DR. FIONA FOLEY

WHO ARE THESE STRANGERS AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING?
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BALLARAT INTERNATIONAL FOTO BIENNALE
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The Ballarat International Foto Biennale is delighted to present *Who are these strangers and where are they going?*, a mid-career survey of Dr Fiona Foley’s photographic practice. The exhibition, curated by Djon Mundine OAM, offers an opportunity to understand the collective intensity of Foley’s practice.

Fiona Foley is one of Australia’s leading contemporary artists. Her practice has been consistently dedicated to the questioning of histories through personal narratives, forgotten archives and collective imagery. Her work renegotiates Australia’s historical erasure, often placing her own body at the centre of her photographs. Her autonomy as an artist and a woman signal the taking back of control of the White colonial imagery that has dominated Australian national identity since colonisation. It is the complexity of this task that Foley has teased out over her thirty-year internationally acclaimed career.

At the Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Foley will present a new commission that once again disrupts colonial fantasies. The soundscape takes the first sighting between the Badtjala people of K’gari/Fraser Island and Captain Cook in 1770 as its historical starting point. This event is chronicled in the oldest known Aboriginal song, which has been almost lost due to the forces of assimilation and White superiority. In a reclamation of language and place, Foley commissioned contemporary Badtjala musicians to produce new verses to the dying song and resurrect its cultural future. The work exemplifies Foley’s approach to photography: a malleable form whose inherent documentary function can be subverted, questioned and reinterpreted.

*Who are these strangers and where are they going?* is presented in Ballarat’s Old Mining Exchange Grand Hall, demonstrating the Biennale’s commitment to contemporary artists who inquire, protest and question the very fabric of our world today. The Ballarat International Foto Biennale is delighted to present a deep consideration of Foley’s work that will allow audiences to appreciate her appropriation of the photographic medium to polemic and political effect.

It has been a delight working with Foley and Curator, Djon Mundine OAM, to produce an exhibition that so perfectly encapsulates the enquiry of the 8th Ballarat International Foto Biennale: Who are we? And what are the consequences of our actions? My thanks to Fiona, Djon, writers Odette Kelada and Louise Martin-Chew, and designer Jordan Rowe on the production of an outstanding publication.
WHO ARE THESE STRANGERS AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING?
/ DJON MUNDINE OAM

These are the words of a Badtjala song, created in response to observing the ship Endeavour sail past K’gari (Fraser Island) south to north in 1770. It is also the title chosen by Badtjala artist Fiona Foley for her major survey exhibition at the Ballarat International Foto Biennale in 2019. A singing of this song by Teila Watson and contemporary Badtjala people is part of the exhibition. The International Foto Biennale is held in Ballarat – where supposedly the oldest camera store in the country opened its doors in 1872 on the gold fields. Aboriginal people appeared in photographs for the first time in 1847 (in Victoria), and Badtjala people were first photographed around 1900. Ever since, Aboriginal people at large have appeared in front of the lens to be perpetually defined and stereotyped by ‘white’ people behind the camera. Fiona Foley’s Badtjala Woman series (1994) was inspired by this period, particularly the photograph Young Woman from Fraser Island.

Fiona Foley was born in Maryborough in 1964, a time of great change culturally in Australia. This was the year that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones first toured Australia. It was the year of the first publication by an Aboriginal poet; Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker 1920-1993) of Stradbroke Island, who reflected on Aboriginal cultural life and destructive effects of colonisation, as possibly ‘gone and scattered’. In the same year, The Legends of Moonie Jarl, told by Fiona’s great uncle Moonie Jarl (Wilf Reeves) and great aunty Wandi (Olga Miller) was published by Jacaranda Press, illustrating a still living cultural memory.

“In this book, you will learn about how the wallaby got its pouch, how the boomerang was invented, and how the little fire bird came to have that bright scarlet spot on its back. The stories tell why the curlew cries like a woman at night, and how the swam [sic] stretched its neck, and why the bat or flying fox hangs upside down. You will also learn some secrets of Aboriginal Magic which you can try for yourself.” Author Moonie Jarl (Wilf Reeves).

Foley’s Badtjala are the people of K’gari, a ‘sand island’ born in the mouth and estuary of the Mary River, possibly the largest sand island in the world. It was a place with abundant food and water resources and therefore one of the most intensely populated sites in Aboriginal Australia. Life as we know it was created in wet, intertidal zones where the saltwater mixes with the fresh and the coming and going of tides breathes life. Foley speaks of the K’gari sand ridges and how the constantly moving sand dunes both cover and expose memories.

