

***Collective
Unease***

Andy Butler

Lisa Hilli

James Nguyen

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Unease***

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Lisa Hilli
James Nguyen**

OLD QUAD
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
27 SEPTEMBER 2022 –
3 JUNE 2023

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Curators' foreword

SAMANTHA COMTE AND JACQUELINE DOUGHTY

The Ian Potter Museum of Art is pleased to present *Collective Unease*, an exhibition of three commissions inspired by the University of Melbourne's students, archives and collections. Through new works created especially for the Treasury Gallery at Old Quad, Andy Butler, Lisa Hilli and James Nguyen propose counter-narratives to the Eurocentric histories and aspirations embodied by the building's Tudor-Gothic revival architecture.

Andy Butler's video *The Agony and the Ecstasy* juxtaposes artworks from the University Art Collection with footage of the Melbourne University Cheer and Dance Club. Lisa Hilli's *Birds of a Feather* explores the empowerment of educated Papua Niuginian women through the cultural and symbolic connection of the beloved 'kumul' (birds of paradise). James Nguyen's *An Australian National Song* re-interprets a Federation-era song sheet from the Rare Books collection.

By re-framing collection objects and shifting our attention to untold stories, the artists move beyond colonial narratives to a complex, multi-voiced understanding of Australia that is inflected by experiences of migration and diaspora. In the face of difficult histories and an uncertain future, these works emphasise themes of self-representation, empowerment and optimism.

On behalf of the Ian Potter Museum's Board, and its chair Peter Jopling AM QC, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of the exhibition, associated programming and this publication.

Special thanks are due to Lady Primrose Potter AC and Christine Simpson Stokes AM for their generous support of these three new commissions. Thanks also to Claire G. Coleman, Jocelyn Flynn and

Suzannah Henty, who have provided insightful essays to this exhibition catalogue. We would like to acknowledge Dame Meg Taylor for her contributions to Lisa Hilli's *Birds of a Feather*, and the many performers who appear in the artists' videos, including the Melbourne University Cheer and Dance Club, who display their fabulous athleticism in Andy Butler's *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, and the musicians Rollin Zhao, Amy You, Donica Tran and Victoria Pham, who perform alongside James Nguyen in *An Australian National Song*. We are grateful to our colleagues at Museums Victoria for making their collections available to Lisa Hilli during the development of her work.

Collective Unease has been produced by the dedicated and talented Museums and Collections team. We would like to thank Brad Rusbridge, Charlotte Christie, Isabella Johansson, Jack Farley, James Needham and Leela Schauble for their expertise in bringing the exhibition to fruition. We would particularly like to thank Nikki Van Der Horst for her assistance with *The Agony and the Ecstasy* film shoot at Old Quad. We would also like to thank our installation technicians, who provided expert production assistance during the installation of the exhibition. Thank you to Madeline Critchley for the sensitivity she has brought to the design of the exhibition's visual identity, and to Marianna Berek-Lewis for designing this beautiful digital publication.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the artists, Andy Butler, Lisa Hilli and James Nguyen, for the critical insights, conceptual sophistication and generosity they have brought to this project. We are grateful for the opportunity to present these compelling new works at Old Quad.

Collective
Unease

Andy Butler

Lisa Hilli

James Nguyen



Andy Butler

The Agony and the Ecstasy



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
2-channel video, sound, 8 min



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
 2-channel video, sound, 8 min



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
 2-channel video, sound, 8 min

The Agony and the Ecstasy: Decoloniality, Care and the University

SUZANNAH HENTY

Andy Butler's video work *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (2022) takes its title from Irving Stone's eponymous 1961 biography of Michelangelo and its 1965 film adaptation. The book and film are concerned with the struggles the Italian master painter had with Pope Julius II and the institution of the Vatican while painting the Sistine Chapel. Butler appropriates this story from art history and uses it as an allegory to address the historical and structural dilemmas faced by The University of Melbourne in its moral, legal and increasingly ideological requirement to decolonise its history, and care for its students.

Butler's video contrasts the agonistic legacy of settler-colonial Australia, embodied and institutionalised by the prestigious University, with the ecstatic optimism of students as they prepare for the future. The video begins by showcasing objects held in the Russell and Mab Grimwade 'Miegunyah' Collection and the Samuel Ewing Collection, as the Melbourne University Cheerleading Club arrive to the Old Quad. Major artworks from the University collection, including John Longstaff's *Portrait of Dr Samuel Ewing* (c. 1922), Arthur Streeton's *The Dome of St Marks* (1908) (painted while living in Europe), Rupert Bunny's *The New Step* (c. 1908–11), Hans Heysen's *Gums in Morning Light* (c. 1912) and Paul Fitzgerald's *Portrait of Sir Russell Grimwade* (date unknown), form a semi-circle with late eighteenth-century figurines, likely collected by Russell Grimwade (1879–1955) and Mabel Louise Grimwade (1887–1973) during their travels. As canonical figures of Australian art, the works by Streeton, Bunny, Longstaff and Heysen are of immense value to the University and what it represents. Here, they resemble a coven summoning power.

