

**REWRITING ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHY
REUSE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONTEMPORARY
INDIGENOUS ARTISTS**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

For over thirty years, artists from all over the world have recycled, reworked and repurposed visual imagery from popular and commercial cultures, both those contemporary with them, and those from past periods. The postmodern practice was known as “appropriation,” and attracted controversy from those who expected art to be original, and those who valued the temporal authenticity of imagery. Within this context, particular Indigenous artists have used this approach as a means to articulate the complexities of Indigenous identity-formation. They deliberately reuse images of their people, or of their direct ancestors, that were taken by non-Indigenous anthropologists, official recorders, or commercial photographers. Through these processes of artistic transformation, they inflect them with new connotations, above all those that attribute agency to the person or people depicted, or those that manifest the contemporary artist’s own agency. In this study, I focus on works made between 1996 and 2014 by three Indigenous Australian Artists: Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd. I draw on concepts of Aboriginality offered by Indigenous scholars such as Marcia Langton to show how these three artists problematize the expectation that Aboriginality can be captured in fixed forms, and thus reveal the fluidity and adaptability of the concept and of its lived reality.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, artists throughout the world have appropriated photographic images from past periods and adapted them to their present purposes. Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd are outstanding among the contemporary Aboriginal artists who have reused archival or ethnographic photography as a means of establishing identity and of articulating their particular conceptions of Aboriginality. These practices constitute a “reuse” rather than a use or appropriation based on the definition, “to use again especially in a different way or after reclaiming or reprocessing.”¹ By changing the context of already existing photographs, these artists fundamentally alter the purposes and meaning of these images. From the advent of photography in 1839 up until the second half of the 20th century, the medium was incorporated into the practice of ethnography and anthropology in many geographic regions.² In 19th century Australia, Aboriginal peoples were widely believed to be a “dying race,” and photography was one means to preserve or document their images before their eventual extinction.³ Photographs of non-European peoples share similarities with contemporaneous European portrait practices. However, these photographs of non-European peoples have a particular resonance with

¹ Merriam Webster Dictionary, “Reuse,” Accessed January 7, 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reuse>.

² Christopher Pinney, “The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography,” in *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 76.

³ Jane Lydon, “Introduction,” in *Calling the Shots*, edited by Jane Lydon, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 6.

ethnography—and the documentation of ethnic peoples—to contemporary viewers, regardless of the original intent.⁴ There was a great discrepancy of power between Indigenous sitters and European photographers. European photographers' intentions could be scientific or commercial, but share ends in the documentation and typecasting of racial or ethnic difference. Viewing these 19th and early 20th century photographs, one is struck by a series of questions: Is this image faithful to the sitter in terms of how he or she wished to be presented? Was this image posed to represent some sort of staged authenticity? What can or should the contemporary viewer or artist gain from viewing or reusing this type of photograph?

The global archive of ethnographic or ethnographic-looking photography thus provides artists with a broad body of source material. The challenge of the original images and the questions they raise for contemporary readers makes them fruitful for reuse.⁵ In the United States, the African American artist Carrie Mae Weems reworked slave photographs with text and color her 1996 series, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (Figure 1). Weems was commissioned to create a work in response to the J. Paul Getty Museum's collection of African American photographs.⁶ She re-inscribed a sense of personhood and self-ownership to the people in the original photographs, who were referenced only as slaves in the archives of the collection and, thus, remained nameless.⁷ Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd, working in Australia, have used ethnographic photography as source material for their diverse bodies of

⁴ I will use 'peoples' rather than 'people' throughout this paper especially in reference to Aboriginal peoples to reflect the diversity of Aboriginal Australians. They are not one people but many diverse peoples.

⁵ I use the term reuse rather than appropriation as there is a history of appropriation and re-appropriation specific to Australia in the 1980s and 1990s. As my subject is outside of this dialogue, the word reuse is better suited for my discussion. See Rex Butler *What is Appropriation?* (Brisbane: IMA & Power Publications, 1996), for a consideration of appropriation and re-appropriation in Australia.

⁶ Thelma Golden, "Some Thoughts on Carrie Mae Weems," in *Carrie Mae Weems: recent work 1992-1998/ with essays by Thomas Piché and Thelma Golden*, edited by Carrie Mae Weems, (New York: George Braziller, 1998), 29.

⁷ Golden, "Some Thoughts on Carrie Mae Weems," 30.

work. Andrew, Ah Kee, and Boyd are Aboriginal artists, members of the Indigenous peoples of Australia, and thus their work responds to the history of Aboriginal peoples through archival photography in the Australian context.⁸ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Australian Aboriginal artists such as Leah King-Smith created bodies of work also based on archival photography. King-Smith's *Patterns of Connection* series from 1991, like Weems' series, was a response to a specific archive, the State Library of Victoria.⁹ In photographs from the series, such as *Untitled II*, King-Smith layered archival photographs of Aboriginal people over photographs of landscapes from a national park (Figure 2).¹⁰ The resulting pieces are haunting. The sitters appear ghost-like and semi-transparent with the landscape visible through them.¹¹ King-Smith intended for the series to be positive representations of the people, evoking notions of interconnectedness and suggesting a lineage from these people to the artist.¹² Although little known outside of Australia, King-Smith's series and practice was a quite early moment of reuse and her practice may have influenced the practices of subsequent artists.

The work of Andrew, Ah Kee, and Boyd should thus be conceptualized as part of a broader artistic practice. Their works are both individual expressions and part of a larger trend of articulating identity through photography. The four series I will discuss have not yet been considered together in terms of their shared practice, reuse of photography, and their shared conceptual basis of Aboriginality. The three artists' works all serve as interventions on what it

⁸ 'Indigenous' will be capitalized when referring to or describing people based on Ian McLean's concept of indigenous (lower cased) as a biological term rather than people. Aboriginal is similarly capitalized to refer to specific groups of people. See Ian McLean's "Introduction," in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Contemporary Indigenous Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

⁹ Claire Williamson, "Patterns of Connection: Leah King-Smith," in *Photo files: an Australian photography reader*, edited by Blaire French, (Sydney: Power Institute, 1999), 221.

¹⁰ Leah King-Smith, Conversation with the author, Brisbane, Australia, July 14, 2015.

¹¹ Williamson, "Patterns of Connection: Leah King-Smith," 222.

¹² Williamson, 223.

means to be Aboriginal and question the concept of Aboriginality as an identity and an identifier. The photographs these artists reuse are all of Aboriginal peoples. They are ethnographic-looking, and were originally taken for commercial or scientific purposes. Through their reuse, these artists provide three distinct lenses for how to understand Aboriginality in the contemporary context. Rather than providing strictly positive interventions or denying the original ethnographic intent, their works deliberately challenge the assumptions of the original photographs.

In 1996, Brook Andrew created his seminal work *Sexy and Dangerous*, a digitally manipulated print of an ethnographic photograph by Charles Kerry's studio.¹³ Charles Kerry was a successful commercial photographer in the late 19th and early 20th century.¹⁴ Kerry photographed Aboriginal peoples from New South Wales, who he believed were nearing extinction. This was a widely shared perception at the time.¹⁵ *Sexy and Dangerous* catapulted Andrew's career and served as the inception of a trope in his diverse oeuvre—the use and manipulation of early photographs of Aboriginal peoples.¹⁶ Ten years later, Vernon Ah Kee created two large-scale triptych drawings, *See Me* and *Neither Courage nor Pride*, based on Norman Tindale's ethnographic photographs and photographs of his own children.¹⁷ Norman Tindale was an anthropologist who worked mostly in the 1930s, scientifically photographing and documenting Aboriginal peoples.¹⁸ Ah Kee is a member of the Yidindji, Kuku Yalandji, Waanji,

¹³ Marcia Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 48 (2008). Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria. Commissioned by Judith Ryan.

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/brook-andrew-ethical-portraits-and-ghost-scapes/>.

¹⁴ Jane Lydon and Sari Braithwaite with Shauna Bostock-Smith. "Photographing Indigenous People in New South Wales," in *Calling the Shots*, edited by Jane Lydon. (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 68-69.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes," <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/brook-andrew-ethical-portraits-and-ghost-scapes/>.

¹⁷ Robert Leonard, "Your call," in *Vernon Ah Kee: Born in this Skin*, edited by Robert Leonard, Anthony Gardner, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Blair French, and Glenn Barkley, (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2009), 6.

¹⁸ State Library of Queensland, "Transforming Tindale, Gallery," September 2012, Accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/showcase/transforming-tindale/gallery>.

Koko Berrin and Gugu Yimithirr peoples, group memberships which he references in his works.¹⁹ Daniel Boyd's 2014 *Untitled* deviates most dramatically from its original photograph of Pentecost Island, now part of the island nation of Vanuatu.²⁰ His grandfather was forcibly taken from the island to work on mainland Australia.²¹ Boyd is a member of the Gangalu and Kudjla peoples, as well as being a South Sea Islander, which he references in *Untitled*.²²

As Aboriginal artists sourcing photographs of Aboriginal peoples, Andrew, Ah Kee, and Boyd oblige us to consider the original images and their contemporary works in the context of Aboriginal identity that is both broad and specific. Through his piece, Andrew contemplates Aboriginality through ethnic type and stereotype. Aboriginal people have been stereotyped by non-Aboriginal Australians since the beginning of their interactions.²³ Andrew is forcing a reconsideration of the given ideas about Aboriginal peoples. Ah Kee conceptualizes Aboriginality as an overarching identity, but one which is extremely personal as it relates to him. Through the use of his family portraits, Aboriginality is something very close to Ah Kee, a way of understanding himself and future generations as distinct from non-Aboriginal Australians. Boyd, whose work has often dealt with Aboriginality, conceptualizes it as one of a multitude of identities. He references his own family history to suggest that the Aboriginal experience is connected to other histories of Indigenous peoples. The large scale of all three works suggests an inversion of the original small scale of the photographs. By creating monumental pieces, these

¹⁹ MCA, "Vernon Ah Kee," *Artists and Works*, 2015. <http://www.mca.com.au/collection/artist/ahkee-vernon/>.

²⁰ Djon Mundine and Daniel Boyd, facilitated by Dan Rule, "Conversation," in *Law of Closure*, edited by Dan Rule, (Melbourne: Perimeter Editions, 2015), 85.

²¹ Mundine, "Conversation," 85.

²² Tina Baum, "Daniel Boyd," in *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennial*, (Canberra: Publishing Department of the National Gallery of Australia, 2009), 72.