In holidays from art school in Sydney, Foley spent considerable time wandering the island with her family, following the long open beaches, travelling across the living landforms of the ever shifting sand dunes and into the rainforest interior. Searching for, and re-engaging with, the spirit of place. At that time, the Badtjala had no legal title or ownership to K’gari, the land that they had lived on for tens of thousands of years, let alone recognition of their spiritual and social relationship to their island. Living on the coast they could only gaze across the water at K’gari, occasionally visiting but never conducting rituals to spiritually re-connect their souls to this site. A form of devotional deprivation relentlessly oppressed them as they fought to retain the memory of their origins and bring these truths into the light.

Like you I am endowed with memory
Like you I have struggled with all my might against forgetting
Like you I have forgotten (unfortunately)
Like you I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone.
Each day I resisted with all my might against the horror of no longer understanding the reason for remembering.
Hiroshima mon Amour (1959)

I was told by a pregnant mother that if she ran a torch over her stomach at 22 weeks, the child in her womb could discern light and shadow through their mother’s skin, even though the unborn child’s eyelids are still fused shut. All photography is about light and shadow. All Aboriginal history has been portrayed as light and shadow – visible and invisible. The highest Aboriginal spiritual being appears in the form of a reflection or refraction of light into the ‘rainbow’ spectrum, appearing in the skin of reptiles, the scales of fish, the wings of insects and the surface of shell fish and oysters.

The photographic artwork of Fiona Foley can be read both epistemologically and ontologically as the written archive of history, and as the personal experiences of a lived, active, conscious, life. These works come from actual personal places in her life, as well as a broad social-political historical brush. Although originally trained at art school in print-making and sculpture, in which she had great success, Fiona has used photographic images as an art form virtually from the start of her training. A photograph is an art object, and in art terms Fiona has combined sculpture and installation with sets of photographs referencing historic images, people, places and events, as well as adding a very strong personal commentary on racism and racial stereotyping. She places photographic portraits in key positions to draw your eye to the central point of the meaning and the message in her renditions. The overall point is that of mnemonics, justice, balance, and dark history.

Seven photographic series are featured in this extraordinary curated exhibition presented for the Ballarat International Foto Biennale, interspersed with objects both natural and man-made: Badtjala Woman (1994); Wild Times Call (2002); HHH (2004); Bliss (2008); Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom (2010); The Oyster Fishermen (2012); and Horror Has a Face (2017). In both photography and painting the ‘focal point’, and the ‘vanishing point’ are meaningful terms. Wikipedia defines ‘focus’ as: the point on the axis of a lens or mirror to which parallel rays of light converge, or from which they appear to diverge after refraction or reflection. The ‘vanishing point’ is the point in the distance where parallel lines seem to meet. The Aboriginal concept of time is cyclical
and not the European linear notion. However, it seems to me, that every decade or so, the Australian national society goes through this existential question – who are Australians really, are we aware of our history ‘warts and all’, what do we believe in, how do we (as a society) relate to Aboriginal people who were robbed of everything including our dignity in the criminal colonial action. Where do we, as a nation and society, want to go (morally, legally, and philosophically, and not just economically)? Aboriginal people seemingly periodically drift into the focal point of this question, before being moved off into the vanishing point in the historic distance. We are the centre point of this question and must remain in focus.

Foley told me that in creating the images of the HHH series in order to focus and empower she asked the models to imagine they were staring at a white robed Klu Klux Klanner. The resultant hate and reversal of roles simply burns. The exhibition and events related to the weaving of threads of Fiona Foley’s life and her extended family fall into two converging art-forms and concepts concerning memory, truth, and consciousness. The exhibition contains photographic images, oyster shells, and, a two-hundred-year old song performed in the Badtjala language. The Badtjala song is a response to the so-called heroic colonisation, it is the other, the Aboriginal side of history. Balance in the telling of this story is needed. For the 2020 Tamworth Textile Triennial; Tension(s) 2020, curator Vic McEwan insightfully talks about a ‘balanced’ view – that of 20-20 vision – perfect vision in both eyes twenty-feet from an eye chart. We can use this as a metaphor for history and a different kind of eye test where other attributes such as: events on the periphery; ability to see things in depth; eye co-ordination; ability to move quickly with events; and colour vision awareness also need to be considered to read history fully. These attributes must be utilised to completely see history correctly and bring to light the often invisible Aboriginal side of history.