What does the video ask in this juxtaposition? One narrative unfastens the legacy and mechanics of power held within the University's collection of objects that sustain the myth of settler-colonialism, while the other celebrates the exhilarating solidarity and optimism of the Melbourne University Cheerleading Club. Yet, the optimism of the cheerleaders is bittersweet. Practicing inside the 167-year-old colonial buildings of the Old Quad, the team warm-up and perform the University chant "black and blue", "Go MU Let's Go" and "Fight MU", "Let's Fight", "Let's hear it", "F - I - G - H - T for Justice"—the later chants were written specifically for the artwork. Performed in the Old Quad, the chant recalls the industrial action that took place at the founding of the University. In 1856, during the building of the Quadrangle, stonemasons put their tools down and demanded fair working hours. The chant for justice echoes the history of the building, whose stones bear the legacy of colonialism and exploitation.

To whose *collective unease* does the exhibition refer if not the institution of the university and those it benefits? The University is aware of the double bind in decolonising a settler-colonial nation: "On the one hand, the University was an undeniable agent of colonisation and dispossession, and of the imposition of European ideals onto an Australian setting. On the other, it was a local institution, with practical requirements in a developing colony."¹ Butler's excavation gauges the tension between decoloniality and care as expressed by an institution which is an embodiment of the state. For some time now, we have been encouraged to feel uncomfortable with colonial legacies. And for what purpose? The colony yearns to be blamed so that it can absolve its own guilt and forgive the nation of its own crime.

By posing a conversation between the past and the present, Butler asks us to consider decoloniality in terms of the legacy we inherit, and the care that it implies.ⁱⁱ A current crisis facing the University, that resonates with its foundation in a strike by its builders, is its attempts to deal with its history of discrimination, mistreatment, and exploitation. This year, the Fair Work Ombudsman launched a landmark legal case against the University due to a permanent staff member allegedly threatening long-term casual employees with punishment for recording the hours they work in their pay slip.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is something deeply puzzling about the way university institutions mistreat their teaching staff. In 2004, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney wrote that “[t]he university needs teaching labor, despite itself, or as itself, self-identical with and thereby erased by it.”^{iv} For academics, it all begins at teaching: “Before there are grants, research, conferences, books, and journals there is the experience of being taught and of teaching.”^v Yet, in academia, teaching is “often ... taken to be a stage [in one’s career], as if eventually, one should not teach for food.”^{vi} Like the stonemasons building Old Quad in 1856, rank and file casual academics are campaigning for safe and fair working conditions.

If teaching is the business of education, students are the clients. University institutions need students, to whom we, academic staff, are beholden. In spite of our working conditions, it is our duty to ensure students are safe and supported in their learning. Care is an integral ingredient in the teaching process that cannot come in the abstract from upstairs (though we depend on it). It must first come from a love for the co-constitutive relationship of teaching and learning; it must come from a community that we keep building together each semester and in which students are the beating heart. Students are the ones who suffer when the university increases class sizes and fees—they’re the ones who suffer when casual staff aren’t paid to go to lectures, prepare classes, or give their assignments the time they deserve when marking (i.e., gatekeeping scholarships and further education). Given the financial exploitation of the University teaching staff and students by the University for its own profit, how can they expect us to believe they care about us?

Butler gives no answer to the questions asked in his juxtaposition of founding events and the vitality and hopes of a new future generation, but in reminding us how this story began with another power object in the University collection—an engraving of Captain Cook ascending to heaven at Karakakooa Bay, where he was killed in 1779—he suggests an inevitable complicity between the future and past that the present is called to, indeed condemned, to negotiate. By unearthing the University’s treasures, Butler allows students to imagine their future differently.

The real reckoning, Butler’s *The Agony and the Ecstasy* suggests, is breaking down colonial hierarchies. Butler calls for justice directly, and the marching band soundtrack gives a sense of urgency. However, by celebrating the exuberance and power of the University’s students and anachronistically invoking the legacy of the University’s inheritance, Butler also reminds us that after collective unease comes joy.

Suzannah Henty is a Graduate Research Teaching Fellow (Art History and Curatorship) at the University of Melbourne where she is a PhD candidate in Art History and Anthropology.

Notes

- i. “Our history,” The University of Melbourne, accessed October 2, 2022, <https://about.unimelb.edu.au/old-quad/learn/our-history>.
- ii. Tian Zhang’s recent publication *A manifesto for radical care or how to be a human in the arts* (2022) directed us to “[s]top looking to institutions to care for us and start remembering how to care for each other.” For the curator, care means “holding space and being held, being grounded in community and in Country. Care is not just a feeling; it is action, process, practice, impact.” Zhang’s manifesto is cautious of the capacity of art institutions, including universities, to provide meaningful care because it generates hierarchy. The first step to provide radical care is to recognise that institutional hierarchies “restrict the growth and flow of care.” That means we are not the problem but the institutions we choose to inhabit.
- iii. “University of Melbourne faces court,” Fair Work Ombudsman, August 11, 2022, <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/2022-media-releases/august-2022/20220811-uni-of-melb-litigation-media-release>.
- iv. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “The University and the Undercommons,” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 102.
- v. Moten and Harney, 2004, 102.
- vi. Moten and Harney, 2004, 102.



