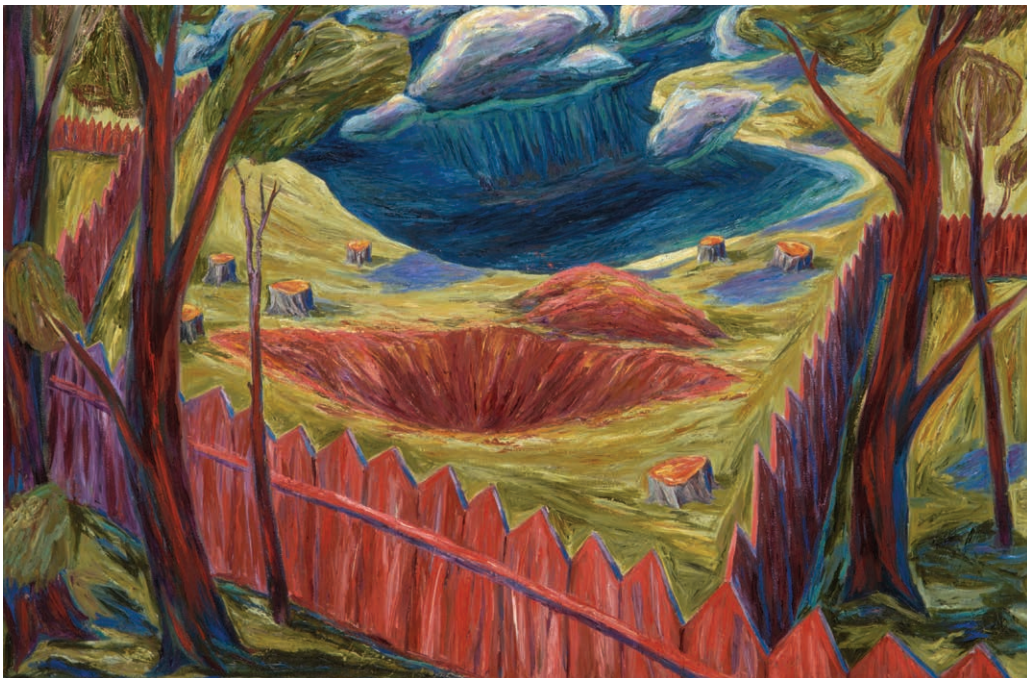




COUNTRY & COLONY

VISIONS OF AUSTRALIA FROM THE CRUTHERS COLLECTION OF WOMEN'S ART

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY | 22 JULY - 16 DECEMBER 2017



ON 'COUNTRY & COLONY'

I can't find the specific quote now, but Somali-Australian artist Hamishi Farah once tweeted that white curators love curating exhibitions critiquing colonisation so that they can colonise decolonisation as well. The wording might not be exact but the sentiment has stuck with me, because I know in the case of this exhibition he is right: many of these stories are not mine to tell.

Once I was naïve enough to believe that, because two of my four grandparents were estranged from their families and my surname was Anglicised from the original German at one of the times in Australia when it was unpopular to be so, that I was a person with a history deficit, alienated from a sense of lineage or cultural tradition. My parents, through Ancestry.com, have discovered since that once of my great-grandparents survived the 1915 landing at Anzac Cove – he is a tiny face in that photograph of diggers at the Egyptian Pyramids – and another ancestor had claimed by naming a small patch of land outside of Adelaide for my great-great-grandmother: Port Julia. I am about as implicated in the history of Australian imperialism as it gets – that *is* my culture – and I understand much better now that being recorded in this way, being discoverable, is a kind of privilege in itself.

One of the artists in this exhibition – among those who have had to work the hardest to resist being severed from their history and culture – has a birth date prefaced by a telling 'c'. Circa: records aren't clear. Others were purposefully separated from their families, re-named, forcibly discouraged from speaking their languages and practicing their cultures, as part of an organised governmental policy of violent forgetting¹. This year, Australia is celebrating the mere 50 years since these artists, with birthrights to this land that pre-date the naming of Port Julia, SA, by some tens of thousands of years, were even counted in the Australian Census. As a nation we are celebrating this by debating whether or not our First Nations people should be recognised in the Constitution on terms that they themselves have outlined.²

Country & Colony brings together works from the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art that elucidate some aspects of this story, these stories of Australia: of what it means to be Australian, what the Australian experience looks and feels, and has felt like. The stories that they tell are about the land and landscape, about the body, about industry, and culture. In a room together are works by a Pitjantjatjara woman who chose to make text paintings in English whilst rebuilding the dictionary of her mother tongue, a decision that has teeth considering her statement: *when I was at the mission*; the descendant, in spirit at least, of a settler-colonial woman depicted corseted and sickly in the implied heat, bearing

in her body responsibility of the colony's perpetuation and policies; an Irish-Scottish-Badimia woman who learnt to make portraits by recording strangers on public transport, searching faces for the recognition of relatives lost to the Stolen Generations; the matriarch of a dynasty of male artists whose art practice appears often only as a note in their longer biographies.