Most people in the Australian art world would know Gauguin’s late nineteenth century painting; Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? (1897-8), but few would know the song words of the Badtjala people from 1770, a hundred years earlier, after observing Cook and his ship the Endeavour sail past. The sets of Foley’s images and installations engage the viewer directly and forcefully but never casually. We should remember that Gauguin’s question on colonialism fell on deaf ears in supposedly post-revolutionary intellectual France. Gauguin wrote a detailed description of the work concluding with the messianic remark to the art world: “Seeing they see not, hearing they hear not”. At almost the same year as this painting, the Queensland government passed the Restriction of the Sale of Opium and Aborigines Act 1897 leading to restrictions in the sale of opium and direct control over the lives of Aboriginal people in Queensland. A series of stories, untold or unheard, are told, retold and chanted by Fiona Foley. A binary history of the bible or the gun. A history of Aboriginal encounters with ‘white colonials’, those of assimilative Christian missionaries, or the violent murder, dispossession, and enslavement of people as cheap labour. The title of Fiona’s PhD photographs project; Horror Has a Face, speaks of the ‘Protector’ of Aborigines in Queensland, Archibald Meston (1851-1924), who based himself on Fraser Island for a time in the late 1800s; and of the use of opium (and alcohol) in the enslavement of an Aboriginal labour force. These title words are quoted from another story of senseless murder, attempted genocide and madness, the American armed forces in the Vietnam War of the 1960s portrayed in the film Apocalypse Now (1979). Colonel Walter E. Kurtz states “… Horror. Horror has a face…”, after Conrad in The Heart of Darkness (1899), “… the horror, the horror,” … a comment on the pointless, emptiness, and inhumanity of colonialism.

Artists like Fiona Foley struggle successively but successfully, to keep Aboriginal people in a rightful ‘focal point’ position in this national existential discourse. Foley, through her life, as with many artists of her generation, spoke in her work to refute negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal art. Many artists now pontificate and attempt to make profound political statements but remain ‘legends in their own lunch-time’. Foley wrestles with the creative burden of being an artist, writer, academic, Badtjala Aboriginal and Australian citizen. Her art creates a space for debate, and her artwork is symbolic of Aboriginal people’s inhuman horror of perpetual alienation in the land of their birth and spiritual origins. Her art strenuously challenges the official histories of Australia and the exclusionary writings and ideas of the western art cannon. A life on the edge, how she; and any of us aboriginal people remain human is a wonder.

“… I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. That’s my dream. That’s my nightmare; crawling, slithering, along the edge of a straight razor and surviving…” Colonel Walter E Kurtz, Apocalypse Now, 1979.

Djon Mundine OAM
“SUDDEN FROM HEAVEN LIKE A WEEPING CLOUD”:
FIONA FOLEY AND THE ART OF TRANSGRESSING SILENCE.
/ ODETTE KELADA

The experience of collectively viewing bodies of work across decades of an artistic life is the most opportune time to appreciate the skill of Fiona Foley as a virtuoso conductor - on stage is white fantasy, the colonial imaginary. Across the stage appears a succession of loaded performances and exposures. Toni Morrison speaks of making the invisible visible throughmapping the white imaginary in the literary canon:

"I want to draw a map, so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World - without the mandate for conquest".

Morrison's intention captures the creative power and need for artists who do the groundbreaking truth telling evident in Foley's work. As with Morrison, Foley is more than any cartographer. The mapping allows the emotional terrain to surface, laid bare for Foley to provoke, play, interrogate, entice and trouble. The exploration of the racial imaginary is a means to make those who witness Foley’s art, feel. It may sound odd to say a retrospective could be conceived as rehab but there is much in common with the effects of a drug induced stupor and the levels of denial, obstructive fog, ignorance and amnesia that comes with conversations on race and understandings of ongoing colonialism today.

Only a fool would let his enemy teach his children – Malcolm X

An intervention is needed – not the kind where the government ‘intervenes’ to take land, rights, self determination and human dignity under the guise of protection – but a genuine cut through of the double-think to educate, inspire and illuminate.

Why are there no people left?: Foley speaks in an interview of how she used to ask her Grandmother; Why are there no people left on Fraser Island? She goes on to explain how much her work has its origins in that question, understanding the absence and the histories of the attempted genocide of her Peoples. It takes great courage, experience and wisdom to penetrate a cloud of colonial fantasy. Foley has at her behest an impressive arsenal of strategies and tactics trialed over so many years. She demonstrates how a most effective way to counter fantasy is to enter into the fantastical, take over its worldly dimensions from within, using symbol, wonder and magic.

One of Foley’s weapons of choice is beauty itself. Beauty is ever present to the eye – the sheen of silver to the letter V in Black Velvet or the D in Dispersed studded with .303 bullet casings where one might expect gems; rich waxed black Dutch cloth painted with vibrant patterns, ridicule the hoods of the KKK; sepia drenched photographs or the stain of a blue dress reminiscent of a fairy tale. Fiona Foley deploys the means of an opiate, a soft lulling comfort, a scene of exquisite beauty, transcendent poetic bliss. In horror films, a common technique to contrast the terror is to have a musical score of a child-like joyous melody play across the most violent acts - like the opening of ‘Get Out’ where a black man is chased to the perky bopping tune of ‘run rabbit run’. In Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom the contrast of poppy flowers with systemic brutality - slavery sanctified in law - has no starker backdrop. The paper-thin petals dancing in the winds are signifiers of the role that opium played in the story of Aboriginal labour exploitation and sexual servitude.

