



# INHABITING THE TRACE

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Presented by the Berndt Museum  
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery



Laurel Nannup, *Grandad's Visitors*, 2001, etching, printing ink on paper, Berndt Museum Collection [2002/0022], courtesy of the artist.



Mulkuḡ Wirrpanda, *Wukigi*, 2008, etching, printing ink on Hannemulle paper, Berndt Museum Collection [2008/0070], courtesy of the estate of the artist.

## INHABITING THE TRACE

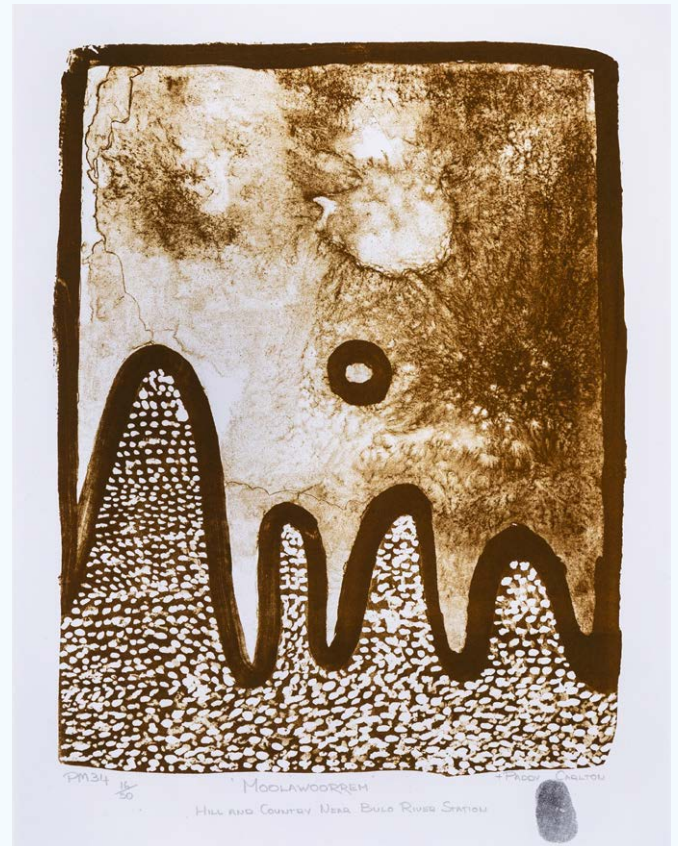
In 2008, twenty-seven artists made prints responding to reproductions of the *Yirrkala Drawings* (1946–47), that remain in the Berndt Museum, many of them descendants of original makers, using pencils to dislodge wax on soft ground etching plates as analogous gestures of mark-making and knowledge sharing.<sup>i</sup> Peter Cameron began making small linocut prints from Casuarina prison in the mid-1990s, distilling narratives into iconographic designs that oftentimes explored his complex thinking on Indigenous conceptions of health and well-being, and sending out artworks, stories, and research in letters to Dr Anne Read and Dr Fiona Stanley at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.<sup>ii</sup> In her 2006 book, *A Story To Tell*, Laurel Nannup unfolded life memories across short vignettes, from dreamlike encounters in the bush at Pinjarra, to life as a child removed to Wandering Mission, delicately rendering the apparitions of memories in etchings and woodcuts – printing techniques she would pass on to her son Brett Nannup.<sup>iii</sup>

The idea for the title of this exhibition was partly derived from Ivan Illich's 1984 address on the philosophical concept of dwelling, who said that to dwell 'meant to inhabit one's own traces, to let daily life write the webs and knots of one's biography into the landscape'.<sup>iv</sup> Illich's speech highlighted the ways that contemporary architectural spaces refused the 'art of living' by demanding to be restored as new rather than baring the marks of generational inhabitation, much like the modernist 'white cube' gallery space.<sup>v</sup> A more Indigenous conception of dwelling, might be to say that country is not over-written with our biographies but births and holds them – that our own stories and the traces of them enjoin ancestral and eternal ones embodied within and guided by place. A trace isn't a thing left behind that only materialises *pastness* but is woven into the fabric of dwelling/inhabiting/living with place, and so too, marks carried from hands and

implements through inks onto plates, pressed onto paper, create sites of presence that live within deep and on-going stories.