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
2-channel video, sound, 8 min



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
2-channel video, sound, 8 min



Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
 2-channel video, sound, 8 min

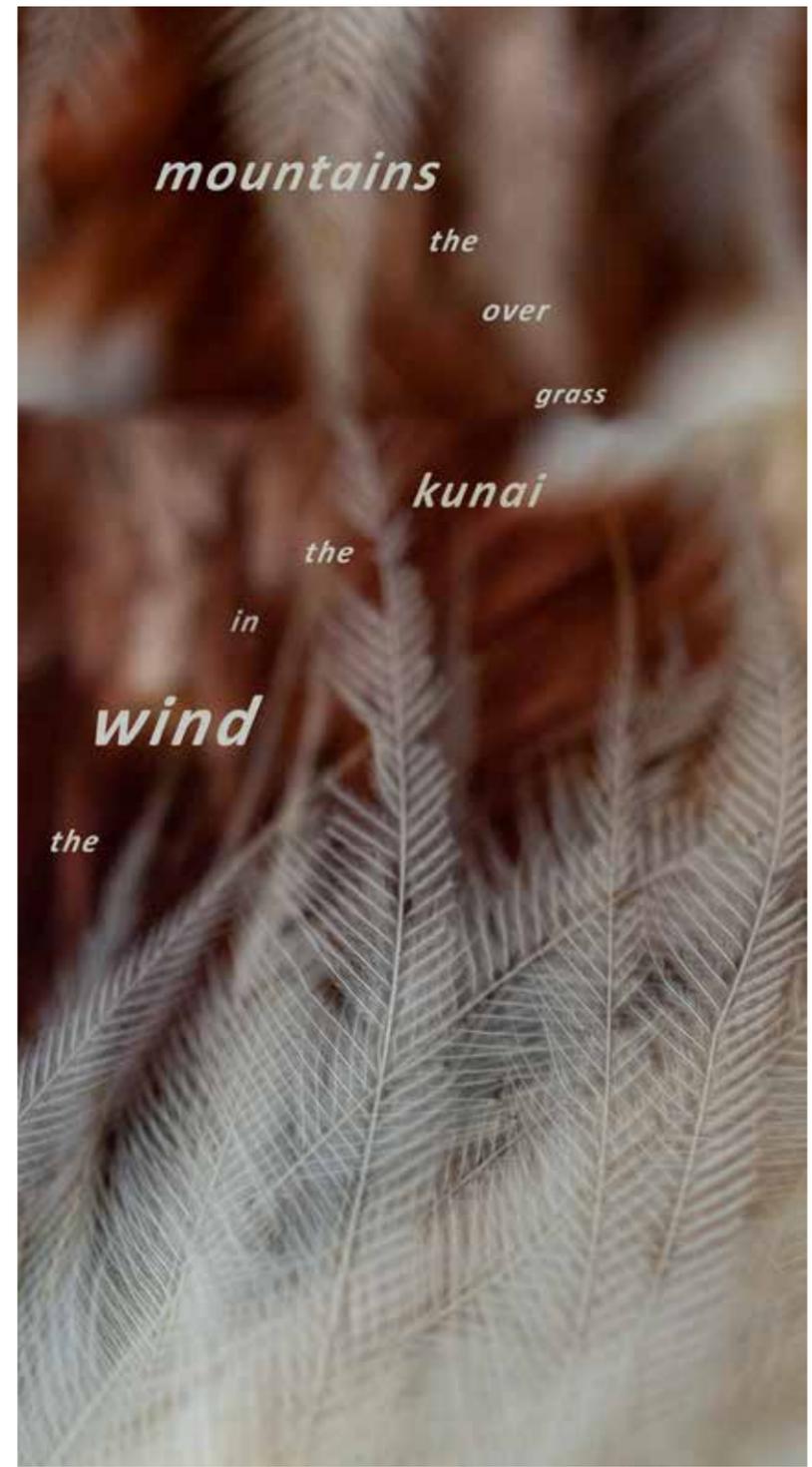


Andy Butler
The Agony and the Ecstasy (still) 2022
 2-channel video, sound, 8 min