²³ Kelly Gellatly, "Brook Andrew" in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*, edited by Judith Ryan, (Melbourne: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2015), 28.

interventions into what it means to be Aboriginal are impossible to ignore. Before exploring the artworks, I will provide some background on the Australian context, the concept of Aboriginality, and ethnographic photography.²⁴

²⁴ My discussion of scale of the piece is based broadly on the real spaces approach to art based on David Summers' *Real Spaces* (London: Phaidon, 2003).

II. BACKGROUND ON ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Australia, like Canada, New Zealand and the United States, was originally established as a settler-colony by the British. Captain James Cook encountered the landmass that is now Australia while voyaging on behalf of the British crown in 1770.²⁵ In 1788, the First Fleet of British ships with soldiers and convicts sailed to Port Jackson to establish a goal or penal colony.²⁶ Since these early encounters, Aboriginal peoples have clashed with non-Aboriginal colonist populations.²⁷ At its inception, Australia was declared a terra nullius, meaning land of no one, despite the many encounters early settlers had with Indigenous peoples.²⁸ The policy of terra nullius was in effect until very recently in Australia's relatively short history. It was not overturned until 1992, more than 200 years after colonization.²⁹ Terra nullius formed the legal and conceptual basis for removing Aboriginal peoples from their ancestral lands and denying their rights and privileges relative to white Australians.³⁰ The Citizenship Act of 1949 gave all Australians citizenship, but laws of specific Australian states—such as the Wards' Ordinance, which viewed Aboriginal peoples as wards of the state—superseded these rights.³¹ The 1967 Referendum, which is often credited with granting Aboriginal peoples citizenship, legally

²⁵ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Domination*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1994), 21.

²⁶ Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Domination*, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁸ Malcolm Prentis, *Concise Companion to Aboriginal History*, (Sydney: Rosenberg Publishers, 2011), 204.

²⁹ Broome, 231.

³⁰ Prentis, *Concise Companion to Aboriginal History* 204.

³¹ Prentis, 53.

included Aboriginal people as citizens on the Australian census.³² By declaring Australia as a “land of no people” prior to colonization, the Indigenous peoples of Australia then legally did not exist.³³ Their omission from the census reinforces a crucial issue with Aboriginal peoples in Australia beyond citizenship, the struggle for acknowledgement. Terra nullius challenges Aboriginal peoples’ personhood—their very existence. By denying their basic existence, any request for rights, better treatment by the government or recognition of land rights was simply out of the question for colonial governments. Although less prevalent in the literature surrounding Aboriginality, the political, social and psychological effects of terra nullius were extremely influential on Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia.

The colonial governors and later prime ministers of Australia claimed traditional Aboriginal lands and attempted to control Aboriginal peoples often by violent or oppressive means. Starting as early as 1814, Aboriginal peoples, traditional owners and inhabitants of the land, were seen as a burden to be dealt with, a people that needed to be “civilized” or, more precisely, made more “Australian.”³⁴ From the 1920s to the 1960s, thousands of Aboriginal people from remote communities were taken as children from their parents and raised in either religious or government schools.³⁵ They were completely removed from their culture, left without a sense of where they came from and unaware of the rich traditions of their families.³⁶ Their sense of being Aboriginal and of belonging to a particular culture was taken from them; thus, they are known as the “Stolen Generations,” a term coined by historian Peter Read in

³² Prentis, *Concise Companion to Aboriginal History*, 180.

³³ Prentis, 204.

³⁴ Broome, 31.

³⁵ Prentis, 196.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 196.

1982.³⁷ The exact number of people in the Stolen Generations is unknown, but the policy affected a great number of Aboriginal Australian peoples. While Vernon Ah Kee, Brook Andrew and Daniel Boyd were all born after this practice, the connection to the Stolen Generations is deeply felt within the artist community, according to the artist Tony Albert, whose father is a member of the Stolen Generation and who is also Ah Kee's first cousin.³⁸ Albert's father and one of Ah Kee's parents were siblings.³⁹ However, Ah Kee and Albert only discovered this connection as adults working in the same artistic circles as Albert's father was taken from his family as a child and raised apart from them.⁴⁰

The year 1988 marked the 200th anniversary of Australia based on the 1788 landing of the first fleet.⁴¹ The bicentennial was marked by a massive protest by 20,000 Aboriginal peoples and white Australians who marched away from Botany Bay in protest of the colonizers' official march route.⁴² The bicentennial celebration was congratulatory toward the original colonists and subsequent governments, with most of the events and funding directed to non-Aboriginal Australians.⁴³ The protest demonstrated dichotomous views of Australia on the part of the government and Aboriginal peoples, and it was yet another in a trajectory of protests against the government by Aboriginal peoples. The Day of Mourning, first organized on Australia Day, January 26, 1938, was a grassroots effort to demand citizenship for Aboriginal peoples by the Aborigines' Progressive Association.⁴⁴ Similar to the bicentennial protest, the Day of Mourning demonstrated that the settlement of Australia was a triumphant achievement for white settlers but

³⁷ Ibid, 196.

³⁸ Tony Albert, Conversation with the author, New York City, NY, November 5, 2015.

³⁹ Albert, Conversation, November 5, 2015.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Julie Marcus, "Bicentenary Follies: Australians in Search of Themselves," *Anthropology Today* 4.3, (1988), 4.

⁴² Marcus, "Bicentenary Follies: Australians in Search of Themselves," 5.

⁴³ Marcus, 5.

⁴⁴ Prentis, 65.

devastating to local populations. In Australia, the experience of Aboriginal peoples has largely been one of occupation, oppression and misunderstanding confounded by the government and dominant culture's refusal to acknowledge this experience. On February 13, 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an apology to the Aboriginal peoples for their treatment by governments of Australia and particularly to the Stolen Generations and their descendants, now known simply as the Apology.⁴⁵ Although the wrongs of previous administrations and individuals could not be undone, the Apology was deeply symbolic and an important moment in Australian history. Rudd acknowledged not only the especially traumatic history of the Stolen Generations, but also the "past mistreatment" of Aboriginal peoples throughout time.⁴⁶

Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee and Daniel Boyd are undoubtedly aware of these and more specific histories of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Ah Kee even references specific dates in his work, as I will discuss later. By the 1990s, artists such as Gordon Bennett and Richard Bell were addressing Aboriginal issues that had already been a decades' long struggle for Aboriginal activists. It is worth noting that Andrew's piece was created prior to the Apology while Ah Kee's and Boyd's were made subsequently. Aboriginality as an identifier for all Indigenous peoples of Australia suggests a commonality of experience highlighted by the shared experience of living in Australia. These artists' individual interventions reveal important distinctions in the conceptualization of Aboriginality.

⁴⁵ Australian Government, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples," last updated November 9, 2015, Accessed November 11, 2015, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>.

⁴⁶ Australian Government, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples."

III. ANTHROPOLOGY, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN AUSTRALIA

The artwork of Andrew, Ah Kee, and Boyd is comparable because of its shared basis in photography. Although not all these artists use ethnographic photography specifically as source material, photographs of 19th and 20th century Aboriginal peoples are conceptualized as ethnographic regardless of the original photographers' intention. Similarly, terms ethnography and anthropology, though distinct in their meanings, have been understood as inherently tied together in their usage, particularly when considering photography. Ethnography is defined as the writing of culture, derived from "ethno," meaning culture, and "graph," meaning writing.⁴⁷ Anthropologists, among others, routinely write ethnographies as part of their extensive studies of a culture, usually addressing a specific group of people bound by a particular geographic location. Ethnography can be part of a larger study of an anthropologist or cultural theorist, but it is often an end in itself; by writing about culture, individuals outside of the specific culture can "read" it and understand that culture. The adjective "ethnographic" can be used when writing or describing an aspect of culture. Although the term connotes the written word, visual materials, photographs or videos that describe or attempt to describe cultures can also be understood as ethnographic.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Merriam Webster Dictionary, "Ethnography," November 14, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnography>.

⁴⁸ Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography," 80.

Classic ethnographies, such as *The Nuer* by E. E. Evans Pritchard, attempted to describe in detail the attributes of a culture based on close study.⁴⁹ Photography served as a related practice, often captioned to suggest a general person or type of person.⁵⁰ Evans-Pritchard included many photographs of the Nuer people in his ethnography as evidence to support his descriptions of the people.⁵¹ Trained photographers often captured images of cultural moments or particular Indigenous peoples for profit. The resulting images can appear ethnographic meaning that they strike viewers as defining a culture or creating a stereotype regardless of intention.

Since the time of the classic ethnographies mentioned above, the field of anthropology has evolved in myriad ways. The first shift occurred in the 1980s when experimental ethnography, writing based more on experience with a culture than scientific observation, was developed as part of the “Writing Culture” movement, which was based on the book *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*.⁵² Many subsequent trends in the field have been initiated as critiques or responses to the Writing Culture movement. For example, there is the feminist response that despite the new writing style being experimental, its advocates were predominantly white and male.⁵³ Scholars working at a similar moment and after such as Gayatri Spivak— particularly in her pivotal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” —have gone further to

⁴⁹ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer, a description of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Edwards, “Introduction,” in *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 11.

⁵¹ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer, a description of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

⁵² This paragraph is based on prior knowledge, for more information about experimental ethnography see James Clifford’s edited volume *Writing Culture: the Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*.

⁵³ For more on the feminist response see, Ruth Behar’s edited volume *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) or Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Writing Women’s Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

highlight non-white, non-Western female voices.⁵⁴ The legacy of the Writing Culture movement is still largely felt in current scholarship; however, classic texts are still taught and referenced in major surveys of the field. Thus, the method of anthropology practiced during the time of E.E. Evans-Pritchard remains influential today as anthropologists look back and beyond the field for the means to write culture.

To anthropologists, photography was once thought of as a tool for recording the outward attributes of a culture.⁵⁵ However, the relationship is much more complex for the descendants of people depicted in anthropologists' photographs. The reuse by Aboriginal people of ethnographic photography depicting Aboriginal people is a fundamental shift in power differentials. By inserting the 19th century photograph into a contemporary work, the artist rewrites its meaning and takes back the photograph. This artistic rewriting has a parallel in contemporary anthropology where ethnographies written by people of the subject culture are fairly common. Conceptions of a culture and who has the means to write it change over time, yet an ethnographic photograph, as such, will always depict and reflect a particular moment. Just as an ethnography written by someone of a particular culture can dispel or correct misperceptions, a reuse of an ethnographic photograph can challenge the original's meaning or interpretation. The subject metaphorically becomes the photographer when an Aboriginal artist replaces the non-Aboriginal photographer and reshoots or recreates a photograph.

