 1996) 93

35. *Notes to Basquiat: Modern Art*, (Exhibition) 17 May - 9 June 2001, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney

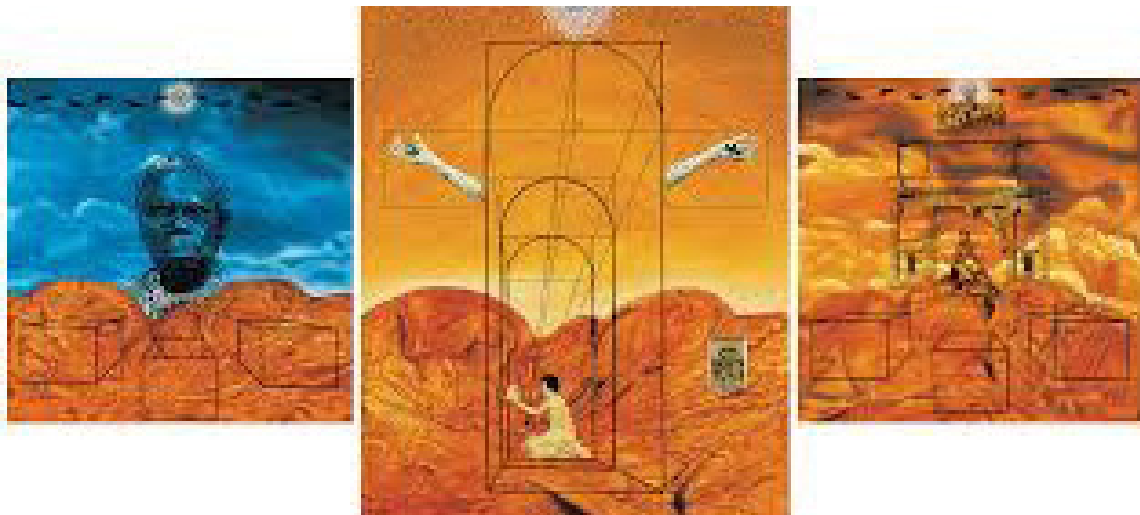


Figure 1 Gordon Bennett *Triptych: Requiem, Of Grandeur, Empire*, 1989, Oil on canvas

painting so that it simultaneously maps a perspectival space'.³⁶ Bennett depicts Jackson Pollock performing his drip paintings within a number of his paintings. Pollock, according to Ian Mclean 'is a way of bringing Basquiat home to Australia'.³⁷ The poignance of this is the historic purchase of *Blue Poles*, 1952, emblematic of the Gough Whitlam years of progressive Australian government, and perhaps Bennett's reminder in real time in 2000 (during the Howard years) of Whitlam's enduring progressive political zeitgeist.³⁸ Throughout his work Gordon Bennett weaves threads of specific political narratives. While leaving room for poetic reading, the reference is specific and located.

Bennett's 1992 *History Painting (excuse my language)*, was quoted in the Imants Tillers' painting *Izkliede*, 1994.³⁹ In Tillers' quotation of this painting, perhaps its most striking element was coldly overlooked. In Bennett's painting, the weltd skin implied in the raised cuts that form the letters are a visceral element which immediately evokes empathy for the victim and gives it urgency as a painting and language, beyond surface typographics.

Bennett has inspired me to work with landscape as a politically charged space, to build complex and open narratives. He inspires methods of assembling these narratives through creating and using his own expansive visual vocabulary.

36. Ian Mclean, "Conspiracy Theory: Pollock, Basquiat, Bennett," Sherman Galleries Goodhope, accessed 4 October 2018 http://www.shermangalleries.com.au/artists_exhib/artists/bennett2/essay.html

37. Ibid

38. Ibid

39. Imants Tillers. *Izkliede*, 1994, gouache, synthetic polymer paint, 292 canvas boards, nos. 39840 - 40805, 302.8 x 914.4cm, from the Gene and Brian Sherman Collection <https://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/TILLERS/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=3> accessed 6 June 2018

Joan Ross

The open ended work of Joan Ross is loaded with complex political statements. Ross is an artist engaged in confronting privilege and postcolonial context through painting-related forms. She does this by subverting romantic paintings from early colonial Australia. The intended romanticism within the John Glover paintings which she appropriates, for example, enables this subversion. They act as markers of a romantic narrative that went off the rails. Ross does this by collaging scenes and selectively inserting a range of disruptive devices: unsettling high-vis colours; collage and rearrangement; animation of selected elements, sound samples; and an ongoing use of other material signifiers. The high-vis colours Ross employs are key: ambiguously, signifiers of either contemporary uniforms of authority or industry, or both: they bring to mind both authority of police uniforms and a contemporised working class uniform. More broadly these are colours of the construction industry, of infrastructure and an OH&S aesthetic, a colour palette for the anthropocene. In her work, these colours trash up, slice up, and puncture the view of the sublime landscape, which in Ross' work is itself pointedly revealed to be a construct.



Figure 2 Joan Ross, *All You Can Eat Seafood Buffet i, ii & iii*, 2017

Joan Ross' work is an example of an Australian contemporary art practice that approaches issues of colonialism in Australia from a non-Indigenous perspective. It also refers to the post-natural in an Australian context; particularly in terms of environmental exploitation and discord. Ross works with what appears to be careful pictorial quotation, assembled and coloured to produce an eclectic and kitsch, yet paradoxically, harmonious range of artefacts, images and videos. In the exhibition *20-50% off all plants & animals*, 2015,⁴⁰ Ross has directly politicised her representation of landscape. From that exhibition, the video *The Claiming of Things*⁴¹ uses as a backdrop the John Glover painting: *The Bath of Diana, Van Diemen's Land*, 1837. Accompanied by an audio track of Australian bird noises, Ross animates the image, using elements from the painting itself and introduced elements. It is a narrative of a paradise trashed by a gradual colonisation of the stage. Beginning with a Christo and Jeanne Claude drape added by a colonial depiction of a Gadigal local under a watchful CCTV eye. Following, various hi-vis elements intrude a picket fence; a couple with spray cans; a synthetic elevator music track plays as a graffiti piece spelling 'Bank\$ia' is added to a

40. Joan Ross, *20-50% off all plants & animals*, 2015. (exhibition) Video, Digital prints, Mixed Media, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, accessed April 10 2017 <http://joanross.com.au/20-50-off-all-plants-and-animals>

41. Joan Ross, *The Claiming of things*, 2012, Single Channel, HD video animation, 7min 36sec, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne.

boulder; dogs bark; ringtones and sirens sound; bulldozers push piles of lurid artefacts and signifiers into the water. Paradise looks and sounds trashed. When the rain falls the inevitable floods come. The narrative is familiar and feels almost expected. However it is not the narrative arc at stake here. An attraction and repulsion acts in the landscape, where both the original Glover depiction and the visual clutter serve to repel, and yet there is an unlikely attraction within the images. Ross inverts the hopes and desire of Australian colonial ideals. Suggestions of an emergent hi-vis anthropocene within this work alone place it close to my research, and demonstrate an approach to these topics in Australian contemporary painting.

In her expansive *All You Can Eat Seafood Buffet i, ii & iii*, 2017 (Fig. 2), Ross remixes Joseph Fowles' c1845 engravings, to create a panoramic view of Sydney, in which she floods the harbour with her fluorescent toxic green/yellow. The land is frozen into morbid, cold greys, and gives the sky a synthetic digital smog. The flattened field of high-vis colour, when viewed in relation to her other work broadly signifies a glut of construction, consumption and 'jobs and growth', and the paradoxical void which is the consequence of these⁴². The figures in the foreshore are grouped separately as Gadigal people, going about preparing and cooking around a central midden; and the colony dwellers standing, staring helplessly to the inbound supplies on the boats.

Ross constructs a perspective of the coloniser and the colonised, and kind of alien to both. The disrupted colonial gaze is achieved here through a patched together twenty first century digital collage with colonial depictions as an aesthetic for the anthropocene. This particular aspect of reinterpreting, not unlike Bruce Pascoe's method of re-reading colonial records, informs my approach and manifests in my work through recycling of troubled narratives and images to reveal revised outcomes.

42. "All You Can Eat Seafood Buffet i, ii & iii," Michael Reid, accessed June 6 2018, <https://michaelreid.com.au/art/can-eat-seafood-buffet-ii-iii/>

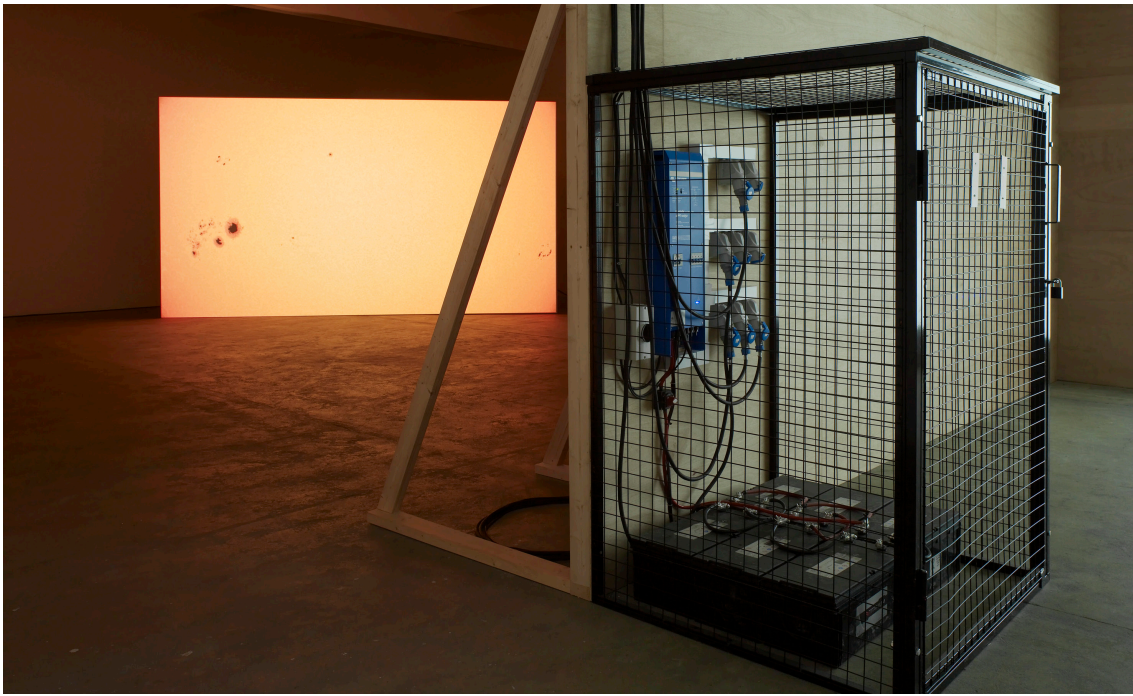


Figure 3 Installation view at Chinsenhale Gallery of Nicholas Mangan's, *Ancient Lights*, 2015

Nicholas Mangan

The work of Melbourne artist Nicholas Mangan is relevant on a number of different levels to this research, particularly its engagement with issues of human production, resource extraction, and the human relationship to the environment implied through these. Mangan investigates the histories of particular 'contested sites and objects'⁴³ which place recent events within an echo of larger histories, and localised sites with relevance to larger narratives. Of particular interest is what is revealed around complex relationships humans have with our environment. His 2018 exhibition *Termite Economies*⁴⁴ has, in the narratives it builds, a destabilising effect on the Western traditional binary relationship between nature and culture.

Limits To Growth, 2016-2017 was an exhibition by Nicholas Mangan and supported by a number of institutions (MUMA in Melbourne; KW Berlin; and IMA in Brisbane). My reflections here are based on documentation of the work as well as interviews and essays by the artist and others in relation to the exhibition.

In its engagement with issues of a geopolitics of resource and production, postcolonialism and geology, it speaks to a wider field of anthropocene, landscape and power. Mangan's work in *Limits to Growth* relates to thoughts around economics of planetary resources addressed by Slavoj Žižek.⁴⁵ From both Žižek and Mangan, in these cases the idea of closed systems of value and resource are expressed, indeed literally denying the existence of a sublime and endless horizon or limitless wilderness. In *Limits To Growth*, resources

43. Nicholas Mangan, "Information and news" Nicholas Mangan, accessed 15 Aug 2018, <http://www.nicholasmangan.com/>

44. Mangan Nicholas, *Termite Economies* Exhibition August 4 2018 (exhibition) at Sutton Galleries, Melbourne

45. "Is there a post-human god?," March 2, 2016, *Slavoj Žižek – Collected Recordings*, Lecture at UCLA, Los Angeles, podcast audio, 11:36, <http://zizekpodcast.com/2017/03/18/ziz158-is-there-a-post-human-god-02-03-2017/>

Mangan uses as his medium (solar, coconut diesel, bitcoin) are either illustration of or testament to the limitation referred to in the title. Similarly, cultural and anecdotal resources are set into another self referential loop, as Mangan says: 'I work with the artefacts that result from the historical account or the anecdote in question—be that images, video footage, or physical matter that is somehow imbued with a resonance of the specific event'.⁴⁶ Within my own research, for example the Tower Hill works, I respond to a location in place and history with a similar methodology, seeing artefacts as both geographic and cultural.