At the bare minimum what they have in common – and what we have in common, these artists and I, and perhaps you too – is that they – we – are Australian women working under colonialism, all marked by it and implicated in it as it continues. But not all implications, and not all responsibilities are borne equally. My thinking in bringing together these works, already brought together from disparate places under the umbrella of the collection, is what American civil rights activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw describes as 'intersectionality'. In intersectional thinking there are no universal or uniting categories of identity, only overlapping, intersecting relationships between systems that privilege and oppress: gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation, wellness, age, and beyond, all working together in the individual to create an ever-shifting whole. To understand one's place in society as a series of intersections creates its own set of complications, but what it does offer is a way to think about relationships that accommodates difference, however irreconcilable. What we can promise, rather than our 'solidarity' – a term that often flattens and conceals power dynamics and asks one group to work on the terms of the other – as women or as Australians, is to work on forming 'coalitions': negotiable and temporary agreements based on coming together over the things we share, whilst acknowledging what we cannot.

Some of these stories are not mine to tell but to avoid telling them is just a different kind of violence. The best I can do is to declare my own hand in doing so, and invite you to do the same.

Gemma Weston
Curator, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, 2017

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1. For more information see *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997.
 2. The 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' was issued by the Referendum Council on May 26th 2017. The statement was produced by 50 First Nations representatives over a three day summit at Uluru, NT and can be read in full online at: www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/uluru-statement-from-the-heart



LIST OF WORKS

Emma Minnie Boyd (1858-1936)

Untitled (View Through Trees), n.d. watercolour on paper, 28 x 45.5cm, CCWA 952. Gift from the estate of Beverly Brown, Melbourne.

Thea Costantino (1980 -)

Populate or Perish, 2014, Giclee Print, edition 1/3, 84 x 54cm, CCWA 957.

Julie Dowling (1969 -)

The Seven Deadly Sins, acrylic and red ochre on canvas, eight parts, 60 x 50 cm ea, CCWA 683.

Hazel Kngwarreye (1935 -) and **Katie Kngwarreye** (unknown)

Untitled (Old Time Camp Scene), 1992. Acrylic on polycotton, 165 x 165cm, CCWA 587.

Raquel Ormella (1969 -)

Golden Soil #2, 2014, nylon, 92 x 152cm, CCWA 971.

Linda Syddick Napaltjarri (c1937 -)

Leaving Home, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 164 x 166.5cm, CCWA 654.

Lesbia Thorpe (1919 - 2009)

Dreamtime Country, linocut 7/7, 51.5 x 42.1cm, CCWA 959v. Gift of the artist's estate.

Spinifex Hills in the Wet, 1994, linocut 3/6, 47 x 45 cm, CCWA 959g. Gift of the artist's estate.

June Walkutjukurr Richards (1951 - 2010)

When I was at the Mission, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 44 x 57.5cm, CCWA 880f.

Judy Watson (1959 -)

fossil, 1992-93, Powder pigments, scenic paint, cowrie shells, glue and string on canvas with eyelets, 220 x 185cm, CCWA 683.

Ruth Waller (1955 -)

"...they cut down the trees, built houses, dug the ground." - *Wooreddy*, 1988, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 91cm, CCWA 388.

The Prisoner's Prisoner, 1988, oil on canvas, two parts, 35.5 x 25 cm ea, CCWA 389.

The Cruthers Collection of Women's Art (CCWA) is the only public collection focused specifically on women's art in Australia. The foundation of the CCWA was a substantial gift of artworks made to the University of Western Australia in 2007 by Sir James and Lady Sheila Cruthers. The Cruthers family began collecting women's art in the 1970s, focusing primarily on portraiture and self-portraiture and isolating key areas such as still life, abstraction, early post-modernism and second-wave feminism. The CCWA includes works from the 1890s to the present day in a variety of media and continues to expand through focused acquisition and generous donation, aiming to contribute to and challenge dialogues about Australian women's art through exhibition, teaching, research and publication.

The CCWA is a registered Deductible Gift Recipient and may receive donations of artworks through the Cultural Gifts Program, facilitated by the Australian Government's Department of Communication and the Arts.

CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover images:

Hazel and Katie Kngwarreye, *Untitled (Old Time Camp Scene)*, 1992, acrylic on polycotton, 165 x 165cm, CCWA 587. Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia. © The artists licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd

Ruth Waller, *"...they cut down the trees, built houses, dug the ground."* - *Wooreddy*, 1988, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 91cm, CCWA 388. Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia. © Ruth Waller / Licensed by Viscopy, 2017.

Inside image:

Thea Costantino, *Populate or Perish*, 2014, Giclee Print, edition 1/3, 84 x 54cm, CCWA 957. Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia. © Courtesy the artist



CRUTHERS COLLECTION OF WOMEN'S ART

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY
OPEN TUES - SAT 11AM - 5PM
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