The field of anthropology emerged as a field of academic study in the early 1900s when photography was already an established practice globally.⁵⁶ Anthropology was considered a

⁵⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-316.

⁵⁵ Edwards, "Introduction," 4.

⁵⁶ Edwards, "Introduction," 4.

social science in relation to the older field of ethnology, which was considered a hard science.⁵⁷ The use of photography was meant to enhance the scientific nature of the field.⁵⁸ People in the photographs were often referred to as specimens and, along with practices such as measuring head circumference, served to document or typify racial and ethnic others.⁵⁹ With few exceptions, ethnographic photographs are loaded objects, embedded with intention and meaning even prior to their printing. Typically, the photographer rather than the sitter determines the meaning and purpose of the image. The sitter thus becomes an object of some end, as well as a subject of the photograph. Contemporary artists, in selecting such loaded sources for reuse, force viewers to reconsider the original intent of photographs and the medium itself.

Photographs are reproducible as objects, like a print, they are created with the possibility of repetition.⁶⁰ Photographs are also inherently indexical in that they can stand in for the thing they represent, but are not the thing itself.⁶¹ Thus, ethnographic photographs, like all photographs, generally possess an inherent possibility of dissemination. However, when such a photo is disseminated, there is also the possibility that a large number of viewers will come to understand an entire population or a type of person through one particular individual's image. Referencing photography doubles the referential nature because a photograph is a marker of a moment in time, a reference to a real person, object, place or event.⁶² Artists do not necessarily have to work within the photographic medium to reuse ethnographic photography. Vernon Ah

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*, (New York: Berg, 2001), 137.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 138.

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 139.

⁶⁰ Judy Annear, "Chapter 5: Transmission," in *The Photograph and Australia*, edited by Judy Annear, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2015), 231.

⁶¹ David Summers, "7.12 Naturalism and Photography," in *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western modernism*, (London: Phaidon, 2003), 604.

⁶² This idea is based on Susan Sontag's conceptualization of a photograph as a "pseudo-presence" from page 16 of *On Photography* (New York: Strauss, Farrar and Giroux 1977).

Kee and Daniel Boyd use the technique of drawing based on photographs. The resulting works are visually similar to the original photographs, yet separated in space and time enough to suggest a distinct reading of these new works. To acknowledge that the photograph comes from a historic or ethnographic source does not fully explain the distinction between the original photograph and the contemporary artwork. The seemingly appropriated nature of the photographs is undone by the uniqueness of the contemporary works. While the originals can be endlessly copied, a drawing of a photograph is wholly unique. Although still distinct and perhaps recognizable as coming from that original image, the drawn version is a unique object based on one that is inherently reproducible. By inserting text and considering the meaning inherent in source photographs, what is at stake is something much larger. The drawing of a photograph denies photography's inherent reproducibility.

Brook Andrew, however, by digitally manipulating the original photograph and creating multiple copies of it, reproduces his art. The version currently on display in the National Gallery of Victoria, printed in 2005, is a reprinting of a reproduction. Andrew recreates a type, the Aboriginal man, highlighting the persistence of this stereotype. His practice, rather than condemning or questioning reproducibility, uses it to his own ends of repeating powerful imagery. The popularity of this work highlights this exploitation of an image to question or suggest an original exploitation.⁶³ This is perhaps related to his deep fascination with ethnographic photography as a source for artwork.⁶⁴ By drawing on a large scale, painstakingly making an original out of a copy or reproduction, Ah Kee and Boyd are more deliberately at odds with reproducibility. Arguably, one could reproduce their images, but the particular scale

⁶³ This work has been reprinted onto Plexiglas to mirror the original as reproduced on paper. It was also the front cover image for Stephen Meuke's book *Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*.

⁶⁴ Marcia Langton, "Tinsel Dreams," *Brook Andrew Theme Park*, edited by Trent Waller, (Utrecht: AAMU Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 40.

and method of the works would make it quite difficult. The medium presents many interesting, and at times contradictory, impulses with which these artists grapple.

The history of photography of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, beginning roughly when photography was introduced to Australia, should be understood as highly localized, evolving in practice and in use based on the location in Australia.⁶⁵ While this history impacts how particular photographs were disseminated and took shape, a detailed discussion of these regional distinctions is beyond the scope of my study. Instead it is more pertinent to consider the contemporary dialogue surrounding these photographs. According to the historian Jane Lydon, individuals in Aboriginal communities prized photographs of themselves as far back as the 1860s.⁶⁶ However, these microhistories are often unknown or unacknowledged. It is more commonly known that in the 19th century, non-Indigenous photographers and anthropologists captured images of Aboriginal peoples without recording their names.⁶⁷ Since many photographs from the 19th century are extant, there is a specific practice in Australia of historians attempting to identify the nameless subjects of ethnographic or commercial photographs.⁶⁸ The project of identifying Aboriginal people depicted in photographs has consumed the academic lives of some scholars, such as Michael Aird, a historian who is of Aboriginal descent.⁶⁹ Through detailed research, scholars such as Aird have been able to provide names of people depicted, negating and overriding previous anonymity.⁷⁰ His research often works in tandem with Lydon's projects,

⁶⁵ Jane Lydon, "Introduction- The Photographic Encounter," in *Calling the Shots* edited by Jane Lydon, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 4.

⁶⁶ Jane Lydon, "Photography Across Cultures," in *The Photograph and Australia*, edited by Judy Annear, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2015), 118.

⁶⁷ Annear, "Chapter 3: People," in *The Photograph and Australia*, 113.

⁶⁸ Michael Aird, Conversation with the author, Brisbane, Australia, July 10, 2015.

⁶⁹ See Michael Aird and Mandana Mapar, *Object of the Story*, (Southport: Keeira Press, 2013) or Michael Aird, *Portrait of Our Elders*, (Brisbane: Queensland Museum, 1993).

⁷⁰ Aird, Conversation, July 10, 2015.

suggesting that despite how photographs may appear to contemporary viewers, the act of being photographed demonstrated agency on the part of the sitters.⁷¹

Does acknowledging the sitter's agency detract from the understanding of a photograph as being ethnographic? The photograph as ethnographic is not based on the intention of the sitter, but rather on the intention of the photographer. The photographer ultimately determines the outcome of the sitting, by first selecting the subject and then by composing and printing the photograph.⁷² Regardless of the initial agency of the sitter, by creating and disseminating a photograph as representative of a type, the photograph can be understood as ethnographic by later generations. Naming the subjects is one means of reclaiming the camera or returning a sense of agency back to the original sitter. By reusing ethnographic photography, Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd respond to similar concerns of agency and intention. However, through the concept of Aboriginality, they address identity rather than identification.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Summers, "7.12 Naturalism and Photography," 603.

IV. CONCEPTUALIZING ABORIGINALITY

“Aboriginal” is a term commonly used to describe the Indigenous peoples of Australia.⁷³ However, “Aboriginal” has no linguistic roots in Australia.⁷⁴ It roughly means from or of the beginning, based on the Latin “ab,” meaning from, and “origine,” meaning the beginning.⁷⁵ The term has been used in recent scholarship on Indigenous art almost interchangeably with the word “Indigenous,” particularly in the context of Canada and First Nations peoples. More specific identity based on linguistic or “tribal” groups can also be used to define Aboriginal peoples, but the shared experience of colonization allowed a commonality of experience and identification fitting to the general term Aboriginal.⁷⁶ Other terms exist that are used by Aboriginal peoples to describe themselves based on geographic region, such as “Koori” for Indigenous people from southeastern Australia, and “Goorie” for people from New South Wales.⁷⁷ However, given the breadth of cultures in Australia, no term is as widespread as Aboriginal, nor as all-encompassing. Aboriginal, like many other terms for Indigenous peoples, was given by a settler colony to describe a people rather than used by the Indigenous people in describing themselves.

⁷³ Prentis, 13.

⁷⁴ Ian McLean, “Introduction,” *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1.

⁷⁵ Prentis, 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 118.

Since the 1970s, Aboriginal as a term has largely been taken up by the Indigenous peoples of Australia as a means to band together.⁷⁸ “Aboriginality,” according to Ian McLean, came into usage at the same time as the word “Aboriginalism” as a part of the Aboriginal power movements of the 1970s, influenced by the Black Power movement in the United States.⁷⁹ The use of “Aboriginality” to refer to collective Indigenous Australian identity has continued in usage, unlike “Aboriginalism,” which is used far less frequently.⁸⁰ The Aboriginal flag created by Harold Thomas in 1971, emerging from this moment of Aboriginality, symbolizes collective Aboriginality and has served to unite many groups in Australia (Figure 3).⁸¹ Many of the policies governing Aboriginal peoples in Australia were based on assumptions about the Aboriginal race as an immutable set of characteristics.⁸² Terms such as “Abo” for an Aboriginal person were once acceptable, but are now seen as racist or problematic.⁸³ Other terms such as blackfella for Aboriginal person and its non-Aboriginal equivalent whitefella continue in their usage.⁸⁴ For much of Australia’s history, being Aboriginal meant one was subjected to policies and treatment different from and often worse than white or non-Aboriginal Australians. Claiming Aboriginality or Aboriginal identity as a positive was thus important politically and psychologically for Aboriginal peoples.

Marcia Langton’s essay, “*Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television*,” opens the field of questions and considers the possible ways to understand Aboriginality.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Ian McLean, *White Aborigines*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 107.

⁷⁹ McLean, *White Aborigines*, 107.

⁸⁰ McLean, *White Aborigines*, 107.

⁸¹ Prentis, 89.

⁸² *Ibid*, 177.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 14.

⁸⁴ Nick Tapper, ed. *Ngarra: The Texta Drawings* (Perth: Mossenson Art Foundation, 2015), 161.

⁸⁵ Marcia Langton, “*Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television*”: an essay for the Australian film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things, (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1993).

Langton is a cultural theorist and scholar of Aboriginality who identifies as Aboriginal.⁸⁶ Commissioned by the Australian Film Commission, Langton attempts to make sense of depictions of Aboriginal peoples in film and television and suggests how such depictions can be improved.⁸⁷ According to Langton (who was writing in 1993), “Aboriginal” is the most disputed term in Australia, not by its definition but instead by what makes something or someone Aboriginal as such.⁸⁸ She suggests that Aboriginal as a set of characteristics is contested.⁸⁹ In the years since her project, the issues of the term have not been resolved. Langton begins her discussion of Aboriginality through the High Court of Australia’s definition of Aboriginality based on descent, identification, and recognition by other members of that group.⁹⁰ The term “Indigenous” was defined by the United Nations in the 1990s in response to global issues of Indigeneity, and the political issues of Aboriginal peoples have necessitated an official definition of the term.⁹¹ The political definition has a purpose for the government, but does not address the personal experience of being Aboriginal or the broader cultural context. She classifies Aboriginality as “social” in the sense used by anthropologist Emile Durkheim, which is based on some kind of interaction between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people.⁹² These interactions can be in person or through media representations, such as watching an Aboriginal person on a television show.⁹³ The term itself rests on the distinction of Aboriginal versus non-

⁸⁶ Langton, *Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television*, 93.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

⁸⁸ Langton, *Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television*, 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁹² *Ibid*, 31.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 31.