Limits To Growth is a political action, as revealed in the specific portrayal of certain narratives and artefacts. The case has been put that in this work, the 'culpability' for climate catastrophe lays at the feet of 'capital, together with the behaviour of an elite minority...'⁴⁷ The work successfully teases out a universal inquiry, rather than direct judgment, allowing the objects and terrain to precipitate the work's own narrative.⁴⁸ In dealing with this story, Mangan is able to deliver a political reading, yet manages to rise above an immediate judgemental stance in favour of placing artmaking within a geological timescale.

In the book *Limits To Growth* published to accompany the exhibition, Helen Hughes' essay *Means of Production*⁴⁹ contextualises *Progress In Action* in the history of film-theory and talks about film becoming the defining medium for representing time, 'the exemplar of temporal irreversibility...'.⁵⁰ In this thesis I seek to argue that similarly, satellite generated digital mapping are an emergent 'defining' experience of place and environment.

The themes of resource and production present in this work speak of both the anthropocene and colonial exploitation. The Bitcoin generating resources used to print work, while a solar powered projection of the sun into a darkened room, poetically illustrates Žižek's environmental 'total commodification'.⁵¹ In the words of New Zealand writer Emil McEvoy, it becomes 'a poetics of late capitalism'.⁵²

A considered materiality employed by Mangan to convey political and historical complexities is at the center of my interest in *Limits to Growth*. They bear a connection to my studio work through material references such as industrial cement sheeting as a painting surface, flaked remnants of a Berlin studio wall embedded in the linen of *Headwaters*, 2018 (Fig. 11), or using low-poly 3d data from available mapping resource to render *Tower Hill token*, 2018 (Fig. 10). The work of Mangan I have examined here is an model for re-interpreting landscape as environment. The multiple modes of representation is revelatory, and confirms the inherent narrative value embedded in material or objects. It also reveals future pathways to explore ideas crucial to the environment, resource and energy.

46. Nicholas Mangan in a catalogue Essay
(Limits to Growth KW Institute For Contemporary Art Berlin 2 June – 13 August 17)
accessed August 8, 2018, https://www.kw-berlin.de/files/KW_2017_Nicholas_Mangan_EN.pdf

47. Max Andrews, <https://frieze.com/article/landscape-artist> (accessed 5 June 2018)

48. Ibid

49. Hughes, Helen. "Means of Production" in
Limits to Growth / Nauru: Notes from a Cretaceous World (2009-10), ed., Nicholas Mangan,
(Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016)

50. Ibid: 51-60.

51. Ibid: Žižek @ 11:36

52. Emil McEvoy "Pay Dirt" EyeContact January 17, 2018 <http://eyecontactsite.com/2018/01/pay-dirt>

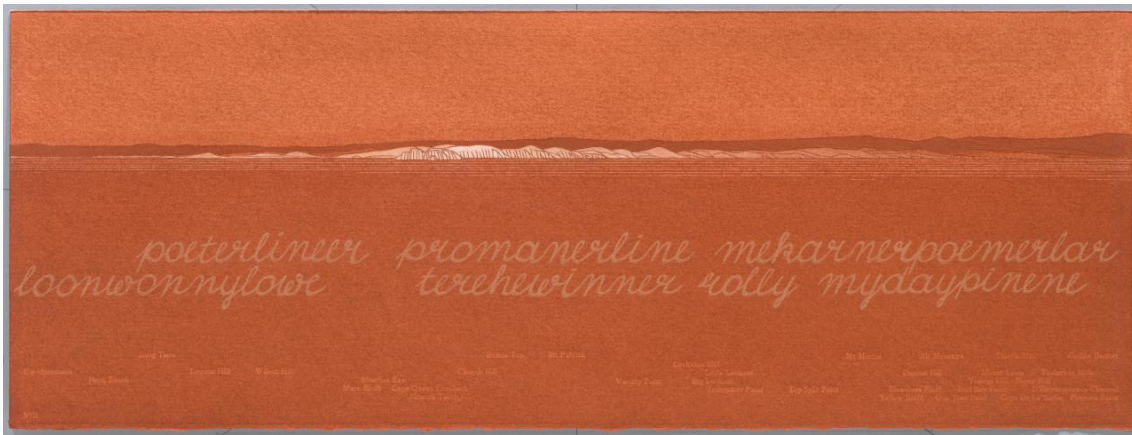


Figure 4 A sheet from Bea Maddock's *Terra Spiritus ... With A Darker Shade Of Pale*, 1993-98

Bea Maddock

The late work of Bea Maddock has explored a shift within more traditional visual paradigms. Undertaking a viewing of the landscape through adjusting her perspective, her well known *Terra Spiritus... with a darker shade of pale*, 1993-98 (Fig. 4) is a linked 51 sheet circumlittorial panorama depiction of the entire Tasmanian coastline,⁵³ as viewed towards the inland from out on the sea. Maddock has mapped of the edges in order to view the land implicitly from a colonial perspective. At first glance it appears as the loaded perspective from beyond the shoreline as an early European maritime outsider would have viewed the land. A twist to this may be that her original inspiration for the work occurred when viewing the coastline at the end of a journey by boat not from Europe, or even the Australian continent, but approaching from the Antarctic, in the process of returning home. The overlay of cursive script infuses it with a coloniser lens, yet feels more empathic, and this could be explained by a number of factors. Her 'act of homage'⁵⁴ in the use of ochre and white pigments to build the image or the Indigenous and colonial languages intersecting, drawing an empathic attention to what Irena Zdanowicz calls 'Confronting the coloniser's side of Terra Nullius, with the presence of Aboriginal spirituality'.⁵⁵ Unlike the seafaring outsiders, circling their Terra Nullius, Maddock imagined the vista in the hues and minerals of the women who lived upon it, and whispers in the ghostly white pigment Aboriginal language names mingled with the colonially asserted names.⁵⁶ This treatment of the view represents the overlapping entangled spaces of indigenous and non-indigenous culture espoused by Kali Myers.⁵⁷ In a 2003 essay, Patrick McCaughey concludes: 'In the manner of those artists who accompanied the early maritime explorers of Australia, the work minutely describes the coastline of Maddock's native Tasmania. But this is no longer simply the mapping of bays and inlets, promontories and hills. The land is not terra nullius. Behind this low-lying coast lies a land of contested histories that have followed the European colonization of Australia'.⁵⁸

53. Zdanowicz, Irena, "Geography with a Purpose Bea Maddock's 'Terra Spiritus'" *Print Quarterly* 28, 4 (London: Print Quarterly, 2011): 471-477

54. Ibid: 473.4.6

55. Ibid: 477.1.1 - Footnoted as: 10. D. Thomas, op. cit., p.

56. Alisa Bunbury "Terra Spiritus... with a darker shade of pale 1999," National Gallery of Victoria, accessed October 4, 2018, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/bea-maddock-terra-spiritus-with-a-darker-shade-of-pale-1993-98/>

57. Myers, Kali. 2013. "Colonial Landscapes: From Historical Trauma to Mythic History," *Melbourne Historical Journal* Vol 41 (1): 45-64.

58. McCaughey, Patrick 2003. *Federation Square & Mapplethorpe*. Best Australian Essays (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003): 181

In spite of the inferred colonial perspective looking in on the land from out at sea, as a detached Other, another narrative is hidden in plain sight. As these views gaze inwards at measured intervals, the radial axes along which these intervals are determined originate inland, from the center of the island. Similarly the 51 sheets, when installed, practically encircles a whole gallery room forcing the viewer to look outward at an inward-looking depiction. As Irena Zdanowicz put it in her 2011 Print Quarterly essay 'Her calculations emerged from inland, that is, from Aboriginal territory, as if looking out to sea, yet the actual depiction mimics the coastal profiles of traditional European hydrography which were made at sea looking towards the land'⁵⁹. In this way Maddock's *Terra Spiritus* represents a two-way perspective. It is a contemporary, layered view of a contested territory. It inverts the colonial gaze, and does so through a precise and premeditated ritual positioning of the viewpoint.



Figure 5 Geoff Lowe, *Untitled*, 1986, synthetic polymer paint on canvas 200 x 100cm

Geoff Lowe

Geoff Lowe is a multidisciplinary artist and painter who has spent considerable time dealing with the topic and site of Tower Hill in Western Victoria. During the 1980s and 90s Tower Hill attracted a lot of attention in the Australian and particularly the Melbourne art scene, notably for its value as a site for postmodernist thought. The postmodernist idea that the copy is more important than the original, is particularly problematic in relation to this, the Koroit Gunditj clan's historic home for thousands of years before they were all but wiped out in the nearby *Convincing Ground* massacre in the 1830s.⁶⁰

However it is particularly the work around Tower Hill that has provided a relevant perspective. Lowe paid particular attention to this terrain during the 1980-90s. The violent colonial history around Tower Hill as well as its more recent history aligns with the topics of this thesis, even more so for the fact of it having attracted so much attention of painters. Eugene von Guérard's *Tower Hill*, 1855⁶¹ is a

59. Ibid: 476.2.14

60. Bruce Pascoe, *Convincing Ground* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007)

61. Eugene von Guérard *Tower Hill*, 1855 oil on canvas 68.6 x 122.0 cm

Warrnambool Art Gallery, Victoria, accessed October 4, 2018,

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/eugene-von-guerard-nature-revealed/3/>

picturesque romantically wooded Edenesque vista and was used as template for its late 20th century re-styling. It was therefore seen as a glaring example of a postmodernist space, and so drew much attention from artists such as Lowe in the 1980s.

In the work of Lowe, Tower Hill often becomes a stage set background to myths and legends, or the ambiguous form onto which a history is suggested. This is the case in the painting, *Untitled*, 1986 (Fig. 5),⁶² where Tower Hill is flanked on the left by Buckley, from Lowe's earlier painting *Buckley's chance* from the series *Ten famous feelings for men*, 1984, with the figure representing a colonial portrait of an Aborigine from *Impersonation*, 1983 from the same series, on the right.⁶³ Large and centre-stage is a pair of ambiguously painted figures either painted onto or framed by a dark backdrop within the image, one seated and the other standing in an ambiguous interaction. Another figure in the sky, possibly a heavenly figure or angel cropped out and awesomely floating amongst the clouds, Bourke or Wills looming up from over the distant western horizon, a ship on the left hand (Seaward) side full steam along the horizon line, and two small figures in a battle who embrace in the foreground, chaotically echo the large, central, more passive pair. It is a colonial theatrical stage, set amongst what we know is a reconstructed landscape crowded with colonial motifs; the stage is constructed with all this artifice of nobility yet the colonial violence continues in real life and present tense.

