Collaboration, demystification, Rea-historiography: the reclamation of the black body by contemporary indigenous female photo-media artists

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Collaboration, Demystification, Rea-historiography
The Reclamation of the Black Body by Contemporary Indigenous female photomedia artists

by

Eva Fernández

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the reclamation of the 'Blak' body by Indigenous female photo-media artists. The discussion will begin with an examination of photographic representations of Indigenous people by the colonising culture and their construction of 'Aboriginality'. The thesis will look at the introduction of Aboriginal artists to the medium of photography and their chronological movement through the decades. This will begin with a documentary style approach in the 1960s to an intimate exploration of identity that came into prominence in the 1980s with an explosion of young urban photomedia artists, continuing into the 1990s and beyond. I will be examining the works of four contemporary female artists and the impetus behind their work. The three main artists whose works will be examined are Brenda L. Croft, Destiny Deacon and Rea, all of whom have dealt with issues of representation of the 'Blak female body, gender and reclamation of identity. The thesis will examine the works of these artists in relation to the history of representation by the dominant culture. Chapter 6 will look at a new emerging artist, Dianne Jones, who is looking at similar issues as the artists mentioned. This continuing critique of representation by Jones is testimony of the prevailing issues concerning Aboriginal representation.
I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

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Dianne Jones has been my best friend for about ten years now. We have been through many situations together in this time, which have repeatedly revealed to us our difference. The awareness of these differences was at first new to me. Unfortunately, like most white people, I was unaware of such a thing as 'white privilege'. I now know that these revealing situations were part of Dianne's everyday life.

Dianne is Nyungar; her family comes from the South West Central region of what is now known as Western Australia. Her ancestors have inhabited this area thousands of years before Captain Cook landed on these shores, what most children in this country have come to learn as the beginning of Australian history.

One revealing situation raised its ugly head when Dianne's car had run out of petrol. Luckily, this happened quite close to her home and she was able to walk a short distance to the petrol station on the corner of the street where she lived. With only a plastic container in hand, Dianne entered the petrol station, unaware of the image that this would inscribe. She spoke to the familiar attendant. Explaining her situation, she inquired about how she could purchase some petrol. The attendant hastily refused, claiming that she was unable to fill a plastic container with petrol, as it was unsafe and illegal. Dianne then asked what she needed to carry the petrol in and he told her she would need a metal container. Identifying one such container in the close vicinity, Dianne endeavoured to purchase it. Once again she was refused, this time without explanation. The attendant took a step backwards, almost fearful. It wasn't until she started to walk home, confused, that the extent of what had taken place struck her.

When she got home she called me and explained the situation. I listened in dismay, hoping that she had been mistaken or perhaps misunderstood the situation. The seriousness of her tone dismissed my
misconception. Her car still stranded, I offered to go to the petrol station and get some petrol. Myself having great aptitude to miraculously run out of fuel, I fortunately had a petrol tin in the back of my car. I went straight to the pump of the same petrol station and in full view of the attendant, with Dianne at my side and proceeded to fill up the container. The attendant didn’t bat an eye lid when I went in to pay and avoided eye contact as he blurted out ‘Three dollars fifty thanks, love.’ Dianne wouldn’t come in with me; she waited outside, like her predecessors had been made to do only decades before. She felt shamed. I wanted so desperately to say something, to resolve the situation in some way; to reach depths of this individual’s intellect. I realised that this was probably impossible, so I walked out frustrated and irritated.

I felt my performance impotent as we walked down the road to her car and I silently pondered a different more potent resolution. Why was I unable to challenge or confront the situation? What would I say? Dianne’s resilience surprised me, seemingly content just to have petrol in her car again. As her jalopy rabbit hopped down the road until the air was expelled from the fuel line, the situation continued to disturb me. Eventually we laughed, I am not sure why.

Dianne is also an artist, and when she is in the gallery space she commends great respect from all around her. Her work has begun selling very well and investors and state galleries enthusiastically have begun collecting. Eager people crowd around her, carefully taking in each word, especially fervent to hear harrowing stories of heartbreak and pain in relation to Aboriginal experience. She is now ‘authentically Aboriginal’ and is in the space where the wider community is comfortable with her. She has become a curiosity, perhaps Strange Fruit. She is now safe to approach. I watch from a distance, proud, but also in amazement at how such a person can be treated so differently under particular circumstances.

I have come to realise that these situations are not alien to Dianne. This and many other situations are constant reminders of her difference, her ‘otherness’. ‘Otherness’ that is constructed from myths and misrepresentations since white met black which still strongly permeates contemporary culture.
Another day Dianne and I found ourselves at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. We were looking at an exhibition, which included a video by Destiny Deacon; *I don't want to be a bludger* (1999). In the video, Deacon constructs several scenarios, which echo stereotypical white Australian attitudes toward Aboriginal experience.

Dianne and I quickly became engrossed in the video and in a short period of time found ourselves laughing quite noticeably. People from around the space started to gather curiously, only to stare at the screen blank faced for a moment and then continued on their journey through the Indigenous collection, perhaps in search of the bark paintings or something less confronting in which they could comfortably reinstate their cultural distance. I felt as though we had almost become part of an installation. We watched the movie for quite some time. As the loop continued, more people came and went.

The movie replayed in my mind for quite some time. I wondered why some people walked away after a brief moment, totally affected. I wondered why Dianne laughed. I wondered why I laughed. I needed to find out.
INTRODUCTION

They are ghosts deprived of rest. The photographers have put the subjects on the historical map, often falsifying forever a person's place in the world. (Croft, 1997, p. 9)

The photographers that Croft refers to in this statement are the white men who made some of the first photographic representations of Indigenous people in this country. They are the recognised names: 'Douglas T. Kilburn. Charles Kerry. John William Lindt. Paul Foelsche. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen. Fred Kruger. The authors of these images are all recorded with few exceptions. We know their names, like some mantra reverberating from Book of the Dead.' (Croft, 1997, p. 10)

The ghosts deprived of rest are the subjects of these photographs, the unnamed, the people who have been disconnected from their identities and culture and therefore unable to reach eternal peace.

It is these types of representations which began the construction of the 'other' in the white Australian psyche and have consequently created stereotypes and attitudes towards Indigenous people. These images have dislocated the subjects from their context, 'disembodied, cut off from their traditions, their spirits never to rest.' (Croft, 1997, p.11) The stereotypes are varied and numerous: 'romantic nomad', 'primitive', 'savage', 'dying race', 'victim', 'island princess' and they continue to evolve into the millennium:

Aboriginal people recently have had representation in many areas as "extensive research argues that there has been a shift over the last thirty years from stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal people as "victims" to stereotypical portrayals as "criminals"." (Perkins, 1994, p. 4)

My thesis examines the way in which contemporary Indigenous female photo-media artists challenge these inscriptions. I have chosen to research female artists because their struggle from these binding stereotypes is two
fold. They are challenged by their cultural difference as well as by their gender.

The distorted and often offensive representation of Aboriginal people has served as the driving force for the numerous contemporary Indigenous photo-media artists who have surfaced in the last two decades. They have turned these experiences into amazing, potent, political, humorous and beautiful pieces of art that continue to confront the hegemonic system of thought.

The first chapter of this thesis looks at the origins and rationale of the construction of representation of the Indigenous 'other' in its various forms. Representation is constructed from the time and context in which it originates. The introduction of the camera to Australia came at a time when there was an accumulation of knowledge in the sciences and the origins of humanity. This technological progress by western culture, confirmed their belief of their intellectual superiority. Eurocentric ideology led the dominant believe that their Aboriginal subjects were somewhat inferior and this was the cause of their demise. The colonisers were incognizant to the actual consequence of the demise of the Indigenous population; introduction of disease, murder, detribalisation, and dispossession. This attitude is perpetuated in the photographic representations of Aboriginal people of this time as well as in the basis of colonisation on the notion of terra nullus. This reduced the Indigenous people of Australia to flora and fauna. '[w]here the white people had culture, the black people existed in a permanent state of nature.' (Carver, 1996, p. 69)

My resurrection and re-evaluation of these early images may be problematic and possibly perceived as reiterating the analytical investigation of early ethnographic and anthropological scrutiny. My intention is not to analyse these images in order to examine the subjects, but to look at them in context of the time and attitude that they were taken, in order to identify the hegemonic systems in place and illustrate how representation was constructed. I will also refer to these early photographs to exemplify the commentary used by contemporary Aboriginal photo-media artists, in reference to these representations.
Chapter 2 will examine the introduction of contemporary Indigenous photography, beginning in the 1960s with Merv Bishop and continuing into the explosion of young Aboriginal photographers onto the art scene in the 1980s. This was the period when Aboriginal Australia picked up the camera and reversed its use as a weapon against their culture, using it as a tool to record a perspective of their own and document the many political activities of the time such as the Australia Day Bicentennial protests of 1988.¹

I will also examine the change from the 'other' culture being the subject of the gaze, to the 'other' culture speaking for itself. I will proceed to look at the new generation of photo-media artists of the 1990s and beyond, and the change from the photo-documentary approach to a more complex examination of identity through photography and digital media.

The artists which will be discussed in the following chapters, all work in the medium of photo-media. The selected works are dealing with issues of representation, predominantly of the female body.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the work of Brenda L Croft. Here I examine her work with reference to that of anthropological photographs of the late 19th century such as those by Paul Foelsche. Her aim is to make Aboriginal people identified subjects and part of the process of being photographed, to make this a collaborative process so that the subjects have power over the way that they are represented. Some of the works discussed extend to installation pieces including soundscapes of the subjects in the exhibition space to enhance the sense of the situation. Croft gives her subjects identity and a voice therefore empowering them in the process of representation.

In Chapter 4, I examine selected works by Destiny Deacon with reference to the images of women as 'exotic' 'other' of the early carte de viste images of Indigenous women. These representations present the notion of the black women as 'exotic' and 'black velvet', an item of consumption for the white colonists. Deacon draws upon white Australia's interpretations of Aboriginality, 'Aboriginalism', to critically appraise the culturally implanted stereotypes. She uses devises of humour and wit to resurrect, mimic and

parody scenes reminiscent of early Australian cultural artefacts, revealing the history of racism, suppression and objectification in these representations. 'These artists take on the dominant culture, rework it, then dish it back.' (Groves, 1998, p. 86)

In the series of work discussed in Chapter 5, Rea shows the 'Blak' female body objectified, bound, entrapped, dissected and bottled. She recounts her interpretation of the effects of history on the 'Blak' female body. The work evokes the treatment of Aboriginal people (women) as scientific specimens, objectified and scrutinized. Rea is piecing together her history with her own family photographs to rewrite 'her-story', investigating issues which are relevant to her experience but also echoing the experience of Aboriginal Australia.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the work of newcomer, Dianne Jones. The introduction of this artist at this time is testimony that these issues of representation of Indigenous people have not yet been resolved and so a new generation of artists continue to tackle these similar concerns.

The selected bodies of works discussed have been chosen because of their relevance to the topic. These artists also deal with many other issues in other works that have not been discussed in this thesis. To talk about the artists collectively is not to say that their work is synonymous, but they share a mutual concern in the issue of representations of Aboriginal women and reclamation of their identity. They also share the use of technology in the works discussed, in the form of photography and digital media in order to comment on these inaccurate histories and by doing so, access and claim one of the very technologies that assisted in their misrepresentations.

The work of these artists is of great importance as they are breaking down the Eurocentric notions of 'Aboriginality', which have been created by early images and stories and that still have relevance in the treatment and attitudes towards Aboriginal people today, as noted by Langton;
Textual analysis of the racist stereotypes and mythologies which inform Australian understanding of Aboriginal people is revealing. The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists. (Langton, 1993, p. 33)

Contemporary criticism of these early images has concluded that these images are more accurate in determining the attitudes of the dominant culture toward Aboriginal people than acting as accurate documents describing Aboriginal culture. The early photographs and representations have become ‘social artifacts’ (Scherer, 1990, p. 141) or as Destiny Deacon refers to some items ‘white Australian artefacts’.

These contemporary artists are helping to change attitudes toward Aboriginal people and break down the dangerous stereotypes that have been constructed since colonisation. Their work is about raising questions, presenting realities and challenging the expected in a hope to make social change.

Thus, we must sort out the myths of Otherness and stereotypes. We can begin to do this by learning how non-Western photographers see themselves and how various cultures interpret these seemingly identical forms according to culturally specific symbolic meaning and function. (Scherer, 1990, p. 146)
CHAPTER 1

Origins and rationale of the construction of representation of the Indigenous 'other'

The camera's conception during the period of Enlightenment, made it a perfect device in the observation, analysis and classification of the natural world. Everything was subjected to scientific scrutiny including the study of human beings. With this accumulation of knowledge came the belief that the more that was known about the visible world, the closer we would be in revealing the truth of its origin. It was believed that the 'mechanical eye' was able to produce an accurate and objective replica, facilitating systematic organization and analysis, in the service of scientific enquiry. The idea that 'the camera does not lie' was resolute in the ideologies of its early operators. 'Photography was viewed largely as a simple recording truth revealing mechanism' (Edwards, 1992, p. 4) 'The assumed reality of the photograph invested it with illusion of "truth" and gave it much of its power...the growth of photography made images, especially depicting exotic places which were now accessible, available to people everywhere.' (Scherer, 1992, p. 33)

As radical movement flowed out of Europe to the unknown and 'primitive' worlds, the camera was deployed as the tool to document these travels and the discoveries in them including their mysterious inhabitants.

The first use of the camera in Australian Aboriginal cultures was made by British colonisers who assumed that they were documenting the final stages of life of a 'dying race', the equivalent to the 'vanishing race' of the North American Indians since the colonisation of Columbus 300 years before. As the numbers of Aboriginal people had been decimated from '750 000 in 1788 to 95 000 in 1901' (Willis, 1993, p. 96), this was seemingly true, though it was believed that this process of extinction of a race was a natural process
from the notion of 'survival of the fittest', the ideology of Social Darwinism, and not the actual consequence of invasion.

Central to these models was the belief in the intrinsic relationship between the physical, biological nature of man and his cultural moral and intellectual nature. Thus culture was seen as being biologically determined. Non-European races, who appeared less accomplished technologically, were interpreted as representing the 'childhood of mankind', a phase through which European man had passed in his prehistoric and proto-historic periods in a linear progression toward 'civilization'. (Edwards, 1992, p. 6)

This idea was the precedence set for the notion of white man's superiority over the supposed primitive 'other':

The cultural circumscriptions included under the modern interpretive blanket 'Western perception of the “Other”' are central to the creation and consumption of photography in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth centuries. (Edwards, 1992, p. 5)

There were different types of photography taking place at this time, from the amateur anthropologist, to the professional photographer's carte de visite portraits, to scientific records. 'There was no traveller armed with a camera who was not already operating as an ethnologist.' (Frizot, 1994, p. 267) Photographs taken by amateur photographers and 'week-end anthropologists' were collected by institutions as ethnographic documents being defined as of 'scientific interest'. Therefore even the lay person was able to contribute to the construction of the 'other's' identity.