Aboriginal, that without the non-Aboriginal person, an Aboriginal person as such would not exist.⁹⁴ Langton thus understands Aboriginality as complex and relational.⁹⁵

Langton concludes her essay with a particularly helpful conception of Aboriginality. She argues that, “‘Aboriginality’ is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and reinterpretation.”⁹⁶ Aboriginality, thus, is a fluid term, necessarily being “remade” as a result of identification and interaction. Although she does not specifically mention the artists whose work I will discuss, Langton provides several examples of Aboriginal peoples creatively representing themselves through Aboriginality as a complex, fluid identification, citing Destiny Deacon and Tracey Moffatt as examples of such artists.⁹⁷ However, she suggests that Aboriginal people do not necessarily represent other Aboriginal people in a more positive or accurate way.⁹⁸ Langton challenges the concept of identifying the “first Aborigine to...” as a means of reinforcing the stereotype of the inherent backwardness of Aboriginal peoples.⁹⁹ Indeed, early examples of Aboriginal people in film suggested that a primitiveness or wildness was inescapable and inherent to them based on their Aboriginal heritage.¹⁰⁰ The work of Moffatt specifically is used as an example of representation of Aboriginal people by an Aboriginal person that, if not entirely positive, does not repeat or reinforce negative stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples.¹⁰¹ To be Aboriginal should not be understood as inherently negative or

⁹⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 81.

⁹⁷ Langton, *“Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television”*, 45-51.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 46.

inherently positive, because such distinctions are simplistic.¹⁰² Instead, the most informative means to conceptualize Aboriginality is as something that is constantly being “remade.”

Aboriginality as a fluid, or even slippery designation, is a useful means to conceptualize artworks by Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd. In the context of their work, Aboriginality can be negotiated through the processes of representation and re-presentation, reusing earlier images of Aboriginal peoples. In this sense, their artworks serve as interventions, the mediums through which Aboriginal identity is remade. Each intervention is highly distinctive, as Aboriginality is a broad category, but can be applied directly to individuals, stories and experiences in the recursive practice of definition.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid, 51.

¹⁰³ Based on Terence Smith’s concept of one stream of contemporary art as recursive, recursive re-modernism specifically, particularly in the “Introduction” of *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011).

V. SEXY AND DANGEROUS ABORIGINALITY

Sexy and Dangerous by Brook Andrew from 1996 is a relatively early example of an Aboriginal artist reusing ethnographic photography of an Aboriginal person.¹⁰⁴ This pivotal work of Brook Andrew's career was based on his encounter with ethnographic photography.¹⁰⁵ The piece is an extremely important work as an intervention into stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples. Many scholars have written about this work, and Marcia Langton in particular has visited and revisited this work.¹⁰⁶ A 2005 edition of the piece was included in a recent rehang of the Aboriginal art galleries at the National Gallery of Victoria, a major art museum in Australia.¹⁰⁷ Andrew encountered ethnographic photography in 1995, a year before creating *Sexy and Dangerous*.¹⁰⁸ According to Andrew, "I came across them in 1995 and I was astounded by [them]."¹⁰⁹ Although *Sexy and Dangerous* is based on an archival photograph not taken by an ethnographer or anthropologist, discussion of the piece is often based on its ethnographic-looking nature. Andrew uses the strategies of increasing the scale, altering color, and

¹⁰⁴ Marcia Langton, "Tinsel Dreams," in *Brook Andrew Theme Park*, edited by Trent Waller, (Utrecht: AAMU Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 39.

¹⁰⁵ Langton, "Tinsel Dreams," 39.

¹⁰⁶ See Marcia Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 48 (2008). <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/brook-andrew-ethical-portraits-and-ghost-scapes/>. or Marcia Langton, "Tinsel Dreams," in *Brook Andrew Theme Park*.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly Gellatly, "Brook Andrew" in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*, edited by Judith Ryan, (Melbourne: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2015), 28.

¹⁰⁸ Langton, "Tinsel Dreams," 40.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 40.

incorporating text to question the implicit stereotype of the Aboriginal man as “sexy and dangerous.” The piece thus takes on Aboriginality through type and stereotype by Andrew’s use of an ethnographic-looking photograph. The type of Aboriginality present in *Sexy and Dangerous* is not particularly ennobling, but instead challenging or even confrontational. Are Aboriginal people really “Sexy and Dangerous”? Or do non-Aboriginal people just “read” images of them as such?

Sexy and Dangerous features an Aboriginal man with body paint and a piercing, shown shirtless from the waist up (Figure 4). The sleek look of the image suggests a kind of newness at odds with its 19th century source and subject matter.¹¹⁰ One version of the original photograph was most recently exhibited in *The Photograph and Australia*, a survey of photography in Australia included in a small section of 19th century photographs of Aboriginal peoples.¹¹¹ The original photograph is a sepia-toned portrait of an Aboriginal man who is shirtless in body paint, with a nose piercing, head ornament, and hair plaited in the middle in ponytails.¹¹² It is a *carte de visite*, “visitor card” in English, an early form of postcard with multiple photographs developed for commercial sale. It is captioned, “Aboriginal Chief,” and signed with the studio name, “Kerry & Co. Sydney (Figure 5).”¹¹³ In the original photograph, the color of the Aboriginal man’s skin is dark but muted by the similarly brown background. The *carte de visite* is small and portable, meant for individual or personal viewing.¹¹⁴ By purchasing the photograph, the 19th century owner (presumably a non-Aboriginal person) could carry a piece of Indigenous Australia in his or her pocket. The generic title, “Aboriginal Chief,” and the *carte de visite* format seem to

¹¹⁰ Gellatly, “Brook Andrew,” 28.

¹¹¹ Judy Annear, “Chapter 5: Transmission,” in *The Photograph and Australia*, edited by Judy Annear, (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2015), 230.

¹¹² Annear, “Chapter 5: Transmission,” 243.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 243.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 230.

dehumanize the man, as if he could be bought and possessed as a curiosity. The subject's otherness as an Aboriginal man is reinforced by his lack of clothing, forehead piece, nose piercing and body paint. Returning to Marcia Langton, the purchase or viewing of this photograph could be the only interaction between a non-Aboriginal person and an Aboriginal person.¹¹⁵ In this case, the Aboriginality would be enacted through stereotype, through a controlled encounter with an "Aboriginal Chief."

Andrew's piece is digital, but the original photography and resulting contemporary piece are visually quite similar.¹¹⁶ The points of departure, or perhaps intervention, are Andrew's use of text, expansive scale and coloration. The piece is closer to the scale of public art or a wall installation than a typical photograph.¹¹⁷ When installed, it dominates the already sizable wall needed to display it. In Andrew's piece, the man depicted is many times larger than life-sized, looming over the viewer. His skin appears darker in Andrew's piece, but as the original is sepia the exact shade cannot be determined. His skin color is striking next to the mostly white background areas. It makes the man appear more lifelike and humanizes him, but simultaneously highlights the exoticism of his accessories, his nose piercing, head piece and body paint. At this scale, the stripes (which I viewed as body paint) could almost be strips cut from the original photograph to resemble body paint and contribute to his exoticism. The change in scale and color bring this Aboriginal man into contemporary space and time, but also provide a commentary on his perceived exoticism. Andrew's use of text and language has further implications of exoticism.

¹¹⁵ Langton, "Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television", 31.

¹¹⁶ Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes."

¹¹⁷ My discussion of scale is broadly based on the approach of David Summers in *Real Spaces* (London: Phaidon, 2003).

Sexy and Dangerous includes words that the viewer can read; based on the image and the chosen words, a conceptualization through Aboriginality is particularly fitting. The piece incorporates the words “Sexy and Dangerous” inscribed on the Aboriginal man’s body in English and Chinese characters.¹¹⁸ Andrew points to a movie poster as his inspiration for this work, specifically a Chinese film with the English subtitle, “sexy and dangerous.”¹¹⁹ The use of Chinese positions Andrew in the contemporary global period, where one encounters Chinese writing in one’s daily life. This plays on notions of exoticism as the script is foreign to both the man on whom it is written and the artist. The text is on the chest of the man, suggesting his very body or his whole person embodies the concept of “sexy and dangerous.” The short phrase is essentially a statement of exoticism; the exotic is “sexy and dangerous” for its novelty and unfamiliarity. As Andrew and the piece are tied specifically to Australia, the exoticism here is Aboriginality—not the complex fluid version of Langton, but the 19th century stereotyped understanding of Aboriginal peoples. At the time and perhaps in the concept of Australia overall, Aboriginal peoples are still exotic despite the fact that they are tied to the geography of Australia while white Australians came at some point from somewhere very far away.¹²⁰ Like the scale, the words are impossible to ignore. Through this use of text, Andrew is highlighting the stereotypical reading of the native body as beautiful or “sexy,” while also highlighting that to non-Aboriginal observers the native body is distinct from the white or European body and thus “dangerous.” The words are not meant to be read as such, but rather to confront the viewer who might agree with these stereotypes of Aboriginal men. An Australian viewer, or any viewer who knew the original photograph was from Australia, would read the ethnicity of the man depicted

¹¹⁸ Langton, “Tinsel Dreams,” 39.

¹¹⁹ Gellatly, “Brook Andrew,” 28.

¹²⁰ Annear, “Chapter 5: Transmission,” 230.

as Aboriginal. But with the addition of Chinese script and the English text, the visual reading of his ethnicity cannot be separated by an interpretation of what it means to be that ethnicity, to be Aboriginal. The Aboriginality enacted here is viewing this chief and understanding Aboriginal men based on this man's beauty and exoticism as sexy and dangerous. Is this man sexy and dangerous only to a non-Aboriginal audience or do all viewers have to contend with this reading of Aboriginality?