62. Geoff Lowe *Untitled*, 1986. synthetic polymer paint on canvas 200 x 100cm Private collection, Melbourne p77 Based on a true story: Geoff Lowe 1972-92 and A Constructed World 1993-2012

63. Geoff Lowe, *Ten famous feelings for men, and, Tower Hill / Geoff Lowe* (South Yarra, Vic. : Powell Street Gallery and Geoff Lowe, 1985)

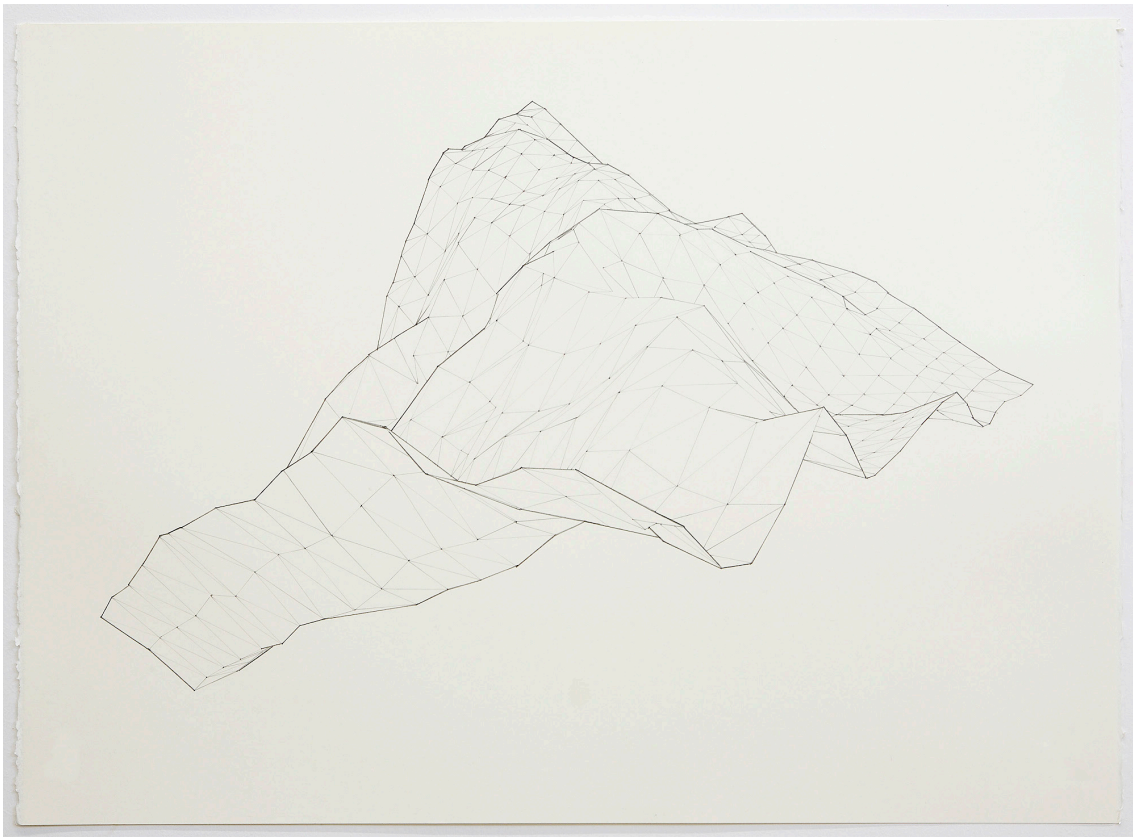


Figure 6 Piers Greville, *Mount Digital drawing 2018*, pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac

2. Dissolving nature

The artists and thinkers I have examined in the first chapter are my chosen markers in the specific intersection that this thesis occupies. They form a focussed context for discussing the questions examined here in the second chapter. I aim for these questions to inform and underpin the issues in my work, the central thesis question: How is the ‘idea’ of our environment thought of through painting, and how does this relate to the inherently problematic constructs of *nature* and *landscape*?

My stance on this question has developed through researching both text and visual material, but also in practice and through writing. The environment can be thought of through a revised cultural lens, akin to Haraway’s position which eliminates constructed distances caused by an Othering view of the environment. Disrupting the colonial gaze can also contribute to an atmosphere of Indigenous reconciliation, through an acknowledgement and embrace of traditional Indigenous cultural values and resulting in empathic treatment of our environmental space. Models for this treatment have been described as a ‘collaborative commons’ by Žižek⁶⁴ and as ‘jigsawed mutualism’ by Pascoe.⁶⁵ The urgency for forward-looking narratives around landscape is driven by the advancing omnipresence

64. “Is there a post-human god?,” March 2, 2016, *Slavoj Žižek – Collected Recordings*, Lecture at UCLA, Los Angeles, podcast audio, 11:30, <http://zizekpodcast.com/2017/03/18/ziz158-is-there-a-post-human-god-02-03-2017/>

65. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014): 138



Figure 7 Piers Greville, *Taranaki Drawing II*, 2018, watercolour and road marking paint on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

of human technology into our atmosphere and across the surface, encasing our planet in a lattice of information. A convergence of ideas seen through this thesis and the related studio research is the idea that maps, particularly satellite digital mapping, are an emergent exemplar of the way we see place and environment.

I am of course a painter, so it should be understood that in part my argument is delivered through a set of creative works, which attend to the central question. But I'm going to tease out the central question here, through the two attendant questions that I established in the introduction: What replaces a nature-culture binary in theoretical foundations of the way we treat and view ourselves and our environment? And: Can a critical view of the landscape contribute to reconciliation?

Replacing a binary

What replaces a nature-culture binary in theoretical foundations of the way we treat and view ourselves and our environment? When asking this question, I am aware that there is nothing that is purely artificial, and arguably, nothing fits established definitions of being natural either. I see the historical practice of clinging to these futile constructs as an attempt to control and dominate, imposing a flimsy hierarchical order on things.

As glaciers recede and rivers dry up, their reality is rapidly being replaced by the rise of new and strange urban geographies the likes of Urban Heat Islands (UHIs) which are 'considered as one of the major problems in the 21st century posed to human beings' or London's

150 ton Whitechapel Fatberg,⁶⁶ just one of the many bizarre tales of the Anthropocene. Moreover, the invention of genetic editing system, *Crispr-Cas9* allows a level of biological intervention altering not just an immediate organism or person, but also their hereditary into the future. According to excerpts of his posthumous book *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*, 2018⁶⁷ the late Stephen Hawking predicts this will have profound impact on humanity:

*‘Once such superhumans appear, there will be significant political problems with unimproved humans, who won’t be able to compete... Presumably, they will die out, or become unimportant. Instead, there will be a race of self-designing beings who are improving at an ever-increasing rate.’*⁶⁸

That this prediction ultimately leads to a future era of super humans with consequences of rapid accelerated evolution, to put it mildly: we live in fascinating times. As the planet approaches exponential change due to human growth, the urgency of the resultant discourse is causing a paradigm shift. Marked in anthropogenic global warming and factors such as artificial intelligence, these fundamental shifts in the physical world due to human agency, but also signal fundamental shifts in the way the environment is *seen*. Aligning with this way of thinking, and in response to this question, I draw on common threads between three contemporary thinkers: Slavoj Žižek argues for an urgent and fundamental shift in our view of the environment to a permanent state of negotiation with our environment as ‘collaborative commons’.⁶⁹ The opinions Žižek cites suggest that the collaborative commons are far from a form of communism, more a ‘communalism’.⁷⁰ He argues that it is in fact closer to a pure capitalism, through the ethic of diligently assigning a value to every thing. In a practical sense it is similar to Bruce Pascoe’s assertion of the collaborative commons being rooted in history across Australia. This, Pascoe argues was based in lore in traditional societies’ estate management approach to agriculture, sharing and nurturing ecologies to sustain life.⁷¹ Pascoe shows the practice and philosophy of collaborative commons was strictly built upon values of generational continuance, not just for the immediate family but that ‘...clans were cooperating to prepare large areas of land for production... [with] a concern for people they might never meet, and a respect for the prey species embedded in the spiritual and cultural fibre’.⁷² It is a collaborative order that goes beyond mercenary advantage, family or even species boundaries. In this case, people belong to and toil for country, not the reverse.

66. “‘Monster’ fatberg found blocking east London sewer” BBC news September 12, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-41238272>

67. Sarah Marsh “Essays reveal Stephen Hawking predicted race of ‘superhumans’” The Guardian, October 14, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/oct/14/stephen-hawking-predicted-new-race-of-superhumans-essays-reveal>

68. Ibid

69. “Is there a post-human god?,” March 2, 2016, *Slavoj Žižek – Collected Recordings*, Lecture at UCLA, Los Angeles, podcast audio, 11:36, <http://zizekpodcast.com/2017/03/18/ziz158-is-there-a-post-human-god-02-03-2017/>

70. Ibid

71. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014)

72. Ibid

Žižek discusses the problematics of viewing the environment as resource, but explores a 'crazy' hypothetical 'total commodification' where global resources are entirely accounted for in economic terms.⁷³

A *Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway dissolves boundaries and reconfigures relationships between human; non-human organism; machine; non-physical entity.⁷⁴ An incremental technological encroachment into micro-biological 'inner space' of organisms including human, deepens this concern beyond the geological term 'Anthropocene', to include 'Post-Humanism', 'Transhumanism' and the 'Post-Natural'. To address the question on what replaces the binary, it seems that the emergent relationship is possibly an enmeshed, tangled thicket, as complex as the entities themselves. Inextricable from each other, the entities are the environment and vice-versa, not so much resembling a continuum, but as existentially codependent.

Australian Indigenous history reveals this continent as a human project over millenia with fire farming, other traditions and projects having reshaped the continent's topography, climate and ecologies, as discussed in Tim Flannery's 1994 book, *The Future Eaters*.⁷⁵ This knowledge of the human hand on the landscape helps to reframe what Australian landscape is, and is in step with broader global philosophical shifts. The paradigm shift from a view of nature existing as a separate entity, to a state of inclusive human agency within a continuum of physical systems, renders the 'anthro' in the anthropocene problematic. Paradoxically it is in itself an anthropocentric term. To continue the loop, it seems that it is the changing environment due to human activity itself that has catalysed the evolution of intellectual viewpoints.

Despite this eliminated distance, a subjective human relationship to our environment is useful in recognising the consequence of human agency. In the studio, within landscape representations in drawing, painting and spatial work, I have focussed on the artefact of landscape rather than representing humans otherwise figuratively, as I hold these landscape fabrications as markers of humanity.

A steady human hand upon the landscape is clearly not new to the Australian continent, but the recognition of this and engagement with the idea are steps to undoing the ills of the Terra Nullius. This leads us to the next attendant question:

Reconciliation

Can a critical view of the landscape contribute to reconciliation? Through this research and reconsidering the topic of landscape, it is clear that a postcolonial framework is a necessary part of a study of landscape within Australia. To undertake a re-imagining of Australian terrains, it must be felt that this is colonised land, so I intend for my intuitively European perspective to be dealt with in my self analysis.

73. Ibid Žižek @ 11:36

74. Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: 2000)

75. Timothy Flannery, *The future eaters : an ecological history of the Australasian lands and people*, (Port Melbourne, Vic.: Reed Books, 1994)

The term landscape, according to W.J.T Mitchell is in itself a contested space.⁷⁶ This is particularly evident in Australia, considering its history of colonisation and current practices and industry of resource extraction. Through this lens, the relationship to environment is also inextricable with issues of colonisation and the readjustment of colonial narratives.

Paintings by Indigenous painters from Arnhem Land⁷⁷ to the Great Sandy Desert⁷⁸ document a legal claim as well as continuous historical connection to country. These works are testament to Australian art producing tangible, legal and cultural change. A treaty, or *Makarrata*⁷⁹ may be a direct constitutional contribution to a cultural reconciliation in Australia, but true reconciliation is only possible through cultural narratives. Crucial in the process of reconciliation, is to deconstruct the Terra Nullius myth. In recognising the landscape as embodying a history of an ancient human project, I have looked at known and possible sites of culturally formed and culturally defined landscapes. This has included responding to those in terms of the fabrication and demarcation by that terrain's immediate Indigenous cultures.

Throughout the history of Australian colonial culture we have been confronted with emotive images of the landscape as fear-inducing and morbid space, exemplified by a vicarious fear and pity for the moribund Bourke and Wills obscures their poor judgement⁸⁰ and manners.⁸¹ Australian Gothic culture has a history of indulging in this⁸². Whereas, much Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture celebrates a deep connectedness and love of country, a connection recognised and valued in postcolonial discourse.

An awareness of these contrasts, Indigenous traditions of painting, and the immediate history of colonisation, inform my position on indigenous reconciliation. As such, my position becomes part of my topic. In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's, *Decolonising Methodologies*, she argues for an acknowledgment of privilege in work that deals in colonial space from a non-Indigenous perspective.⁸³ The reasoning of Smith and others suggests, rather than 'use' the stories of colonisation, they form a backdrop and motivation for my concentration on the topic of these landscapes.

76. W.J.T Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power, second Edition* (Chicago, Ill. ; London, University of Chicago Press) 7

77. 'Talking is not enough': Indigenous exhibition reveals the legal power of art Sydney Morning Herald 8 November 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/talking-is-not-enough-indigenous-exhibition-reveals-the-legal-power-of-art-20171107-gzgx1s.html>

78. *Giant Indigenous artwork returns to Australian desert after 20 years* ABC News 24 October 2017, 7:10am <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-23/giant-historic-artwork-ngurrara-canvas-returned-home/9074446>

79. Treaty - Makarrata - Treaty - A Reflection by Michael Anderson <http://nationalunitygovernment.org/content/treaty-makarrata-treaty-reflection-michael-anderson> accessed 5 June 2018

80. "Nardoo Plant," *Culture Victoria*, Accessed October 30, 2018 <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/land-and-ecology/burke-and-wills-then-and-now/nardoo-plant/>

81. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014)

82. G. Turcotte, "Australian Gothic," in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 10-19.

83. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999)

Out of this, through painting I hope to find a way to address and critique the colonial view of the landscape, by repurposing colonial images, dissected, flayed or reapplied in the manner of taxidermy.

