

## Vernacular Terrain

*One Night the moon  
Came a'rollin by  
Drove a big cart  
across the night sky  
One night the moon  
Came a'rollin by  
Called all the dreamers  
To come for a ride.*

*One Night the Moon, 2001.*

Christine Peacock, Rebekah Pitt and John Graham's animation 'Boy and Moth' tells a type of classic morale tale of where knowledge, enlightenment and special powers of perception are placed on an unwitting, unsuspecting innocent hero for them to wonder at, enjoy, and rationalise and come to terms with. Aboriginal art is art made by Aboriginal people whatever its form, scale, practice or material. Certain inherent features of a technology can shut particular people out from access to it, from knowledge or a system of power associated with it.

Our world is aptly described within the title Vernacular Terrain, a moulded landscape of pathways, sites of aggregation, collection, and settlement. A variegated terrain of the personal and social, more so than spatial. Where information, ideas, expressions, feelings and concepts are ambiguously connected to sites and people and yet exchanged or discarded; overpowered and subsumed or escaping to fly free; in a constant state of flux, a temporal and spatial state of being.

Our landscape is strewn with sites of specific actions, people and their stories both creative and destructive. Aboriginal people have always sat uncomfortably in Australian colonial history and Aboriginal art sits somewhat incongruously in 'white-Australian' western art history, our very contemporary existence a challenge to both.

*This land is mine  
All the way to the old fence line  
Every break of day  
I'm working hard just to make it pay  
They won't take it away from me*

Father [Paul Kelly], *One Night the Moon, 2001.*

Some would tell us that new technology is supposedly race, gender and politically neutral yet we know how by its very 'newness' it reinforces [challenges] the stereotypes it supposedly refutes. Are we making old art with new technology? Certainly it appears cyber art forms move faster than laws, experiences and

concepts of, than people can keep pace with. Jason Davidson's 'Martial Art & Multimedia: A Tribute to Wally Nickels' aligns itself *with* the Wadeye [Port Keats] traditional society's youth culture. Here the community is dominated by two warring, extremely visible street gangs 'The Judas Priests' and 'The Evil Warriors' despite an intense Aboriginal religious life, language retention and many other 'traditional' practices. It is in these communities that Asian 'Kung Fu' action movies were the most popular films. Where the language of the script was rendered irrelevant amidst the constant fight sequences; where the small defeat the powerful, good overcomes evil and those aggrieved achieved some form of justice, where meaningful connections were being made between the movies and the communities.

*This land is me  
Rock, water, animal; tree  
They are my song  
My being's here where I belong  
This land owns me  
From generations past to infinity  
We're all but woman and man  
You only fear what you don't understand*

Tracker Albert Riley, *One Night the Moon*, 2001.

Franz Fanon wrote of how colonialism and racism are a form of violence that is embedded through every facet of colonial cultural expression, so subtle and pervasive as to be invisible. To make his point he described the cruel disjunction of a black man watching the film 'Tarzan' with a black audience in colonised Martinique, watching the same film in a 'white' audience in Paris. Overcoming racism through the appropriation of coloured people in film histo-graphies and critique lies in the roll-call of Jenny Fraser's witty titled work 'name that movie', vignettes of Hollywood films.

Postcards were already a 'holiday item' when the 'Box Brownie' camera technology democratically liberated photography for the masses [including some yet to be identified Aboriginal people]. Popular among a myriad exotic postcard images were those of the stereotyped primitive other. Andrew Hill's composition reverses the gaze to unveil the stereotype of the westerner we see exposed in all its true ugliness.

Our historical landscape, our terrain, pathways to enrichment and positive adventures, through British colonisation became unguarded openings to the heart of our societies and our dreams. r e a 's dream sequences alternate from soft pleasurable, 'prenatal', almost indescribable experiences and memories to the jarring, equally unbelievably, brutal, inhuman colonial violence '*maang* [message stick]'.

When the British visited the Australian continent in 1770 there were at least 250 distinct languages living in a myriad of 'vernacular' groups and differing cultural and physical environments across Australia. Through the colonisation processes, over the last 200 years, a flattening of this terrain, to some extent, has happened. However Aboriginal people continue to still live, work, create and dream in an extended number of ancient and new pathways, lifestyles, expressions, contemporary dreaming tracks and song-lines. We remain in a persistently optimistic, confident and extremely visible outlook on our futures as part of a modern vibrant contributing Aboriginal culture life.

**Djon Mundine OAM**

Indigenous Curator Contemporary Art  
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