Marcia Langton, in an article for the National Gallery of Victoria, does not focus on the use of text in the piece.¹²¹ She refers to *Sexy and Dangerous* and other similar works in Andrew's oeuvre as "ghost-scapes rescued from the anthropological archives."¹²² The new image becomes a "ghost-scape" by reusing an image of a person and suggesting through this new piece that the individual was a live person, a physical and spiritual body.¹²³ Langton is suggesting that reclamation of personhood can occur corporeally simply by reusing the body of a person.¹²⁴ In my reading, the text is crucial because, after the insertion of coloration, it is the greatest disjuncture from the original image to Andrew's piece. Langton references Andrew's Wiradjuri heritage because his Aboriginal identity is important to her conceptualization of the artist's ability to create ghost-scapes based on this shared identity between artist and subjects.¹²⁵ Her classification of Andrew as a Wiradjuri man fits the official definition of Aboriginality as through descent and identification, but, for Langton, does not provide this as the lens through which to view this particular work.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Marcia Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 48 (2008) <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/brook-andrew-ethical-portraits-and-ghost-scapes/>.

¹²² Langton, "Brook Andrew: Ethical Portraits and ghost-scapes."

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Langton, "Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television", 29.

A major critique of Brook Andrew with regard to this work is his use of ethnographic images of people who are not connected to Wiradjuri, so who are not related to or are not members of the same Aboriginal peoples he is.¹²⁷ However, this point suggests that Aboriginality is about ethnic or cultural heritage alone rather than a complex history of transcultural engagement. Although the “Aboriginal Chief” could be traced to a specific group or people, Andrew is purposefully using a stereotypical image to confront stereotype. Defined only as an “Aboriginal chief” who could be read as an Aboriginal man, Andrew is suggesting that the link between contemporary artist and 19th century sitter is the overarching concept of Aboriginality that they share. The text “sexy and dangerous,” which I suggested above as exoticizing, is taken one step further in reference to the Aboriginal as exotic. The original image, rather than taken in an unsettled, distant community far from urban spaces, was taken in a studio in Sydney by a professional who photographed both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sitters.¹²⁸ The blankness behind the figure is not simply an artistic trope; it represents the physical space, a curtain backdrop in the photograph. By understanding better the commercial, willing nature of this original image (even if the intent was to document otherness), any suggested violent readings are in the capturing of the photograph rather than violence done by other means to the man.¹²⁹ The authenticity of the original image, faced with the reality of its studio creation, is suddenly called into question. Yet, by considering this exchange through the lens of Aboriginality, authenticity is not a relevant concern. Instead, what is more important is the staging of identity for the camera and for the public.

¹²⁷ Djon Mundine, “Nowhere Boy.” *Artlink* 30.1 (2010): 23-25.

¹²⁸ Gellatley, 28.

¹²⁹ Michael Aird, “Aboriginal Peoples and four early Brisbane photographers,” in *Calling the Shots*, edited by Jane Lydon, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 134.

The man in the original photograph is posing; by extension, so is the man in Andrew's version. He is sitting upright facing the camera, looking directly at the viewer. Rather than confrontational, the original photograph seems quiet, perhaps introspective. The sepia tone of the photograph and the slight contrast between background and sitter give the piece an almost hazy effect. The markers of Aboriginality are clearer in the original photograph than in Andrew's intervention. The band around the man's neck appears to be a necklace instead of an extension of the body paint as it appears to be in *Sexy and Dangerous*. The simplicity and dignity of the original image are underwritten with a conscious display of identity, perhaps even a play of identity. The lack of clothing and markers of non-Western affiliations served to suggest what the title does, that this man was a man, but a type of man rather than an individual. Charles Kerry, a white photographer, titled the original photograph *Aboriginal Chief*, suggesting this man was indicative of a particular type of native.¹³⁰ As images such as "Aboriginal Chief" proliferated and were widely sold, these multiple meanings of the work in its own time are worth considering now. As this piece was taken in a studio presumably with the sitter's permission, the man in the photograph could arguably be identified. The title of the photograph suggests a type, and the viewer is meant to understand the image as a type. Despite its commercial goal, the photograph becomes ethnographic in the intention of the photographer whose aim is to profit from a type. Determining the intent of the artist can often be fraught or problematic, but the title and dissemination support a reading of the work as such.

Andrew created a piece capable of being reproduced that was still photographic. In that sense, it is the most straightforward intervention reusing ethnographic photographs. However, in

¹³⁰ In some internet sources, the piece is titled *Baron River Aborigine*. As part of *The Photograph and Australia* exhibit, a carte de visite with this photograph was captioned *Aboriginal Chief* and so I will use this title to discuss the photograph.

reviewing the two images, side by side, Andrew's intervention and marked changes in the original image become much clearer. The inclusion of Chinese text, as well as the English text, compounds the message. It demonstrates his described inspiration of a movie ad. Rather than just the subject, the text on the body seems to suggest that the body itself is the backdrop for action, intent and message. In this sense, the body becomes further removed from the original image. This returns to my central idea about the use of ethnographic photography in exploiting the distance and closeness invoked when viewing any photograph. The original is intimate in scale, while the piece by Andrew is larger than life sized. Andrew's piece is an intervention precisely because it forces a deep reconsideration of the original photograph. Andrew takes a photograph of an Aborigine and enlarges it with flesh tones and text, thereby forcing the viewer to consider the questions of who is Aboriginal and what being Aboriginal means.

“Sexy and dangerous” is a stereotype not just of an Aboriginal man's body but of Aboriginal people more broadly. The original image suggests an antiquated notion of what it means to be Aboriginal, which is to be exotic and incorporated into non-Aboriginal society as a type, a curiosity to exploit for commercial scale. Brook Andrew is an educated, world renowned, multilingual artist who has traveled extensively. He does not fit this stereotype. This 19th century man, shirtless and painted, suggests an Aboriginal identity totally beyond Andrew's self-conception of Aboriginality. The Chinese text could suggest that one can be Aboriginal and global. This notion of Aboriginality as remote, exotic, outside of the realm of daily non-Aboriginal experience is fictitious at best and at worst antagonistic to a more nuanced concept of Aboriginal identity. Through *Sexy and Dangerous*, Andrew presents Aboriginality as a stereotype to be completely broken down by the artist's clever use of the text and the original photograph.

VI. BLACKFELLA PRIDE: ABORIGINALITY AS MEMORY AND FAMILY HISTORY

Vernon Ah Kee's oeuvre can be characterized by a focus on history, storytelling and portraiture often on a monumental scale.¹³¹ His portraiture demonstrates his highly skilled, academic style of drawing.¹³² His prominence began soon after he finished art school and has grown in Australia and globally. In 2009, he represented Australia at the Venice Biennale.¹³³ His portraits display a high level of technical skill and include, for example, a portrait of William Barak that was commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria, (Figure 6). William Barak was an important Wurundjeri man who served as a cultural interpreter in part through the creation of artworks. He remains extremely relevant to the cultural history of Australia.¹³⁴ In one of the best-known photographs of him, Barak wears Western clothing and draws an Aboriginal ceremony for a white audience (Figure 7).¹³⁵ Ah Kee did not base his piece on this well-known image of Barak; instead, he focused on the man's face, so that the man, rather than his markers of status or position, is front and center. Barak's importance is reinforced by the sheer scale of the piece. In creating a highly detailed, close-up drawing, Barak's features and face are central. Although

¹³¹ Robert Leonard, "Your call," in *Vernon Ah Kee: Born in this Skin*, edited by Robert Leonard, Anthony Gardner, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Blair French, and Glenn Barkley, (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2009), 6.

¹³² Leonard, "Your call," 8.

¹³³ Michael Aird and Vernon Ah Kee, "Tindale Background Notes," State Library of Queensland and Queensland Government, 2012.

¹³⁴ Judith Ryan, "Verona Ah Kee," in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art in the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria*, edited by Judith Ryan, (Melbourne: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2015), 26.

¹³⁵

Barak looms over the viewer, the close up of his face seems a very personal and loving depiction of the great Barak. Ah Kee is not connected to Barak as a relative or even regionally. As the commission is from 2012, the style is likely based on his earlier works of family portraiture.

See Me and *Neither Courage nor Pride* are two triptychs by Ah Kee that use ethnographic photography as sources, specifically photographs of his family from the Norman Tindale photographs (Figures 8 and 9).¹³⁶ Ah Kee's intervention through scale, use of text and the addition of images of his children suggest a more personal reading of the works in terms of Aboriginality. Through these techniques, Aboriginality is an identity in which to take pride and to share with future generations. The use of images of future generations negates a concept of Indigenous extinction. According to Ah Kee, "The Tindale images were envisaged as a scientific record of a dying people."¹³⁷ Ah Kee presents his ancestors as important individuals, not as scientific subjects. They are painstakingly drawn in massive scale and re-captioned as the original photographs also included text captions. Ah Kee was continuing a trajectory of rewriting what was already occurring in his family and translating it into an art practice.¹³⁸ Ah Kee began creating family portraits in 2004 using family photographs he remembered his grandmother carrying in her purse when he was a child.¹³⁹ He later learned that these photographs of his grandmother's mother, her father, and her husband were taken as part of Norman Tindale's project documenting Aboriginal peoples.¹⁴⁰ By keeping the Tindale images in her purse as mementos, Ah Kee's grandmother was rewriting their meaning as keepsakes rather than

¹³⁶ Glenn Barkley, "Interview with Vernon Ah Kee," in *Vernon Ah Kee: Born in this Skin*, edited by Robert Leonard, Anthony Gardner, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Blair French, and Glenn Barkley, (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 2009), 21.

¹³⁷ Barkley, "Interview with Vernon Ah Kee," 21.

¹³⁸ Leonard, "Your call," 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

ethnographies. Tindale's intentions in taking the photographs were insignificant when compared to the personal importance of these people to her. Ah Kee can be understood to be acting with and against this rewriting by using the photographs as a basis for Aboriginal pride yet not denying their source. His relatives are now presented in a public rather than personal realm and are shown as links to the future and as testimonies of the past.¹⁴¹

Ah Kee selected photographs of his family as the sources for these triptychs to inscribe them with personhood. His drawings are thus inherently personal images, even if based on impersonal photographs. Considering a personal image of an emotionally close relative can immediately call to mind Roland Barthes' discussion of photography through a photograph of his recently deceased mother in *Camera Lucida*. Barthes suggests that the photograph of his mother and his dreams about her are similarly evocative of her but no real replacement for her physical presence.¹⁴² Unlike Barthes, Ah Kee finds the Tindale photographs upsetting not because of whom they depict, but because of how they documented his family as scientific specimens. He uses the images to work through the identity of his relatives and, through this process, his sons and himself, as well. This demonstrates a crucial aspect of photographs of people touched on briefly above in my discussion of Michael Aird's work. By recognizing or identifying a family member, the subject of an ethnographic photograph becomes personal, regardless of the photographer's intentions. In choosing these images in particular to re-present, Ah Kee is acknowledging this reuse, but again rewriting it by reflecting on the original intention.