In relation to the painting, *River object*, 2018 (Fig. 24), I was driven by an article from the State Library of Victoria on ‘The Erasure of Melbourne’s Wetlands’⁸⁴ to question if it is possible to reconstruct from local data a vision of a landscape, to one almost unrecognisable, a society all but unrelated? Can re-fabricating the landscape decolonise it? I will cover more of this in relation to *River object* in the following chapter.

The models of territory and generational continuance discussed by Bruce Pascoe,⁸⁵ may upend ingrained western constructs of boundaries and property, but also embedded in these approaches is an intrinsic value of continuance for the environment while engaging with Indigenous cultural perspectives. The engagement of these narratives within my research is a re-viewing and reimagining of this space. In terms of reconciliation and acknowledgment, these perspectives are crucially significant.

As such I see the question of reconciliation as existentially important to discourse around many topics in an Australian context, and especially so with regards to discussions around landscape. In the process of peeling back the layers of this attendant question, I have found that this question deserves a far bigger enquiry. It is entirely relevant, but bigger than the scope of this thesis.

In the course of this research I have acted with the issue of reconciliation in mind, and forming my methodology; however to avoid unilateral assumptions around indigenous experience in my work, forging deeper connections with specific places, people and stories would be crucial to my approach. I am aware that for me, specific knowledge and experience is necessary to reflect on this artistically and with the substance and respect it deserves. Gaining knowledge and experience was my hope and intention, and work on Budj Bim cultural landscape commenced, as mentioned. However given the time and scope constraints, this was not expanded upon substantially in this thesis, or in the final body of work. The ongoing quest for understanding adds weight to the histories and ecologies of the places I look to and weaves ever more complex threads into the tapestry of my understanding the country. It is in this way I have treated this question as a work in progress, an underlying ever present framing to carry forward into new enquiries.

84. Sarah Matthews, “The Erasure of Melbourne’s Wetlands” State Library Victoria (blog) August 29, 2016, <https://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/such-was-life/the-erasure-of-melbournes-wetlands/>

85. Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu: Black Seeds Agriculture Or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014)

3. Fabricated country

As a painter, in part my argument is delivered through a set of creative works, which attend to the central question: How is the 'idea' of our environment thought of through painting, and how does this relate to the inherently problematic constructs of *nature* and *landscape*?

The resulting material has landed in a position that problematizes views of the environment, but does not claim to illustrate solutions or ways forward through these issues, rather dismantles and cuts them adrift.

As was my aim with undertaking this research, the process has given me more openings than it has closed down options or given fixed answers. Within this chapter I hope to point to some of these openings.

The exercise of re-interpreting views of landscape through painting and drawing has enabled me to explore a number of new modes of viewing. The exploration of digitally mediated spaces, as reduced networks of nodes initially produced troubling sterile and cold views, devoid of empathy. Adding a skin to these wireframes added pictorial values and reveal my emotional tending to the space. I have a love and empathy for all the places I have chosen to paint. This is a love of the complexity of ecologies and fascination for their meaning and histories. On one level this skin is applied metaphorically in the manner of taxidermy, on another I am simply alluding to a sudden undermining of the idea of nature; a redefinition of the planet as an engineered artefact. Therefore I am aware of the troubled space it implies. This is a tension I have allowed in my work as I work through issues of colonialism.



Figure 9 Piers Greville, *Ngakanohi Drawing II*, 2018, watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

Drawing together narrative threads

The works on paper are generators of narrative and a way into the pictorial aspects of what might also be paintings. The immediacy of these works also enable a cadence of images, where the progression of work reinforces an idea and a narrative builds. My method for the polygon form drawings involved drawing directly from available google topographic data of a given terrain. In *Mount Digital drawing*, 2018, (Fig. 6) I explored Donna Haraway's *machine skill*, constraining myself as I drew, replicating the strictly polygon geometries plotted in two dimensions, using a ruler and adding struts and elements rhythmically. Through this process there was a feeling of embodying the actions of the machine, and at the time I felt Haraway's theory in action. In other investigations on paper my drawings of structures allude to a larger history, for example: Pieter Breughel's 1563 *Tower of Babel*,⁸⁶ Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, 1920 (Fig. 8),⁸⁷ or a press report image of mangled and twisted metal architectural remains after a recent hurricane, are all in some way symbols of the failure of the human project.

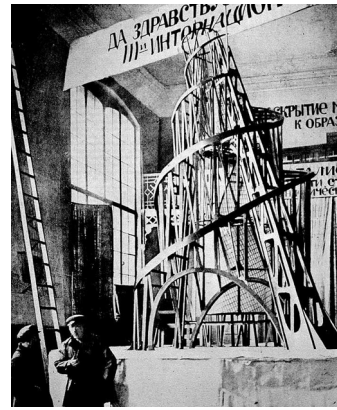


Figure 8 Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International* 1920

Nation states, no longer content with claiming territory, enter an era of creating territory, as in the construction of entirely constructed islands in South China Sea,⁸⁸ as viewed from an extraterrestrial point in *South Sea drawing III*, 2018 (Fig. 36) and *South Sea drawing II*, 2018 (Fig. 37). Drawing on a variety of landscape objects from an isolated 'hanging' glacier in Aotearoa New Zealand in *Ngakanohi Drawing*, 2018, to the South China Sea islands, I am alluding to ideas of discrete landscape objects, either materialised or de-materialised by human activity.

The drawings exist in the stage of thought where I am considering the source material. These sources are various: arrays of plotted node points of topographic 3d wireframes or polygon forms; conventional surveyed contour lines; satellite or aerial photographic imagery, or those combined with digital 3d polygon forms; direct photographic sources of landscapes; google street views; historical artworks or other found images that resemble aspects of the above.

Portraits of two landscapes

In Western Victoria lies a region that reveals an interplay between pre colonial and colonial fabricated space. Lake Condah is an ancient cultural landscape, home to some of the oldest known landscape engineering by humans.⁸⁹ These form a sprawling system of canals redirecting the course of rivers and marshlands over millennia by the Gunditjmarra people and their ancestors for breeding, farming and trapping eels. Nearby is Tower Hill, an extinct volcanic crater painted in Eugene von Guérard's *Tower Hill*, 1855 as a picturesque and romantically wooded Edenesque vista. Almost immediately

86. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1563, oil on panel

87. Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International* 1920

88. Megan Specia Mikko Takkunen. "South China Sea Photos Suggest a Military Building Spree by Beijing" *New York Times* February 8, 2018
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/world/asia/south-china-seas-photos.html>

89. McNiven, Ian J. February 8, 2017, "The detective work behind the Budj Bim eel traps World Heritage bid" *The Conversation*. accessed 25 May 2017. <http://theconversation.com/the-detective-work-behind-the-budj-bim-eel-traps-world-heritage-bid-71800>

after the painting was made, the area was subjected to progressive deforestation and overgrazing over a century, leaving Tower Hill area more akin to a moonscape. Eventually, by the late 1960s a municipal decision was made to revisit the colonial artist's depiction and restyle the landscape enclosed within the crater in its image. Tower Hill drew much attention from artists in the 1980s such as Geoff Lowe amongst others.⁹⁰ The postmodernist posture that affords such attention to Tower Hill was adopted to a degree by Australian painter Imants Tillers in relation to other terrains. In Tillers' manifesto *Locality Fails* he actively diminishes the notion of 'place' (his *Locality*), in the face of emergent 'space'. This is critiqued by artist Richard Bell in terms of its failure to recognise distinct histories and connection to a given place, through Bell's 2003 work, *I'm Not Sorry* and its related discourse.⁹¹

It is in this decolonising narrative that I find the other volcanic landscape, Tower Hill to be its strangely inverted cousin. There's a complex juxtaposition here between a landscape returned to colonial romantic ideals on one hand and the Māori cultural and spiritual relationship on the other. The landscapes are visually similar in their separation from the surrounding grazed pasture country, each appear, standing alone as discrete entities. Also as they are referred to legally or culturally.

Mentioned earlier in the analysis of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, was The former Egmont National Park in New Zealand, now Taranaki Maunga, the site of a dormant volcano on the west coast of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. It has a dense rainforest around its base, which forms a near-perfect circle concentric with the strikingly symmetrical main volcanic cone. The landscape is significant for its legal status enshrined in the New Zealand constitution, granting it legal personhood.⁹² Under New Zealand's *Te Urewera Act*,⁹³ the landscape has the same inherent inalienable rights as a person: 'Te Urewera is a legal entity, and has all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person.'⁹⁴ Visiting the mountain, as I did in January 2018 and being close up to the ecosystem within its temperate rainforest, it is not hard to view it as one continuous thicket, an organism inextricably linked, where it is hard to tell which is moss, fern or giant ancient tree, as the life teems all over itself. The invisibility, but audible omnipresence of the birds only seems to assert their embeddedness in this web of life and geology. It is striking though, that in such an intense ecosystem, beating with so much life, diminishes so abruptly at the edge of its roughly 15km diameter circle. This reinforces the illusion of the landscape as a discrete entity, rather than part of the continuum.

While studying in comparison these two narratives, they somehow represent an inversion of each other. Tower Hill, a reconstruction of a romantic myth which objectifies as an artefact the landscape; and Taranaki which embodies the reinstatement of a Māori tradition enshrined in a contemporary law which inherently respects this

90. Geoff Lowe, Robyn McKenzie, "Geoff Lowe and Tower Hill" *Parket* 45 (1995): 19-22

91. Butler, Rex and Thomas, Morgan. 'I Am Not Sorry': Richard Bell Out of Context [online]. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003: 29-40.

92. Derek Cheng, "Mt Taranaki will be granted special legal status similar to Te Urewera and the Whanganui River" NZ Herald, December 21, 2017, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11963982

93. "Te Urewera Act 2014" *New Zealand Legislation*, last modified October 19, 2018, <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2014/0051/latest/DLM6183705.html>

94. Ibid



Figure 10 Piers Greville, *Tower Hill token*, 2018. oil and earth pigment on board 90 x 60cm.

environment. Somewhere in the dialogue between narratives of *environmental personhood* versus reconstructing the romantic myth as a *re-constructed world* lies a debate at the intellectual heart of the environmental crisis.

Initially I approached Tower Hill from a historical and cultural perspective, reading and researching remotely from the place itself. Searching records of text, paintings, photographs, maps, digital 3d wireframes, I studied and compared these modes. In the painting *Tower Hill token*, 2018 (Fig. 10), I respond to the site through data and text, including *Convincing Ground*, a book by Bruce Pascoe about the convincing ground massacre⁹⁵ of the Koroit Gunditj clan – the traditional custodians of what is now Tower Hill; aerial photography from the mid 20th century of an overgrazed and bare terrain; and contemporary available polygon data of the topography. It is a study of the space and its location in history.

Over a number of field trips to Tower Hill and the nearby Budj Bim cultural landscape, I collected data as drawings, paintings, photographs, maps and notes. My intention was to map out relationships between the geological, ancient indigenous and contemporary landscape formations. However this embodied observation exercise formed a more tangible experience, resulting in nuanced observations of the subtleties of the site. In particular, the empathic perspective provided by traditional custodians while touring the Budj Bim cultural landscape was crucial.

A cultural Australia, according to Kali Myers is best seen as an ‘entangled overlapping’ of Indigenous and non-Indigenous spaces in order to reveal power structures of hegemonic dominance.⁹⁶ Representations of a layering lives within work such as *Tower*

95. Pascoe, Bruce, *Convincing Ground* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007)

96. Kali Myers, *Colonial Landscapes: From Historical Trauma to Mythic History* 2013 p8 p47

Hill token, in its dialogue between material and construct. Tower Hill, depicted as a low-poly form to resemble a crumpled piece of aluminium or lead flashing, and yet it also attempts to resemble a terrain. Meanwhile the backdrop is filled in with blood-red ochre glazed over a white-washed layer concealing other unknowns, standing in for the surrounding country the site of the Convincing Ground Massacre.⁹⁷

My methodology in this case is to treat the terrain as a cultural artefact as well as a place. Its appearance as crumpled aluminium together in a congealed red ochre field reminds me of the viscera depicted as landscape in Gordon Bennett's painting, *Triptych: Requiem, Grandeur, Empire*, 1989. Bea Maddock's use of a similar red ochre in *Terra Spiritus... with a darker shade of pale*, 1999 is a parallel to this painting.