The notion that Aboriginal culture was slowly dying, destined it to be of great ethnographic and anthropological interest. There was a desire to document Aboriginal customs, rituals, tools and artefacts as well as their physical appearances before this culture totally disappeared. The techniques that were employed to obtain these images, demonstrate the attitudes toward the subjects as they were treated equal to scientific specimens. These subjects were photographed from all angles and regarded as though they were specimens of flora or fauna. 2 An example of the process of

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2 Aboriginal people were considered flora and fauna up until 1967, when Indigenous peoples were granted citizenship.
photographing Indigenous people is recorded in 1869, when the President of the Ethnological Society, Professor T.H. Huxley was asked to submit a series of photographs of the various races of men known within the British Empire. (Figure 1)

The system advocated by Huxley required the unclothed subject to be photographed full length, both front and profile. In the front view, the right arm must be out stretched horizontally, the palm of the hand towards the camera. The ankles should be together “in attitude of attention”. In the profile view the left side should be turned to the camera and the left arm bent at the elbow and arranged so as not to obscure the dorsal contour: the back of the hand should be turned toward the camera. In addition to the two full-length photographs, full face and profile photographs of the head were recommended. All the photographs should be accompanied by a clearly marked measuring rod. (Edwards, 1990, p. 246)

It was obvious that the objectification of people was legitimised for ethnographic purposes. The Aboriginal subjects had no advantage to gain through this scientific research and it only served to put them into a subservient relationship with the observers. The individuals were stripped of their clothing, their rights as well as their dignity, for the ‘gaze’ and the analysis of the bourgeois European male scientist. The photograph transformed the subject into an object to be analysed and prodded at. In many circumstances, there is evidence of resistance by the Aboriginals to having their photographs taken in the system advocated by Huxley.

In Victoria the Aborigines, I am glad to say are civilized as regards their habits, but they are not sufficiently enlightened to submit themselves in a state of nudity for portraiture in order for the advancement of science. Indeed they are careful in a matter of their clothing, and if I empowered a photographer to visit the stations and take photographs with Professor Huxley’s instructions in hand he would, I am sure, offend the Aborigines and meet with little success. (Edwards, 1990, p. 248)
Figure 1 Four views of a South Australian Aboriginal female ‘Ellen’ aged twenty-two, photographed (c. 1870 according to Huxley’s ‘photometric instructions’ photographer unknown. (RAI 2116, 2117)
Colonial photography also had a fascination with the 'native' female body; the colonies became 'what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination - a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which European protected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.' (McClintock, 1995, p. 22)

The Western fascination with the 'native' female body was also expressed in colonial photography where the figure of the beautiful, compliant woman posed and pictured in exotic surroundings with a view to erotic allure served overlapping categories of art, ethnography and pornography. (Ryan, 1997, p. 145)

Colonised countries became a popular destination for commercial and travel photographers and the images of this time are full of the stereotypical representation of young bare breasted women attired in traditional costume in alluring poses to gratify the European male's desire for the 'colonial Venus'. (Ryan, 1997, p. 145)

Women were repeatedly posed amongst native plants and exotic fruits, denying that there was a difference, objectifying, making both exotic produce; believed to be rightfully belonging to the coloniser to be devoured visually and in some cases physically. The sexualised stereotype of the 'native' woman was accepted without question. Nudity was also accepted as long as it was not that of a white woman, as the Indigenes were considered nature and not part of the cultured world.

Many photographers took studio portraits of Aborigines throughout southern Queensland and sold these images as cabinet photographs. These were a popular type of postcard from the late nineteenth century and many of the images included bare-breasted Aboriginal women. As popular sellers they were a source of income for the photographer and the viewer could scrutinise without restraint. This was a reflection of the dual moral standards of the time, where nudity was acceptable as long as it was not of Europeans. (Aird, 1993, p. 10) (Figure 2 & 3)
Figure 2 Canando, West Queensland Aboriginal (c. 1900), Tosca Studios, black and white photograph, collection Queensland Museum 13.4 x 21 cm

Figure 3 Daniel Marquis, Brisbane (1862 – 68) Anthropology Museum, University of Queensland, 55 x 93 mm
'Native' women were portrayed as promiscuous to the point of almost being bestial, as having a 'primitive' sexual appetite, '... women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess.' (McClintock, 1995, p. 22)

Indigenous peoples were not alone in the classification of 'otherness'. Anyone that was gauged alongside the white middle-class male of Victorian culture, which was considered 'the pinnacle of intellectual, moral and physical development' (Ryan, 1997, p. 147) was perceived as different and somewhat inferior. 'The body was seen as the visible proof of human differences, criminal tendencies, pathology and delinquency...It was through the body that nineteenth-century society aimed to know, to punish, to exclude and beleaguer, to reduce and to make subject to law.' (Frizot, 1994, p. 260)

Therefore the physical differences Indigenous people were considered equivalent to the insane's psychological differences and the criminal's moral differences.

The 1860s and 1870s saw photography grow and develop into commercial businesses. Colonial expansion in the 19th century also created great intrigue developing around foreign lands and their 'exotic' inhabitants from audiences in Europe and within Australia. Consequently there was commercial viability for imagery of the exoticism of the 'primitive'. This desire for the exotic and the unusual, formed what came to be known as the View Trade. 'Aboriginal missions set up in the 1850's in most areas, functioned as convenient locations for making portrait sales as part of the "view" trade.' (Newton, 1988, p. 49)

The 'native' Australian became a popular subject matter of the time and marked the uniqueness of Australia, as did its flora and fauna. A popular approach to photographing Aboriginal people was adopted by early commercial photographers in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. These postcards of Indigenous people became a lucrative income for the commercial photographer. 'The View Trade catered to an enormous appetite in Europe for images of the strange, the exotic, and the "other".' (Annear, 1997, p. 5)

John William Lindt was one of these photographers who took over the business of Wagner, a local photographer in Grafton NSW in 1868. The business had a thriving export trade in the photography of the Clarence River
Aborigines, which Lindt continued to exploit. He repeatedly photographed Aborigines in his studio from the 1870s to the 1880s. Much of this work went to scientific societies, parliamentary libraries and international exhibitions, the most significant works made during this period are his studio tableaux photographs entitled 'Australian Aboriginals', produced between 1873 and 1874. These mainly consisted of contrived, clichéd studio set-ups. (Figure 4)

Lindt would set up elaborate studio bush settings, complete with dirt floors, trees and painted backdrops, replicating his understanding of a traditional Aboriginal way of life. Items of material culture are used as markers of 'primitiveness and thus of cultural distance' (Edwards, 1992, p. 9) The subjects would be posed with a variety of hunting and gathering artefacts and even freshly killed carcasses, grouped around apparent dwellings. The images were similar to set-ups in a museum, supporting the idea of the subject as object to be 'gazed' at.

In Lindt’s photographs of the early 1870s the process is completed; their removal from the bush to the constructed studio set, which is dressed with authentic local plants, parallels their actual displacement as the land owners. With their weapons laid aside and their wildness neutralised by the studio ambiance, they have been transformed into specimens — like the plants around them. (Poignant, 1992, p. 54)

The photographer was in total control of the image. It was his interpretation of the Indigene which was being constructed within the set and he would manipulate it in a way he thought suitable. This method was more often than not to remove the subject as much as possible from his own interpretation of civilized.
Figure 4 John William Lindt, Untitled (three Aboriginal women and a small child, (c. 1873), albumen print, 20.3 x 15.4, Collection of National Gallery of Victoria.
If not considered to be living an 'authentic' lifestyle, then it was a simple enough task for the photographer to recreate the 'field' to one's liking in the studio. A freshly killed 'roo, add a scattering of weapons or tools, a few leafy branches from a gum tree outside, a mia-mia, throw in some beads, plenty of bare flesh, and presto, 'picture-perfect'. (Croft, 1997, p. 10)

Lindt would not give his subjects names, and often other details of time and place are sketchy. Women were often identified by their station owners' name or white husbands' name, *Bob Murray wife, Bunitj, age 40*, a practice which frustrates contemporary Indigenous photographer and writer, Brenda Croft: 'was she some station owner's trophy wife?' (Croft, 1997, p. 11) 'Aboriginal people were considered sub-human, so little time was expended on the gathering of identifying data beyond the basic of notation.' (Croft, 1997, p. 10)

Westerners' need for the 'other' is expressed here in the non-naming of individuals, the need to construct the 'other' in order to be measured against. If these 'primitives' did not share the same consciousness as Western culture by naming and recognising individuals, Westerners were then somehow more distanced from the 'other', making them higher on the evolutionary scale.

[To] personalise would have been to humanise and the European market could not easily look at photographic depictions of the Indigene unless they were seen as separate and distinct racial types. (Annear, 1997, p. 5)

Lindt's subjects almost always confronted the camera with their eye contact, often they were expressionless, or else had expressions of anger, hatred or fear. These expressions are also prevalent in the work of Paul Foelsche.

In the recent exhibition *Portraits of Oceania*, 1997 at The Art Gallery of New South Wales, (based on a series of photographs by Charles Kerry, Henry King and Paul Foelsche in the collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales) all of the works by Foelsche seem to share a similarity of expression. The women and men stare at the lens indignant or stoical. (Figure 5)
Figure 5 (from left to right) Paul Foelsche, Portrait of a woman, Minnegie, Limilngan NT, aged 20 years (1887), gelatin silver photograph 15.3 x 10.3 Collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Paul Foelsche, Portrait of a woman, Aligator River, Bunitj NT, aged 3 years (1880s), gelatin silver photograph, 15.3 x 10.3 Collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Paul Foelsche, Portrait of a woman, Minnegie or Mary River, Limilngan NT, aged 18 years (1880s), gelatin silver photograph 15.3 x 10.3 Collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Brenda Croft chooses three of Foelsche's photographs that 'take her eye' in her catalogue essay 'Laying Ghosts to Rest';

These last three women 'take my eye' with their belligerence, their determined individuality, their anger resonating from their portraits. They are pissed off and I like them for it, these young warrior women...The collective gaze of the young women register volumes in anger and fear—were they molested or raped—often standard procedural practice in dealing with 'savages'—by the policeman/photographer? (Croft, 1997, p. 11) (Figure 5)

The concept of the anthropological and ethnographic photograph as an accurate record to define a race or group is continually flawed. The C.A. Woolley portrait of Truganini 1866 is a testament to this. (Figure 6) This portrait was believed to be a representation of the Tasmanian Aboriginal and in fact the last surviving of her race. This photograph along with images of Truganini's four living companions at the time were published internationally as engravings in James Bonwick's Last of the Tasmanians (1870) and several other publications. These images appeared as the only photographic representation of the Tasmanian race as photography was in its infancy at the time of their demise. As this was the case these images were seen to be an accurate representation of this race.

The images were of older, broken down people represented as 'black "Europeans"'. (Rae-Ellis, 1992, p. 232) They were not in their natural nomadic state, without clothing. Rae-Ellis suggests this was to make believe that they were successfully Christianised and civilized. This was not the case as there were no converts among them. 'None of the existing images reflect the spirit or physique of younger Tasmanians and their children. Truganini's youthful beauty was legendary, but little evidence remains of it in Woolley's photograph taken when she was fifty-four'. (Rae-Ellis, 1992, p. 232)

This image of Truganini bears resemblance to the images which were taken much later for anthropological studies of Indigenous people.
Figure 6 C.A. Woolley, *Truganini*, (c.1866), R.A.I.
By the end of the nineteenth century the more rigid models of evolutionary thinking began to dissolve in the light of shifts in scientific thinking. There was a general movement towards a more relativist view of culture and the beginnings of extended anthropological observation... However, the cultural assumption of racial, cultural and moral superiority were thoroughly absorbed into and perpetuated by European social and political structures and continued as a powerful supporting system both to colonial relationships and to anthropological thinking. (Edwards, 1992, p. 6)

Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen, the most noted anthropologists of their time, renowned for their documentation on the tribes of central and northern Australia between 1894 and 1926, seemed to have a slightly different approach to their early predecessors. Their studies still record the physical characteristics of the different tribes and present the subject as a specimen, though some of their photographs tend to have a little more informal style as described by Howard Morphy in Gillen-Man of Science:

They took informal portraits of people in daily life as if for inclusion in a family album of a much later era. The nature of the photographs suggest an easy relation with the subjects who were used to the anthropologists and their camera. It was this relationship that allowed them to make such a detailed coverage of ritual and to take such apparently unselfconscious photographs of intimate and emotionally charged occasions, such as expressions of grief in mourning. (Mulvaney & Morphy, 1997, p. 111)

Although these images seem to be of a more 'sympathetic' nature, they are still positioning the Aboriginal people as objects to be observed, the 'other', those who have no rights and no power over their representation. Anne Marie Willis describes this when discussing the images of Baldwin Spencer and Donald Thompson:

In every one of these photographs, no matter how bland and record-like, a power relation is inscribed, for the visual knowledge is being produced not for the people who are the subjects of the camera, but for those behind it and the institutions they served. (Willis, 1993, p. 107)

Spencer also believed that the Aborigines were a dying race and would soon become extinct.
Figure 7 Baldwin Spencer, Aranda boy wearing cast off clothing at Alice Springs, (1901) National Museum of Victoria
No sooner do the natives come into contact with white men than phthisis and other diseases soon make their appearance, and after a comparatively short time, all that can be done is to gather the few remnants of the tribe into some mission station where the path to final extinction may be made as pleasant as possible. (Spencer, 1982, p. 26)

This is obvious in the Spencer photograph of Aranda boy. (Figure 7) The boy is dressed in threads of European clothing, hanging from his body. This image is indicating the slow destruction of Aboriginal culture through European contact. ‘The conjunction of Aboriginal and European, in clothes, artefacts, settings, is the repeated message of the overwhelming and destructive presence of White power inscribed on Aboriginal bodies.’ (Hodge, 1990, p. 44)

Regardless of the impetus behind the photographic representation of the Aboriginal subject, whether it is anthropological, ethnographic or a curiosity to entertain the gaze of the dominant culture, it seems to be manifesting the same set of assumptions. ‘It appears that the non-European nature of the subject was the crucial characteristic in the categorising material.’ (Edwards, 1990, p. 242)

Susan Sontag refers to the camera as weapon; ‘Like a car, a camera is sold as a predatory weapon-one that’s automated as possible, ready to spring.’ (Sontag, 1977, p. 14) The camera has proved to be an instrument of destruction to Aboriginal culture. Although this was not always overtly evident, there was always an underlying power relation.

In post modern criticism the camera has often been seen as an apparatus of control, one of the surveillance mechanisms of the state, in the service of its institutions and immersed in its technologies of power...One is the hunter, the other the prey; one is the agent the other the victim. (Marsh, 1999, p. 114)

The camera cannot kill as a gun does, but it has certainly acted as an accomplice to ethnocide of Indigenous culture. Photography during colonial period was used as a weapon against the Australian Aboriginal. This weapon was used to categorise, define, dominate and invent the internal ‘other’ and was also an instrument of theft and genocide.
These examples of early photography in Australia are more useful in defining the relationships between black and white than describing the Indigenous people.

Photography was used by anthropologists from its earliest days in their attempts to establish a visual classification of race, class and sexual difference. In other words, in the colonial photograph, all that can be seen is the colonizer and his or her prejudice. (Mirzoeff, 1995, p. 139)
CHAPTER 2

Introduction to contemporary Indigenous photography

2.1 The Battle Begins

Indigenous photographers work to overcome memories of generations and centuries of indelible mistreatment, and the mistrust and hatred held by Indigenous people, and people of colour, toward that most abusive of colonial weapons—a camera. (Croft, 1997, p. 14)

Over the last 160 years Aboriginal people have been bombarded with copious images of their people's representations. They have been conscripted into a battle of huge disproportions; a battle to reinvent themselves through their own eyes and minds, for the eyes of their own people and the entire world.