In an essay on print works by Uncle Badger Bates for the exhibition *Emu Sky* (2021–22), Jared Field traces a set of associations between linocut, traditional woodcarving, and the way Bates' works partly recall for Field his Gamilaraay mob's sacred carved bora trees, arguing for an analogous essence encapsulated in the idea of a 'life marked with meaning'.<sup>vi</sup> While writing on Aboriginal art often draws both analogues and overlaps with other practices to which artworks are tethered, printmaking could be said to contain the traces of traces – a series of things being left behind (lines carved out, wax dislodged, inks transferred), materially and conceptually inhabited not as marks of absence but of continuation.

Works in this exhibition all speak in different ways to the influential and innovative nature of print as a significant artistic practice rather than a secondary one, traversing the practices of Indigenous printmakers such as Laurel Nannup, Brett Nannup, and Peter Cameron, as well as important collaborative relationships between artists, art centres, printmakers, and print studios, such as between artists and printmakers at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala Print Space, and Basil Hall Editions; works from a highly collaborative relationship between Lena Nyadbi and Basil Hall Editions; prints by Queenie McKenzie and Paddy Carlton that were some of the first made between artists from Waringarri Arts and the Northern Territory University Printmaking Workshop (later Northern Editions); and two early prints carved into lino by Ngarralja Tommy May and Mervyn Street and printed by Martin King at The Australian Print Workshop who have had a significant on-going relationship with Mangkaja Arts.<sup>vii</sup> From print as response to collections and continuation of cultural



Paddy Carlton, *Moolawoorrem*, 1995, lithograph, printing ink on paper, Berndt Museum Collection [1995/0135], courtesy of the estate of the artist.

knowledge (*The Berndt Etching Series* (2008)), to printmaking as part of book making and storytelling (Laurel Nannup), to the expediency of small printed cards sent in letters from prison (Peter Cameron), to print as an extension of manifesting relationships to country in ways distinct from painting – the relational, responsive, iterative, and communicative tendencies of print have been maximally and creatively wielded by artists to traverse institutional arrangements and circulate knowledge and stories.

While diverse in style, period, and region, these print stories share the tendency of leaning into the medium to communicate stories spanning generations. Laurel Nannup's prints don't simply illustrate her life stories, but are text and image works that encapsulate the uncanny and expansive nature of small memories. Brett Nannup's work traverses both the intimacy of personal affect within visions of the eternal nature of Noongar time and being. Peter Cameron – who was still searching for deeper knowledge of his Inggarda and Martu heritage at the time of his tragic death – created images that draw out broad holistic concepts from across many forms of Indigenous knowledge.<sup>viii</sup> *The Berndt Etching Series* creates a complex criss-crossing dialogue across and between generations of artists. While the gallery walls are thick with the paint of reset, papers embedded with layers of ink feel like surfaces contiguous with others, enfolding us into small moments that are inhabiting the traces of vast worlds.

### Jessyca Hutchens

Jessyca is a Palyku woman, art historian, and the curator of *Inhabiting the Trace*.

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- i. The *Yirrkala Drawings* (1946-47) are 365 crayon drawings on brown paper, made by twenty-seven senior Yolŋu leaders, who worked with anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt, vividly documenting Yolŋu life, culture, knowledge and law. They were inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World register in 2006. The community led access to the drawings with The Mulka Project (a cultural archive, digital learning centre, and production house) funding reproductions that would inspire the *Berndt Etching Series* (2008).
  - ii. Peter Cameron (1960-1997) was close to completing a Bachelor of Science (Medical Science) at Curtin University when he died. He corresponded, while incarcerated, with Dr Fiona Stanley and Dr Anne Read on his ideas on Indigenous Health, outlining his research, ideas on art and philosophy, and sharing his artworks. Peter Cameron began printmaking through workshops with Zoy Crizzle, who would go on to start the JETA (Justice & Equity Through Art) program in 1995, which offered degrees to incarcerated people.
  - iii. Laurel Nannup is a Noongar artist, born at Carrolup in 1943. *A Story to Tell* emerged from her postgraduate study in printmaking at Curtin University, and traverses memories such as life with family at Pinjarra Reserve, and



Peter Cameron, *Happy, healthy child*, c. 1992-1996, linocut, printing ink on paper, artist proof, gift of Professor Fiona Stanley AC, Berndt Museum collection [2018/0207], courtesy of the estate of the artist.