Two components formed the outcomes from this research activity. Firstly, practice based research elements (as paintings and visual records) generated directly from these observations and produced within the field, these form a part of the masters exhibition and are reflected in this exegesis. The other outcome is the detailed knowledge of the landscape gained from my experience and connections with people and place, adding to my deeper understanding of the landscape and human connection with country.

97. Pascoe, Bruce, *Convincing Ground* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007)



Figure 11 Piers Greville, *Headwaters*, 2016, oil on linen, 40 x 30cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

Precarious constructs

The journey of a river is plotted in these works. An arrangement of river views from *Raft*, 2018 (Fig. 12), *Headwaters*, 2016 (Fig. 11), through *Bridge token*, 2018 (Fig. 38) to connect to the *River object*, 2018 (Fig. 24) is a study of the flow of the idea which started figuratively in a high space and meandered away through ideas into a sublime view. Originating in the Kosciuszko National Park, the river is the Snowy River, while not a long river by eastern Australian standards, it is the tallest river on the continent by reasoning that it starts at one of the the highest points, and flows to the sea. Its journey takes it through fragile alpine ecosystems,⁹⁸ down along Deddick Valley, where a plague of feral horses (Brumbies) is devastating the river ecosystem;⁹⁹ and across East Gippsland,¹⁰⁰ all troubled or contested sites over debates around environmental protection versus eurocentric, romantic, or colonial narratives.

The painting *Headwaters* (Fig. 11) and the spatial work *Raft* (Fig. 12) signal two points of the development of this idea. *Headwaters* was developed earlier in this inquiry into re-viewing landscape situated environments. It is painted on this troubled old linen surface. Through mistakes of technique, flakes and fibres are stuck to it from my old studio wall in Berlin. The image is of elsewhere on the planet,

98. Rachel Slatyer, "Climate change impacts on Australia's alpine ecosystems" *The ANU Undergraduate Research Journal* 2 (2010)

99. Blake Foden, "Debate over Kosciuszko National Park brumby cull as bitter as ever" *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/debate-over-kosciuszko-national-park-brumby-cull-as-bitter-as-ever-20180524-p4zh8o.html>

100. Tom Arup, "Forests agency sued for logging" *The Age*, March 18, 2012, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/forests-agency-sued-for-logging-20120318-1vdlw.html>



Figure 12 Installation view of Piers Greville's *Raft*, 2018, oil, plaster and resin on linen, cement, timber and string, data projection, 150 x 90cm x 180cm. Exhibition: *Fabricated Country* at Kings Artist Run, July 2018. Photography by Bridget Mac.

where Eugene Von Guerard once struggled and strained and almost died to bring back a painted image, on his 50th birthday in 1862.¹⁰¹ Instead, sitting in my studio with my phone I navigated there on google street view and positioned my view in as close to the same view as possible, and painted it through this small window, my phone.

Much of the terrain visible in *Headwaters* is depicted in *Raft* and vice versa. *Raft* was constructed using materials which included those of the painting: linen, paint, medium, traces of plaster and a timber frame.

Much of the sculpting process could have been achieved using current 3d print technology, but was executed methodically using a manual process of cutting dowels by hand to measured lengths and placing them upright along points in a dense grid on a peg board guided by a printed topographic contour map. This process afforded an experience somewhere between manual hand craft, and the 'intense pleasure of skill, *machine skill*' as mentioned in Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*.¹⁰² These hundreds of precisely placed pegs were overlaid with plaster sheets which, once dry, formed an orderly but imprecise terrain, a positive mold for the forming of an imprecise impression. The end result retains aspects of the restraint of the *machine skill* but as it is the result of a decaying loop, it is an erosion of the original

101. Eugene Von Guérard, *North East View From Mount Kosciuszko*, 1863, oil on canvas, accessed November 4, 2018. <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=48469>

102. Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London, New York: 2000), 315

form. As the linen sagged and bent, the underlying scaffold was adapted and struts were added as needed to underpin the terrain. This process led to a visibly precarious means of support, the delicate and frayed landscape-object propped-up and balanced in space, suspended with the intent of geometric precision on prism poles hanging on surveyor's cord.



Figure 13 Baugespann,
Photograph by Josef Durrer

These surveyor's prism poles have a referent origin in 'Baugespann', a system of real-space 'propositional outlines' of structures used widely for planning permissions in Switzerland (Fig. 13). Their propositional language and precarious posture of support, speaks to the same frailties in eco-engineering and terraforming the anthropocene.

The terrain's edge in *Raft* is defined by the shape of the contour line that marks an approximate altitude at just below 2,000m. So the terrain approximates

almost the only area on the Australian continent that exists 2 km above sea level. On their climb up onto this range in November 1862 Eugene Von Guerard and his colleagues were armed with geo-magnetic and barometric surveying instruments, their expedition purpose was also to collect environmental and geophysics data. As they climbed 1500m up the ridges to the main range, Von Guerard's Humboldtian leanings must have alerted him to the altitudinal zonation of ecosystems, as they passed the temperate, subalpine, and alpine heathlands.¹⁰³ These zones in that region are unique in the continent and are isolated ecosystems. Currently under stress from global warming, this area above 2000m is as if it is an island going under, an ecosystem with no terrestrial escape route.

The illusion of natural wonder bound up with the Alpine area quickly falls away with a quick glance at climate data or even snow depths from the past 60 years.¹⁰⁴ Beneath the surface however, is another level of tinkering, the Hydro electric scheme consists of massive water conduits redirecting monumental volumes in order to manage flow between a vast system of pondages connected to hydroelectric generators. Given that this range is the highest point on the continent, and part of the Great Dividing Range, the scheme can, in theory, redirect massive flows of water away from the watershed heading to one sea, to another 900 km away at the flick of a switch.¹⁰⁵ The monumental infrastructure of the hydroelectric scheme in the NSW alps arrest, redirect and distort the historical flows of the land. These membranes, valves and veins, pierce and redefine the watersheds, and the same scheme's cloud seeding activity adds an Anthropocene dimension to the sky itself.¹⁰⁶ And yet their presence within a national park, itself an artificially constrained version of 'nature' does set up a theatrical polarity of aesthetics between a haphazard congealed ecology and an engineered and machined concrete, steel and electrical infrastructure.

103. Pullin, V. R. (2007). Eugene von Guerard and the science of landscape painting. PhD thesis, School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne.

104. "Snow Depths Calculator" *Snowy Hydro*, November 5, 2018, <http://www.snowyhydro.com.au/our-energy/water/inflows/snow-depths-calculator/>

105. "Civil Structures," *The Powerhouse Museum*, accessed November 5, 2018, <http://archive.maas.museum/hsc/snowy/civil.html>

106. "Concerns persist over long-term impact of cloud seeding in Kosciuszko" *Sydney Morning Herald*, accessed November 5 2018 <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/sci-tech/concerns-persist-over-longterm-impact-of-cloud-seeding-in-kosciuszko-20150303-13tj6c.html>

The myth of nature is a potent symbol which I display in the ironic sense that I am engaged in representing nature reserves. The thing I aim to show exists only as a construct, landscapes underpinned by the geologic material of anthropocene: concrete.

The recomposed terrains fit within concrete voids, or read through the propositional human language of surveyors markers construction scaffolding and data points. In these depictions I hope to paint a way of critiquing the colonial view of the landscape, and reveal the artifice of these fragments, dissected, flayed and its skin re applied, with a slight slippage reminiscent of taxidermy.

The digital sublime

The blue I have used in *Cadaver II*, 2018 and other paintings is left open ended in its purpose. I see it as amongst other things, a marker of the idea of the digital sublime and consuming the picturesque traditions of chinese painted scenes on porcelain and delftware. Representing a blue of distance marked by oxygen haze and the colour of air, it also implies the cooling, slightly toxic hue of a digital screen, rendering, an acute contrast to the warm grey of concrete. Working with the colour in the studio, it has come to represent these ideas variously and in a formal sense it creates a chromatic separation from the cement board.

The painting *Cadaver II*, 2018 references a digital point view of a mountain terrain in Kosciuszko National Park, viewed through Google Maps. The particular viewpoint is intended to be as close as possible to that painted by Eugene Von Guérard in his *Mount*



Figure 14 Piers Greville, *Cadaver II*, 2018. Oil and wax on concrete board, 180 x 120cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

Kosciusko, seen from the Victorian border (Mount Hope Ranges), 1866.¹⁰⁷ The digital view of landscape is pervasive; satellite navigation, rain radar, geo tagged exercise apps and google maps are the norm. This has seeped into my own view. Even a trip in real space is mediated by digital views. As the internet intensifies across the globe, it reaches every visible pixel. This is a colonisation which encases the entire globe in a matrix of satellite and data surveillance, such that there is nowhere that is not monitored from 'out there' and creates a total accounting for, and therefore commodification of ourselves and our environment. It is conceivable, that eventually everything will have a pixel or a byte assigned to it.

The critical stance that considers mapping a colonial imposition of power onto a given terrain¹⁰⁸ is unlike the traditional painted views of Australia, which depict the horizonless view. In a geometric sense both are top-down like a cartographers' view, floating over the country. This colonial imposition comes from the position of remoteness to the terrain. My action of picturing the country through the digital prism, is an act of simulating the simulation; more than a punctum, pricked or torn image, this is a shredded and threadbare one.

In this 'datascape' view of the Internet of Things, and other models of viewing the land, the low-poly view has become a basis for viewing orographic forms. It also plays out in its reduced aesthetic to engineering languages such as the Finite Element Method,¹⁰⁹ a flimsy propositional framework off which the biological world melts. These wireframes, and low-poly forms lend them the propositional nature of *Tatlin's Tower*, 1920 (Fig. 8),¹¹⁰ and its precarious means of support.

The origins of *River object*, 2018 (Fig. 24) come from a blog post from the State Library of Victoria in 2016 describing '*The erasure of Melbourne's wetlands*',¹¹¹ in which during the 19th and 20th centuries, progressively staged redirections of waterflow and carving out of a whole new harbour, led to the eventual draining and paving of a large wetland spanning current Melbourne CBD and Footscray. Using available data, records and stories, it is possible to reconstruct a vision of a topography almost unrecognisable to us, a society all but unrelated. Can re-fabricating the landscape decolonise it? This landscape un-erased and rewound back to the old topographies, ecologies and culture re-imagined, is unattainable and perhaps it is appropriate that it should be viewed only as a reflection, looking back through the mirror glass of a highrise, as viewed by a 21st century inhabitant. I'll follow up on that later in this chapter. Reading the history in reverse, rewinds, undoes and ultimately implies a decolonisation of the current space. To construct a reverse-speculative view of a familiar urban landscape, a vision of a time before colonisation, is to reveal a time of Indigenous cultivation, culture and prolonged harmony. From a view of the topography, geology and ecological systems, signs of landscape engineering are always evident.

107. Eugene von Guérard *Mount Kosciusko, seen from the Victorian border (Mount Hope Ranges)*, 1866, oil on canvas, accessed November 4, 2018, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5679/>

108. Mitchell, William John Thomas Mitchell *Landscape and Power, Second Edition* University of Chicago Press, 15 Apr. 2002

109. Reddy, J.N. (2006). *An Introduction to the Finite Element Method* (Third ed.). McGraw-Hill. Via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finite_element_method#Basic_concepts accessed 18 Oct 2018

110. Tatlin, Vladimir. Monument to the Third International www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/lost-art-vladimir-tatlin

111. Sarah Matthews, "The Erasure of Melbourne's Wetlands" State Library Victoria (blog) August 29, 2016, <https://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/such-was-life/the-erasure-of-melbournes-wetlands/>

Rather than sampling it, this mimicry is an acting out, a re-romanticising of the surface with knowledge of the limitations of the construct. In describing the terrain's surface in paint I enact a romance of the pictorial. The landscapes' romantic and troubled surface in *Cadaver III*, 2018 (Fig. 20) continue their life, excavated, removed and elevated, their congealed surfaces drip forth onto the structures which suspend them from their former reality. A layering of spaces is enacted in the use of concrete support, representative of the anthropocene. In applying the fraught ritual of painting not to a natural, Indigenous or romantic support like wood or linen, but to a starkly industrial support, I am layering this narrative to a new reality.

The ground that I paint on is also the support, and in itself representative of an archetypal anthropocene ground: concrete. In applying the fraught ritual of painting not to the natural, emplaced or romantic ground, but to a starkly fabricated ground, I am applying a narrative to a new reality. In *Mount Digital, or North-East View from the Internet*, 2018 (Appendix, Fig. 40) by masking the romantic (re-) construct with concrete paint, an inverted narrative is proposed.

