

Jintulu

People of the Sun



Sidney Nolan, *The snake*, 1973, wax crayons and paint on cardboard, 30 panels, 222 x 1221cm overall, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the Department of Foreign Affairs, 1980 © The Sidney Nolan Trust. All rights reserved. DACS/Copyright Agency, 2023

Jintulu: People of the Sun

Indigenous people lived free under the sun, it guided them through their lives and helped to shape their culture and stories. Colonisation is like a shadow, it has cast its darkness across their lands and taken away that which was most sacred to them, their freedom.

Michael Bonner, Lead Curator

In settler imaginaries, the sun has often figured as a visual metaphor of a harsh country, sunburnt and untameable. Of course, colonial encroachment often created the harsh conditions it lamented: cleared lands, farms and prisons, bitumen and pavement, depleted water sources, uncontrollable fires of uncared-for land, the rising temperatures of climate change. Such are the hot spaces of colonial conquest. To be of or under the sun, in post-invasion Australia, is to deal with this contradiction – between the lifegiving sun and the

colonial project acting like a burning lens, turning worlds to dust. This is a picturing Sidney Nolan – whose epic *The snake* installation is shown in the Maller Gallery – also dwelt on, creating visceral images of drought, dust and animal carcasses. By contrast, *The snake*, said to be inspired by the desert in spring, is not one of these hot horror scapes, but rather appropriates Indigenous mythology and uses racialised portraiture to create an undulating quasi-mystical spectacle.

As if to answer this attempt to mythologise the Australian desert through acts of cultural appropriation, the paintings of Terry Murray, shown in the same gallery, carefully draw upon ancestral knowledges that he and his family are responsible for, resting particularly on the Walmajarri iconography of the *jila*. These precious, permanent water sources are brought to the surface through ceremony, allowing Walmajarri

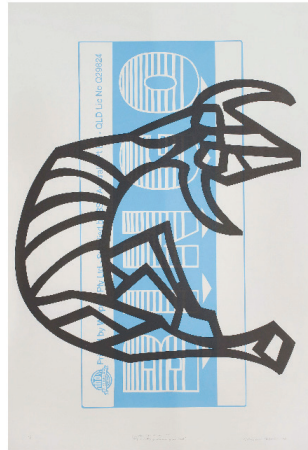


Natalie Scholtz, *Unbirthing patriotism*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 220 x 377cm, courtesy and © the artist, photograph: Rebecca Mansell

people to live freely *with* the sun's heat and cycles. Nolan's installation of gestural fragments (he developed quick motions to repeat his chosen motifs at scale, before working back into each piece) represents a kind of mimicry of ceremony. By contrast, in Murray's large painting made partly in response to Nolan's *The snake* – the snake spirit is not so much represented figuratively as embodied and evoked by the work. "They might travel together," Murray suggests of the two serpents, when we discuss how Nolan's work was once made for the Australian embassy in Beijing – hinting at the subtle hidden cultural work that such artworks might perform out in the world, without the need for monumental national representations.

With some parallels to Nolan's play on settler identities, Natalie Scholtz's paintings in the Westpac Gallery present morphing, distorted figures within

the Australian postcolonial landscape. But if Nolan straddles settler melancholia and, in *The snake*, at least, romanticised primitivism, then Scholtz's morphing, fleshy bodies, often blending human and non-human figures, are far more of a melange of identities. Against an Australian painting tradition of white settler alienation within the land, this is a more complex picturing of racialisation, intersections, solidarities, conflicts and connotations. For Scholtz, the grotesque can be liberating too – fleeing from gendered forms of exoticisation and orientalism. A child of immigrant parents of Persian and South African descent, Scholtz's work also recognises the complexity of black and brown identities within a settler context, something that has also been the theme of collaborative paintings made with Martu artist Curtis Taylor.