In classrooms, much of Australia’s history is taught as selective storytelling, designed to shore up the mythologies of pioneer heroism and peaceful settlement. Widespread ignorance now about this country’s past is a legacy of reiterative terra nullius across the education system. Foley has conducted the most thorough work by any artist on the story of ‘The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’ (1897), causing such myth making to implode and uncovering the manipulation of law for economic capital and colonial desire. In her works on this legislation, she brings to light the truth of how drugs were used as a colonising force. This is not in the national curriculum.

The name of this law evoked the curiosity for further investigation – what does ‘Aboriginal protection’ have to do with opium sales? Unraveling this strange association reveals how protection discourses allowed the Queensland government to confine Aboriginal Peoples to reserves and control every aspect of their lives, deploying the full extent of what cultural theorist, Ghassan Hage, describes as ‘White Nation Fantasy’, where:

‘...nationalists construct themselves as spatially dominant, as masters of a territory in which they have managerial rights over racialised/ethnicised groups or persons which are consequently constructed as manageable objects’.

Frontier shortages created a demand for Aboriginal labour; those who had survived the invasion and massacres. In ‘Biting the Clouds’, Foley's doctoral thesis titled after a euphemism for opium, she cites the Bishop of Sydney who declared in 1866: “If we had known how useful these blackfellows could be, we should not have shot so many of them”. In exchange for the dregs of opium, employers had a dependent addicted workforce. The licenses to distribute opium were sold by the Queensland government, providing lucrative revenue.

Foley's compelling research explains the shift to the need to ‘protect’ Aboriginal peoples from the ravages of narcoleptic bondage and the connection evidenced by the title of the 1897 legislation.

The series, Horror has a Face, refers to a line from Joseph Conrad’s The Heart of Darkness quoted in the film Apocalypse Now. These are apt references for the nightmare story of what happened to the people of Fraser Island, both the Badtjala Peoples, and those who were
dislocated there, and the story of Bogimbah mission. This line about the face of horror, in this context, is particularly profound. Many times when colonial history is referenced there is an assumption that conflict was ‘inevitable’, the regrettable but expected ‘wages of war’ (though a caveat here for the Australian context as the term ‘settlement’ would be used given there is not even yet acknowledgement of Frontier Wars – evidenced by the police presence obstructing protestors marching on ANZAC day in honour of fallen warriors). This kind of comforting nostalgic historic ‘pragmatism’ helps the fog induced blurring of what exactly happened and the war crimes that occurred on this land.

Foley strips through this haze by creating the sets and stages, characters and costumes, enacting the story of the opium dens and the role of church and state in the violent erasure of Aboriginal culture, language and life. Horror has many faces and names. They are knowable. They are nameable. Not in the fashion of honoring murderers with street signs and statues as visible across municipal landscapes, but in tying together the details of the part they played in colonial war.

In ‘The Protector’ (2017), the bearded man with a pistol is Archibald Meston. He apparently went from a killer of Aboriginal people, boasting of the “number of blackfellows who had fallen victim to his rifle”, to the official role of their Protector. Meston, in the style of many others with flimsy credentials, passed himself off as an ‘expert’ on Aboriginal affairs. Under Meston’s ‘protection’ and that of his son, Bogimbah Creek reserve became a punitive correctional institution, rife with reports of abuse, sexual coercion, beatings and brutality.1

Meston’s reports influenced the racist content of the 1897 legislation. This Act became the foundational model for similar Acts in Western Australia 1905 and South Australia 1910, shaping the reservation laws that controlled Aboriginal Peoples through permits and punishment across this country. ‘The Protector’ that Foley reconstructs in the image, speaks to multiple ‘protectors’ whose violent legacies have rippled across generations, such as A. O Neville, known also as Neville the Devil in Western Australia, who advocated for the removal of children now known as ‘The Stolen Generations’.

Foley’s portrait of the priest presiding over a funeral in this series, speaks to the change of the Bogimbah Creek reserve to the management of Reverend Gribble. Another name, another face. Gribble ruled that the Christian faith was to replace traditional culture and beliefs. Poor sanitation, deprivation of food, medicine and housing in a place of exile, led to many Aboriginal deaths and the end of the mission – an ‘experiment’ to supposedly ‘save’, became the catalyst for destruction. Foley makes the telling point that the Queensland government continued to issue opium licenses well after the closure of Bogimbah Mission in 1904, profiting from opium and its poisonous harvest.2

This tale of government corruption and neglect that Foley exposes with her art, from dream like fields of poppies to orientalist fantasies of opium dens, have played out ad infinitum across the states and territories. Such ‘failures’ are acceptable ‘Indigenous Affairs’ policy - indeed ‘The way we civilise’.3

There is something else happening in ‘Horror has a Face’. There is a shimmer of brilliance in the dimensional world Foley creates for Aboriginal women. A dehumanisation can occur in the telling of such pasts, when women are flattened into a homogenous story, the ‘victims’ of sad fates.