This research takes an evolved idea of landscape and situates it critically against a colonial historic space. It takes discrete layers of imagery and the idea of landscape itself in the form of a rendering of a surface, on a surface and the surface itself, i.e., cement board. In these works infrastructure cement spans and columns underpin and subvert, hoisting the sublime landscape as a flimsy flag

Dislocated terrains and the alien perspective

Conceiving a thing in our mind as a discrete object is perhaps in order to comprehend it, even though we know it is in fact woven into an infinite connectivity. The practice of isolating these meaningful fragments is instructive but not realism, it fits more comfortably in the realm of the reductive, instructive diagrams and iconography. In the western tradition of deliberately isolating sections of the world is Albrecht Dürer's 1503 *Das Große Rasenstück* [The Large Piece of Turf],¹¹² Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 1972 *Valley Curtain*¹¹³ and Fabian Knecht's 2017 *Isolation*.¹¹⁴ Whether it is for keeping out the sea, hordes of barbarians or immigrants, walls continue to define geography and landscape. This prophylactic erasure of context is an enduring culture of suspending one reality to create another. A visualisation of a floating chunk of landscape denotes a fantasy realm of children's book illustration, but also alludes to post-truth conspiracy theories, flat-earthers exemplified in a recent article: *Australia doesn't exist! And other bizarre geographic conspiracies that won't go away*¹¹⁵ with its surreal echos of terra nullius.

112. Albrecht Dürer *Das Große Rasenstück*, 1503, Watercolour, pen and ink, accessed November 5, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Piece_of_Turf

113. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain*, 1972, Cloth and Steel Cables, accessed November 5, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christo_and_Jeanne-Claude#Valley_Curtain

114. Fabian Knecht *Isolation*, 2017, various, accessed November 5, 2018, <http://www.artistprofile.com.au/fabian-knecht-nite-art/>

115. James Ball, "Australia doesn't exist! And other bizarre geographic conspiracies that won't go away" *The Guardian*, accessed November 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/shortcuts/2018/apr/15/australia-doesnt-exist-and-other-bizarre-geographic-conspiracies-that-wont-go-away>

The paintings that are mediated by geo satellite data as source material describe a section of wireframe topography, with satellite data re-mapped onto it. The resulting image is a beamed map unfastened from its terrain, which alludes to a slippage between space and place. This re-viewing the landscape through the digital prism employs tools of colonial dispossession: the act of remotely and top-down applying the digital map, onto a polygon form representing its supposedly fixed geographic location. I therefore see this as a mediated and hegemonic viewpoint, a cool, distant, and slightly downward view, as if reflected in a glassy corporate highrise. This image served as starting point for the grid treatment and elevated perspective in *River object*, 2018 (Fig. 24).

By referring to topographic data in my paintings, I am taking as a basis an inherently inaccurate map in a constant state of flux. It is subject to breaks, ruptures and shifts in perspective due to the rough mosaic of images from different seasons, distances and satellites. I have placed myself in this morphous untruthful map, in the same sense that I locate myself within a map on a place I have stood. This afterimage of a landscape is alien in the sense that an image photographed from a satellite is virtually projected onto a set of data points gathered presumably from another satellite, and sent back to me via the internet. It is an alien perspective, extraterrestrial but also in the ill-formed nature of the map, stretched and distorted onto a terrain. The alienation it conjures is akin to the alienation of the digital world it comes from. Subjecting these places to distancing through a process of re-romanticising and also this digital alienation, I then attempt to reverse this by literally revisiting and experiencing the place.

The subtext of this work is the range of modes through which I've experienced the landscape in order to deliver it as images. Be it painting en plein air; peering at a photo or google street view on my phone; locating a viewpoint in an online map to match that of an old painting; or downloading the polygon topography of a terrain – copying these intermodal sources to paint is describing my existence in, and experience of, landscape.

The following two paragraphs address the examiner's remark which questions the viewers' perception of these works as landscape *re-imagined*, or 'rather only *re-imaged*':

To view the paintings at first, it is plain that the landscapes are in part pictured in traditional western modes, in this way they can be seen as a re-imagined in new combinations of colour and composition, rather than re-imaged. While the powerful character of the instantly recognisable mountain-image could debase it as cliché or dominate as a visual hook, leaving the underpinning as mere framing, in these paintings I aim to do something different. Familiar, recognisable forms are perceived initially, parading themselves frontally, but this illusion reveals itself as fragmented and undermined, even fragmented into a fundamentally new construct. Within these paintings and drawings I am hoping to see and share with viewers the strange new reality we are confronted with globally and locally. It is perhaps not an obvious confrontation, more an underlying rearrangement. In the paintings, the underpinning form is left open to questioning, country is imagined as a fabricated surface, placed in a new context and stretched over a new construct. It exists, but not as we (thought we) knew it. While we may see the landscape increasingly as an image, as life is more and more mediated by

windscreen, baby-monitor screen, phone screen, etc., it is precisely this mediation which I hope to subvert and reorder by taking that image back and placing it in a context of painting as a reconfigured shell upon a renewed environment. Nuances lie in material devices such as using concrete, but also in the territory which a terrain remains on, the parts which are included or missing, or possibly even the scaffold which supports it. These all convey ideas of fallibility, colonialism, exploitation or interconnectedness. I am increasingly drawn to these aspects, depicting edges of nature reserves, eco-corridors, boundaries or fence lines. In these edges, stories can be told.

While plenty of early colonial paintings Australian landscapes were led by potential economic value, I have at heart another mode of valuing it. I aim not to objectify nature, which is 'a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration' according to Timothy Morton in his book *Ecology without Nature*,¹¹⁶ neither am I overlooking a love for these terrains, nor beauty within them. It is their complexity which is at stake, vulnerable to impact of human proliferation. And it is this complexity which emerges as worth investigating. In these ecologies lie an ancient library to maintain and nurture.

4. Conclusion

I believe thinking about our environment can be evolved through a critical approach to painting. The research and works discussed in this dissertation have opened up for me a possible re-viewing of the spaces termed nature and landscape. In doing this I have begun to develop a visual language to explore my own ethical stance on ecological and cultural heritage.

I see painting as a vessel for ideas. In doing so it is also used as a model for reconstructing observed realities. This reconstruction occurs on the picture plane, but also can be seen in a performative use of paint. Acts of painting may allude to metaphors of colonisation, for example by whitewashing the support with gesso, it nullifies ground, oil paint applies constructs, and varnish glosses over flaws and creates a seductive depth. Viewing these specific processes as metaphors are a way of connecting the paintings to a political narrative, and as such the specific processes are applied as a part of my visual language.

To approach Australian landscape through painting is to chase a moving target, in terms of the shifting cultural views of it, but also in the need to reconsider the actual landscape and its ecology due to deforestation, urbanization, climate and ecological collapse. Australian painting itself has a long and dynamic relationship with the environment from ancient Indigenous traditions of landscape painting to colonial, modernist and other cultural/philosophical moments. Discourse in environmentalism has, and continues to develop symbiotically with art.

Landscape painting continues to play a significant cultural role across the Australian continent within the oldest continuous culture on earth. While European colonists found a hugely important role

116. Morton, Timothy. 2007. *Ecology without nature: rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007: 5.2.3

for their own brand of landscape painting in forming a more defined coloniser identity, as argued by Kali Meyers, the ancient as well as contemporary Indigenous practice has been disproportionately overlooked.¹¹⁷ Indigenous artists continue to document a claim and connection to country. This perspective is a much needed realistic and empathic perspective.

In this research project, I have advanced through particular approaches to painting the possibility of seeing, and thinking through the environment in new ways. The project demonstrates this along the threads in the exegesis, portraits of landscapes, fabricated country, the digital sublime and dislocated terrains. These threads connect various contemporary and historical philosophies and art. And in turn these threads have found connections to indigenous knowledge of country.

The landscape has compelling narratives in all Australian Indigenous cultures. Indigenous systems of land custodianship, geographic boundaries and protocols for traversing them, altering terrains through fire management and agriculture, landscape-based spirituality, have been deeply considered. Indigenous painting traditions too, such as use of top-down perspectives, songline cartography and the ritual symbolism in iconic earth based pigments have also figured in this project's research.

The urgency for me, of addressing painting through these positions springs from our time of widespread ecological collapse and global warming, sprawling urban space, new territorial conflicts, and an elusive *Makarrata* treaty¹¹⁸ being eternally just around the corner. Issues of culturally framing and understanding landscape have become more important than ever.

117. Myers, Kali. "Colonial Landscapes: From Historical Trauma to Mythic History," *Melbourne Historical Journal* Vol 41, No 1 (2013): 45-64.

118. "Treaty - Makarrata - Treaty A Reflection by Michael Anderson" National Unity Government, accessed June 5, 2018, <http://nationalunitygovernment.org/content/treaty-makarrata-treaty-reflection-michael-anderson>

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6. Creative Works

Masters exhibition documentation

The studio output component of the thesis documented here was exhibited in Southbank Building 873 - The Stables, Victorian College of the Arts from 2-9 December 2018

Documentation as follows: wall text page 48 (this page); list of works page 49; images of work (Fig. 16-36) page 50-65.



Figure 15 Installation view in The Stables, December 2018. Photography by Bridget Mac.

Wall text as provided in the exhibition:

A collective awareness of global environmental crises, urbanization and the advent of genetic engineering and such technology has changed popular ideas and definitions of the word nature. This project is an artistic investigation into how ideas of landscape and nature have evolved. The project focuses largely on the context of Australian visual art and regional terrains which are viewed as postcolonial spaces. A range of ways to view landscapes have been employed: painting from life or from personal and archival photographic records and historical paintings, or locating viewpoints using google street view, digital satellite mapping data and traditional topographic maps.

List of works and exhibition layout

- Front wall** *Raft*, 2018. Mixed media, dimensions variable (Fig. 16, 17, 18)
Headwaters, 2016. Oil and plaster on linen, 40 x 30cm (Fig. 19)
- Stable .01** *Cadaver III*, 2018. Oil and wax on concrete board, 180 x 120cm (Fig. 20)
Mount Digital drawing, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 21)
- Stable .02** *Tower Hill object*, 2018. Oil and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm (Fig. 22)
Tower Hill drawing, 2018. Pencil on paper, diptych 76 x 56cm each sheet (Fig. 23)
- Stable .03** *River object*, 2018. Oil and wax and acrylic on concrete board, 90 x 120cm (Fig. 24)
Cyborg relations I, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 25)
- Stable .12** *Oeschinensee object*, 2018. Oil, wax and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm (Fig. 26)
Zealandia drawing II, 2018. Acrylic on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 27)
Zealandia drawing I, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 28)
- Stable .13** *Taranaki object*, 2018. Oil and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm (Fig. 29)
Taranaki drawing I, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 30)
- Stable .14** *Cadaver II*, 2018. Oil and wax on concrete board, 180 x 120cm (Fig. 31)
- Rear wall** *Ngakanohi drawing II*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 33)
Taranaki drawing III, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 34)
Tower Hill Diorama drawing II, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 35)
South Sea drawing III, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 36)
South Sea drawing II, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm (Fig. 37)

Southbank building 873 - The Stables Victorian College of the Arts

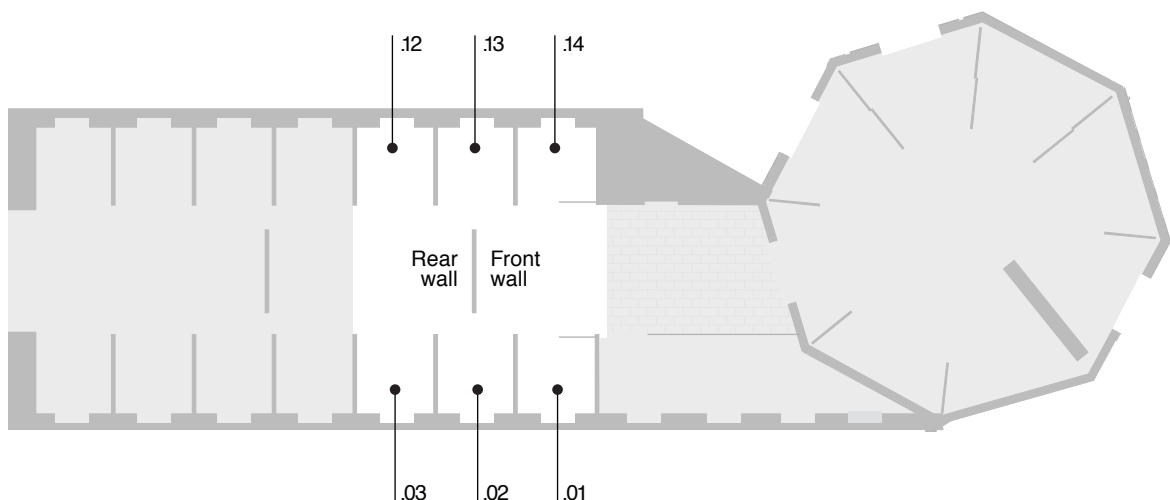




Figure 16 Installation view of front wall, showing Piers Greville's *Raft*, 2018, oil, plaster and resin on linen, cement, timber and string, lasers, 150 x 90cm x 180cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 17 Installation view of front wall, showing Piers Greville's *Raft*, 2018, oil, plaster and resin on linen, cement, timber and string, lasers, 150 x 90cm x 180cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 18 Installation view of front wall, showing Piers Greville's *Raft*, 2018, oil, plaster and resin on linen, cement, timber and string, lazars, 150 x 90cm x 180cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 19 Piers Greville, *Headwaters*, 2016, oil on linen, 40 x 30cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 20 Piers Greville, *Cadaver III*, 2018. Oil and wax on concrete board, 180 x 120cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