Alison Alder, *Intervention I-IX*, 2008, (detail, *Intervention III and Intervention IV: It's a lottery where you live.*), screenprint on Stonehenge paper, ed. 4/5, 112 x 77cm each, Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, The University of Western Australia, © the artist, photograph: David Paterson

In the Lady Sheila Cruthers Gallery, two works dwell within particular historical time periods. Artist Alison Alder confronted what she describes as an overwhelming sense of anger with the Howard Government's 2007-12 Northern Territory intervention¹, considered by many to be a return to racist mission mentalities and a massive denial of Indigenous autonomy and self-determination. Creating prints from receipts and images of everyday shopping items, as well as imaging the lack of coverage in the local newspaper, Alder draws attention to the patronising and discriminatory nature of the policies of invasive 'income management' directed at just part of the community. In the centre of the space, Valerie Takao Binder's epic installation of a *Dwelling Place/Mia Mia* and an accompanying series of paintings, takes us to the Swan Valley Nyungah (Noongar) Community she grew up in in the 1950s, and manages to find registers



Valerie Takao Binder, *Dwelling Place/Mia Mia and One's Own Country/Kallip*, 2000, installation view, *Jintulu: People of the Sun*, 2024, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, courtesy of the Berndt Museum 2001/0004.1-80 and 2001/0023, *Sandy Country/Yile Boodja*, 2000, oil on MDF board, 30 panels, 30 x 30 x 1cm each, on loan from the Western Australian Museum A25946-A25975 © the artist's estate, photograph: Rebecca Mansell

of resilience, self-determination and care for country, alongside and within the extreme control and neglect of the governments of the time. A hand-painted banner in the house that reads 'They Called us Thieving Black Bastards', drives home the social and political marginalisation and contempt that drove these policies and conditioned people's lives. Across both these works, and their build-up of domestic fragments, one sees the various ways people's dignity and freedom has been eroded.

Curtis Taylor's singularly heart-rending work, *Boong*, in the Janet Holmes à Court Gallery, plunges the viewer into mostly darkness. Through an audio track we hear different voices spewing forth a torrent of racist abuse, language all the more disturbing for how everyday and casual it can sound, as well as how visceral and inventive, with every linguistic effort made to induce



Curtis Taylor, *Boong*, 2023, installation view, *Jintulu: People of the Sun*, 2024, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, repurposed bull bars, lights, digital audio, 5:48 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sweet Pea, © the artist, photograph: Rebecca Mansell

fear and project hate. Around the room, bull bars are installed on the dark walls, bringing these words into even more horrific territory. They are a possible referent to the death of 33-year-old Kwementyaye Ryder (killed in 2009 in a racially motivated attack by a posse of five white men who had been speeding around in a 4WD and terrorising people camped out at the Todd River) as well as many other acts of racial violence and pursuit. It is notable that the audio and the wall pieces are almost like bookends – the crime in-between, as well as its victims, are notably absent. But rather than this reducing the impact of the work, its unsettling power rests in the way the works create a brimming undercurrent of violence, always about to take off, an ever-present threat. In this sense the work hovers between specific violent acts, and a more ubiquitous racial animus underpinning Australian society. Like the overwhelming sense of control and marginalisation

created in the middle gallery with Alder and Takao Binder's work, as well as through the disfigurements of racism present in Scholtz's paintings, this final work brings us to the heart of the inescapable colonial shadow, where survival is not about life under the hot sun, but life within the settler state.

Jessyca Hutchens

Jessyca Hutchens is a Palyku woman and a Lecturer in the School of Indigenous Studies at The University of Western Australia.

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1. Officially called the Northern Territory National Emergency Response and initiated by the Australian Federal Government under Prime Minister John Howard in 2007.



Murungkurr Terry Murray, *Parnti Italul (Claypan in Spring), from Seasons on Walmajarri Country series, 2023–4, acrylic on canvas, 119.5 x 119cm

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LIST OF WORKS

Alison Alder

Intervention I–IX, 2008, screenprints on Stonehenge paper, ed. 4/5, 111 x 78cm each, Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art, The University of Western Australia

Intervention I (Powercard)
Intervention II (Day 2)
Intervention III
Intervention IV (It’s a lottery where you live)
Intervention V (Day 176)
Intervention VI (Quarantine)
Intervention VII
Intervention VIII (Wowser)
Intervention IX

Valerie Takao Binder

Dwelling Place/Mia Mia, 2000, mixed material installation, dimensions variable, Berndt Museum 2001/00041-80

One’s Own Country/Kallip, 2000, oil and sand on canvas, 190 x 220cm, Berndt Museum 2001/0023