The colonists instigated the battle, their way of controlling the colonised. Their constructed images of the 'native' and 'uncivilised', the 'other', affirmed their notions of their own 'racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave'. (Hooks, 1992, p. 2)

This accumulation of representations has included numerous deceptive representations of their people and has served as a wealth of inspiration for contemporary photographers and photo media artists, arming them with their own ammunition.

These artists have taken up arms (cameras) and have commenced the struggle of repossession of self-image.

Women were especially exploited, as not only were they represented as the uncivilised 'other', but as an objectified sexual vista for the gaze and gratification of the white European male.
These derogatory and inaccurate representations continue to inspire and motivate strong, political, humorous and hard-hitting re-representations by Indigenous contemporary photo media artists today.

Some Indigenous photographers have taken up the camera to reclaim their images and re-present themselves in their own language and methods. Some have used the colonial representations, not to re-write the history, but to present ‘remnants and illusions that shape the present and work toward a confrontation with our cultural assumptions.’ (Papastergiardis, 2000, p. 24) Some have engaged their ruthless wit to satirise and comment on Australia’s history of Indigenous representation. ‘While the work is, in varying degrees, humorous, it is also profoundly unsettling and a clear example of the sentiment “many a true word said in jest”’. (Broker, 2000, p. 34)

The battle is slow and arduous as the enemy continues to circulate derogatory propaganda of Indigenous people, in a subtler, but as devastating manner

These soldiers are formulating strategies to neutralise the enemy’s warfare, but this is an enormous task as these combatants have been trained in a white educational system and influenced by a racist mass media, the enemy’s infrastructure securely set in place.

Indeed, a fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory. Without this how can we challenge and invite non-black allies and friends to dare look at us differently, to dare to break their colonizing gaze? (Hooks, 1992, p. 2)

The desired outcome of this battle is decolonisation, liberation from the confines of these imprisoning representations. Is this a possibility? Marcia Langton asks these questions: ‘Can we ever decolonise Australian institutions? Can we decolonise our minds? Probably not. But we can try to find ways to undermine the colonial hegemony.’ (Langton, 1993, p. 8) This is just what these Indigenous image-makers are doing.

From the 1960s onwards there has been documentation of Aboriginal people using the camera to reconstruct their images of themselves and their
communities, by their own people, de-constructing the opprobrious and deceptive images that have inundated history since the invention of the camera. The stereotypical images of the ‘other’ represented as specimen, victim, exotic and ‘romantic nomad’ (Croft, 1993, p 64) have been broken down and ravaged by the myriad images by contemporary Aboriginal and Islander photographers. ‘Their works can be seen as an attempt to redress the imbalanced way in which Aboriginal people have been portrayed in this country.’ (Croft, 1993, p.64)

Although there are documented incidences of Aboriginal people using photography before the 1960s, Mervyn Bishop is generally acknowledged as the first ‘recognised’ professional Aboriginal photographer; the first soldier to begin the fight back to reclaim his people’s representation, a lone crusader.

The 1970s marked a hive of political activity for Aboriginal Australia, some of which Merv Bishop was there to document.

Working for the Sydney Morning Herald from 1962 to 1974, and then for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs from 1974 to 1979, and back to the Herald until 1986, Bishop produced a huge collection of images, some of which are icons today, but his struggle was not an easy one and he was often reminded of his difference.

In 1971 he was announced the Press Photographer of the Year for a photograph he took of a nun rushing a child, suspected of taking an overdose, to hospital, 'Life and Death Dash'. (Figure 8) This image seems to perpetuate the ‘restraint of the era’ (Moffatt, 1991, p. 1) The dark skinned subject is still being treated as victim here, the victim who is being saved by white culture, the hero and holy one. Christianity, which promised to be the saviour of the Indigenous people, has in fact been criticised for the loss of Aboriginal culture.
Figure 8 Merv Bishop, *Life and Death Dash*, (1971), gelatin silver photograph, 40.2 x 30.4 cm, National Gallery of Australia
This restraint can also be seen in most of Bishop’s photographs of this time, this also being indoctrinated by the context he was working in.

I learnt photography in the school of hard knocks, training as a news photographer with the Sydney Morning Herald in the mid-60’s. What I learnt first was how to get the picture the editor wanted. (Retake, 1999a, online)

Although it was standard practice at the Sydney Morning Herald for the achievement of Press Photographer of the Year to substantiate a promotion and subsequently a salary increase, this was not to be the case for Bishop:

It was customary at the Herald that if any photographer won the award they would instantly get promoted, but that wasn’t to be for me. I was quietly told that I wouldn’t be getting promoted, the reasons weren’t exactly spelt out. I knew I’d hit a barrier in what I had to remind myself was still a white world. Here I was the only Aboriginal press photographer in Sydney and possibly Australia. The Herald had given me a break and for that I was grateful but now I was shown there were limits (Moffatt, 1991, p. 4)

This incident appeared to influence Bishop’s decision to seek employment in a ‘black’ world...‘I felt it was time to put my energies into working for my own people.’ (Moffatt, 1991, p. 5).

In 1974 he moved to Canberra and commenced working for the newly formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs, travelling to various areas around Australia in the position of staff photographer.

It was during this period of time when he took the celebrated photograph of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pouring soil into the hand of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari, N.T. 1975 in a handing back gesture at Wattie Creek. (Figure 9) ‘Bishop’s image encapsulates so much of the optimism that accompanied the Whitlam government's attempts to upgrade opportunities for Aboriginal self-determination.’ (De Lorenzo, 1993, p.59)

With employment in an Aboriginal corporation and the new political climate of the ’70s, came a new approach to Bishop’s style. He seemed to relax, and no longer having to please the editor meant that he could really go out on a limb and show things as they were.
Figure 9 Merv Bishop, *Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into hands of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari*, Northern Territory, (1975), direct positive colour photograph 76.2 x 50.8 cm, National Gallery of Australia
Effectively the history of professional Aboriginal photography commenced in the early 60s with the work of Mervyn Bishop, who can be seen as something of a marathon runner, carrying the torch until a creative outburst of activity ignited in the mid to late 1980s. (De Lorenzo, 1993, p. 58)

2.2 The 1980s

In the late 1980s Aboriginal Australia picked up the camera and reversed its use as a weapon against their culture, using it as a tool to record a perspective of their own. A documentary practise was initiated by the proceedings leading up to Australia's Bicentenary in 1988. As white Australia celebrated 200 years of habitation, Aboriginal Australia was documenting their protests of the invasion, reclaiming their representations and recording their identities in their own language.

'Australia's Bicentenary provided the impetus for a compelling body of documentary photography that dealt directly with the issues surrounding white Australia's celebration of its 200th birthday'. (Gellatly, 1999b, p. 8)

It was during this time that a number of Indigenous photographers emerged onto the art scene. This emergence is seen to be consequential of an increased access to institutional art education and the institutions of art as Hetti Perkins discusses in an essay written for an exhibition catalogue on urban-based Indigenous artists Blakness: Blak City Culture 1994:

Yet, it is only in recent year that arts institutions have (generally) begun to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to pursue the development of individual forms of expression through a variety of media. Only recently have established commercial galleries been considered as appropriate venues for displaying and marketing their work. Even later still, state and national galleries and museums have begun to exhibit and acquire works by artists from urban centres. Finally, commentators are actually writing reviews and these are becoming less descriptive and increasingly analytical. (Perkins, 1994, p. 5)

Brenda L. Croft was one of these emerging artists who began in the mid 80s to document activities of resistance, protests and rallies leading up
to and during the Bicentennial Celebrations and Australia Day or more aptly named 'Invasion' Day in 1988.

There was a lot of things that were happening, and so it was not difficult to take good images, or images of things that were going on at that time, and I guess the desire also to work as a photographer had stemmed from wanting to create something that was my own; being an urban-based indigenous person, I felt kind of uncomfortable sort of following what was being pushed as being Aboriginal art at that time, which was you know, painting with dots, and I thought I needed to do something that expressed who I was, and it was about issues of representation and it was about being an insider photographing what was happening, it wasn't about just sort of coming in and taking images and then going back out. (Croft, 1998, on-line)

Croft majored in photography at Sydney College of the Arts in 1985. Her work was first in the NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney in 1986. This was the first exhibition of the works of Indigenous photographers. In these early days, Croft was interested in giving an Aboriginal perspective on the numerous political events that were taking place. ‘[T]he camera became a register of activities of resistance during this historical 'moment' and was used to convey an overtly political message.’ (Gellatly, 1999b, p. 8) ‘I wanted to present an Aboriginal perspective of what was going on in the community at that time: and you know mid-'80s and leading up to 1988 with the Bicentennial...It was a really vibrant time in Sydney.’ (Croft, 1998, on-line)

Living in Everleigh Street, Redfern, Croft was in the middle of the action. 'And so I'd go on these marches and I'd photograph them, and as you can see, it's pretty much a straight kind of social-documentary image - it really just showed what it was like living right in Everleigh Street in Sydney.' (Croft, 1998, online) Here Croft is referring to the photograph, *Koori family in Everleigh Street Sydney, Redfern. Stop Black Deaths in Custody rally, 28 September 1985,* (1985). (Figure 10)
Figure 10 Brenda L Croft, Koori family in Everleigh Street Sydney, Redfern. Stop Black Deaths in Custody rally, 28 September 1985, (1985) gelatin silver photograph, 50.4 x 40.5 cm, 50.4 x 40.5 cm

Figure 11 Brenda L Croft, Michael Watson in Redfern on the Long March to Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988, (1988) gelatin silver photograph, 50.4 x 40.5 cm, National Gallery of Australia
It was during this time Croft produced the iconic image *Michael Watson in Redfern on the Long March to Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988*, 1988. (Figure 11)

And it's a favourite of mine because I think you can see the big difference here with the relationship between me, as the photographer, and the person that I am photographing. He's absolutely at ease; it's not aggression, it's just he's really happy to have me photograph him. There's a lot of humour that's within that, it's a really strong stance; he's very much an urban young black man, and I love that one, you know it's actually in the same street, but it's kind of times, the time that capture with that, the difference in kind of you know upbringings and backgrounds. (Croft, 1998, on-line)

Croft showed concern about the intimacy of the people that she was photographing in this social-documentary style, 'I still felt removed from them though, and that was the thing, as though I felt quite conscious of the fact that the people that I was photographing didn't necessarily know me, but I kind of moved on from that later on.' (Croft, 1998, on-line) Croft's later work began to demonstrate her aspiration to have a more collaborative interaction with her subjects. This type of work will be discussed in Chapter 3.

One photographer during this time used the camera in a different manner to the documentary approach of Aboriginal photographers of the time. Tracey Moffatt's *Some Lads* marked the beginning of the use of directorial photography. These photographs were included in *NADOC '86 exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers*. (Also included works of Mervyn Bishop, Brenda L. Croft and Michael Riley.)

These works place Aboriginal subjects in a studio setting in positions that contrast with the denigrating stereotypes that occurred in early 19th century representations of Aboriginal people.

I have looked a lot at the way in which Aborigines have been represented in Australian photography over the last 150 years. From the 19th century scientific studio studies of Lindt and King, used postcard images at the turn of the century, through to the twentieth century preoccupation with capturing people in their living environment. It distressed me that the so-called 'Aboriginal photograph' was anchored in this later realist approach. Aborigines have been continually presented as ethnographic or documentary subjects. The idea behind my
Some Lads series is an attempt to dispense with the seriousness and preciousness (or even, if there is such a word, the 'comicness') which a lot of photographers (especially the 'Hippy' photographers of the '60's and early '70's) have cloaked us in. Some Lads is a series of studio photographs of male dancers from the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre here in Sydney. The images are intentionally posey and sensual. These are traits rarely assigned to Aborigines and rarely sought out and captured within photographs. (Batchen & Moffatt, 1986, p. 25)

Although Tracey Moffatt continues to be prolific in the arena of photography and film-making, there is a diminishing amount of her work included in exhibitions of Aboriginal artists. This seems to be initiated by her dislike at being labelled an Aboriginal artist because of the consequence that accompanies this, one of which she discussed in an interview with Geoffrey Batchen.

There is one aspect about exhibiting work which I find annoying and that's the white guilt feeling which hinders most non-Aboriginal critics. Reviewers are always over cautious in their gut reactions to our work, no doubt because they naturally fear seeming to be ethnocentric or racist in their views. Perhaps in time this will change. (Batchen & Moffatt, 1986, p. 26)

Moffatt continued to refuse invitations to exhibitions that were exclusively Aboriginal or explored issues of cultural identity. Eyeline magazine published a number of faxes exchanged between Clare Williamson, Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photography at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1991, and Moffatt. They refer to an invitation to Moffatt to exhibit in Who Do You Take Me For?, which Williamson curated for the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane. Moffatt responds;

You say you're wanting to curate an exhibition of photography that explores issues of 'cultural identity'. I believe it transcends such simplistic categorisation. I have never been a social issues type artist, in fact my work has never been BLACK. (If there is such a definition). I have made a point of staying out of all black or 'other' shows (except once, years ago, my work wasn't even well known but even then I felt it was a step backwards in my career). I want to be exhibited in Contemporary Art Spaces and not necessarily always bunched together with other artists who make careers out of 'finding themselves-looking for their identities'!!
The reason why I have been successful is that I have avoided allowing myself to be ghettoised as a BLACK ARTIST. You Clare have seen my work, surely you can conclude that it is attempting something much more interesting and complex. There is a line from my friend Isaac Julien's (British Filmaker) film Looking for Langston, "Black art keeps black art and artists in their place".

I refuse to be kept in my place. I could never progress as an artist if I did. Your proposed exhibition could only be seen as an unprogressive and dated move for me and the art world in general. (Moffatt, 1992, p. 6)

Hetti Perkins continues discussion on this debate in an essay written for an exhibition Blakness: Blak City Culture, 1994.

Urban-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have successfully achieved recognition as active and vital participants in the arena of contemporary arts. However, this has precipitated debate as to the relevance and appropriateness of stating or acknowledging the Aboriginality of the artist implying that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice and contemporary art practice can only operate under separate and distinct criteria. Such constructions contain assimilationist overtones in their implication that contemporary art practitioners assume a homogeneous, monolithic mass identity. On the other hand, to assume indigenous artists cannot exhibit together as it restricts the meaning and application of the work and thereby 'ghettoises' the artist is equivalent to racist stereotypes placed on urban communities. (Perkins, 1994, p. 5)

This debate continues to beleaguer Indigenous artists as it did in the women's art movement and gay and lesbian artists or any other marginalised group. Tracey Moffatt has continued to be successful and a recent sale of a signature image from Something More, auctioned in Sydney, August 2001 sold for AUD $74 000, a record price for a work by an Australian photographer. (Newton, 2001, p. 9)

The 1980s marked a time for when photography in Australia became the medium of choice for a number of women artists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. 'In the 1980s many women photographers began to adopt the theoretical strategies of postmodernism to subvert and destabilise the modernist and historical canons of the masterwork'. (Martin, 2001, p. 15)
‘During the 1980s, a number of women photographers, realising the absence and omission of art history and informed by the dual debates of feminism and postmodernism, began to question the representation of women in art, both as objects and subjects.’ (Martin, 2001, p. 16) This question was also the question raised by Indigenous women photographic artists, only in a different context. Not only are they dealing with the issues of representation as women but the representation of the ‘other’. These representations are the impetus to the work of the photographers that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

2.3 The 1990s & 00s

A generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists has emerged in ‘the city’ during the 1990s, whose presence is attributable largely to the efforts of others before them. College educated, politically aware and sharing a strong cultural identity, Blak artists are developing new strategies by which to create visibility for Aboriginal people within a social environment in which they have historically been most severely dispossessed. (Williamson, 1994, p. 21)

Another avenue of support has been the establishment of arts based organizations set up to encourage Aboriginal urban-based artists. One of these, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative established in 1987, was Sydney’s only Aboriginal owned and run contemporary art space. Boomalli facilitates the self-management and control of a community art gallery for the display of Aboriginal works of art. It also provides space for Aboriginal artists giving them the opportunity to pursue their art practice. Brenda Croft was employed at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists’ Co-operative as the Coordinator from 1990 to 1994 and then the General Manager from 1994 to 1996.