In *Neither Courage nor Pride*, three massive portraits are placed one after another in a modern triptych. In *See Me*, the same format is repeated. The portraits are drawn in black

¹⁴¹ As with many ethnographic collections of photographs, it is disputable how wide the distribution of these images are. Most currently exist in the collection of the State Library of Queensland.

¹⁴² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 66.

charcoal with white highlights set against a gray background. The combination of black and gray gives the images a soft, almost atmospheric quality, which is an interesting juxtaposition with its dominating scale. *Neither Courage nor Pride* includes two images of Ah Kee's great-grandfather, George Sibley, shown with a stoic expression in a frontal portrait and a profile portrait, followed by a third image of Ah Kee's frowning, young son.¹⁴³ The use of text in the image is not the title repeated, as in *Sexy and Dangerous*. Instead, Ah Kee's own text is based on the original Tindale photographs marking racial identity.¹⁴⁴ In the triptych, Sibley wears a simple button-up shirt that seems to be his everyday clothes. Susan Sontag argued in *On Photography* that candid pictures were violent by preventing subjects from looking their best.¹⁴⁵ The same could perhaps apply to an ethnographic photograph since one might not want to be portrayed in a work shirt. The nonsmiling faces and straightforward poses seem to harken to earlier days of photography when sitters had to maintain the same pose for long periods of time, but by the 1930s when most of the photographs were taken, this was no longer necessary.¹⁴⁶ Like Brook Andrew's unnamed man, Ah Kee's grandfather is quietly dignified, sitting up straight and looking directly at the camera. In the third portrait, Ah Kee's son seems to be scowling. Its relative scale has been further increased so that only his head is visible. He was drawn even fainter and appears almost ghostlike, with the lines around his face much lighter and looser to convey the physical softness of his head and jaw.

The title *Neither Courage nor Pride* could have multiple meanings. The title is not inscribed on any one of the drawings to suggest that all three pieces collectively possess "Neither

¹⁴³ Leonard, 7.

¹⁴⁴ State Library of Queensland, "Transforming Tindale, Gallery," September 2012, Accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/showcase/transforming-tindale/gallery>.

¹⁴⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1977), 172.

¹⁴⁶ State Library of Queensland, "Transforming Tindale, Gallery."

courage nor pride.” The first frontal portrait of George Sibley in *Neither Courage nor Pride* has a flag in front of his body, space for text that is left blank and ambiguous. In the second portrait, a profile portrait of Sibley, the words “Kuku Yalandji” and “1967” are written on a similar flag. Ah Kee’s great-grandfather, and thus Ah Kee and his children, are members of the Kuku Yalandji people, an Aboriginal people of Australia. The year 1967 is important politically to Aboriginal peoples. It was the year the Referendum passed finally including Aboriginal peoples on the census.¹⁴⁷ It is popularly understood as the date when Aboriginal people were declared citizens of Australia and no longer considered wards of the state.¹⁴⁸ Although this interpretation is inaccurate, it is a highly important year in history for Aboriginal peoples in Australia.¹⁴⁹ A second interpretation of the meaning of 1967 in the portrait is that it represents Ah Kee himself, who was born in 1967.¹⁵⁰ The date could be a substitute for a portrait of Ah Kee as he is the link between his ancestors and his children; without him, these future generations would not exist. The portrait of his son contains a longer list of peoples, including Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yimithirr Bama and possibly Koko Berrin as Ah Kee is also a member of these peoples.¹⁵¹ “Koko Berrin” is obscured by the words “Blackfella me,” which could be seen as an inversion of the statement, “I am a blackfella.” “Blackfella me” is the most important text in this flag as it is written on top of and therefore obscures the specific people group associations.

According to Nick Tapper, a scholar of Aboriginal art, “blackfella,” is “a generic descriptor for Aboriginal people that contrasts with the similarly non-pejorative descriptor

¹⁴⁷ Prentis, 30.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁵⁰ Museum of Contemporary Art, “Vernon Ah Kee,” *Artists and Works*, 2015, Accessed 14, 2015, <http://www.mca.com.au/collection/artist/ahkee-vernon/>.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*.

whitefella.”¹⁵² In Australia, the term “blackfella(s)” is used colloquially in place of the term Aboriginal.¹⁵³ Ah Kee’s use fits the general understanding of the term. The term might be based on racial differences, contrasting typically darker-skinned Aboriginal people as “blackfellas” with non-Aboriginal “whitefellas,” but as a stand-in for the term Aboriginal, its usage is no longer so simplistic. Ah Kee is a member of the peoples he lists, so he is deeply aware of the specific distinctions. Instead of highlighting these specific identities, he uses instead the general term, “blackfella.” His use could also be in response to how non-Aboriginal peoples might view Aboriginal people. To “whitefellas,” his family might simply be “blackfellas” without reference to specific peoples or group associations.

Ah Kee’s use of text is the primary means through which he interrogates the original photographs and presents Aboriginality in his series. The date 1967 places the image in time specifically in the past, while the lack of date on the image of his son complicates the temporality if one does not know that this image is of Ah Kee’s son. The picture of his son, taken decades after the other images, was most likely not taken beside markers with a list of the Aboriginal peoples of which he is a member. The choice suggests that Aboriginal peoples, categorized and delineated initially by non-Indigenous peoples, must still be understood through these lineages. The covering of these peoples with the text “blackfella me” again suggests a reading of the image as self-consciously Aboriginal. Documenting people outside of one’s own culture and classifying them by geography and language are explicitly colonial practices.¹⁵⁴

Ah Kee and his sons call themselves “blackfellas” so that they determine their own identities. This intervention seems to act upon Marcia Langton’s first level of enacting

¹⁵² Nick Tapper, editor. *Ngarra: The Texta Drawings* (Perth: Mossenson Art Foundation, 2015), 161.

¹⁵³ Tapper, 161.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards, “Introduction,” 7.

Aboriginality in which Aboriginal peoples interact with other Aboriginal peoples largely outside of non-Aboriginal society.¹⁵⁵ Ah Kee, by using this language of classification and anthropology, is subverting initial colonial aims. Instead of the more formal term “Aboriginal,” Ah Kee’s use of “blackfella,” a colloquialism, demonstrates how Aboriginal peoples refer to themselves.¹⁵⁶ Ah Kee could also be suggesting that regardless of these other distinctions, his son is seen as an Aboriginal person, a “blackfella.” The broad classification of Aboriginal could work to override these other distinctions and how people would perhaps choose to identify themselves. Thus, it would take both courage and pride to be a “blackfella” and neither courage nor pride to document a “blackfella” in the case of Norman Tindale. However, the entire project could be seen to negate the colonial aims of documenting people on the verge of extinction because the line continues with Ah Kee’s sons. The great-grandfather connects to the youngest generation, who calls himself a “blackfella.” Rather than being calm or complacent in current times, the youngest generation is angry, aware of the history and the act of being classified. To combat classification, the statement “blackfella me” claims and proclaims Aboriginal identity. To be Aboriginal then is not a negative but, as contemporary Indigenous peoples are sometimes cast, to be set in the future while always remembering the past.

The original photographs of George Sibley, Ah Kee’s great-grandfather, greatly resemble Ah Kee’s portraits (Figure 10).¹⁵⁷ The two photographs have blank backgrounds with a muted gray color that is quoted almost exactly by Ah Kee. In the first profile photograph, there are two lines of text on the flags. The first line, “PALM ISLAND QUEENSL,” gives the location where the picture was taken. The designation of geographic location might have been used to document

¹⁵⁵ Langton, *“Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...”*, 81.

¹⁵⁶ Tapper, 161.

¹⁵⁷ State Library of Queensland, *“Transforming Tindale, Gallery.”*

all of the people from a certain community. The second line is difficult to make out, but seems to be a two-word phrase with “Adelaide” as the second word. Palm Island is an island off the east coast of Australia in the state of Queensland where Indigenous people from reserves all over Australia were sent if they were seen as troublemakers.¹⁵⁸ The Aboriginal community of Palm Island in the 1930s was diverse and represented many distinct peoples, including Ah Kee’s family. Blackfella could be used to reflect the diversity of Palm Islanders who have roots throughout Australia, but are all blackfellas.¹⁵⁹ The third line is “N958.” The numbers seem to be on a second piece of paper that is leaning against the main sign. They might be the identifying numbers for George Sibley in particular. As a community with Indigenous people from all over Australia, establishing a “Palm Island” type most likely proved futile to Tindale. The date of the photograph of George Sibley is 1938.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, the year 1967 must have a meaning beyond reflecting the original photographs.

There is a striking similarity between Ah Kee’s portraits and the original photographs. The closeness of the portrait to the original is mainly in the rendering of his relative based on close inspection of the Tindale photograph of George Sibley. The exterior side panels of a home or perhaps window blinds are visible from the left corner of the original profile photograph. This photograph was most likely not taken in a studio, but outside or even in Sibley’s own home. From the photograph, the flat gray color background appears to be a sheet or screen, draped or leaned against the wall for the effect of flat color. The panels were left out in Ah Kee’s rendering; instead, Ah Kee set the figures against a blank expanse made by a curtain or screen, causing the figures to float in the space. The looseness of Sibley’s shirt, buttoned to the top with

¹⁵⁸ Robert. “Your call,” 7.

¹⁵⁹ “Transforming Tindale, Gallery,” State Library of Queensland, September 2012.
<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/showcase/transforming-tindale/gallery>

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

its drooping pocket, is drawn in exacting detail by Ah Kee. He similarly painstakingly renders the great detail especially of Sibley's face in his large work.

See Me and *Neither Courage nor Pride* depict the artist's children and ancestors in the same style, with *See Me* focused on Ah Kee's grandfather, Mick Miller. The original photos of Mick Miller are not easily accessible. Ah Kee's portraits of his grandfather in *Neither Courage nor Pride* are quite close to the original Tindale photographs of George Sibley, and thus his portraits of Miller in *See Me* are most likely similarly close representations.¹⁶¹ In *See Me*, Ah Kee's grandfather sits stoically and looks out, directly at the photographer. In the piece, the highly delineated portraits of Miller are connected to a soft portrait of another one of Ah Kee's sons on an even more exaggerated scale. The boy looks stern, less angry and more stoic than his (presumably) younger brother. His neck is visible, but it is still not quite a bust or full length portrait. The scale of Ah Kee's son's portrait seems to expand far beyond the canvas based on his scale. The scale of the younger generations, on the same size canvas but relatively larger than Ah Kee's ancestors, suggests the importance of future generations in relation to the still important past generations.