- being taken to Wandering Mission at the age of eight. The project became a touring exhibition through Art on the Move in 2012. See Laurel Nannup, *A Story to Tell* (Perth, Western Australia: UWAP, 2006).
- iv. Ivan Illich, 'Dwelling', address to the Royal Institute of British Architects, York, UK, July 1984, published in Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990* (London; New York: Marian Boyars Publishers, 1992), 55.
- v. *Ibid.*, 57.
- vi. Jared Field, 'Ngamil-a gunagala-gal', written in connection with the exhibition *Emu Sky, Old Quad*, University of Melbourne, curated by Zena Cumpston, available at [https://emusky.culturalcommons.edu.au/blak\\_yarn/ngamil-a-gunagala-ga-jared-field/](https://emusky.culturalcommons.edu.au/blak_yarn/ngamil-a-gunagala-ga-jared-field/).
- vii. In addition to these relationships, the exhibition also features two works by Brett Nannup made in collaboration with Michael Kempson at Cicada Press, COFA, UNSW.
- viii. Cameron's death occurred while on home release just before he was due to receive parole and was a death in custody.

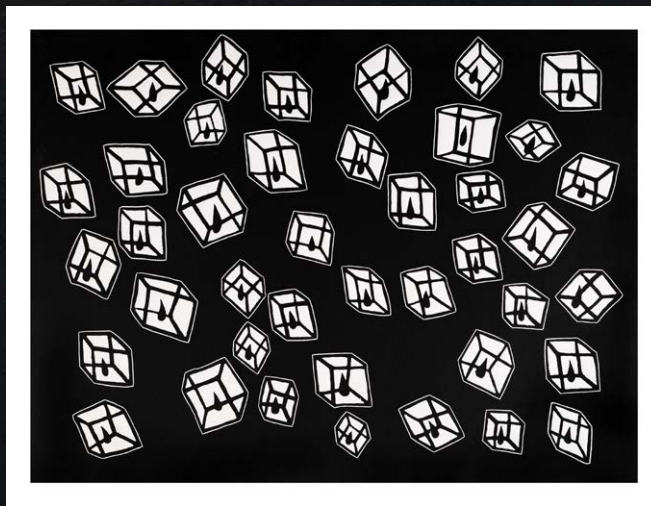
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Inhabiting the Trace* is an exhibition of printed works on paper by Australian Indigenous artists represented in the Berndt Museum collections, displayed in the Janet Holmes à Court Gallery at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. We would like to thank all of the artists and printmakers involved in creating the dynamic artworks shown in this exhibition, as well as the art centres Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, and Warmun Art Centre who support artist's practices. We would like to thank Debra Cameron, Dr Fiona Stanley and Dr Anne Read for helping us understand more about Peter Cameron's work, and Basil Hall, Martin King and Franck Gohier for wonderful conversations on printmaking. We would like to thank The University of Western Australia Art Collection for the loan of two works by Brett Nannup, and Cross Border Productions for their touching film on Laurel and Brett Nannup. This exhibition and its public programs have been supported and produced by many Berndt Museum, Lawrence Wilson Gallery, and School of Indigenous Studies staff members as well as an installation team. A special thank you to Odd Anderson, Alana Colbert, Lyle Branson, Courtney Henry, Anthony Kelly, Guillermo Kramer, Janice Lally, Clare McFarlane, and Siti Ridhuan.

We would like to acknowledge that this exhibition takes place on Noongar boodjar, and that Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practice their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge.

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Brett Nannup, *Frozen Tears*, 2007, woodcut, printing ink on paper, Berndt Museum Collection [2002/0032], courtesy of the artist.



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