This is a disservice that Foley does not let happen. In one portrait in particular, ‘Smoldering Pride’, a young woman in 18th century lace looks back at the camera, smoke curling in her nostrils. A liveliness and refusal to be trodden into stereotype counters another form of violence that comes from forgetting the agency, spirit and character of women who existed in this time. This image evokes the early photographic portraits of Foley herself, embodying her ancestor in ‘Badtjala Woman’ (1994), and the series Native Blood (1994). Foley shows the imaginative adventurism and sharp wit in her work, as she performs the ultimate resistance in these photographs, honoring nuance, complexity and dignity. The banality of racism cannot steal humanity or pride.

This kind of work may, as Foley describes the historic records in Queensland, jump like ‘ Fraser island sand fleas’, into the body, biting under the skin. For some, this art may be an affront; to see Foley take over the frame and the stories with a superlative oppositional gaze.4 Given the scale, quality and longevity of her practice, Foley should be recognized, supported and celebrated as one the most important artists today. A founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-op, she has led and lit the fire for emerging artists, curated phenomenal exhibitions such as Courting Blackness, and is internationally prolific and respected. Series such as HHH and Wild Times Call, express a global vision that traverses geographies in deconstructing the imperial machine, connecting communities across time and space. Transgressing silence however, is the essence of her practice and in a place where denial is encoded into the psyche of whiteness, there is no surprise Foley says that her work is often met with institutional and collective silence.

One of Foley’s famous sculptural works is potently called ‘Witnessing to Silence’. If Foley is a witness, she goes well beyond acts of looking and remembering. The renowned artist, Vernon Ah Kee, has a powerful text work drawing on Baldwin’s words: “[I]t is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.5 Foley reconstructs the crimes, does the detective work, researches exhaustively and presents the evidence in the forecourt of galleries and public spaces on national and international display at every opportunity. This is not about abstracted intellectual enquiry. This is profound archival intervention and transformation of historic record into living proof.

As we walk through this exhibition, the ground of the gallery morphs under our feet from oyster shells to Persian carpets to cornhusks. The past shifts under us. It is not linear but circular. The NT intervention continues as ‘Stronger Futures’ legislation, reminiscent of the ‘Protection’ Acts. Every child locked up in the NT is Aboriginal. More children are removed from their homes than at the time of the Stolen Generations. The current Government refuses to consider the Uluru statement and calls for a First Nations Voice in the constitution - with some rejecting this voice as a form of apartheid in the cruelest twist of a term against those who were forcibly removed and segregated. This country is in violation of multiple international human rights conventions. After witnessing Foley’s epic art, it is impossible to plead innocence. The same horrors committed on Fraser Island are in action today, and if no one is ever accountable, will continue tomorrow.
Throughout a celebrated career, Fiona Foley has put herself in the photographic frame, at the same time drawing attention to little known narratives of Australian history and the importance of identity. Badtjala Woman (1994) saw Foley adopt, for the camera, the traditional dress and accoutrements from an image (dated c.1899) of a young woman she had found in the State Library of Queensland – photographed without a name, tagged simply “Young woman from Fraser Island”. As both subject and photographer, Foley returned the gaze. Foley’s selection as a feature artist for the Ballarat International Foto Biennial (founded 2005 and Australia’s most significant photographic festival) recognises her commitment to photography during her 30 year practice. It is also pertinent during the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages. A cultural artefact, language (and naming) identifies individuals within their group. Language, culture and family also sit at the heart of her work.

This mid-career retrospective exhibition includes many of Foley’s photographic series from the last 30 years, extended with sculpture and installation. Curator Djon Mundine writes that in this exhibition, “The sets of Foley’s images and installations engage the viewer directly and forcefully but never casually... A set of a series of stories, untold or unheard, are told and retold – chanted, by Fiona Foley – the Australian history which has been conveniently unacknowledged.” Who are these strangers and where are they going? is presented in Ballarat’s Mining Exchange Grand Hall, a large heritage building.

The exhibition title is taken from the oldest known Aboriginal song – a remarkable record of the Badtjala sighting of Captain Cook as he sailed past Takky Wooroo (the top most point of K’gari/Fraser Island) in 1770. Cook named this rocky outcrop Indian Head after observing the group of Aboriginal people standing there, watching him watching them. (The song is the subject of a new film by Fiona Foley called Out of the Sea like Cloud, to be released later in 2019).