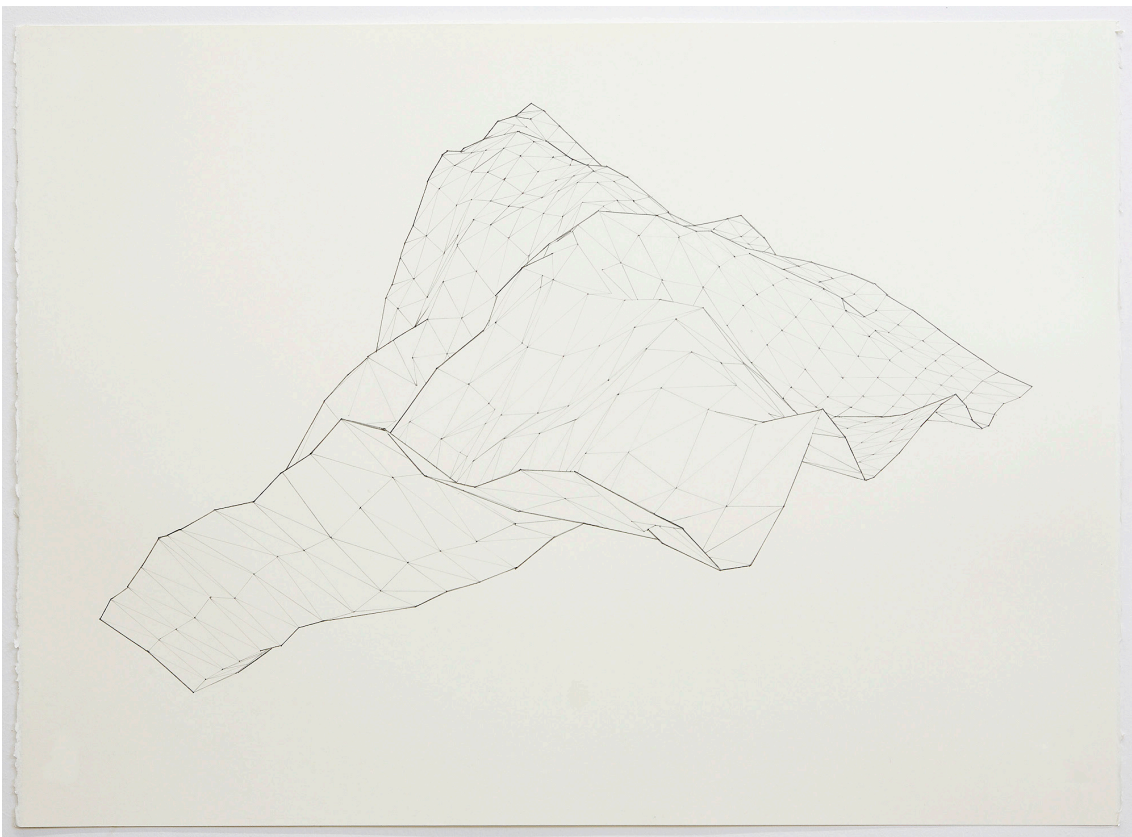


Figure 21 Piers Greville, *Mount Digital drawing*, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 22 Piers Greville, *Tower Hill object*, 2018. Oil and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm.
Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 23 (this and next page) Piers Greville, *Tower Hill drawing*, 2018. Pencil on paper, Diptych 76 x 56cm (each sheet). Photography by Bridget Mac.





Figure 24 Piers Greville, *River object*, 2018. Oil and wax and acrylic on concrete board, 90 x 120cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 25 Piers Greville, *Cyborg relations I*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 26 Piers Greville, *Oeschinensee object*, 2018. Oil, wax and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 27 Piers Greville, *Zealandia drawing II*, 2018. Acrylic on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 28 Piers Greville, *Zealandia drawing I*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 29 Piers Greville, *Taranaki object*, 2018. Oil and acrylic on board, 90 x 120cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

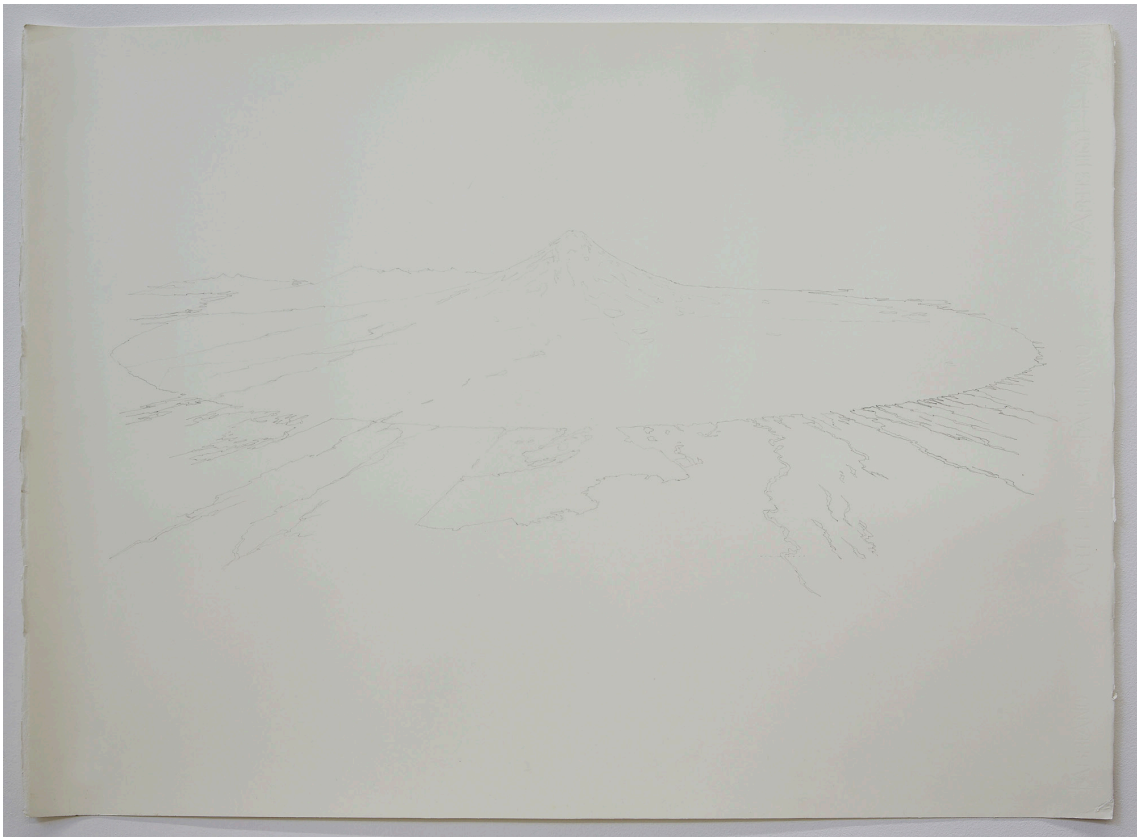


Figure 30 Piers Greville, *Taranaki drawing I*, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 31 Piers Greville, *Cadaver II*, 2018. Oil and wax on concrete board, 180 x 120cm.
Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 32 Installation view of drawings on rear wall. Photography by Bridget Mac.



Figure 33 Piers Greville, *Ngakanohi drawing II*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

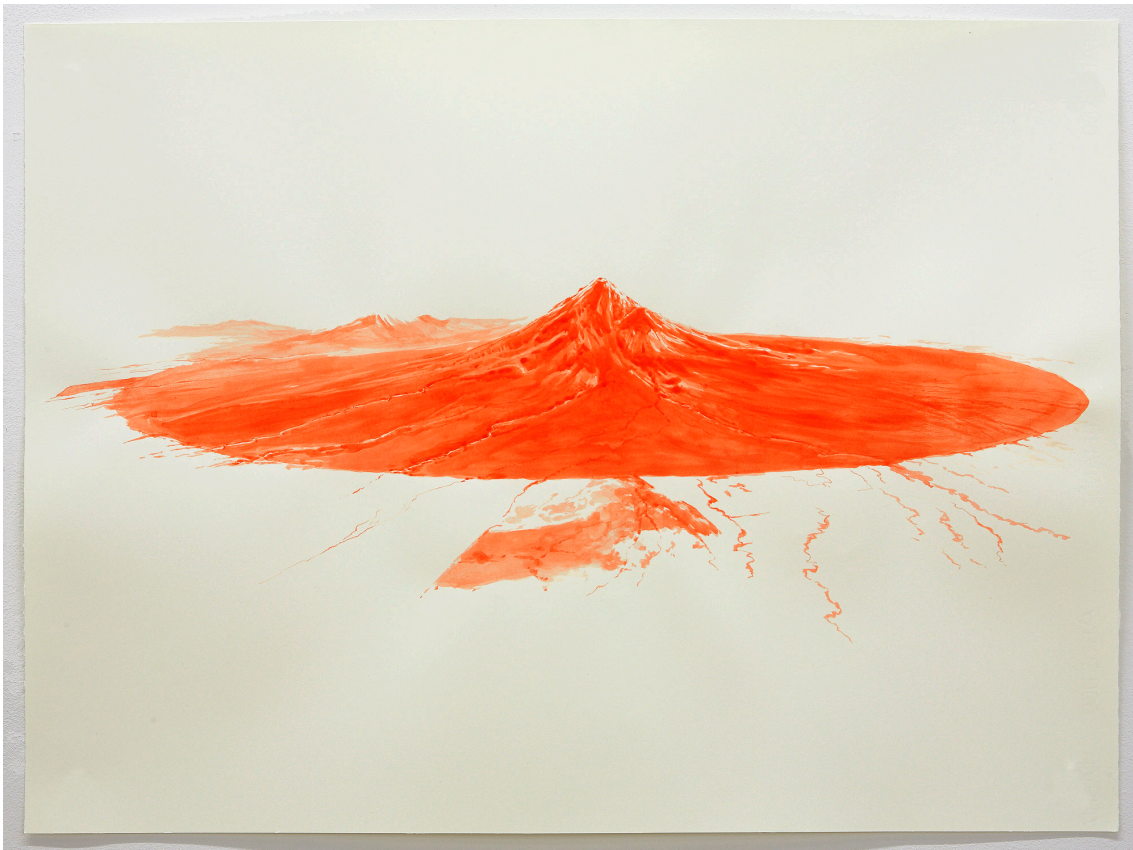


Figure 34 Piers Greville, *Taranaki drawing III*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