Sandy Country/Yile Boodja, 2000, oil on MDF board, 30 panels, 30 x 30 x 1cm each, on loan from the Western Australian Museum A25946–A25975

Generations, c. 2000, acrylic on canvas, 110.7 x 80.5cm, on loan from the Western Australian Museum A26082

All Valerie Takao Binder works were commissioned by the Western Australian Museum/Perth International Arts Festival, 2001

Irwin Lewis

Faces, c. 2007, acrylic paint, sand and modelling compound on canvas, 91 x 60 x 1.5cm, Berndt Museum 2007/0034

Reflections, 1994, acrylic on canvas board, 66 x 62.3 x 4.5cm (framed), Berndt Museum 1994/0215

Murungkurr Terry Murray

**Japingka Jila Dreaming*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 220 x 514cm

**Jila Japingka Creation & Jila Permanent Water*, 2024 installation: acrylic on canvas, 6 panels, approx. 111 x 81cm each, coolamon and sand, dimensions variable

**Seasons on Walmajarri Country*, 2023-24, acrylic on canvas, 10 panels, approx. 120 x 120cm each

Warla Winpa, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120cm, Berndt Museum 2014/0007

Sidney Nolan

The snake, 1973, wax crayons and paint on cardboard, 30 panels, 222 x 1221cm overall, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of the Department of Foreign Affairs, 1980

Natalie Scholtz

**Venus (standing)*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 134 x 94cm

**Venus (kneeling)*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 134 x 94cm

**Venus (reclining)*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 134 x 94cm

**Unbirthing patriotism*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 220 x 377cm

**Face I–X*, 2023, mixed media on ply, 10 panels, 13 x 10 x 4cm each

January has two faces, 2023, mixed media on canvas, 64 x 53cm

Midas mouth, 2023, mixed media on canvas, 57 x 47cm

**Wearing faces*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**To quieten*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**Glow up*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**All ears*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**Voices*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**We*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**You internalise everything*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

When I want it, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

The Cat, the Kanga and the Cow, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**Learning lots*, 2023, mixed media on paper, 75 x 56cm

**Noah prepares for an exhibition*, 2023, mixed media on linen, 220 x 377cm

Curtis Taylor and Natalie Scholtz

MUTHA CUNTRY, 2023, mixed media on linen, 218 x 215cm

Curtis Taylor

Boong, 2022, repurposed bull bars, lights, digital audio, 5:48 minutes, courtesy of the artist and Sweet Pea, commissioned by Dark Lab for Dark Mofo 2023

All works courtesy of the artists unless otherwise credited

*Commissioned for *Jintulu: People of the Sun*, Berndt Museum and Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 2024

CURATORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank all the artists, families and communities involved in this exhibition. Special thanks to the remarkable staff of the Berndt Museum, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, School of Indigenous Studies and Perth Festival who assisted in realising this exhibition, including Justine Ambrosio, Lyle Branson, Minette Brewin, Helen Carroll, Alana Colbert, Fiona Gavino, Courtney Henry, Anthony Kelly, Kate Hamersley, Deborah Haseldine, Jessyca Hutchens, Kayla Johns, Annika Kristensen, Janice Lally, Clare McFarlane, Jill Milroy, Nerry Nichols, David Sadler, Sabrina Swift, Gemma Weston, and the installation and visitor experience team. The exhibition was supported by the generosity of the following organisations and lenders: Art Install, Funeralcare, Icon AV, Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation Fitzroy Crossing, Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency, Redcliffe Art Gallery, Rita Pasqualini, Amber Proud, Sweet Pea, WA Museum Boola Bardip (Ross Chadwick & Moya Smith) and Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation. Thank you to Sarah Douglas from the UWA School of Design for hosting artists-in-residence Natalie Scholtz and Murungkurr Terry Murray and for your ongoing support.

Published by the Berndt Museum and Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at The University of Western Australia, 2024.

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We acknowledge we are situated on Noongar land, and that Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practise their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge. We pay our respects to the traditional owners of the lands on which we live and work across Australia.



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Jintulu: People of the Sun

17 February – 27 April 2024 | Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

Curated by Michael Bonner (lead curator) and Sam Leung (assistant curator) from the Berndt Museum, with Lee Kinsella (curator) from Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

Presented as part of Perth Festival 2024 in association with the Berndt Museum and Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.



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