Lisa Hilli

Birds of a Feather



Lisa Hilli
Birds of a Feather (detail) 2022
digital print on fabric

*Papua New Guinea
is like the kumul
bird of paradise*



*It can only fly
when both its wings
are strong*



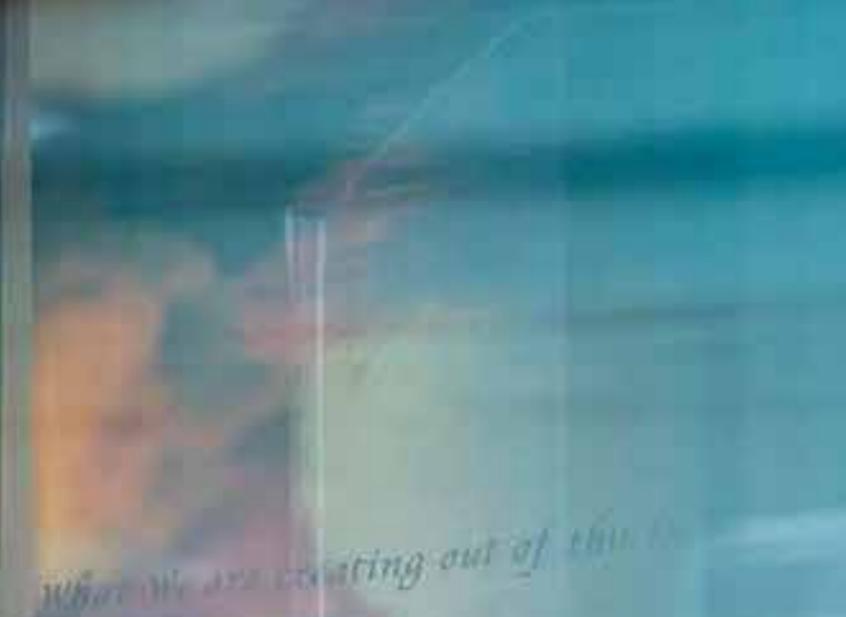
*Mek
Mek*



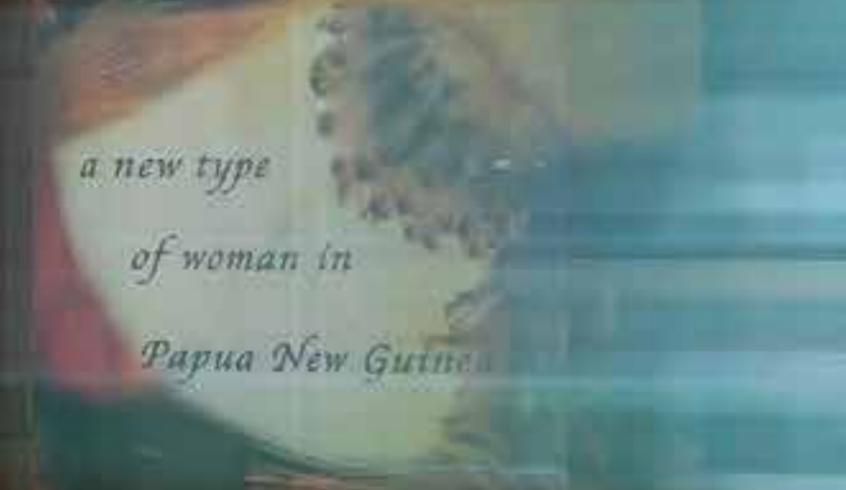
*the bird of paradise
with the long Red tail*



**Education and
Opportunity
for all Women**



What we are creating out of this is



*a new type
of woman in
Papua New Guinea*

On the Wings of Mek

JOCELYN FLYNN

Lisa Hilli's *Birds of a Feather* (2022), a magnificent portrait of Dame Meg Taylor, is a call for the celebration of Papua New Guinean (PNG) women who defy the challenges they face in modern society. Composed of images of our national bird, the bird of paradise, the artwork honours a significant Melanesian who inspires women to uplift and emancipate each other. The bird of paradise is a symbol of PNG identity, but carries a greater significance for Taylor as her 'ples nem' (village name) is Mek—the Wahgi name for Stephanie's *Astrapia*, a native species known for its iridescent blue feathers and long black tail. Displayed as part of the exhibition *Collective Unease*, the artwork comes at a time when women's equality in PNG is threatened.

Taylor is a pioneering leader for PNG and greater Oceania who achieved many firsts. She became the first PNG woman to receive a law degree, attained through a scholarship at the University of Melbourne; was advisor and private secretary to PNG's first Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare; and more recently, was the first woman to serve as Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum.ⁱ She has been a lifelong advocate of women's equality, but understands that navigating it is as difficult as the terrain that characterises the country.