See Me, like *Neither Courage Nor Pride*, incorporates text, specifically dates on portraits of Ah Kee's ancestors. The marker in the first portrait of Miller has "Yaanji Man" written on it, rather than being left blank as in *Neither Courage nor Pride*. The second portrait reads "Blackfella Me 1938." Mick Miller and George Sibley's photographs were both taken in 1938, 30 years before Ah Kee could have known them.¹⁶² The youthful look of Miller disturbs the temporality of the photograph, especially considering the date given of 1938. The date of 1938 is temporally correct, being drawn from the original photographs; yet, it is still temporally

¹⁶¹ Barkley, "Interview with Vernon Ah Kee," 21-23.

¹⁶² State Library of Queensland, "Transforming Tindale, Gallery."

confusing as the portrait dates to 2006. The date, however, was not included in the Sibley photograph and was most likely not represented in the Miller photograph. As the photographs of George Sibley and Mick Miller were taken at the same time, the generational differences of grandfather and great-grandfather are visible.¹⁶³ The piece is confusing though, as the older generation bears the later date of 1967.

The two dates are significant as moments of Aboriginality—that is, of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples’ interactions.¹⁶⁴ According to Ah Kee, white Australians have had many opportunities do right to Aboriginal peoples and have instead chosen to do wrong.¹⁶⁵ The dates of 1938 and 1967 could be conceptualized in this way. The year 1938 was one instance of doing wrong by documenting Aboriginal people and classifying them with numbers. The year 1967 was then one instance of getting it right by finally counting Aboriginal people on the census, though this date as Ah Kee’s birth year could be merely coincidental. But as both *See Me* and *Neither Courage nor Pride* are based on Tindale photographs, this history of documentation in 1938 is highlighted more explicitly.

It would be simplistic to frame this and all other ethnographic photography projects as “wrong” precisely because of Ah Kee’s grandmother’s reuse. While the photos were traces of a scientific project to document people, she cherished them as keepsakes. This reinforces Michael Aird’s broader premise that regardless of intention, archival photographs allow descendants actually to see their ancestors. The original intention is thus less important than the meaning of the photographs to their owners, as in the case of Anne Sibley, Ah Kee’s grandmother. However, Ah Kee’s reuse of the Tindale photographs to present that moment in 1938 suggests a more

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Vernon Ah Kee, Conversation with the author, New York City, NY, November 5, 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Ah Kee, Conversation with the author, November 5, 2015.

complicated interpretation. To Ah Kee, the personal meaning and the ethnographic intention are inseparable. The portraits that have resulted from these photographs should be understood as similarly personal and broad. They are personal to Ah Kee, but by describing these relatives as “blackfellas,” they become subsumed in the wider grouping of Aboriginal, a category that negates a type for the breadth of people that can fall into it.

Ah Kee’s intervention demonstrates that through reuse and the distance of time, one can challenge the original intention of ethnographic photographs. “Blackfella me” understood as an inverted statement is worth returning to at this point. Ah Kee’s use of “blackfella” can be better understood by viewing the original photographs alongside Ah Kee’s contemporary works. When discussing another piece, Ah Kee stated, “I live my whole life as an Aboriginal person.”¹⁶⁶ The conscious lived identity of what it means to be Aboriginal is what these series highlight and unpack. This Aboriginality exists for and in Ah Kee alone, without the negotiation of non-Aboriginal people.¹⁶⁷ As his great-grandfather and grandfather’s photographs prove, scientists (or perhaps more to Ah Kee’s point, non-Aboriginal Australians) have had the power to document people, to capture and show who is Aboriginal.¹⁶⁸ By reusing the images for more personal or political means, one can subvert these original intentions. Connecting his grandfathers to his children, with himself as the missing link, and repeating the phrase of “Blackfella me,” Ah Kee is stating that not only is his whole life lived as an Aboriginal person but that is how his ancestors lived and how his children will live. The only way to subvert this classification of “Aboriginal” that has been imposed by the colonizer is to claim it, to call oneself a “blackfella,” and to do so in a stern or angry manner, as Ah Kee’s children demonstrate. Ah

¹⁶⁶ Ah Kee, Conversation with the author, November 5, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Langton, *“Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...”*, 81.

¹⁶⁸ “Transforming Tindale, Gallery,” State Library of Queensland, September 2012.
<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/showcase/transforming-tindale/gallery>.

Kee used personal images, but the point is much broader than his immediate family. Rather than being some long forgotten people, Aboriginal people exist and will continue to exist.

The title of the triptych *See me* points to this quest for recognition, as the forced removal of Aboriginal people from their ancestral lands made it easy to ignore or push them aside. In fact, the massive scale of *See Me* as well as *Neither Courage nor Pride* makes seeing them inevitable. The title *See Me* can be further understood as suggesting a command, “See me as a person,” and not just as a person but as a proud and perhaps even angry blackfella. According to Ah Kee, all Aboriginal people should be angry.¹⁶⁹ Anger is the result of understanding as an Aboriginal person that Aboriginal peoples have been ill-treated, denied citizenship (political personhood) and have chronically experienced othering. To proclaim oneself as a blackfella and to express a self-aware Aboriginality is in itself a courageous act, as is having pride in claiming a people usually discriminated against. The use of his children is crucial in these works. As a politically concerned or even motivated artist, these particular issues and Ah Kee’s stance on them will not end with him. The self-aware brand of Aboriginality must continue with his children, represented by these lightly drawn defiant faces. The delicacy of these portraits could perhaps demonstrate that they are not yet fully defined and that this later stage of what it means to be Aboriginal will be for them to determine.

¹⁶⁹ Ah Kee, Conversation with the author, November 5, 2015.

VII. ABORIGINALITY AMONG OTHER IDENTITIES

The artist Daniel Boyd is member of the Kudjla, Eastern Kuku Yalanji, Kangulu, Jagara, Bandjalung, and Kuku Djungan peoples of Australia, and he has roots in Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, as well.¹⁷⁰ Boyd was born in 1982 and is part of the newest generation of art school trained Aboriginal artists.¹⁷¹ His prominence is relatively recent, but his career since the mid-2000s has been marked with great shifts in aesthetic style and concepts. His piece *Untitled* from 2014 received national attention as the winner of the 2014 Bvlgari Art Award (Figure 11).¹⁷² As part of the award, it was acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, making Boyd the first Aboriginal artist to claim this prestigious Australian prize.¹⁷³

Boyd has gained prominence in Australia and globally by reinterpreting historical moments from an Aboriginal perspective, such as the landing of the first fleet under Captain Cook in his piece *We Call Them Pirates Out Here* from 2006 (Figure 12).¹⁷⁴ In this work, Boyd paints Captain Cook not as a hero but as a pirate, responsible for stealing land and resources from the Aboriginal people.¹⁷⁵ Although this may be a reductive interpretation of an extremely

¹⁷⁰ Bergit Arends, "Pointillist Observations in Notebooks of Earth and Universe," in *Law of Closure*, edited by Dan Rule, (Melbourne: Perimeter Edition, 2015), 70.

¹⁷¹ Art Gallery of New South Wales, "Daniel Boyd is the 2014 BVLGARI ART AWARD Recipient," Archived Releases, April 15, 2014. <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media-office/daniel-boyd-2014-bvlgari-art-award-recipient/>.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Tina Baum, "Daniel Boyd," In *Culture Warriors: Australian Indigenous Art Triennia*, (Canberra: Publishing Department of the National Gallery of Australia, 2009), 72.

¹⁷⁵ Baum, "Daniel Boyd," 72.

complex historical figure, Boyd is targeting Australian reverence for Cook and for the colonial mission that he represents.¹⁷⁶ The piece is based on a well-known historical painting, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770*, by E. Phillips Fox from 1902 (Figure 13).¹⁷⁷ Boyd's composition and scale are very close to Fox's, but it is painted in acrylic and includes the title caption "We Call Them Pirates Out Here."¹⁷⁸ With works like *We Call Them Pirates Out Here*, Boyd has built a career on creating challenging work from an Aboriginal perspective.¹⁷⁹ His work was most recently featured in the 2015 Venice Biennale's exhibit *All the World's Futures*, curated by the internationally acclaimed curator and art historian Okwui Enwezor.¹⁸⁰ The pieces in *All the World's Futures* used Boyd's technique from *Untitled* of first drawing then layering these works with archival glue.¹⁸¹

Globally known as an Aboriginal artist, Boyd's choice to explore his roots in Vanuatu in *Untitled*, creating a drawing from an archival photograph of Pentecost Island, was extremely fraught.¹⁸² However, *Untitled* demonstrates that Boyd can explore this other Indigenous heritage without detracting from his Aboriginality as his Aboriginality is about more than just ethnicity. In an interview with art historian Djon Mundine, Boyd states that, "It's only quite recently that I acknowledged that connection to Vanuatu in a way... I grew up as an Aboriginal person. I guess people were afraid to be mixed or acknowledge they come from mixed backgrounds."¹⁸³ *Untitled* represents a shift in his conceptual and his artistic practice, as Boyd began using archival glue

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 72.

¹⁷⁷ National Gallery of Victoria, "Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770, E. Phillips Fox," Collection Online, Accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/5576/>.

¹⁷⁸ Baum, 72.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Roslyn Oxley9, "56th Venice Biennale, All the World's Futures, Curated by Okwui Enwezor," Accessed December 20, 2015. http://www.roslynoxley9.com.au/artists/287/Daniel_Boyd/.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Djon Mundine and Daniel Boyd, facilitated by Dan Rule, "Conversation," in *Law of Closure*, edited by Dan Rule, (Melbourne: Perimeter Editions, 2015), 84.

¹⁸³ Mundine, "Conversation," 84.

layered over drawings just a few years earlier during his residency at the Natural History Museum, London, in 2011.¹⁸⁴ The scenery depicted is based on an archival photograph of Pentecost Island in the modern-day island nation of Vanuatu, north of Australia.¹⁸⁵ Pentecost Island has a personal significance to Boyd because his great-great-grandfather Samuel Pentecost was forcibly taken from this island to work in Queensland sugarcane fields.¹⁸⁶ Most sources on Boyd's work do not address the original image, other than to point out this narrative. Unlike in the work of Ah Kee and Andrew, the original photograph is not widely accessible to the public. Perhaps most striking in the comparison is that though people are present, this reference to Boyd's great-great-grandfather is not a portrait but rather a landscape with people. As Vanuatu is an island nation that was never part of Australia, the tie to Aboriginality is more complex.¹⁸⁷ Daniel Boyd has roots outside of mainland Australia yet still claims Aboriginality. The displacement of his ancestor was at the hands of non-Aboriginal Australians, much like the broader displacement of Aboriginal peoples. This work does not seem to be an exploration of Boyd's non-Aboriginal identity, but rather a consideration of Aboriginality existing within and among other identities.