In this exhibition, a new installation, ten metres of 3,000 oyster shells, greets audiences at the entry. Together with the Wild Times Call series (2001) which is displayed in a series of rooms filled with corn kernels, Foley reiterates Bruce Pascoe’s arguments (outlined in his best-selling Dark Emu, published 2018) about the complexity of Aboriginal agricultural systems. The other photographic series included are The Oyster Fisherman (2010), with its confronting yet beautifully rendered narrative about racism, violence and exploitation on K’gari. Let a hundred flowers bloom (2010), which includes images of opium poppies growing in Tasmania juxtaposed with opium pipes and speaks to Queensland history, the HHH (Hedonistic Honky Haters) (2004) and her recent series Horror has a Face (2017).

This epic group of nineteen images captures her filial, personal and historical memories. Set late in the 1800s-early 1900s, they conjure a time when opium was legislated as a mechanism to control the Indigenous population. While the colonial intentions may have been to rectify, in some way or another, the dysfunction, disease and death that the first one hundred years of invasion had brought, its effect was to exacerbate already significant damage to Indigenous people and to create new craters of disconnection. The memories that Fiona writes large for us are not her own but are an imaginative conjuring up of the places and spaces research has taken her. She said, “Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble strode out onto the historical stage and became central... they had active roles in shaping the destinies of many Aboriginal lives through their ideologies, experiments and methods of isolation. Rendered here, featuring a largely Aboriginal cast, are some of my thoughts on colonial vice and profiteering.”

The first of the nineteen images shows Colonial Captor (Meston) sitting in front of a tent, a kangaroo-skin rug under his feet, musket in his hand. Protector’s Camp widens the vista to show a campsit clearing of leaf litter surrounded by trees. His Aboriginal companions are dressed in period clothing and serve him; a fire is underway, tea is being made and an Aboriginal man wearing a breast plate marked “Badtjala Warrior” locates the camp in the bush of K’gari. The site of the first mission that brought Aboriginals together from all over Queensland to quarantine them from white society was established on K’gari/Fraser Island. That Foley’s great grandmother was Gribble’s sister Ethel, who met her great grandfather Fred Wondunna on K’gari, is central to Foley’s personal perspective on this story.

Bogimbah’s Bell-Ringer is the precursor to the final image, with missionary Ernest Gribble presiding over the graves that were the sad outcome of Bogimbah Mission, mounds of sand decorated by bush flowers. In this series Fiona explores K’gari’s importance as the site of the first mission, the tragedies that unfolded here and the dysfunction caused, that builds and ricochets into our present. There is an emotional tenor in these works, a taut resonance that speaks to her ancestry, the power she holds as a mature Aboriginal woman, and an artist whose reputation is established. This body of work feels financially, emotionally and psychologically invested.

This retrospective exhibition establishes the mature tone of Foley’s career which has consistently asked questions about the frontier wars waged against Aboriginal peoples and brought the “hidden histories” of the massacres and dispossession into galleries, public spaces and a broader, society-wide debate. In recent years her exposure of the familial threads that join her Aboriginal heritage to the family of white missionaries that came to K’gari/Fraser Island in 1897 emerge as a tour de force.

Mundine suggests, Foley’s “… wrestles with the creative burden of being an artist, writer, academic, Badtjala Aboriginal and Australian citizen. Her art creates a space for debate, and her artwork is symbolic of Aboriginal people’s inhuman horror of perpetual alienation in the land of their birth and spiritual origins. Her art strenuously challenges the official histories of Australia and the exclusionary writings and ideas of the western art cannon – a life on an edge.”
DRAConian legislation
MARAUDING white males
HORROR has a face
NATIVE GIRLS
MIGGER HUNTS
OPIUM Slave
PROTECTOR of aborigines
WHITE woman
BIOGRAPHY

1964 Born Maryborough, Queensland.

1983 Certificate of Arts, East Sydney Technical College, Sydney

1986 Bachelor of Visual Arts, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney

1987 Diploma of Education, Sydney Institute of Education, Sydney University, Sydney

2003 Adjunct Professor, Griffith University, Brisbane

2011 Adjunct Professor, The University of Queensland, Brisbane

2018 Doctor of Philosophy, Griffith University, Brisbane

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017 Horror Has a Face, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

2016 A Quintessential Act, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Biting the clouds (as a part of Tarnanthi—Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art), Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA), Adelaide

2014 Vexed, Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin

2013 Retro-active: A 25 year survey, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

2012 Flotsam and Jetsam, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

The Oyster Fishermen, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

2010 Circumspect Circumstances, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Fiona Foley, Glasshouse Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie, New South Wales