The sensibility Taylor has for her ples, the Wahgi Valley, is captured in *My Father, My Country* (1989), a documentary that follows her as she remembers and retraces her father, James Taylor's footsteps. James, an Australian Patrol Officer, with John Black and Pat Walsh ventured into the PNG Highlands on the Hagen-Sepik Patrol in 1938, making first contact with and documenting tribes who lived as they had from time immemorial. The survey's purpose was to bring these tribes under the control of the Australian colonial administration. To the people of the Highlands and the Westerners who journeyed there, the survey revealed astonishingly different worlds. These disparate worlds collided again when James married Yerima, Taylor's mother, a woman who in his words "embodies everything [I] love about [PNG]".ⁱⁱ Yerima was as much a pioneer as her husband, marrying James, a white man who was initially seen by her community as a spirit visiting from another world. In retracing her father's journey, Taylor recounts, "It's a part of letting go great men in history...and letting spirits settle."ⁱⁱⁱ The journey allowed her to diverge from the legacy of her father, forming for herself an identity outside a heritage entrenched in the past. In the same way that she forged through the challenging landscape of the Highlands, Taylor forges a way for herself and others to redefine a woman's place in history.

PNG women hold an inferior position in society, however, the founding leaders of the nation envisioned the opposite. In the preamble of the Constitution, the second objective of the *National Goals and Directive Principles is Equality and Participation*. This objective calls for a number of ideals including, "[the] equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities."^{iv} The women's place was not going to be inconspicuous, this was decidedly a nation that was as equal as it was "ancient, free and independent."^v In this ideal of modern PNG, education was viewed as the emancipating tool for young Papua New Guineans, a means to shape and modernise the country. Educating women is a key development goal for many countries in the Global South, valued for its social benefits, including economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. For this reason, tertiary opportunities for Papua New Guinean women should be the catalyst to change their unequal position in society. It is widely accepted that educating women provides them with the tools for emancipation. Why

then are educated women in PNG still without the basic rights afforded to women in other parts of the world? Taylor, too, is sceptical of the promises of equality in the Constitution, holding the belief that, “women are more disadvantaged [today] than they were before Independence.”^{vi}

The reasons for widespread gender inequality relate to family and kinship obligations, a lack of women in leadership positions, and the fact that educated women are a minority group making up 3.7% of the population.^{vii} Compounding the impact of gender disparity are outdated expectations of PNG women, as Anne Dickson-Waiko writes:

The new, educated woman who emerged in the independence era became the object of male backlash...judging such women against frozen images of an ancient past, [and considering them] inauthentic.^{viii}

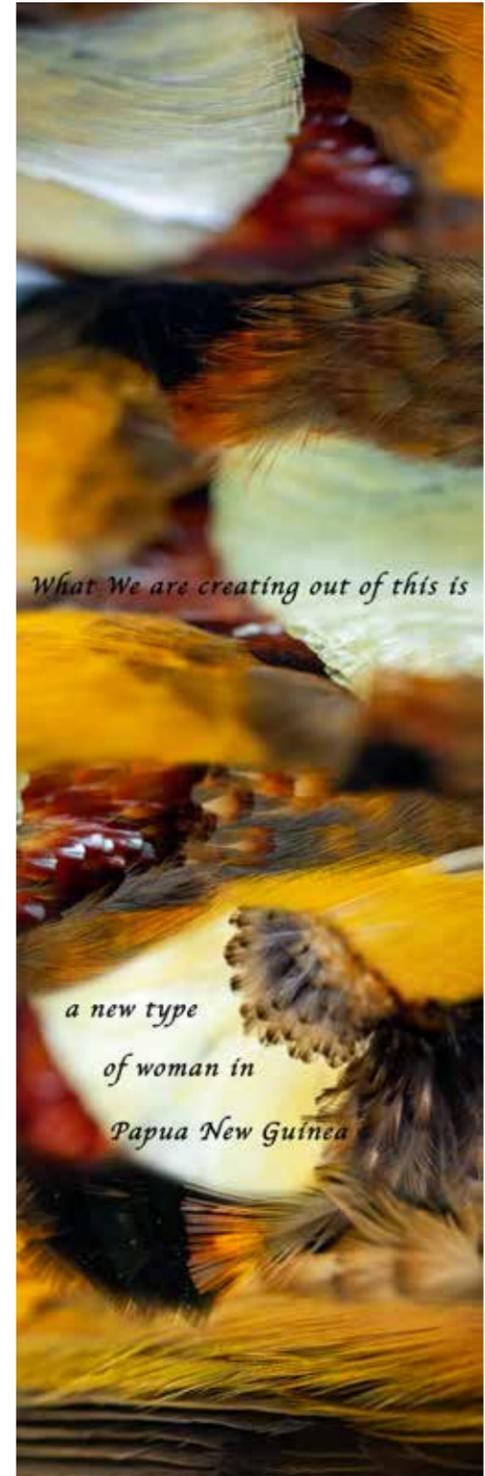
Women who aimed to impart structural change were criticised by their male counterparts for being a ‘bikhet’ (nuisance), a disrupter of societal norms. Dickson-Waiko suggests that improving the status of women has always been a low-priority in government development policies and implementation due to unorganised political and bureaucratic structures.^{ix} These conditions highlight that whilst education is empowering, an unlearning of previous notions of women’s role in society is requisite for achieving full emancipation.