In the late 80s, there is a differing approach by young Aboriginal photographers; particularly women, who have moved away from documentary style of the 1970s and early 80s, to explore identity with a more intimate approach.
The ideologically 'correct' images of the 1980's are giving way to a more complex investigation of Aboriginality, desire, photography, and the seamless overlays of discourse and imagery available to a post-modern practitioner. (De Lorenzo, 1993, p. 61)

Three women artists working in photo media begin to stand out with their brazen commentary, Destiny Deacon, Brenda Croft and Rea, all of whom have dealt with issues of representation of the 'Blak' female body, gender and sexuality and reclamation of identity.

These three artist have a common concern in the work that I have chosen for this research thesis, that is they share a mutual pursuit in the issue of representation of Aboriginal women. They also share the use of technology in the form of photography and digital media in order to comment on these inaccurate histories and by doing so access and claim one of the very technologies that assisted in their misrepresentations.

By choosing to work with photography, they in a sense "take back" the very medium which has been responsible for so much misinformation about and control over Aboriginal people since the nineteenth century. They also collapse neat boundaries of identity demarcation such as race, gender and sexuality by producing work which "acts up" and proposes fictions as well as facts. (Williamson. 1999, p. 5)

Working in this medium is also a powerful statement against the popular belief that Aboriginal art takes the form of 'traditional' painting of acrylic on bark or canvas and that the Aboriginal artist is one living in rural remote communities. During this period, recognition of urban-based Aboriginal artists at an institutional and gallery level becomes more prevalent as does their involvement in major national and international shows.

The Aboriginal artist is now the speaker. Most importantly the works are in the language of the speaker. There has been a shift in locus, a change in perspective – from being the object "spoken about" to the speaker making challenging and provocative statements to the world...In this context, it is possible to trace through the 20th century, a movement away from "other" culture being the subject of the gaze, to the other culture speaking for itself, reflecting back to the dominant culture its own world views and thereby shifting the dynamic between the two cultures. (Maughan, 2000, p. 4)
CHAPTER 3

Brenda Croft

The priority has been to take back Aboriginal history and culture – all very idealistic sounding I'm sure – but an essential step towards redetermining our peoples' self-esteem and the way in which we were/are portrayed to the non-Aboriginal public. (Croft, 1993, p. 64)

3.1 The Big Deal is Black

Reclaiming representation is essentially what Brenda Croft does in her series of photographs of Aboriginal women in The Big Deal is Black. She is re-presenting Aboriginal women in a truthful, honest, and willing way. She is ‘taking back’ the way in which Aboriginal people have been represented and putting their views forward, rather than the view of the dominant coloniser culture. Her work crushes the stereotypes that have inundated the media and also tackles Aboriginal peoples' previous invisibility.

Aboriginal people know of images from history books or anthropological documentaries that serve to create the stereotypes which, until recent times, narrowly confined us to limited roles (e.g. the romantic nomad). If you fall outside these confines, you become one of the ‘invisible’. (Croft, 1993, p. 64)

The Big Deal is Black was exhibited in 1993 at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney. This show was part of Wiyana/Perisferia (Periphery), Satellite Event of the 9th Biennial of Sydney.

This exhibition, with Boomalli members and Sydney based Latin-American artists, was a response to the 1992 Quincentenary – an overblown ‘sell-abrasion’ of 500 years since Columbus stumbled, lost, upon the Americas, mistaking the continent for India, hence the misnomer for the original inhabitants ever since. With Indigenous Australians having suffered a similar whitewashing of history in Australia during the
'Buy-sell-tennial', Wiyana was attempting to redress the imbalance, overturning the notion of 'out of sight, out of mind'. (Croft, 1999)

In *The Big Deal is Black*, Croft introduces her audience to a scene that is rarely observed in mainstream white Australia, Aboriginal women and children in their homes in urban living situations. The public has not previously had the opportunity to see this situation as they have always been given the depiction created by the colonialist psyche in either film, media, text or images. Marcia Langton expresses this in her essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and issues.

Films, video and television are powerful media: it is from these that most Australians 'know' about Aboriginal people... "Aboriginality", therefore, is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation. (Langton, 1993, p. 33)

Croft invites us into this intimate space to see first hand an honest and diverse representation of Aboriginal women. These women are presented to us by an Indigenous image maker, who does not desire to purely represent these people with her own judgment, but to make an 'interactive creation, defined by real people.' (Bellear, 1993, p. 21)

This exhibition was Croft's initiation to a directorial approach from the social documentary style which characterised her earlier work. Croft expresses a desire to become more involved with the subjects: '... I'd gone from doing these documentary images where I still felt quite removed from who I was photographing, to wanting to work with people, and for them to have a bit more of a collaborative process in what I was doing.' (Croft, 1998, on-line)

Croft has exercised many determining factors to amend the myriad stereotypes which have plagued Aboriginal representation since the introduction of the 'mechanical eye' to Australia. The images from *The Big Deal is Black* are large colour photographs, almost life like; the subjects are equal to the viewer. Some of these subjects look back at the viewer, confident, happy and proud, such as Figure 12, *The Ingrams*, (1993)
Figure 12 Brenda L Croft, *The Ingrams: Millie, Norma, Sue Leeane, Sylvia, Jarin, Jemiah, Jaden and Shanae*, (1993) direct colour positive photograph, National Gallery of Australia
The photographic subjects are no longer specimens to be studied for ethnographic purposes or people portrayed as victims or representations of white Australia's notion of Aboriginality. Croft expresses her dislike of this kind of representation: 'I've always hated images of Aboriginal people that were the fleeting glimpses; some voyeur coming in taking photos and then doing an exhibition on the theme of an empty land...' (Croft, 1994b, n.p.) This practice of documenting Aboriginal people in such style isn't unique to photographers of colonial times. Nicholas Adler's much-publicised book of photographs *Portraits from an Uninhabited Land*, 1988, does just this. (Figure 13) The book consisted of 79 photographs of Aboriginal people from remote bush communities in Western Australia photographed against a black backdrop, taking them out of context of their environment in an attempt to see the individual 'eye to eye'.

Adler wants us to see his photographs as windows open to the people who stood in front of the camera, where his own hand in constructing them was apparently only for the purpose of showing us these individuals. Adler has been the explorer who has been to an uninhabited land, (the land off of his map) and brought back evidence of a peopled land. What has been his purpose in searching for what he calls "non-existent" people? (Dewdney, 1994, p. 34)

Alder's title, *Portraits from an Uninhabited Land*, of this series of images serves as support to the notion of *terra nullus*.

His photographs are not unlike the image of *Aranda boy* by Baldwin Spencer. (Figure 7) He shows a group of people with no context, in European clothes and in many cases in a poor state of being, still being rendered as 'victims' and a 'dying race'. They seem to hold the same glaring stare of Folsche's subjects. These expressions cannot be blamed on the technical restraints caused by long exposure times, as they have been in early images of Indigenous people.

By contrast, the women in Croft's photographs are people who she knows, her friends and acquaintances. They are big, proud, strong and Black.
Figure 13 Nicholas Alder, (1988)
Top left Eric Lawford Jangala Gooniyandi, and Liam Lawford Japurrula Wangkajunga, both from Christmas Creek, 1988
Top right Dicky Unghango, Wallambi, Kalumburu
Bottom left Munda Nampitjin, Kukatja, Mulan
Bottom right Rachel Seela Nungungurayi, Jaru, Ringers Soak
The Big Deal - is a card game, is the Mabo issue, is a land deal, is no big deal, but it all comes back to being BLACK and living in the city, and all the roads that lead you here. Don't intend to turn this into any opportunity for any convenient, misinformed labelling by any readers. All this BIG DEAL is about is letting you see something of us on our terms. This is about being a Black woman – you might be mother, sister, aunt, cousin, friend – no difference, the DEAL is the same. (Croft, 1993)

Croft chooses to represent city living Indigenous people. 'The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population within these centres are made up of groups of people who identify with particular locations or language groups within or outside the region and others who have independently gravitated toward the cities.' (Perkins, 1994, p. 4) But for many urban based Indigenous people there is a lack of belonging and a rejection by both white culture and 'traditional' Aboriginal culture.

This is a group which has been typecast by the media. 'The centralised urban communities are often stigmatised as “ghettos” and blighted with infamous and inaccurate reputations as hotbeds of violence and crime and as “breeding ground” for trouble makers'. (Perkins, 1994, p. 4) Croft challenges and breaks down this stereotype with her images. She is empowering her 'Blak' subjects and celebrating not only their achievements in the public arena, but celebrating their families, motherhood, sisterhood and survival, irrespective of all the hardship and tragedy which has faced Aboriginal Australia.

All of the women in the exhibition and their families and children have been actively involved in Aboriginal affairs. They may have established Aboriginal Land Councils, like Judy Chester; or have preformed in nightclubs in Sydney in the 1950s and '60s and dressed like "glam-girls", like Rosalie, Olwyn and Mercury/Betty; or perhaps they are curators like Hetti Perkins; And the Ingram family are famous too for their continuous work for Aboriginal Australia; along with Cathie Craige, a writer who everyone knows doesn't take any nonsense from no one! (Bellear, 1993, p. 21)
The relationship and dynamics between the photographer and the sitter in these large scale colour images, is one that is immediately different to the representations of Aboriginal people that have inundated Australian culture until recent times, when Aboriginal people have been able to represent themselves. This is obvious in the gestures and expressions of the women and the children in the images. The women are comfortable and at ease with the photographer and the children act up for the camera, some grinning from ear to ear and some disinterested almost bored with the prospect of being photographed, their attentions elsewhere; this representing a sign of comfort with the photographer.

The subjects are photographed, not in a clinical studio setting, but in their own homes, a place of comfort and safety, a place where they can be themselves. This comfort resonates through all of the images in the show and was also emphasised in the initial showing by the soundscape which accompanied the images.

We have an opportunity to listen and learn with our eyes – from the images on the gallery walls, as well as from the voices and music which complimented the images. The people in the photographs have a relationship of trust with Brenda, which comes through both the images on the walls, along with the sound emanating through the soundscape. (Bellear, 1993, p. 21)

Croft's familiarity with her subjects and identification of each individual, is in stark contrast to the early representations of Aboriginal people, as she describes in her essay *Laying ghosts to rest* (1997):

Why is it that the names of those who collected these photographic 'specimens' are so familiar, whilst we are left with an irrevocable sense of loss over the identities of those portrayed? Douglas T. Kilburn. Charles Kerry. John William Lindt. Paul Foelsche. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen. Fred Kruger. The authors of these images are all recorded with few exceptions. We know their names, like some mantra reverberating from the Book of the Dead. Possibly these white men were trusted by the people they photographed, perhaps some even considered as friends. I do not sense this as I refer to “their” images over and over, searching for something not already observed. (Croft, 1997, pp. 10-11)
The soundscape included in the exhibition consisted of people talking, chatting about the 'early days that the government of this country denied Aboriginal people the basic rights', (Croft, 1993, n.p.) about growing up in missions, injustices committed on Aboriginal people, sounds of 'chops cooking, music playing, kids crying, women laughing'. (Croft, 1993, n.p.) All these sounds in combination with the images, create an intimate view into the lives of these Aboriginal women. Lisa Bellear expresses her desire to be able to sit at the exhibition space to absorb the rich atmosphere: 'I only wish there has been room for a park bench or even a couple of lounge chairs, so the viewer could sit down and relax and take in all the information and the atmosphere, while perhaps drinking a café latte'. (Bellear, 1993, p. 21)

Croft describes how the sitters have control of their own image by choosing their clothes and their poses:

I wanted to photograph them in their own environment, where they felt totally comfortable, where they could get dressed up and sort of look however they wanted to; but it was about capturing, I hoped, a sense of joy, and also a sense of the everyday. (Croft, 1998, on-line)

She also took the time to interview them and hear their stories, some of which appear in the exhibition catalogue and others in the accompanying sound scape.

When I was photographing people I would also take time to interview them, I mean that was the whole process of hearing their stories as well, and so I wanted to give a sense of windows; that you were looking in the windows of peoples' houses, but not without their knowledge, you know, there was an equal relationship going on there. (Croft, 1998, on-line)

These are the possible ancestors of the people in Foelsche's or Lindt's photographs that Croft writes about in her essay Laying Ghosts to Rest from the exhibition Portraits of Oceania; but here the people are all clearly named, every one of them clearly identified. Some, only by first names emphasising the familiarity of the photographer with her subjects, for example Hetti and Tyson (Figure 14), portrait of Hetti Perkins with her son Tyson, close personal friend of Brenda Croft. Croft expresses her frustration
Figure 14 Brenda L Croft, *Hetti and Tyson*, (1993), Colour print
with the practice of not recognising the individual in early colonial photographs.

Re-reading the sparse details relating to the portraits, a heady combination of anger and grief almost overwhelms me. I want to know who they were, where they are from, what became of them. Their names should be invoked, although this acts against traditional cultural practice, these people deserve to be commemorated as the individuals, community members and the elders they were; not disembodied, cut off from their traditions, their spirits never to rest. So few of them identified - not by their own name, colonial name, or even by tribal affiliation. They are like ghosts deprived of rest. (Croft, 1997, p. 9)

Another difference between these works and the works of other photographers documenting Aboriginal people is that Croft is an integral part of the community that she is documenting. Her sitters are friends, colleagues and family. They are people she knows and people who trust her. When she speaks about her earlier work she expresses: 'it was about issues of representation and it was about being an insider photographing what was happening, it wasn't about just sort of coming in and taking images and then going back out.' (Croft, 1998, on-line)

Croft wants her subjects to be a part of all the processes of the image taking and beyond, so that they have control of their representation, as well as how and who sees it or owns it.

I really want people that I take photos of to be part of that process. From the beginning, if I sold images to galleries I'd always ensure wherever possible that I had the permission of the person that I'd photographed and made sure I'd get copies of the prints back to them just so there was some sense of trust there. With The Big Deal is Black I really wanted it to be as collaborative as possible and I had people coming back saying "Oh I don't like that bit, can you make sure that doesn't get aired" and fine that's okay. They have to be comfortable with it. I want them to be there at the showings so that they see themselves and I think that was good fun for the people involved. (Croft, 1994b, n.p.)