2009 Nulla 4 Eva, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

Fiona Foley: Forbidden, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane

2008 Sea of Love, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

2006 Strange Fruit, October Gallery, London, England

Black Friday, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Red Ochre Me, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney

2005 No Shades of White, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane; Niagara Galleries, Melbourne; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

2004 Bring It On a.k.a. HHH, International Studio and Curatorial Program, Brooklyn, NY, USA

Beyond the Sea, Presentation Convent, Carlow, Ireland

Wandering, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

Fiona Foley, Karen Brown Gallery, Darwin

2003 Samsara, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

Red Ochre Me, Dell Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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| 2018 | Finalist The 40th Alice Springs Prize, Alice Springs  
Myall Creek and Beyond, New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale  
Dark Rooms: Women Directing the Lens 1978-98, Griffith University Art Museum, Brisbane  
Continental Drift: Black/Blak Art from South Africa and North Australia, Cairns Art Gallery in partnership with the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Cairns City |
| 2017 | The Boomali Ten, Boomali Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Leichhardt, New South Wales  
Defying Empire, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Indigenous Australia: Masterworks from the National Gallery of Australia, me Collectors Room, Berlin, Germany |
| 2016 | With Secrecy & Dispatch, Campbelltown Arts Centre, New South Wales  
On the Beach, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria  
Six Senth, National Art School, Sydney |
| 2013 | My Country, I still Call Australia Home: Contemporary Art from Black Australia, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane |
| 2012 | Moving Change, National Art Museum of China, Beijing |

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Award</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Redlands Westpac Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Australia Council Visual Arts Laureate Award, Australia Council</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2018 | Windmill Trust Scholarship, National Association of Visual Arts (NAVA)  
Fraser Coast NAIDOC Award, Lifetime Achievement |
CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITED ARTWORKS

04. PITCHA MAKIN FEILLAS, Breast Plates, 2019, acrylic paint, forex, metal chains, various sizes

10. Fiona Foley, Wild Times Call 1, 2001, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 112 x 89cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

12. Fiona Foley, Wild Times Call 2, 2001, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 89 x 112cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

14. Fiona Foley, Wild Times Call 3, 2001, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 89 x 112cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

16. Fiona Foley, Wild Times Call 5, 2001, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 89 x 112cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

18. Fiona Foley, Wild Times Call 7, 2001, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 89 x 112cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

20. Fiona Foley, HHH #1, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 76 x 101cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

22. Fiona Foley, HHH #2, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 101cm x 76cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

23. Fiona Foley, HHH #3, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 101cm x 76cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

24. Fiona Foley, HHH #4, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 101cm x 76cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

25. Fiona Foley, HHH #5, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 76 x 101cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

26. Fiona Foley, HHH #6, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 76 x 101cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

27. Fiona Foley, HHH #7, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 76 x 101cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

28. Fiona Foley, HHH #8, 2004, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 76 x 101cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

30. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 1, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

32. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 2, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

34. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 3, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

35. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 4, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

36. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 5, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

37. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 6, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

38. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 7, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

39. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 8, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

40. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 9, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

42. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 10, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

44. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 11, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

46. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 12, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

48. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 13, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

49. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 14, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

50. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 15, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

52. Fiona Foley, The Oyster Fisherman 16, 2011, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 60 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

54. Fiona Foley, Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom, 2010, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 28 x 37cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

56. Fiona Foley, Protector And Aborigine, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

57. Fiona Foley, Badtjala Warrior, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

58. Fiona Foley, Protectors Camp, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

60. Fiona Foley, Native Girl And Protector, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

62. Fiona Foley, Colonial Captor, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

63. Fiona Foley, Aboriginal Beauty, 2017, Hahnemühle Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.
64. Fiona Foley, Smouldening Pride, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

65. Fiona Foley, Missionary Zeal, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 80 x 45cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

66. Fiona Foley, Watchin And Waiting, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 80 x 45cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

67. Fiona Foley, Bogimbah's Bell-Ringer, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

68. Fiona Foley, Opiate Of Opulene, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

69. Fiona Foley, Silent Witness, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

70. Fiona Foley, Demons Of The Den, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

71. Fiona Foley, A Colonial Tramp, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 24 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

72. Fiona Foley, Licensed Licentiousness, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 60cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

73. Fiona Foley, A Forbidden Plesure, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 17 x 28 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

74. Fiona Foley, Lucky Dip, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

75. Fiona Foley, Bogimbah's Bell-Ringer, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 33cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

76. Fiona Foley, Night Rider, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 80 x 45cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

77. Fiona Foley, Badtjula Warrior, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 25 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

78. Fiona Foley, Sweet Pea, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

79. Fiona Foley, Badtjula Warrior II, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 25 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