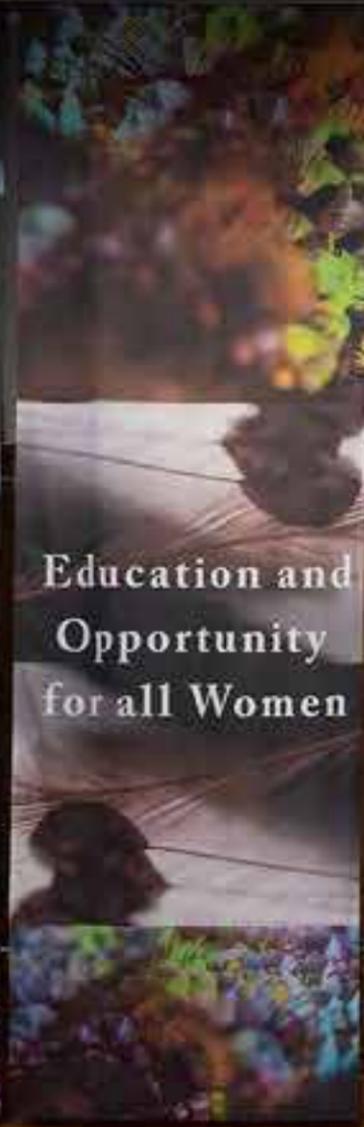
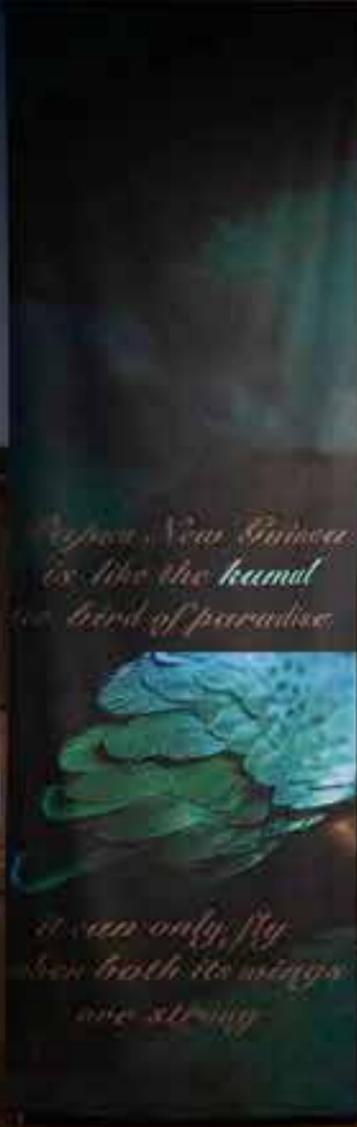
Birds of a Feather celebrates Dame Meg Taylor and endorses the values she embodies as a proud Papua New Guinean and an advocate for a society that values women’s education. The artwork is a reminder that in honoring women like Taylor, we build upon the work of those who came before us - women whose embodied knowledge and wisdom is the ancient and hidden antidote to current discontentment. They are our mamas, susas, lewas, and tambuna meris. I am humbled to emulate PNG women who fight for the equality promised in the doctrine of our nation, and who stand not on the shoulders of giants, but fly on the wings of Mek.

Jocelyn Flynn is a Meanjin-based arts worker and emerging writer. She is from the Notsi People of New Ireland province, Papua New Guinea and responds to the memories, stories and traditions of her heritage.

Notes

- i. The Pacific Islands Forum is the region’s premier political and economic policy organisation.
- ii. *My Father, My Country*. Directed by Peter Butt (Film Australia, 1989), Kanopy, 55:28
- iii. *My Father, My Country*
- iv. *Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea Preamble 1975*, 3
- v. *Constitution 1975* 1
- vi. Macintyre, Martha, “Melanesian women and human rights”. In *Human Rights and Gender Politics: Asia-Pacific Perspectives*, edited by A. Hilsdon, M. Macintyre, V. Mackie, and Maila Stevens, 195 (London: Routledge) 2000.
- vii. National Statistical Office of Papua New Guinea, “Summary Indicators by Citizen and Non-Citizen”. 16 August 2022, <https://www.nso.gov.pg/statistics/education/>
- viii Dickson-Waiko, Anne. “Women, Nation and Decolonisation in Papua New Guinea.” *The Journal of Pacific History* 48, no. 2 (2013) 186.
- ix. Dickson-Waiko, Anne, “Women, Policy Making and Development.” In *Policy Making and Implementation: Studies from Papua New Guinea*, edited by R. J. May, 294 (Canberra: ANU Press) 2009.





*the bird of paradise
with the long black tail*





*It is not to be
guessed
having
education*

*Where London
Remains in the
affairs of the nation*

James Nguyen

An Australian National Song



James Nguyen
An Australian National Song (still) 2022
4-channel video, sound, 8 min 55 sec



Give a Land A New Song

CLAIRE G. COLEMAN

A song begins in silence. Silence descends at the end of a song.