Many of the subjects in The Big Deal is Black are fair skinned, perhaps not immediately recognisable as Aboriginal to the general white audience. This seems to be another issue that Croft is dealing with in her
work as a fair skinned person herself. As she says she is interested in attempting to 'reverse the expected'.

I am fair, I am aware that I am not what people are looking for when they want something black, something real, something authentic, something truly Aboriginal, but I am here. I am aware that as I look through magazines they are not of me, for me. The models white and pure, or black and foreign, and/or exotic, not from here not of me. I turn on the television and the advertisements make me feel that I have travelled to some other country, I am not at home...By placing myself behind the camera I am taking control of my self image and images of ourselves. I cannot, do not, take sole responsibility but challenge and attempt to reverse the expected. (Croft, 1993 p. 192)

The issue of 'hybridity' is another concern that Croft deals with in more detail in Strange Fruit 1994, which was first shown at The Performance Space.

3.2 Strange Fruit

Lewis Allen was an American leftist who frequented the New York nightclub, Cafe Society, where Billie Holiday was the featured act. He presented Holiday with a song he had written about the peculiar Southern custom of lynching. Her label, Columbia, was put off by the graphic imagery, so she took the song to Commodore. On April 20, 1939, Holiday recorded Strange Fruit. It was to become her first substantial cult hit.

Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

In 1994, Brenda Croft had a solo show held at The Performance Space, Sydney, also called Strange Fruit. The exhibition consisted of a series
of small richly coloured photographic prints mounted in chunky wooden frames. The images in the frames comprise sections of images of women, some faces, some hands with rings or weapons, one, discarded flowers on a wicker chair, others almost full portraits of the sitters. (Figures 15 & 16)

The walls on which these images hung, were painted in various colours and labelled with their paint manufacturers' charts: 'Colonial white', 'Coconut', 'Foreigner' and 'Tennant Creek Tan'.

When originally shown, these works were accompanied by a large bowl of exotic fruit and fresh flowers. 'The aroma and colours worked with the warmth of the images, whilst unearthing ideas concerning the “foreign” and the “nature/culture” debate in the viewer.' (Carver, 1996, p. 70) An audio recording plays, naming colours: 'blue black, yellow black, light black, dark black' symbolising the definitions we have created for expressing blackness and different shades of it.

Croft's *Strange Fruits* are women of colour. She opposes the Eurocentric idea of native woman as 'exotic' and sexually devourable, by characterising her subjects as iconic coloured personas: Frida Kahlo, Walyer, Zora Neale Hurtston, Josephine Baker, Dorothy Dandridge, Billie Holiday and Eartha Kitt. Each subject appears as herself and then as one of these icons. These iconic women are strong resistance fighters of their own accord, voices fighting the oppression of 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy'. (Hooks, 1994, p. 197)

Croft's drive for *Strange Fruit* comes from the attitudes of people toward her own fair complexion and their attitudes toward people who looked more 'Aboriginal', including her father.

It comes out of that thing of not looking "Aboriginal". People say to me "you're not what I expected" or "you're not like the rest". I used to get so bored when dad would introduce me to white friends and then wander off and they would turn to me and say "he's not bad for an Aboriginal person" or, the classic one, "it must have been hard for you growing up with your father an alcoholic" – and dad doesn't drink. But there was that immediate assumption and they thought that because I looked like them, that because I was fair, that I was going to agree with them. (Croft, 1994b, n.p.)
Figure 15 Brenda L. Croft, *Strange Fruit (Billie) – Camellia, Cane Chair* (1994) cibachrome, 23.5cm x 29cm, collection of the artist

Below Figure 16 *Strange Fruit* – Frida, *Strange Fruit* – Walser, *Strange Fruit – Billie*, (1994) cibachrome, each 29 x 23.5 cm, collection of the artist
All of Croft's subjects are Indigenous women living in Sydney. She includes herself as one of her subjects. Croft often uses photography to explore hegemonic and imposed definitions of skin colour. 'She takes issue with the concept of "hybridity" and it's permeation of popular culture.' (Perkins, 1996, p. 93) These women are mostly fair skinned, not what the general public expects when imagining an 'authentic' Aboriginal 'something truly Aboriginal'. (Croft, 1993b, p 192) They are the products of Australia's policy of assimilation and the desire to rid society of Indigenous people by breeding them out, forcibly removing children of mixed-blood from their parents. Mixed race, strange fruit and all the connotations that go along with these words: Half-blood, half-caste, half-breed, Eurasian, mulatto, mestizo, tercon, quarton, quinteron, quad-roon, octo-roon, griffo, zambo, and cross, mongrel. Terminology has been invented, seemingly by every colonised country, in an attempt to define and control this group.

These definitions reflect not only the Anglo-Australian legal and administrative obsession, even fixation, with Aboriginal people, but also the uncertainty, confusion and constant search for the appropriate characterisation: "full blood", "half-caste", "quadroon", "octoroon", "such and such an admixture of blood not less than half Aboriginal" and so on...This fixation on classification reflects the extraordinary intensification of colonial administration of Aboriginal affairs from 1788 to the present. Elaborate systems of control aimed, until recently, at exterminating one kind of "Aboriginality" and replacing it with a sanitised version acceptable to the Anglo invaders and immigrants. (Langton, 1993, pp. 28-29)

Croft describes this obsession with classification of people according to skin colour or percentage of Indigenous blood, when speaking of an image taken from a children's book on Australian Aborigines from the 1940s which had a great effect on her.

A whiter shade of pale. An image from my early childhood, indelibly etched on my retina, a permanent marker of what had gone before, and of which I am the end result, like so many of my family, friends and colleagues, is an undated photograph of a group of Blak women - with a lone Anglo-Australian woman – arranged in a line like some colour chart. My guess is that this image dates from the late 1930s, early 1940s if one takes the style of clothing as a marker, from a little Golden Book for Childrens series, The Australian Aborigines, Printed in the 1960s. The photograph fascinated me long before I ever
understood its eugenetic implications. Read from left to right, the viewer is treated to a gradual delineation of racial makeup, from European – or “full-blood white” (the irony being, that the racial makeup of Europeans was and is incredibly diverse), through young women with varying ratios/fractions of Aboriginal blood, culminating in a “full-blood” Aboriginal woman... Left to right, black to white, wrong to right, are the underlying inferences, as well as the officially sanctioned policies. The perfect example of a racial experiment. Social engineering. Cultural genocide. I cannot remember how the image was paraphrased, particularly for its audience comprising of children like myself. What I remember most clearly was searching for myself, my place, and my sense of being, somewhere in that melancholy line-up. I identified with the young woman in the middle, the only one who appeared to gaze directly, perhaps sullenly, dejectedly, angrily at the person behind the camera, and indirectly, across time and distance, at me. (Croft, 1999)

Croft, born in 1964, would have at this time not been considered an Australian citizen; as Aboriginal people were only granted citizenship in 1967. Until this time Indigenous Australians came under the Flora and Fauna and Fishery's Act, still supporting the concept of terrae nullae. This culture/nature debate is highlighted in the title of Strange Fruit. These women are seen as strange hybrid fruits, a mixing of cultures that produces something not like either of its origins.

With “hybridity” and “Strange fruit” it’s that notion of sectioning people, collecting them in quadrants and fractions and where you’re supposed to fit yourself in, how you’re supposed to look, act and feel. It ties you down to that idea of being flora or fauna, native or exotic species, introduced species and hybrids – how they created new flowers, vegetables and animals which didn’t have any taste or scent. It’s that whole thing of breeding the colour out of Aboriginal people so that they’ll vanish into the rest of white society. (Perkins, 1996, p. 93)

Croft uses similar collaborative devices in the production of Strange Fruit as in The Big Deal is Black. Being very much aware of the ‘patronising distance of the audience and the subject’ (Papastergiardis, 1996, p. 16) of colonial photographers and beyond, Croft consciously tackles this paradigm by again involving the subject in an interactive process.
Figure 17 Brenda L. Croft, *Strange Fruit*, (1994) 1. *Strange Fruit-Billie*
cibachrome, each 29cm x 23.5 cm, collection of the artist
While the shutter is clicking we talk, ask questions, share stories and laughs. Yet an intangible undercurrent surfaces as conversations twist and turn. It is these ephemeral moments that Croft captures. (Perkins, 1996, p. 92)

Croft becomes even more intimate with her subjects this time, coming closer, right in, to reveal their close-up segments, seemingly dividing up, sectioning, like quadrants of an orange.

This series is the first of Croft's where she presents herself in one of the portraits. She prefers to present herself through photographing people who are close to her. ‘...I wanted to get down to really individual things, really showing people and also the environment that I live in because I wanted to see myself reflected without directly showing myself. I feel it's easier to represent myself through other people.’ (Croft, 1994a, p. 5)

The main device in the works discussed is the recognition and inclusion of her subject in the production of her images. She reclaims the black female body by giving it identity and empowering it with the control of its representation, taking into consideration how the individual wants to be seen and where and how this will take place. This practise is unique to the representation of Aboriginal people until the inclusion of Indigenous image-makers into contemporary art. Croft sorts out the myth of Otherness and stereotypes.
4.1 Welcome to Never Never

Never, never land, is a term used by Charles Wilson in his publication *Australia: the creation of a nation 1788-1988*, to describe Aboriginal culture's unsustainability, in his objectionable reading of Australia's history since colonisation. As he puts it:

Yet, whatever happens, no one can suppose that even the greatest island is sufficiently great and remote to afford them an existence of dreams in the Never-Never Land, isolated from the rest of the world. Nor is this the future that they themselves would be likely to welcome. (Wilson, 1987, p. 89)

Destiny Deacon uses this term in her installation, *Welcome to Never Never*, (1995), in her reading of Australian history, 'the degrading history of white representation of Aboriginal people, particularly women and children, or, in the language of the settlers, “lubras” and “piccaninnies”.' (Langton, 1997, p. 104)

As the title of this exhibition suggests, Destiny Deacon draws upon white Australia's' interpretations and representations of Aboriginality to critically appraise these culturally implanted stereotypes of Aboriginality. She does this by resurrecting scenes reminiscent of Australia's history of racism, suppression and objectification. Her visual language is drawn from popular culture: comics, television, cinema, mass-circulation magazines, newspapers, pulp-novels, advertising, kitsch souvenirs, memorabilia and domestic knick-knacks.

"Television imagery and stereotypes influence me", Destiny says; as has "looking at the way ‘Aborigines’ have been perceived and portrayed by non-Aboriginal photographers since colonisation". (Fraser, 1993, p. 9)
Welcome to Never Never consists of eight large bubble-jet prints enlarged from Polaroids, tacked onto the wall and a museum cabinet containing kitsch, racist paraphernalia; white Australian artefacts. Welcome to Never Never along with Brenda Croft's Strange Fruit were part of a project, Abstracts, New Aboriginalities, organised by Boomalli and the South West Aboriginal Print Project which was opened at Watershed Media Centre, Bristol.

The white Australian artefacts contained in the museum cabinet of Deacon's installation consist of mass-produced plywood boomerangs with paintings of natives and kangaroos, tea towels with images of the outline of Australia containing images of flora and fauna and more natives, an ashtray with a Noble Savage motif and pieces of China with 'cherubic Aboriginal girls, kookaburras and kangaroos – the “fauna” of the New World, reduced to its most facile form.' (Carver, 1997, p. 14) (Figure 18)

The collection is representative of cheap disposable utility items, whose imagery, alongside that of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Opera House and Ayers rock, are the main source of repetitive stereotypes of a migrant and colonising culture in search of an assimilationist cultural set of icons. (Dewdney, 1996, p 93)

The purpose of these artefacts would be to place on the wall or around the house, a little piece of Australia, captured on a souvenir plate tea towel or object. A reminder of how we view the ‘other' and how this supports white Australians' notion of superiority, how we can commodify and commercialise the ‘other' in order to have our unique ‘Australianness'.

This kitsch bric-a-brac facilitated the notion of ‘Aboriginality' to the dominant culture of Australia through the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. 'Ashtrays with pictures of Aborigines, often grotesquely sketched, upon which cigarettes could be ground out. Decorative plates with Aboriginal children that could be hung up in the home: like pets.' (Engberg, 1999, p. 44)

Aboriginal people would have also had these items in their homes during the '40s and '50s, some of the only public representation of Aboriginality at the time. Croft recalls her mother collecting plates with drawing of 'piccanies', along with other items of Aboriginal arts and crafts in
Figure 18 Destiny Deacon, *Welcome to Never Never*, (1995) white Australian artefacts, dimensions variable, Collection of Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
order to give her children a sense of their Aboriginal identity. (Croft, personal
communication, December 27, 2001)

'The items in the cabinet are individually harmless but together
threatening, objects of a racist strand of Australian society which attempts to
make light of its own history of colonisation and attempted genocide.'
(Dewdney, 1996, p. 93)

These objects become threatening because they were instrumental in
shaping the perception of 'Aboriginality' to white Australia and also to visitors
from abroad. It was how a nation considered and consequentially responded
to Aboriginal people, curious objects placed on their walls or showpieces in
their homes. These representations are constructions of the white psyche
based on racist notions of cultural superiority.

'All representations are derived from, and act against, historical
representations and historical symbols of "Aboriginality".' (Langton, 1993, p
36)

Deacon presents the viewer with these objects collectively to illustrate
white Australia's construction of 'Aboriginality' based on these artefacts, and
not one based on lived experience.

Each representation of Aboriginal people is a reconstruction, an
imagined experience, a tale told with signifiers, grammatical
and morphological elements, mythologies. (Langton, 1993, p
50)

4.2 Last Laughs

It is the representation of black women as sexual objects for the white
male desire that Deacon is reconstructing with her Last Laughs (1995).
(Figure 19) This type of representation is typical of the late nineteenth
century, staged photo-postcard of bare-breasted 'native women', presenting
them as the 'exotic' other for the white male gaze.
In the late nineteenth century, cultivated Anglo viewers would have gazed on such images with horror and mild titillation, being confirmed in their views of white superiority. A contemporary European tourist may purchase a postcard of a tribal Aboriginal and gaze on it with a distance curiosity, the image perhaps signifying an exciting strangeness linked to the idea of a remote and mysterious continent. (Willis, 1993, p. 110).

Deacon reclaims the figure of native woman from the colonial genre of the ‘exotic’. The three women in this image laugh wildly and uncontrollably. They engage the viewer with their eye contact. Are they laughing at the viewer? Or are they laughing at white cultures ideas about them? The stereotypes that white Australia has constructed of them.