80. Fiona Foley, Ruby Joy, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

81. Fiona Foley, Black Velvet, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 17 x 22 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

82. Fiona Foley, Den Master, 2017, Archival Inkjet Print, 45 x 80cm, Courtesy the artist and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

83. Fiona Foley, Charcoal Opium, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 13 x 22 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

84. Fiona Foley, Chinese Scapegoats, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 24 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

85. Fiona Foley, Draconian Legislation, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 16 x 20 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

86. Fiona Foley, Horror Has A Face, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 14 x 22 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

87. Fiona Foley, Native Girls, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 23 cm,Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

88. Fiona Foley, Nigger Hunts, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 13 x 23 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

89. Fiona Foley, Protect Of Aborigines, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 15 x 22 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

90. Fiona Foley, White Woman, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 10 x 22 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

91. Fiona Foley, Draconian Legislation, 2017, Brass and enamel paint, 16 x 20 cm, Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ballarat International Foto Biennale would not be possible without the support of its board, partners, staff, interns and volunteers. I would like to acknowledge the tremendous festival board for their constant support and guidance: Chair, Stephen Jurica; Deputy Chair, Bridgid Moloney; Treasurer, Alane Fineman; Secretary, Morgan McLay; and members Zoë Croggon, Alicia Linley, Nikki Foy and Jacqueline Williams. I would also like to thank my team: Madelyn Pickersgill, Ella Cawthorn, Amelia James, Annabel Mason, Liza Martin, Heidi Jarvis, Eliza Hopkinson, Kate O’Hehir, Bianca Cornale, Jordan Rowe, Amanda Fewell, Hody Hong, and all interns and volunteers. We are a small but brave team.

The catalogue for Dr. Fiona Foley’s exhibition Who are these strangers and where are they going? was a collaborative project, made possible by the input of many ambitious individuals. Of course, I would like to thank Fiona for her generosity, expertise and direction in the realisation of this project. Thank you to Djon Mundine OAM for his curatorial vigour and hard work. To Jordan Rowe Creative Direction, the final product would not be what it is without your expert knowledge of design. And finally, to writers Djon Mundine and Odette Kalela, thank you for your considered responses to Fiona Foley’s career-long photographic practice.

We must also thank our partners: Hahnemuhle, global leader in fine art inkjet printing and photographic paper; Starleaton, Australia’s leading supplier of technology to the graphic imaging market; and Lumix, our camera partner. And of course, our major community partner Central Highlands Water, and our Government Partners: City of Ballarat, State of Victoria Government, Festivals Australia, Creative Partnerships Australia, Made of Ballarat, The Australian Federal Government, and Regional Arts Victoria. And finally, I would also like to thank our trusts and foundations support: Bardas Foundation, Besen Family Foundation, Dara Foundation, Gordon Darling Foundation, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, The Ian Potter Foundation and the Russell Mills Foundation. Dr. Fiona Foley’s exhibition exemplifies the power of the photographic medium seen throughout the Biennale: the questioning of histories, imagining of futures and interrogation of the consequences of humankind.

ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Fiona Foley would like to acknowledge her dealers Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. She would like to thank the hard work of all of the BIFB staff in producing both the exhibition and catalogue. Foley would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the catalogue’s writers and thank them for their considered responses to her work. And finally, Foley would like to thank Carl Warner whom she has worked with for the past decades on various projects.

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The Oyster Fishererman – Photo: Carl Warner
HHH – Photo: Dennis Cowler
Wild Times Call – Photo: Peter Foe
Horror Has a Face – Photo: Carl Warner

NOTES

Who are these strangers and where are they going?
Essay By Djon Mundine OAM

Fiona Foley: In The Company Of Strangers
Essay By Louise Martin-Chew

• “This essay was commissioned by and first published in VAULT: Australasian Art & Culture, Issue 27, Aug to Oct 2019 and is kindly republished here with their permission. 23 August to 20 October 2019

1003 words, Louise Martin-Chew/6 August 2019

‘Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud’ :
Fiona Foley and the Art of Transgressing Silence.
Essay By Odette Kelada

• Title Quote. ‘But when the melancholy fit shall fall Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud, That fosters the droop-headed flowers all…’ (Keats, Ode On Melancholy, 1819) As Foley writes, “‘Biting the clouds’ is a euphemism for being stoned on opium” (Foley, PhD Thesis, 2017, p.4)
• ibid, p.78.
• iv, p.104.
• v, p.116.
• vi Title of book that Foley quotes in film on the opium fields Bliss (2008):
• viii ibid, p.104.
• ivibid, p.116. 
• *This essay was commissioned by and first published in VAULT: Australasian Art & Culture, Issue 27, Aug to Oct 2019 and is kindly republished here with their permission. 23 August to 20 October 2019

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