Songs can rise and songs can fall.

Songs can die and songs can be destroyed.

To a purpose.

White nationalist theories of white genocide, of “the great replacement” in which they imagine themselves replaced by brown and bla(c)k people, in the places they imagine as white nations, play into their victim stance. The colonisers have always been the aggressors but in an extremist form of DARVO (the abuser technique of Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender) they position themselves as the victims on lands they have stolen and changed forever, they have oppressed the land itself and now see themselves as the oppressed.

Curiously, the places White Nationalists consider to be white nations under attack are places where brown and black people were already; USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

In James Nguyen's *An Australian National Song* (2022), a blurry hand-held camera, often out of focus and staggering drunkenly off kilter, reveals a room I feel I should recognise—one of those 19th century colonial spaces hidden in the back, behind the scenes, of institutions like museums and libraries, or galleries; collecting institutions where the colony stores the story of itself for itself; where the colony stores the material culture of the colony and the colonised. Feet walk up the stairs into the same sort of building, again I can almost recognise it. These are the spaces where art so often happens, where we research, develop, gather, create.

The colony has eyes on itself, it's a little narcissistic—thinking it was the greatest thing to ever happen. Australians have a passion for collection, for preservation, for conservation, and as equal and opposite a passion for erasure and destruction. It appears sometimes the urge to collect/erase, sometimes the treatment of cultural assets, material or immaterial, is determined by nothing more than the colour of the maker's skin.

There is sheet music in museums of the earliest colonial songs—music as propaganda for the colony, for mother England, and invitations for those (whites only) who come and those who might come. I grew up singing some of those songs in school, the calls for a new colonial nation on the continent where my family have been forever, the songs calling settlers from across the sea. The White Australia energy is strong in many of them.

The music from those who were here already, who were here forever and will be here forever, has been erased, forgotten, lost, and that is done with intent. Our songs, our stories, even our language is endangered, many Indigenous languages are completely lost. Our songs, those that were recorded as sheet music were shoehorned into European styles to fit the notation.

The white, the English, the Western European are protected against all risks, at all risk; with the same passion with which immigrant/coloniser trees in Melbourne are protected by heritage listings while 800-year-old birthing trees, mother trees, are being chopped down to widen a highway during a climate crisis that may soon see road

transport becoming extinct. If you are coloniser/whitefella you are protected, if you are Indigenous or other you are erased; the same rules apply to our material and intangible culture. The same rules of erasure apply to settlers of colour.

James Nguyen reverses this tradition of erasure, reframing and reforming colonial songs, and in the process, eventually erasing them.

In this work, immigrant musicians perform George W.L. Marshall-Hall's '*An Australian National Song*' (1899), a work about Australian fellowship nationalism, on violin, an instrument of particular sophistication, a symbol of culture and even wealth. When we imagine an expensive instrument most of us would picture a violin or a viola, some of which sell for eye-watering prices at auction. There is no instrument considered more refined than the viola and its bigger and smaller siblings, the cello and violin.

Their sophistication is destabilised, their bows turned into weapons to attack the sound; a violin is used as a bow on a violin, reminding me of a moment in the movie *This Is Spinal Tap* in which a violin is used to bow an electric guitar.

In the end the song is completely obliterated. The method of erasure is powerful and unexpected, also direct; expanding foam is sprayed into the instruments as they are being played until it begins leaking out of the holes, yellow, frothing and hardening. This material, vapid in the black and white video, I know to be mustard yellow, an angry colour, a blight upon and an insult to the warm natural wood tones of the instruments. The resonance of the instruments is destroyed completely and that is not enough, in the end the insulating foam coats the strings, stopping their vibration.

Nguyen's attack and erasure of a colonial song, in a colonial building, insults, unpacks, and terrorises the colonial structures; systems of power we are not supposed to question. We can imagine the edifice groaning under the assault, the song of the tormented instruments speaking the colony's anguish.

White nationalists have an interpretation of the world the rest of us find bewildering; they see it as against them, when they are privileged, they see themselves as victims, when they are the abusers, they theorise what they imagine as "the great replacement" and "white genocide". Having performed frequent violent erasure of other people, they imagine themselves erased by the people they once enslaved and colonised. We don't want equality, they imagine, we want revenge; in their imagining we want to destroy/destroy them.

In this work could be imagined the first moment of their fear realised, the destruction of a National Song, a tormenting of their cultural materiel.

Yet, the white genocide the white nationalists imagine does not and will not exist. We are not erasing them, we want to decolonise, we want to leave the colony. I want to decolonise and I want to take the settlers along with me to a new post-colonial world.

Perhaps, we might imagine, a new song will arise once the old one is muffled out of existence.

Claire G. Coleman is a Wirlomin Noongar writer, whose 2017 debut novel *Terra Nullius* won the Norma K. Hemming award. In addition to novels *The Old Lie* (2019) and *Enclave* (2022), Coleman has published poetry, essays, and the recent non-fiction book *Lies, Damned Lies* (2021), which unpacks the effects of the history of Australian colonisation.