The three women in *Last Laughs* wear revealing clothing; leopard skin prints, mini skirts, tight fitting tops, the lips on their wide-open mouths painted with bright red lipstick. The dress of one of the models hangs alluringly from her shoulder, flesh is in abundance, but these women are not to be consumed as their predecessors. They are now controlling their sexuality and it has become their way to exert power. '[Deacon] denies white male voyeurism. She denies the aural, sexual and colonialist conquest...She makes impotent the white male fantasy of 'black velvet.'” (Langton, 1993, p. 51)

Inverting old imagery the subjects have placed themselves in the role of dominator. They are able to use this new role to seduce and conquer; they are declaring their allure and desirability while denying access by laughing in the face of the colonisers. 'The representation of women in these prints mock any attempt to exoticise them, rejecting a passive and repressive sexualised gaze and instead reclaiming sexuality as an intimate part of their identity.' (Dewdney, 1996, p. 93)

These images have become instruments used to disable and neutralise the power relations inherent in previous stereotypical representations. 'Female subjects are no longer victims of the lens. Fully aware of photography's power (and delight in the 'exotic'), they are all-too-willing to play the game, but from a position of total control.' (Gellatly, 1999b, p. 11)
Figure 19 Destiny Deacon, *Last Laughs*, (1995), Colour Polaroid bubble jet print on paper, 59.5 x 72.5 cm Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne
In order for stereotypical representations to be broken down there needs to be a decolonisation of the mind of both the coloniser and the colonised. Destiny Deacon presents us with these reconstructed representations in order to compel the viewer to look at the ridiculousness of these images, to deal with the uneasiness that these stereotypes present and to understand the origins of their construction.

Deacon's strategy is employed to pursue her objective: to disrupt and question the construction of identity, specifically her own 'blak' and female one. In this way she robs the audience of the preconceived assumptions about Aboriginal women absorbed through our contemporary culture. (King, 1995, p. 43)

Deacon also reclaims language by re-spelling the term 'black' in her Blak lik me, (1991) series. 'It became a term of identification originating from the self rather than an imposed description of the other, and is now used regularly by other Indigenous artists.' (Carver, 1997, p. 14) It is an attempt to reclaim colonial language by creating a means of self-determination and self-expression. It also is a means to deny the dominating control of the colonists' vernacular.

4.3 Peach Blossoms Revenge

Peach Blossoms Revenge, (Figure 20) another image in the Welcome to Never, Never series, is a constructed video cover, a satire of the B-grade action/war movies. The cut and paste construction emphasises the nature of these low budget films. Although here she is parodying the femme fatale role from the 'orient', the subject's position parallels that of her own; a non-Caucasian, objectified woman; the 'exotic other'. 'Thus we are presented Peach Blossom, a machine gun totting moll on a bed, complete with satin cheong-sam.' (King, 1995, p. 43) trampling all over the imperial stars and stripes. This could just as well be the British Union Jack or the flag of any other colonising nation.

The spoof on the 'Mattress Actress Production' video jacket reads as a witty pastiche of the genre of violent representations of women in these films.
Practically ON YOUR WAR MEDALS is our Miss Perth Blossom, an overweight, over-sexed adoptee, trying to find her roots. Watch her combine her high school skills into a lethal cocktail of bar-burning and jungle beauty. She’s mighty sure she’s out to settle scores. "Revenge until it hurts!" This is action packed! A mystical, supernatural search for truth and justice, the Peach Blossom may from sweet Hawaiian smokeshow, through empty bars in Bangkok, to a terrifying climax in a shaky USS military base.

SOCIETY OFFERS NO ANSWERS! MR. QUITTER NO ESCAPE!

Figure 20 Destiny Deacon, Peach Blossoms Revenge (1995) colour bubble jet print, National Gallery of Australia
Tina Harris, [star of I SPIT ON YOUR WAR MEDALS], is our Miss Peach Blossom, an on-the-run-from-Tassie adoptee, yearning to find her roots! Watch Tina H. combine her birthright skills into a lethal cocktail of ‘bar-bunny’ and ‘jungle bunny’. She’s mighty sore and she’s out to settle scores! “Revenge until it hurts”! This is action packed! A mystical, suspenseful search for truth and justice, the Peach Blossom way: from the sacred Tasmanian snowlands, through steamy bar in Bangkok, to a terrifying climax in a shady U.S. military base...SOCIETY OFFERS NO ANSWERS! SHE OFFERS NO ESCAPE!

The text is saturated with connotations and references to Aboriginal Australia’s experience and representation. For instance, ‘Miss Peach Blossoms, an on-the-run-from-Tassie adoptee, yearning to find her roots!’ The irony in this statement is the fact that the Tasmanian Aboriginal population was near decimated; Truganini the last full-blooded Aboriginal dying in 1876, so Miss Peach Blossoms search for her ‘roots’ is in fact possibly in vain, but the question may be asked, what kind of ‘roots’ is the viewer in this kind of movie really interested in?

However, [Deacon’s] strategy is not to re-write that history in a more comprehensive or more accurate way; rather she begins with the remnants and illusions that shape the present and work toward a confrontation with our cultural assumptions so that, at the very least, the obvious search for authenticity is revealed as the most obscene and indulgent form of identity. (Papastergiardis, 2000, p. 24)

Miss Peach Blossoms is referred to as ‘jungle bunny’ and ‘bar bunny’, once again forming terminology to define, control and make reference to the subject as sexual object. ‘She’s mighty sore and she’s out to settle scores! “Revenge until it hurts”!’ The pain of the loss is paralleled in a sado masochistic sexual way.

Peach Blossoms’ journey of revenge is mapped out, almost like the missions of Lara Croft, as she treks though exotic places, bouncing flesh, animated super-realistically over the crude background details. She dashes from one life threatening situations to another, wearing the bare minimum, toting large calibre weapons. Until finally the mission reaches climax in a ‘shady U.S. military base’...
4.4 Welcome to my Island

'Destiny Deacon collapses stereotypical views of her identity and culture through strategies of exaggeration and mockery'. (Williamson, 1994, p. 24) Once again this obvious exaggeration and mimicry of colonial representation confronts the viewer with their cultural supposition. Deacon uses this strategy to debunk and demystify the myth-building paraphernalia and photographic representations of 'blak' women.

When colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty of the behaviour of the colonized. (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 139)

Deacon locates this crack in the representation of 'blak' women by the dominant culture and opens it wide up. She mimics their representation to the point of grotesque exaggeration in order to get the viewer to see the cracks in the white man's constructed representations of Aboriginality.

Welcome to my Island plays with the paradox of the 'exotic' beauty against an ugly Australian iconic backdrop. The corrugated iron backdrop marks the introduction of white man and his construction of buildings and development of agriculture, which led to the detribalisation of Aboriginal culture.

The full figured Island maiden plays up to the camera, posing in a mocking gesture against the all too familiar corrugated iron humpy. (Figure 21) Gone are the painted backdrops of some far away European looking mountains or tropical plants and fruits that flanked the colonial images, here now we are presented with the reality of the living conditions of many Aboriginal fringe dwellers since colonisation.

Destiny loves to resurrect the imagery of our oppression, position her favourite dolls or people in her stage sets, and eke out the discomfort. (Langton, 1997, p. 105)
Marcia Langton remembers growing up in a humpy and reminisces about the images that corrugated iron resurrect:

I grew up in a humpy and - without wishing to give the impression of unexamined nostalgia - I can say that it was heaven for me, if not for my beleaguered, long suffering elders. On the down side, I was reviled by the pastoralists' kids at school for being 'one of the boongs from the blacks' camp down at the river'. Corrugated iron has a special sweet and sour resonance for us fringe dwellers and Destiny has pushed the right buttons in this image to kick-start the memories, smells and emotions. (Langton, 1997, p. 105)

The 'exotic' beauty of this image holds exotic fruit in her hand and oranges are scattered around her feet, as an offering, welcoming you to her land. This gesture emphasises the attitudes of the time of colonisation that these countries were there for the colonisers to consume, their lands, produce and women alike. The colonial postcard resonates these attitudes and consequentially represents women as sexual objects for the gaze of the colonist, tourist or soldier sent abroad.

Photography steps in to take up the slack and reactivates the phantasm at its lowest level. The postcard does it one better; it becomes the poor man's phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourists, the soldier, the colonist. It is at once their poetry and their glory captured for the ages; it is also their pseudoknowledge of the colony. It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision. (Alloula, 1986, p. 4)

Beneath the main photograph, there are three more images of the model posed in a serene backdrop of flowers sitting on the lawn, her eyes inviting the fruit now gone and she is all that is left to consume. Deacon mimics the phantasm of the 'exotic' woman in these colonial postcards and images. These are constructions, mythologies of the imperial white male patriarchal conscious, which locates the black body into a sexualised, submissive, disposed position.

Moreover, it's fixation upon the woman's body leads the postcard to paint this body up, read it, and eroticize it in order to offer it up to any and all comers from a clientele moved by the unambiguous desire of possession. (Alloula, 1986, p. 5)
Figure 21 Destiny Deacon, *Welcome to my Island*, (1994), colour bubble jet print, 45.7 x 35.2 cm, National Gallery of Australia
This postcard type image that Deacon parodies, reproduced by the thousands, would have been responsible for the construction of Aboriginal women’s identity through the eyes of the colonisers. Women were constructed as sexual objects with ‘primitive’ appetites, as submissive objects to be ‘colonised’. These images serve as reflections of the psyche of those responsible for the representations.

‘The reflection of a reflection, the exotic (and/or colonial) postcard is above all an art of simulacrum, in both the theatrical and the compensatory sense of the term’. (Alloula, 1986, p. 64)

4.5 Eva Johnson

John Michael Crossland’s portrait of Nannultera, a young cricketer of the Natives’ Training Institution, Poonindie (1854), (Figure 22) illustrates the overt objective of imperial policy; for the ‘natives’ of Australia to be ‘civilised’ and ‘Christianised’, to mimic the colonising culture’s behaviour, habits, institutions and values. Although the desire of the coloniser is to have this duplicate of his manner, there is still a definable difference, one which sets the coloniser and the colonised apart, one which still has the coloniser in a position of control. ‘[T]hen colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86)

Poonindie Training Institution was established as an institution where Aborigines from Adelaide were able to receive practical training such as farm work and additional instruction in Christianity in an environment free from ‘corrupt influences’. (Whimpress, 1994, online) The role of cricket at the Mission has been examined generally in terms of its civilizing capacities.

Cricket is supposedly the sport of gentlemen. Therefore this representation of Nannultera endeavoured to express the success of the ‘civilisation’ of the Aborigines at Pooninidie Training Institution. The young boy, Nannultera, is named, unlike most of the representation of Aboriginal subjects at the time, who were referred to as ‘native’ boy or other defining terms, so in this case the boy is given an identity. He is dressed in European
Figure 22 John Michael Crossland, *Nannultera: a young cricketer of th Natives’ Training Institution Poonindie* (1854), oil on canvas, 99 x 78.8 cm

Figure 23 Destiny Deacon, *Eva Johnson* (1994), Cibachrome colour photograph.
clothing and his hair is neatly in place in the style of an English gentleman, confirming his transformation into the 'civilised' world. This is how the colonisers came to want to see their Aboriginal converts. Apparently this example was not an accurate model in the majority of cases. 'The introduction of cricket obviously had some importance but it will be argued that this has been exaggerated as the civilisation of Aborigines came increasingly to be seen in limited terms.' (Whimpress, 1994, online)

Deacon’s *Eva Johnson* (1994) (Figure 23) directly references J.M. Crossland’s portrait. In Deacon’s version however, the subject’s cricket bat has been replaced by an axe and the subject is replaced by the writer and activist, Eva Johnson.

This replacement of the subject from a once submissive young boy to an assertive political figure, marks the reclamation of Aboriginal identity, ‘correcting’ European imagery of Aboriginal people.’ (Williamson, 2001, p.112)

Here Johnson has adopted the colonisers' cultural habits (European dress) and institutions (European modes of education and writing), but this mimicking has turned the colonised into a subject who can now scrutinise the coloniser in their own language.

‘Mimicry reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction.' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 140)

This ‘not quite’ the same imitation of the imperialist’s desire has become its nemesis.

The artist has said of this work:

I felt sorry for Nannultera when I first saw him at the NGA ... A few years later I was stumped for image/s as an exhibition opening loomed days away. I looked about. Eva was at my place. Virginia Fraser too ... From begging Eva (to pose) and Virginia (to make the set), it took less than an hour to get the image right. Improvising in the laundry. A couple of months later, the NGA and the National Library (who own Nannultera) both bought Eva’s portrait. Now Nannultera won’t have to be alone; Eva Johnson, writer, will keep him company. [Retake, 1998, online]
By juxtapositioning these two works we can observe the reclamation of identity and the empowerment of Aboriginal representation by Indigenous artists. Deacon's words also show sadness for the past events and a desire to respect past souls with a show of contemporary strengths.

Deacon re-works this historically renowned painting in an empowering gesture. She demonstrates a more realistic representation of Aboriginality, in the identity of a woman, an assertive activist and writer, and one who holds a weapon, ready to chop down the constructs of her representation by the colonising culture.

It is myths that Deacon presents to us of the genre of 'exotic' island princess, the 'noble savage', and 'cherubic' Aboriginal girls and the 'civilised savage'. She uses these methods of mockery to expose the inaccuracies in these mythologies. Vijay Mishra designates the use of the word 'Aboriginalism' when speaking of Aboriginal representation in Australian texts.

I am inclined to think that as a hegemonic system which saturated white Australian consciousness and became a system of thought in its own right, 'Aboriginalism,' like Orientalism, simply confirmed prejudices based on doctrines of evolutionary difference and intellectual inferiority. (Mishra, 1988/1989, p 165)

It is 'Aboriginalism' which Destiny Deacon attempts to deconstruct in her parody of representations of the 'blak' female body by the colonising culture. She breaks down these prejudices based on white culture's ideas of superiority. By mimicking these representations, she permits the viewer to comprehend the pretence this collection of stereotypes presents. She forces the viewer to confront their supposition of the 'other', therefore exposing these racist and denigrating representations. By looking at Deacon's work the audience is in fact forced to look at itself.
CHAPTER 5

Rea

The easiest and most 'natural' form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible. Indeed, racism can provide a complete and satisfying comprehension of black identity (which is why it persists) and one that is linked to the viewer's ideological framework. (Langton, 1993, p. 24)

As a Blak woman, I have been made invisible. The construction of the Blak female was objective. I am subjectifying it, reclaiming my history to make her-story, creating a space for the black body. (Carver, 1996, p. 68)

The work of Rea's is mainly concerned with reclamation and reframing of cultural identity, particularly that of the 'Blak' female body. As a child she embraced history, history of Australia and history of the world, but soon learnt of her difference and the different perspectives held by white Australia and Indigenous people.

I learnt like every Australian that a man called Captain James Cook settled this land in 1788, true or false? I thought that it was great to remember the his-torical dates of Australia's settlement. I also learnt the his-tory of the world, his-tory was my best subject. The books were full of words that I sometimes found difficult to understand but I always loved the pictures because they told me more.

Once, I asked a teacher, "who is that blak man in the background of those Australian painting?" He told me that he was a native and that the natives used to live in Australia.

I then asked my mother who he was and she said that he is one of your ancestors. She then told me of our people and she began to tell me the story on my family, which was still a matriarchal family (pew!!, I was lucky there).