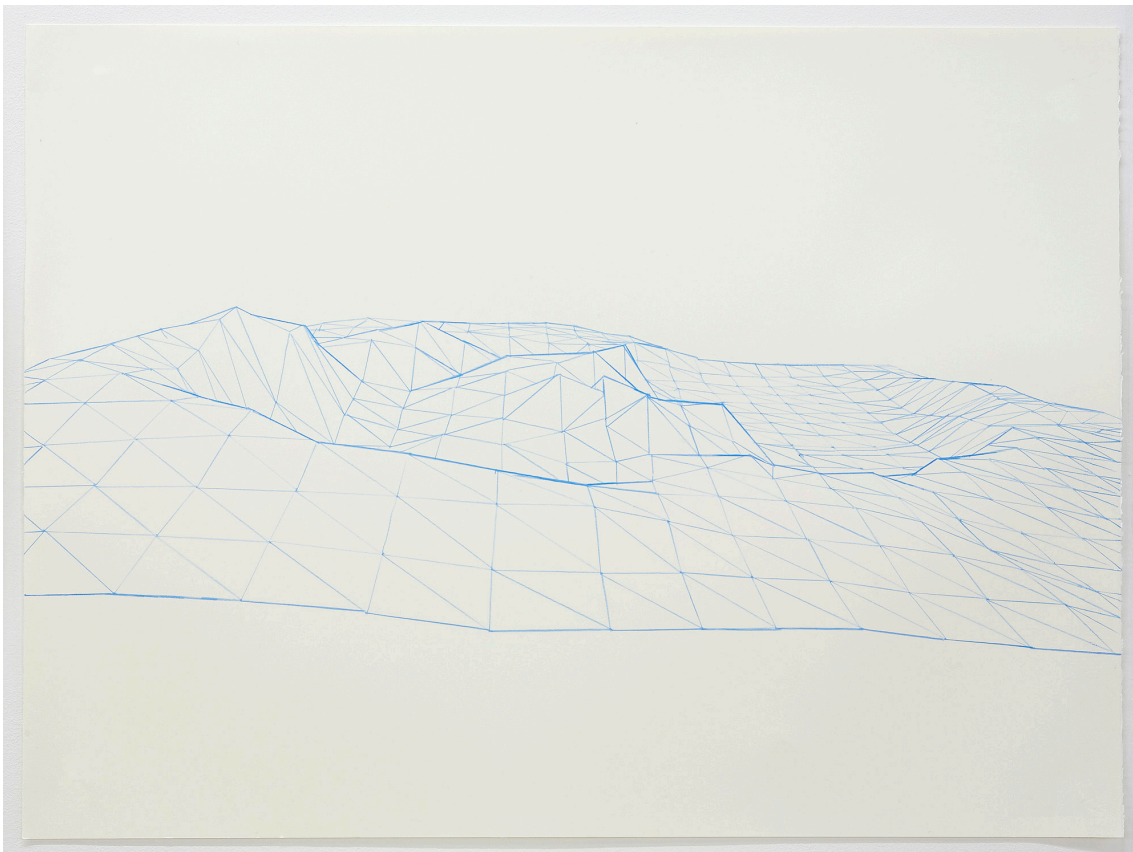


Figure 35 Piers Greville, *Tower Hill Diorama drawing II*, 2018. Pencil on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

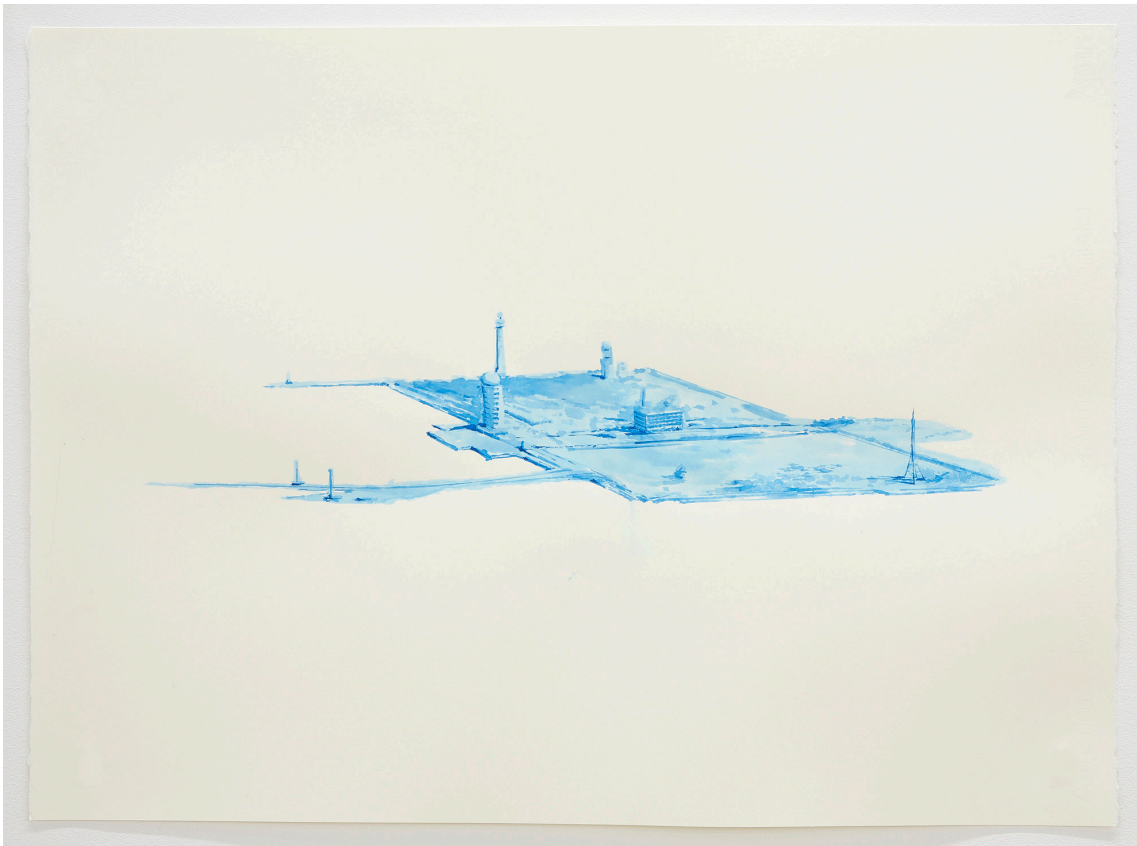


Figure 36 Piers Greville, *South Sea drawing III*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

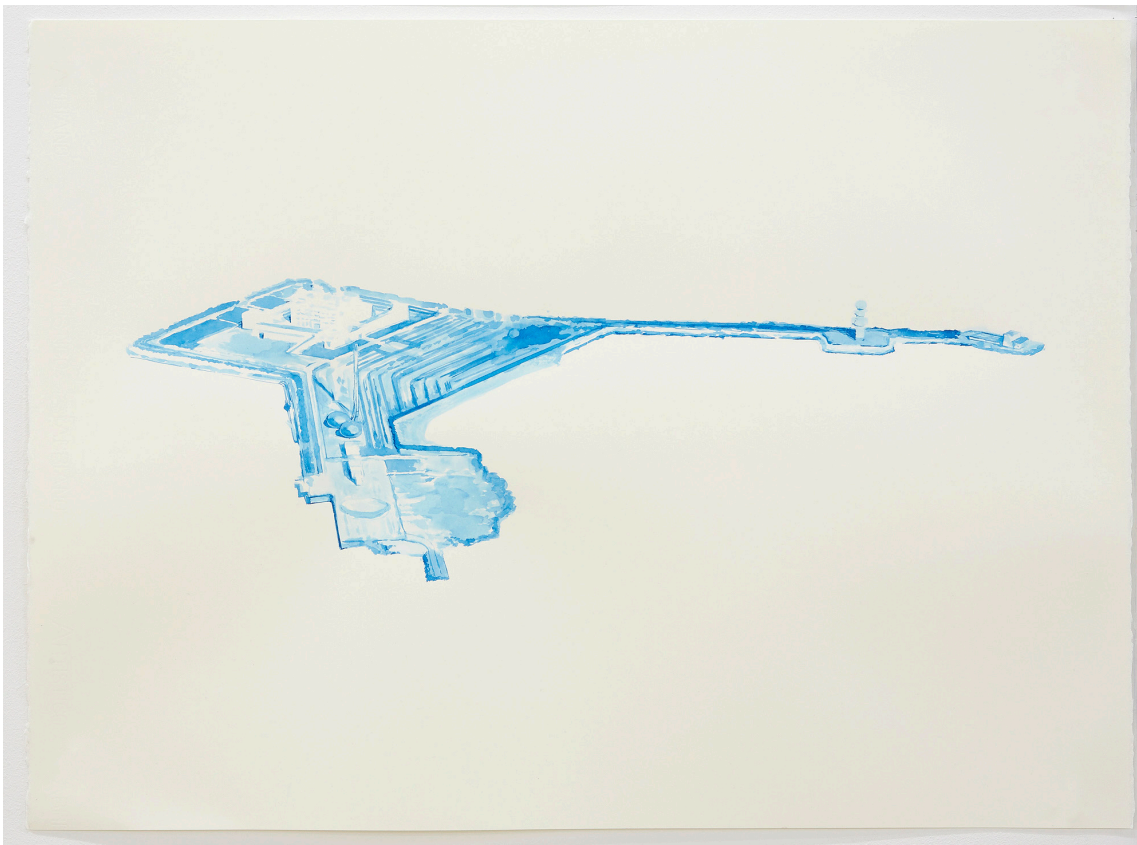


Figure 37 Piers Greville, *South Sea drawing II*, 2018. Watercolour on paper, 76 x 56cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.

Appendix 1: Related exhibitions

Additional exhibitions forming part of the masters research:

Fabricated Country, July 2018

solo exhibition at Kings Artist Run, Melbourne.

Universal Personal, March 2018

MFA cohort group exhibition with Allison Kennedy, Brigit Ryan, Freya Pitt, John Gosper, Luke Adams, Nathan Stolz, Piers Greville, Sue Beyer. VCA Artspace, Melbourne

Work from this research has also been presented at:

Beyond Boundaries, May 2018

at Piki Mai: Up Here ^^ / Auckland Art Fair

Beyond Boundaries II, August 2018

at Melbourne Art Fair

Siren Song Creek, February 2019

Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.

Appendix 2: Other works

These works are referred to in the text, however were not included in the main thesis or exhibition.

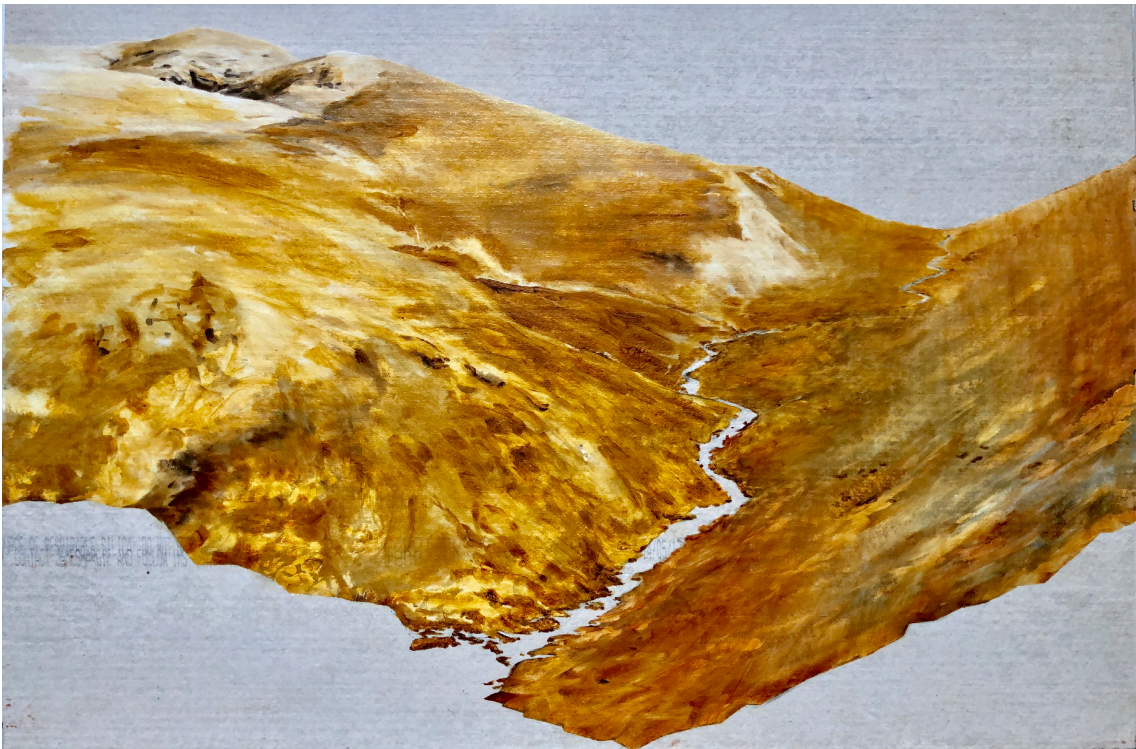


Figure 38 Piers Greville, *Bridge token*, 2018. Oil on concrete board 90 x 60cm.



Figure 39 Piers Greville, *Wurdi Youang token*, 2018. Oil and cement on board 90 x 60cm.



Figure 40 Piers Greville, *Mount Digital, or North-East View from the Internet*, 2018. Oil, concrete and acrylic on linen 150 x 90cm. Photography by Bridget Mac.