James Nguyen
An Australian National Song (still) 2022
4-channel video, sound, 8 min 55 sec







List of works

Andy Butler

The Agony and the Ecstasy 2022

2-channel video, sound, 8 min

The University of Melbourne Art Collection, purchased 2022

Produced with the support of the Sustaining Creative Works Initiative, Creative Victoria

Assistant Director: Amrita Hepi

Cinematographer: Justin Balmain

Camera Assistant: Luce Nguyen Hunt

Production Assistant: Leila Doneo Baptist

Gaffer: Chris Dewhurst

Sound Design: Daniel Jenatsch

Percussion: Dylan Lieberman

Colourist: Daniel Stonehouse—Crayon Studios

University of Melbourne Project Manager: Nikki Van Der Horst

Choreographer and Cheer Coach: Maddy Theobald

Athletes: Megan Allis, Sarah Browne, Carmen Chung, Molly Corr, Imogene Creati, Olivia Div, Eloise Hardy, Anouk Heidenrich, Yoshika Hida, Josey La, Yifan Li (Lily), Ziyi Mak, Maya Pearson, Anais Peate, Renae Potts, Kezia Sanders, Maddy Theobald, Zoë Amanda Wilson, Emily Yamashita, Emily Ye, Mia Ylagan

Lisa Hilli

Birds of a Feather 2022

digital print on fabric

Collection of the artist

James Nguyen

An Australian National Song 2022

4-channel video, sound, 8 min 55 sec

Collection of the artist

Produced with the support of the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body

Performers: Rollin Zhao, Amy You, Donica Tran, Victoria Pham and James Nguyen

Artist biographies

Andy Butler
born 1987 Kalgoorlie; lives and works in Melbourne

Andy Butler is an artist, writer and curator. His practice focuses on the ways societal structures of power shape cultural production, especially at a time of social and political upheaval.

His writing on art and politics has been published to wide acclaim, including in *Frieze*, *The Saturday Paper*, *The Monthly*. His writing has appeared in museum catalogues and artist monographs, as well as anthologised in essay collections.

As an artist, he works across painting, film, performance and installation. His work has been exhibited at artist-led and public galleries, including firstdraft, Bus Projects, Substation, Arts House and Footscray Community Art Centre. He has participated in international residencies in the Philippines, Indonesia and New Zealand. His work is held in collections including the University of Melbourne Art Collection.

As a curator, he tackles questions of how predominantly white cultural institutions engage with the practices of those who have historically been underrepresented in public cultural discourse, and the slippages and contradictions we find ourselves in when those who hold power talk about social transformation and equity. He was previously Curator and Director (Acting) at West Space.

Lisa Hilli
Gunantuna (Tolai) people
born 1979 Rabaul, Papua New Guinea;
lives and works in Melbourne

Lisa Hilli is a contemporary artist with lineages from PNG (Tolai/Gunantuna), Finland, England, and South Africa. Her work highlights the in/visibility of Black and Melanesian women's bodies through themes of landscape, history, and archival research, which she explores through photography, video, textiles, and installation.

Her major works have culminated in touring exhibitions, including *Trade & Transformations* (2018), *Social Conditioner* (2015–2016), *Vunatarai Armour & Midi* (2015–2016), and *Just Like Home* (2010–2013), while others have been featured at galleries and events in Australia, Belgium, Netherlands and recently Berlin. Hilli is a member of Galang, an international Indigenous think tank for the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, a member of the Oceania Working Party for the Australian Dictionary of Biography and was recently an International Research Fellow at the German Maritime Museum, a Leibniz Institute for Maritime History.

James Nguyen
born 1982 Bao Loc, Vietnam;
lives and works in Melbourne

James Nguyen works with documentary, installation and performance to examine the politics of art, self-representation and how decolonising strategies can contribute to diasporic dialogues. His work deconstructs pervasive binaries such as East and West; white and Indigenous Australia, and addresses the way migrants in Australia are recruited into a continuing ideology of terra nullius.

His work has been included in group exhibitions across Australia, including *The National*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2019. Recent solo exhibitions include *Re:Tuning*, (with Victoria Pham and collaborators, the Sydney Opera House), 2022; *Re.Sounding*, (with Victoria Pham and collaborators), Samstag Museum, Adelaide, 2021; *Homesickness*, (with Nguyen Thi Kim Nhung) a commission by the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 2018; and *BuffaloDeer* (with Nguyen Ngoc Cu), Westspace, Melbourne, 2016. He has been the recipient of several prizes and awards, including the Copyright Agency Partnerships Commission, in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship.

Collective Unease

The Ian Potter Museum of Art at Old Quad
The University of Melbourne
27 September 2022 – 3 June 2023

Curated by Samantha Comte and Jacqueline Doughty

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