I now had two totally different stories so I was very confused, but I began to realise that I was different, in fact more different than I really wanted to be. (Rea, 1996, p. 28)
Rea’s objective is to make the invisible visible. To reconstruct history with a Blak perspective, to create her-story, the voice of an Indigenous woman. Her new use of words and language is another attempt at re-representing herself and Indigenous women, ‘Blak’ - first used in Australia by Destiny Deacon and ‘his-tory’, ‘her-story’. She even goes as far as to be referred to only as Rea ‘i do not use SAUNDERS as i feel that this white surname is part of all the things that i struggle to resist as an indigenous woman and as an artist. i only use REA.’ (Rea, 2001, electronic mail)

She does not presume to be a voice for all, but only to express her views. This stance is likely to be taken in order to prevent tokenism. ‘[T]he token Aboriginal person is expected to speak on behalf of the entire Aboriginal nation and risks reinscribing the position and the structure of the dominated. However defined, tokenism remains tied to a colonial agenda.’ (Johnson, 1993, p. 34)

‘Rea has constantly reiterated in public talks that her opinion is her own, that she speaks for and represents only herself. She has stated that she presents “difference” as positive: in her work the centre is reclaimed as her own – a Blak position’. (Carver, 1996, p. 71)

5.1 Look who’s calling the kettle black

Ruby Pearl Leslie (Williams) 1910 - 1996, Rea’s grandmother and greatest inspiration, was forcibly removed from her Aboriginal mother as a child and spent her childhood in Cootamundra Girls Home. Here she was trained as a domestic servant for white families, along with thousands of other Aboriginal girls in similar institutions around the country, forcibly removed from their families, in Australia’s attempt at assimilation.

In Rea’s series Look who’s calling the kettle black (1992) (Figure 24) she places black and white photographs of Aboriginal women dressed in uniforms of domestic servants, into highly coloured computer drawings of domestic appliances. A frying pan, a microwave, an iron, a stove, a toaster. This is how these women have been framed, objectified, contained in these appliances, unable to escape the role in which they have been trained and placed.
Figure 24 Rea, *Look who's calling the kettle black*, (1992), dye-sublimation print, 20.3 x 25.3 cm, National Gallery of Australia
Encased inside sleek, glossy household appliances are “real” photographs of Indigenous domestic servants, who have literally become objectified as “white goods” for domestic usage and consumption in “ordinary”, comfortable white, predominantly middleclass homes, an addition to the household like a refrigerator or an iron. (Nicholls, 2000, p. 38)

Below the image are dictionary definitions of terms used to describe these women; woman, black, lubra, gin, domestic, coloured. More European terms used to confine and classify the identity of Aboriginal women.

In each image, an electric cord with a plug stands ready to be plugged in, plugged into a European power system, one that negates other cultures’ ideologies or even existence, one, which takes the power from the colonised and places them into a submissive position, that of servant.

This work can be seen as a memorial to her grandmother and the sacrifices that she went through, ‘Rea uses the medium of photography to memorialise her grandmother, reinvesting moments of loss with a spirit of resistance.’ (Chui, 2000 p. 70)

My own resistance to many things which have been forced upon me gave me an initial insight into my history. As I looked at my great grandparents and nana as a child I realised that their resistance had already been engulfed by Christianity (Koori culture/spirituality had been pushed underground). With bibles in hand and dressed in their Sunday best they lost all they had ever known and so did I. (Howe, 1993, p. 23)

Rea’s use of photography is another testament to taking back the very medium that is responsible for her people’s representations.

Embracing modernity’s technology in order to explore a problematic construction of history, in which that very technology has played a significant role, is one more strategy in the process of accessing the cultural power grid. (Howe, 1993, p. 25)

‘Using “White Man’s” tools to critique “White Man’s” way’s, Rea’s imagery resonates with her explorations into racism, colonialism, history, sexuality and power’ (Williamson, 1999a, p. 111)

She uses high key colours in this series, which contrast with the grainy black and white images of the photographs, perhaps demonstrating the
contrast and difference between cultures. While white Australia is worrying about new ‘white goods’, black Australia was becoming ‘white’s goods’.

Rea’s use of a high key, rich colour palette is influenced from the era and environment in which she grew up. As she summarily puts it:

I grew up in the era of kitsch, Elvis, movie stars and red dresses, and my mother painted all her kitchens yellow and purple, so I can’t help but relate to wild colours and pop art! (Retake, 1999, online)

5.2 Definitions of Difference

Definitions of Difference (Figure 25) consists of six large-scale C-Type photographs which have been digitally manipulated. One of the images in this series consists of a topless black female torso from behind, with a hangman noose of some form around her neck. Another image is almost identical, but a necklace of beads is arranged as the noose. ‘Blak’ bodies bound and repressed by devices of entrapment.

As the title suggests, the positioning of these similar looking objects, (a hangman’s noose with a string of beads) exemplifies the difference in the symbolism of these images with the difference between black and white understandings of these symbols.

One may read the works as signifying women’s enslavement to western cultures idea of femininity and sexuality, but the obvious reading of the noose is Aboriginal people’s tragic association with deaths in custody and enslavement to white colonial culture.

‘In this work fragments of the black and “white” body function as blank pages on which text is inscribed.’ (Gellatly, 1999, online)

Other images fragment the female body. A pair of legs is also caught in the hangman’s noose. The body parts appear in monotone, almost silhouette in some images, on coloured backgrounds. In another, the female figure is donning on a long pair of gloves. This slipping on of gloves to Aboriginal women may signify domestic labour, entrapment, where to white
Figure 25 Rea, *Definitions of Difference*, (1994), digital direct positive colour photographs, comp 100.2 x 71.5 sheet 112.4 x 83.2, Collection of the artist.
Australia; it may be read as preparing for a social affair, not something that would have been familiar to Aboriginal women, with enforced curfew and banishment from certain city areas. Another image is a pair of outstretched hands, constrained by a rope around the wrists.

All of the images are overlaid with text. The text on one image reads:

Capsize – verb used to describe the distortion in the shape of a knot that loosens or slips when under stress.

And another:

Core or heart – the inner part or heart of a rope: it is formed from a loosely twisted strand or from a bundle of parallel yarns.

Rea has expressed that the text reflects her interests in fishing;

This text, which incidentally reflects the artist's interest in fishing and knots, foregrounds the differences in black and white experience symbolised by the juxtaposition of the string of pearls and hangman's noose. (Gellatly, 1999, online)

The text may reflect the artist's interest in fishing and knots, but implies something much more insidious. It was ropes and chains which were used to bind Aboriginal prisoners together in order to control them. It is ropes and knots that are responsible for the many hangings of Aboriginal people since colonisation and their deaths in custody. Ropes and knots are symbols of repression, power and control over Aboriginal people. The association between ropes and knots may be automatic to a person of colour, but Rea is also dealing with a different kind of death in custody, one which we are not immediately alluded to when we are confronted with these images;

I'm focussing on the deaths of black women in custody because nobody really talks about women. I feel that society traps black women as domestic, servant and slave and that to be trapped you don't have to go to jail. (Rea, 1994, p. 109)

Definition of Difference also looks at the invisibility of the black female body, a common theme mentioned by the artists discussed. 'As Aboriginal people we're all oppressed in this society, but as women we are members of two minority groups.' (Rea, 1994, p. 104)
Rea still struggled with the invisibility of the 'Blak' body, even within the constructs of feminism, which she still considered rendered the 'Blak' body invisible.

When I presented the body in Definitions of Difference and Resistance III (1994) it was the first time that I took the risk as a Blak feminist to actually put a body up there and the reason why I was able to feel free enough to do that was because I realised that I'd been educated and indoctrinated with white feminist ideas. White feminist ideas keep the Blak body invisible as well, so when I saw the body I never, ever saw a Blak body, I saw a white body. So for me, I had to change my way of thinking and take the risk to present a Blak body and to remember that no matter what I do or anyone else does, in terms of the body, we do live in a society now where we all view the body through the male gaze – so women don’t escape this either, because of the way that we’ve been socialised. (Rea, 1995)

These concerns of feminism’s inability to represent women of all cultures and classes, is shared by feminist critics who in the 1980s ‘began to argue that Western feminism, which had assumed that gender overrode cultural differences to create a universal category of the womanly or feminine, was operating from hidden, universalist assumption with a middle-class, Euro-centric bias.’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, pp. 102-103)

Unlike the history of Western (white, middle-class) feminisms, which has been explored in great detail over the last few decades, histories of third world women’s engagement with feminism are in short supply. There is a large body of work on “women in developing countries,” but this does not necessarily engage feminist questions. There is now a substantial amount of scholarship on women in liberation movements, or on the role and status of women in individual cultures. However, this scholarship also does not necessarily engage questions of feminist historiography. Constructing such histories often requires reading against the grain of a number of intersecting progressive discourses (e.g., white feminism, third world nationalist, and socialist), as well as the politically regressive racist, imperialist, sexist discourses of slavery, colonialism, and contemporary capitalism. (Mohanty, 1991, pp. 3-4)
5.3 R.I.P: The Blak Body Series

*R.I.P: The Blak Body Series* installation consists of two main parts. There are a variety of preserving jars containing different undefinable substances and there is also a floor piece made of dried grasses, underneath which the words 'Inherent in the Preservation is the Destruction' are painted. 'The smell of grasses filled the gallery as viewers stood on them and pushed them aside to read the text, unintentionally participating in “destruction” and excavation themselves.' (Carver, 1996, pp. 69-70)

Then there is a series of six images of jars, computer generated, superchrome prints, 100 x 71 cm. These 6 images serve as a chronological history in the representation and treatment of the 'Blak' female body.

The jars appear in different forms. The first jars are full of preserved food and then there are a couple of jars of just coloured water. In the hallwall section there's a floor piece which says *Inherent in the preservation is the destruction* and randomly across that text will be open empty jars. In the final room, the jars are on the wall presenting different fragments and different times in history, going from the heart that was ripped out of the culture and then the different times we went through; up to my grandmother when she was a servant, to my mother when she was in the 60s and rock 'n' roll and all that sort of stuff, to the final image which is an image of my younger sister (Teresa) and what she's actually doing is she's smashing the jars. (Rea, 1995, n.p.)

*Ripped into Pieces* is part of a personal and artistic journey in which Rea has stepped further and further into the past, gathering pieces of her fragmented history as she goes.' (Carver, 1996, p. 69)

The first image consists of a preserving jar containing preserved sections of the body. 'Disguised as an innocent berry jar, the "strange fruit" of another story unfolds as one looks closer into the image.' (Carver, 1996, p. 69) This image alludes to the scientific observation, classification and collection of Aboriginal people and remains during colonial periods and 'through to the last shipment of Aboriginal bones out of this country in 1951.' (Rea, 1995, n.p.)
Figure 26 Rea, R.I.P.: The Blak Body Series I & VI, (1995), computer generates image, superchrome print, 100 x 71 cm
In the same spirit of 'advancement', Aboriginal 'specimens' were sought and prized by figures such as the notorious 'Angel of Black Death', Amalie Dietrich. It is estimated that up to 10,000 Aboriginal bodies and remains left Australia for overseas museums, many from robbed graves, others the trophies of commissioned murders. (Carver, 1996, p. 69)

The pieces of the body are preserved in the jar as specimens for further investigation and classification; to be gauged against the white middle-class male of Victorian culture, which was considered 'the pinnacle of intellectual, moral and physical development.' (Ryan, 1997, p. 147)

Accommodation and display of Aboriginal remains is still in practice in some museums and institutions today, and it is only recently that these remains have begun to be returned such as the example of the skull of the 19th century warrior, Yagan, which was only returned to Western Australia in 1997. Recently the Royal College of Surgeons in Britain have decided to return the stolen remains of Tasmanian Aboriginals. These including some hair and skin from Truganini, the last full-blooded Tasmanian Aboriginal, who died in 1876. (Lam, 2002, p. 5) In the last years of Truganini's life she was haunted by the idea of her body being dissected and butchered like that of her lover, William Lanne, as a scientific curiosity.

Holding firmly to her culture's belief, she regarded the skeletal remains as sacred objects, and refused even to utter the names of the dead. But convinced that the same treatment awaited her own end, Truganini lived on in terror for seven lonely years before the nightmare became reality. (Rae-Ellis, 1992, pp. 232-233)

Unfortunately Truganini's greatest fears came to fruition when in 1876 her body was exhumed and handed over to the Royal Society, and later in 1905 her skeletal remains were placed on exhibition in the Tasmanian museum until 1947, as an 'absolutely unique exhibit'. (Rae-Ellis, 1992, p. 233) 'Possibly a composite, with Truganini's skull connected to the postcranial skeleton of an unknown female replacing that of Truganini which appears to have been stolen about the turn of the century.' (Rae-Ellis, 1992, p. 232) Finally in 1976 the remains of Truganini in the possession of museum
were cremated, but as recent newspaper articles show, there are still remains in the possession of some institutions and Aborigines believe that 'until the head and body are burnt together the spirit cannot be released into the dreaming.' (Lam, 2002, p. 5).

This type of blatant disregard to Aboriginal beliefs is foregrounded in this image of Rea's. Spinal chords overlay the image of the preserving jar, one of the body parts, which was continually measured and examined. The anthropological and ethnographic photographs of this time demonstrate the methods and treatment of Aboriginal people for these purposes, such as the system advocated by Huxley to photograph the races of the world. (Figure 1)

The second image is a dilly bag encapsulated in another preserving jar of richly coloured fluid. Aboriginal artefacts and tools were also collected, photographed and shown in exhibitions and kept in museums and ethnographic collections. 'If the field and studio photographers were being influenced by theories about the nature of 'primitive' tools, the discovery in Australia of tools judged to be of archaeological importance also became a subject for the colonial photographer.' (Fox, 1999, p. 173). These artefacts were seen as markers of determining Aboriginal people's position on the evolutionary scale. Their tools and technology were judged as being 'primitive' in comparison to white culture and therefore they were also judged as being inferior, in the 'childhood of mankind.'

In the second image, the dilly bag 'appears to be suspended – the bright colours suggesting preservation fluid – the black frame around the subject freezes and objectifies it.' (Carver, 1996, p. 69). This dilly bag is also captive in a jar; it has been collected and preserved, as have the body parts, like an artefact from this 'dying race' which was so extensively collected. Rea expresses this obsession of western society to collect and own a piece of 'Aboriginality'. 'We’re objects of desire, people have to own us, people have to hang us on their walls and in there museums. First it was our bodies, now it’s our culture.' (Rea, 1995, n.p.)

The dilly bag has also become commodified, once made out of traditional natural fibres, depending on the area it originated, it can now be found in a variety of forms and materials in any of the many Aboriginal arts and crafts or souvenir shops as can replicas of boomerangs and didgeridoos.
and tea towels with transfers of traditional Aboriginal painting, more of what Deacon refers to as white Australian artefacts.

The dilly bag is traditionally made by women. This gathering implement along with the coloured pandanus leaves in the background of some of the Rea's images, as Hetti Perkins noted in the catalogue, alludes to weaving and women's work, 'A woman, like a basket for example, may be considered utilitarian, inferior, perhaps disposable and as a carrier – a carrier of food, a carrier of children.' (Perkins, 1995)

Perkins also suggests that the use of the pandanus leaves as a metaphor for women's flesh or women in the exhibition, and Rea responds;

Yeah, because the actual colour of the original image I used was a very burgundy red, so for me I saw it as flesh, I saw it as blood and Muscle an image that binds my body to the land. It is all related to women. And when I tested the pandanus, it worked exactly the way I wanted it to work like if someone peeled your skin off they would see all these different layers of muscle and flesh. Just like over the years how the land as been peeled lay by lay, and then covered with layers of toxic coating, another cover up. (Rea, 1995, n.p.)

Preserved in the third image is a diagram of female genitalia, another representation of the Blak female body, this time as an object of sexual desire and curiosity.

The fourth vessel contains a servant's uniform, once again referencing Aboriginal women's history in the domestic service. This time the uniform is empty, a reminder of the way Aboriginal women's identity was seen only as a servant or as in other works, objectified as a domestic appliance. This absence of a material body may also refer to the hopeful end of enforced enslavement.

A 1960s dress and shoes are submerged in the colourful preserving fluids of The Blak Body Series V; these objects represent Rea's grandmother and mother. This era marked a time when Aboriginal people were beginning to assume power and were able to make political changes such as finally having recognition as citizens of their own country.
The sixth image is of Rea’s younger sister with a hammer and emptying the contents of the jar, releasing the containments. This image represents a positive future, change, smashing out of the confines of these representations and a hopeful end to the history of discrimination.

In this image she’s got an empty jar in her hand and she’s smashing it down onto a full jar, to break the final jar. It’s symbolic in that she’s saying “I won’t be constrained anymore, I won’t be confined to little boxes and bottles and shelves. I’m taking back my own power and I’m reclaiming the Blak body and a space for the Blak body to be in.” She’s representing Blak men and women because the body is a Blak body. She happens to be a woman because I’m from a very matriarchal family and the process of learning has come down through that. (Rea, 1995, n.p.)

With optimism, Rea resurrects the history of representation of the ‘Blak’ female body which culminates in a confident finale. One that has the Indigenous person in the driver’s seat, taking control of their own representation. This personal family history of Rea’s may be interpreted as a shared experience by Aboriginal Australia’s, although she insists that her voice speaks for itself alone. With the insurgence of Indigenous women image-makers into the contemporary art scene, dealing with issues of representation and gender, hopefully there will be a break of ‘this cycle of classification and confinement, discrimination and denial’. (Genocchio, 1996, p. 20)
CHAPTER 6

L.H.O.O.Q. ‘ere! The work of Dianne Jones

We are in a very interesting period of transition, a period of Indigenous image-makers, especially women, reclaiming their representation. As the inclusion of new Indigenous image makers dealing with issues of representation is very recent, it is not an issue which has yet been reconciled.

One such artist who has recently come into the limelight is Dianne Jones, an emerging Indigenous artist whose work deals with issues of representation and identity and is quickly gaining notoriety. Her work has been included in an exhibition, ‘Girls on Film’, Art Gallery of Western Australia, September - December 2001 and ‘Unsigned Artists’, at Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, 8 – 26 January 2002. Dianne Jones has been described as ‘having the potential to join the current divas, Tracey Moffatt, Destiny Deacon and Fiona Foley.’ (Corrigan, 2002, n.p.)

Dianne Jones, a Nyungar woman from country Western Australia uses digital photo media. In her most recent images she positions family portraits into iconic Australian paintings to comment on the invisibility of Aboriginal subjects and their misrepresentation.

Eugene VonGuerard’s many canvases, painted on commission from prosperous settlers, established an Australian genre of sophisticated homestead portraits. In Jones’s Brenda’s Wedding (2001) she replaces the tiny gothic-like ‘primitives’ of Eugene VonGuerard The Barwon River, Geelong, 1854, with a family portrait of her sister’s wedding. In doing so, Jones is repositioning Indigenous people in the landscape. Here, her family portrait dominates the background. Her subjects are given identity; they are in the landscape but not as part of it. VonGuerard painted his subjects equal to the flora and fauna he was recording, rendering them in a permanent state of nature. Jones denies the theory of terra nullus.
Figure 27 Dianne Jones, *Brenda's Wedding*, (2001), inkjet on canvas, 45.7 x 75 cm, Art Gallery of Western Australia.
Jones’s Picnic (2001) (Figure 28) is another of Jones’s works that replaces the small insignificant ‘natives’ of Glover’s Natives dancing at Brighton, Tasmania, with a family portrait. A portrait of the Jones’s carrying out a typical family outing. The title resonates the cliché, ‘keeping up with the Jones’s’ not an image normally associated with Aboriginal families, and so continues to ‘reverse the expected’.

It was one of these Glover paintings, that as a child, Rea asked her mother who the people were. Her mother’s response was they were her ancestors. Rea asked the same question to her school teacher who answered that they were natives and that natives once lived in Australia. Jones makes these people her immediate family, her family living here and now. She makes these people real and big as life, she connects them to her past and present. She reclaims Aboriginal peoples’ importance in art history, as the subjects of these famous paintings.

The family photographs of Jones’s works also contest the stereotypical photographic images of Aboriginal people of this time. The time is the 70s, a time when the ‘Hippy’ photographers were portraying Indigenous people in a social documentary style, still portraying them as ‘romantic nomads’, not as contemporary people. Jones denies this by placing the image of her family, all dressed in their groovy clothes of the time, jumpsuit and purple pants in Jones’s Picnic.

Shearing the Rams (1888-90) by Tom Roberts is the ‘single most widely recognised and best loved painting.’ (Hansen, 1996, p. 36). Crude imitations of this icon hang in lounge rooms, pubs and hotel foyers, but the priceless original, like all of Australia’s iconic images, are housed in the National galleries and museums of Australia and around the world. The originals are guarded in their fortified fortresses, kept safe, national treasures, the icons that preserve Australia’s national identity and cultured history.

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3 A term used by Tracey Moffatt to refer to the photographers of the 60s and 70s documenting Aboriginal people in a certain style.
Figure 28 Dianne Jones, *Jones's Picnic*, (2001), inkjet on canvas, 73.7 x 113 cm.
'Certainly his stature as an interpreter of landscape is unquestionable; it was Roberts and his "Heidelberg School" colleagues who helped to redeem the bush from its sublime and Romantic colonial image, from what Marcus Clarke famously called its "weird melancholy".' (Hansen, 1996, p. 36)

Artworks like Bailed Up, The Golden Fleece: Shearing at Newstead and Shearing the Rams are now regarded as priceless treasures because they were among the first to depict the distinctly 'Australian' character of the bush.

It is '[a] history that portrays a defiant, laconic, big armed, big-hearted rural labourer, a Chips Rafferty before the movies' (Hansen, 1996, p. 36) and always white, struggling against the harsh environment, to make an honest living. This is not a his-tory 4 that Jones experienced in country Western Australia.

My father was a gun shearer and my brother was also a shearer. I had many relatives working in sheds as shearers, shedhands, stukers etc. Aboriginal people were definitely the backbone of this country with working for the farmers and most ironically of all building fences which then kept them out. In the Tom Roberts painting my father is shearing in the forefront of the painting with my brother and nephew also doing the work. I often had people who do not live in the country or have ever lived there ask me if there were many Indigenous shearers because until I had told them about my father and brothers and relatives they thought that there weren't any at all. It is not unusual to find that a lot of people are unaware of the 'real history' of Australia. (Jones, personal communication, September 20, 2001)

In the Centenary of Federation, '2002 – Australia Year of the Outback' and the opening of 'The Australian Shearers Hall of Fame' 26-28 January, (significantly on Australia Day week-end) it seems a perfect time to critique these memorials to Australian identity. Jones does just this by digitally positioning original images of her father, brother and nephew into the original Shearing the Rams by Roberts. In doing so she is reclaiming the role and importance that Aboriginal people played in the rural communities. Aboriginal people made up a large percentage of the pastoral work force.

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4 This is a term used by Rea to illustrate the patriarchal characteristic of history narration.
Figure 29 Dianne Jones, *Shearing the Rams*, (2001), inkjet on canvas, 121.9x 182.6 cm, Art Gallery of Western Australia
For example, when Roberts painted *Shearing the Rams* (1890), his icon of Australian identity and “strong masculine labour” on the frontiers of empire, such labour was being performed on the new Australian frontiers in the north by Aborigines – male and female. In 1881 over 2000 Aborigines were “employed” in the pastoral industry, with the figure rising to 4000 in 1905 – though employed is here a euphemism for slavery. (McLean, 1998, p. 62)

There are images of Aboriginal shearers and labourers as Ian McLean identifies in *White Aborigines: Identity politics in Australian art*, with the image *Family photograph, Corruna Downs Station – old Drake property, WA, c 1905*, (Figure 30) the home of Sally Morgan’s grandmother, an image almost identical to *Golden Fleece*. 1894. Though it seems that these images would not have been appropriate to portray Australian identity. ‘The image of Aboriginal shearers was too transgressive to be considered an icon of the nation at a time of Federation.’ (McLean, 1998, p. 62)

Robert’s *Shearing the Rams* was also painted in a time when there was relatively no Aboriginal representation in painting. This new period of Impressionism in Australia, disregarded the previous melancholy of the Australian bush. This marked a time when Australia preferred to ignore the decimation of Aboriginal population since colonisation.

Aborigines are absent, and the drama of colonialism is depicted as one of empire, not indigeneity...Aborigines disappear from non-Aboriginal Australian art, not to appear again until the time of the Second World War. (McLean, 1998, p. 60)

The painters of this time ‘sought a transcendence which completely forgot the slaughter, destruction and melancholy of colonial history.’ (McLean, 1998, p. 55) There was therefore an invisibility of Aboriginal subjects in this time. This is the invisibility that Croft, Rea, Langton and now Jones all express in their words and works, along with many other Indigenous artists.
Figure 30 Family photograph, Corruna Downs Station – old Drake Brockman property, c 1905, WA.
Jones challenges this absence of Aboriginal subject in the history of Australian painting to inform and rewrite the history. Making the Aboriginal subject visible, we are forced to acknowledge the past of slaughter, destruction and melancholy of colonial history.

Jones also takes another of Robert's paintings, *The Golden Fleece* – *Shearing at Newstead*, 1894, which depicts the same national identity and mateship as *Shearing the Rams*, and dares to insert women subjects into the place of the men. By doing so Jones castrates the identity of the masculine, macho Aussie male ego. Aboriginal women were also carrying out this type of labour on the new frontier as identified by McLean in the photograph of the shearing shed at Corruna Downs Station in Western Australia (c. 1905). (Figure 30) Even Jones's future had these possibilities. ‘You know dad always wanted me to be a shearer, eh?’ (Jones, personal communication, January 23, 2002)

Jones is claiming a place in history, her own personal family history and a history not dissimilar in Aboriginal Australia.

Jones's title of her work, *Golden Fleece, Black Velvet*, comments on the attitudes towards Aboriginal women by the pastoralists as identified by Marcia Langton;

There is a song about ‘black velvet’ from the Australian pastoral frontier which expresses the colonial lust of drovers demanding a fuck after a hard day's work. The term has passed into 'redneckspeak', and the subliminal power of the concept also ricochets around most sexual images of Aboriginal women. (Langton, 1993, p. 50)

The women in Jones's image are not viewed as vistas for the male gaze, but are seen as equals, able to carry out a hard day's work and are given the respect that these subjects would otherwise receive.

The title *Golden Fleece, Black Velvet* also exemplifies the different cultural readings of the image of Indigenous woman. This also relates to the work of Rea's in the different cultural readings of *Definitions and Difference*. 
Brenda Croft, curator of Indigenous Art of the gallery at the time, reports that people who saw Jones's *Shearing the Rams*, as they entered the Art Gallery of Western Australia, rushed in when, from afar, they recognised *their* most familiar icon. 'I didn't know the Tom Roberts was here!' they excitedly gasped, only to be, perhaps, somewhat disappointed when they came closer and realised the travesty that had been committed. (B. L. Croft, personal communication, 17 September, 2002)

Perhaps this may have been a similar sentiment felt by bourgeois lovers of art when Marcel Duchamp donned a moustache and beard on the icon of all icons, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. Jones re-enacts this derision with white Australia greatest hero, Captain James Cook. Jones places the graffiti like Duchampian facial hair on the face of Captain Cook, in John Webbers, *Captain Cook* (1782) painting, rendering him, in his noble stance, ridiculous.

Jones goes as far as to appropriate part of Duchamp's title in *L.H.O.O.Q. 'ere!* (Figure 31) *L.H.O.O.Q.*, in Duchamp's title stands for something like; she has a great ass, in French, but sounds like *look* in English. Jones adds 'ere, signifying Nyungar English, to make the statement, *Look 'ere*! a reaction to the attention that this portrait had received, especially when recently purchased by The National Portrait Gallery, Canberra for $3.5 million.

To Jones, and likely many other Indigenous people, this hero of white Australia, signifies the beginning of colonisation in Australia and the devastation that has occurred since, on Indigenous people.
Figure 31 Dianne Jones, *LHOOQ ERE!* (2001), inkjet on canvas, 114 x 91 cm, Art Gallery of Western Australia
CONCLUSION

The four photographers discussed have all been influenced in one way or another by the early colonial images of Indigenous people as well as images up to the late 20th century. In many cases it is these representations of their people by white culture that have driven them to reclaim their identities from the myriad misrepresentations.

The coloniser's representations of Indigenous people continue to be housed in museum archives, important documents in the history of Australia. However, as time goes by, there is a shift in the interpretation of these documents. What is becoming increasingly clearer is that these images are more useful in determining the attitudes of the dominant culture, rather than being descriptive of the Aboriginal culture. Looking at these images for white culture is looking at a reflection of themselves. The attitudes and expressions in the faces of the subjects reflect only, the treatment, anger, fear and resentment felt by the people being photographed.

Looking again at Deacon's video, *I don't want to be a bludger* (1999) I became aware of why it is we could find these scenarios humorous. Deacon is re-presenting the myths that have been constructed by white society. The video is about white perception, not 'Blak'. To laugh at these constructs is to disempower them, to take away their ability to harm, reduce, exclude and demean as they have in the past.

As Aboriginal artists continue to delve into issues of identity and representation, others are continually challenged in their way of thinking and the hegemonic modes which affect representation. These artists have become crusaders in the movement to shift the thinking and changing attitudes, to budge these culturally embedded stereotypes and representation, which until very recent times have been sturdy monuments in the Australian psyche.

This is an art of contestation and struggle. It is an art in which a politics of representation is the central motivation and axiom which creates its own dynamic and problematic. (Dewdney, 1996, p. 94)
The struggle has also to make the invisible, visible. Here Rea describes the struggle to become visible,

Contemporary urban Aboriginal is the art that I am most passionate about because we have had to fight a long hard fight to be visible and I am proud that I am part of a movement which continues to interrogate colonial constructs and explore the immense diversity of Aboriginal identities. (Rea, 1998, online)

Deacon expresses how her art practice has given her a voice and made her visible;

Deacon has [also] spoken about the voice and the sense of visibility which she has been able to create for herself through her photography. As an urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, she has often experienced a peculiar sense of invisibility. Through her art practice, she has been shown respect by people who 'wouldn't normally give me the time of day'. (Williamson, 1994, p. 22)

These contemporary Indigenous image-makers continue to critique the constructs of colonialism in order to create a space for the 'Blak' female body. This continuum of new artists joining the ranks of established contemporary Indigenous artists dealing with these issues of representation, is testimony that these issues continue to promote new works and effect new generations. These works can be seen as a way to implement education and change.

Looking beyond the prejudice that reduces individual subjects to garden objects, such works reveal how art can serve, in an exploration of complex political issues, as a means of augmenting real social change. (Genocchio, 1996, p 20)

Hopefully with the insurgence of new artists and the continued critique of representations of Indigenous people through all types of media, we may come to a place where we can disrupt the constructs of 'Aboriginalism'. Or in the optimistic words of Rea, 'A change is gonna come'. (Dewdney, 1994, p. 101)
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