The exploration of his Vanuatu roots is not limited to Boyd's Bvlgari winning piece. In 2013, Boyd created *Untitled (HM)*, which is an image of his great-grandfather Henry Mossman (Figure 14).¹⁸⁸ Like *Untitled*, the piece is drawn in black. Henry Mossman was Samuel Pentecost's son and Boyd's great-grandfather, but it is unclear whether this piece is also based on

¹⁸⁴ Arends, "Pointillist Observations in Notebooks of Earth and Universe," 70.

¹⁸⁵ Arends, 70.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

¹⁸⁷ Art Gallery of New South Wales, "Daniel Boyd is the 2014 BVLGARI ART AWARD Recipient," Archived Releases, April 15, 2014. Accessed October 30, 2015. <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media-office/daniel-boyd-2014-bvlgari-art-award-recipient/>.

¹⁸⁸ Cassandra Bird, "Daniel Boyd- New Hebrides," Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, April 4, 2013, <http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/news/releases/2013/04/04/230/>.

a photograph.¹⁸⁹ Boyd could have created a portrait in his particular style for his Bvlgari entry, in a similar vein to Ah Kee's portraits. Instead, through *Untitled*, the landscape and people suggest a connection to both country and people that is acknowledged but is not entirely worked out. The source of the photograph acts on both the personal and the impersonal levels for Boyd. The found photograph had resonance with the artist based on its location, but it is also somewhat removed based on Boyd's distance from his South Sea Islander roots. For the artist who confronts Aboriginality in his work and has made a career of it, the choice to explore this identity in such a popular form is unique. Boyd is not denying his Aboriginality by highlighting this other Indigenous heritage; instead, it can be seen as contributing to his identity as an Indigenous person from Australia. The choice of Pentecost Island references a particular slave history of ill treatment of Indigenous people by non-Aboriginal Australians beyond the mainland of Australia.¹⁹⁰

The art historian Bergit Arends, writing on Boyd's work, has suggested that *Untitled* could be based on J.W. Beattie's photographs of Pentecost Island from the early 1900s.¹⁹¹ Other publications on this work (many short sources resulted from the Bvlgari win) have not identified the exact source photograph, but described it as a 19th century photograph.¹⁹² Nor have I found the original source photograph. Boyd is unaware of the exact location from where his great-great-grandfather was taken.¹⁹³ Lacking the original photograph, one can only consider the contemporary piece, which is a landscape with figures and not a portrait or a landscape devoid of

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Arends, 70.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 72.

¹⁹² Art Gallery of New South Wales, "Daniel Boyd is the 2014 BVLGARI ART AWARD Recipient,"

¹⁹³ Mundine, "Conversation," 85.

people. Instead, as is sometimes the case with anthropological projects, place and people are considered simultaneously.

The connection between place and people is suggested by the title of J.W. Beattie's project, *Catalogue of a series of photographs illustrating the scenery and peoples of the islands in the south and western Pacific published in Hobart Tasmania in 1900*.¹⁹⁴ Some of the images from this catalogue are digitized and, of those available, most are either landscapes without people or are portraiture.¹⁹⁵ *Villagers sitting on beach at Lamalana, Raga, New Hebrides, 1906* is perhaps the closest available to the original photograph with villagers sitting on the beach (Figure 15).¹⁹⁶ However, the similarities are mostly in the location and time, as Boyd's landscape does not seem to be a beach. Unlike Boyd's project of creating the later work, Beattie provides detailed locations to enable viewers or readers of the photographs to sense the space within the islands. In the absence of the exact source, I will consider the contemporary work in itself.

Untitled is a massive piece, over 10-feet high. It is a drawing of a photograph rendered in charcoal and layered with archival glue. In professional photographs of the work, the obscured nature of the drawing is not visible. The glue is highly reflective and as installed in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the lighting can cause the white dots of glue to appear yellow in color (Figure 16). The figures appear dark against the jungle-like setting of vines and trees. There seem to be five figures, two people kneeling and three people standing, all in the center of the piece. These people could be walking away from or towards the photographer in the original piece. The scale of the trees and shrubs in relation to these diminutive figures suggests a lushness

¹⁹⁴ Clive Moore, "J.W. Beattie Photographs," University of Queensland Australia, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, August 2013, Accessed September 10, 2015. <http://hapi.uq.edu.au/beattie>.

¹⁹⁵ J.W. Beattie, "The scenery and peoples of the islands in the South and Western Pacific," Details 1906. National Library of Australia. 2015. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-141094401/view>.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

of nature, even if some of the trees are bare. The figures move through this untamed space of the trees. The legibility of the piece, perhaps even the visibility of the figurative scene, is disrupted upon physical viewing.

The archival photograph is most likely much smaller in scale and, given the nature of known photographs by Beattie, one can assume that the figures and setting would be more clearly articulated.¹⁹⁷ Boyd, unlike Ah Kee, does not painstakingly recreate the photograph but draws then blurs it so the details of the piece, such as the gender of the figures or the types of plants, remain unclear. The figures are gestural, with simple shapes indicating heads or torsos. It is a piece rendered in black and white, not in the sepia of Beattie's photographs. The glue and drawing method give the work shades of gray and dotting, which one reviewer has compared to Pointillism, at least in its visual effects.¹⁹⁸

There is a clear distinction between Boyd's intervention and that of Ah Kee and Andrew. Basic format is one point of disjuncture. The genre of portraiture is the starting and ending point of Andrew and Ah Kee's pieces. Boyd selected a photograph of Pentecost Island as his source and provided this detail in the description of the work. Thus Boyd is intentionally using an obscured technique to picture a place that is personally important to him, regardless of whether or not he has been there. The lack of specificity on Boyd's great-great-grandfather may be evocative of the forced nature of his move from Pentecost Island. Taken away from his land and his culture, the tie to place by Boyd's generation would be loose but still felt. The forced movement of people from Pentecost Island to mainland Queensland is a particularly Australian

¹⁹⁷ Moore, "J.W. Beattie Photographs."

¹⁹⁸ Dani Rule, "A modern take on primitive," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 7, 2013. <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/a-modern-take-on-primitive-20131206-2yuzq.html>.

story and again a type of interaction with extreme power differences that echoes Aboriginal experiences.

This lack of narrative, despite the information provided by Boyd, makes this work especially challenging to consider in relation to Aboriginality. Langton considers Aboriginality in terms of socialization as “the subjective experience of both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue.”¹⁹⁹ *Untitled* could seem almost to subvert a reading in relation to Aboriginality by the lack of text within the work and the title. However, the context suggests intercultural dialogue by Pentecost Islanders, Aboriginal peoples, and non-Aboriginal Australians. Boyd is a product of this exchange and movement, like Ah Kee, as member of Aboriginal peoples across Australia. The lack of text, as well as the descriptive title, opens the piece up more for consideration. Instead of Vanuatu, this location could be the Australian mainland, and these shadowy figures could be Aboriginal rather than Pentecost Islander. As with much of Boyd’s work, Aboriginality—the concern for identity and understanding of one’s self in relation to the world—is central.

In this sense, Boyd’s work returns us to a consideration of Carrie Mae Weems’ work. Without knowing exactly where on the island his grandfather was from and lacking specific photographs of him, this piece could perhaps be seen as a memento, a displaced memory that was integral yet removed from current time. As the figures are obscured, any one of them or even none could be related to Boyd. Weems appropriated 19th century photographs of slaves in her 1996 work *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. Lacking photographs of distant ancestors, most likely because of the legacy of slavery, Weems invited the viewer to consider that these abject bodies were the ancestors of people today, and more importantly, they were

¹⁹⁹ Langton, “Well I heard it on the radio and saw it on the television...”, 31.

people in and of themselves. The portraiture style of Weems' photographs seems to have much in common with Andrew and Ah Kee's works; however, conceptually, Boyd has very similar ends. Without a record of his great-great-grandfather's being taken from the island, the exact village that he was from is unknowable, as unknowable as the exact origins of the African ancestors of black Americans today. Rather than reclaim these bodies by putting their faces to the forefront, Boyd denies the voyeurism of the contemporary viewer.

CONCLUSION

The pieces I have explored by Brook Andrew, Vernon Ah Kee, and Daniel Boyd concern Aboriginality as one form of identity making. Their shared basis in ethnographic or ethnographic-looking photography demonstrates these artists' common concern for history and contemporaneity. The source photographs have a history and temporality distinct from the later artworks, yet in selecting and reusing these images, a recuperative strategy is at play. The original photographs, like the history of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, are loaded. In the case of *Sexy and Dangerous*, Andrew forces viewers to consider stereotype, but also the agency of the sitter, who to be dangerous was never entirely powerless. In Vernon Ah Kee's triptychs, the past connects with the future through the missing link of Ah Kee himself. The Aboriginality at stake is not without interaction with non-Aboriginal peoples as "blackfellas" are distinguished as such from "whitefellas." However, the pride of the assertion "Blackfella me" suggests that this new future generation feels and expresses a pride in Aboriginal heritage and in having ancestral roots around Australia. The pride is rooted in an acknowledgment of historical degradation and othering, but it does not diminish the future Ah Kee sees in his own children. Lastly, Daniel Boyd forces us to consider that Aboriginality can also be understood through other Indigenous heritages. Although Aboriginal peoples' experiences are unique, they had and have common connections with Indigenous peoples from areas near Australia. Boyd's Vanuatu roots do not diminish his Aboriginality because Aboriginality is more than just ethnic or group identity.

Throughout her essay on the Australian film industry, Marcia Langton considers the ways in which Aboriginality can be both enacted and created.²⁰⁰ After pointing out the fluidity of this identity, which I quoted from the conclusion above, she states that Aboriginality can be enacted by experiences between Aboriginal peoples, through stereotype of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people, and finally through actual interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.²⁰¹ Although these new layers of intersubjectivity are contradictory to her earlier discussion, they relate rather succinctly to the artists' enactments of Aboriginality. Andrew acts upon stereotype, but in viewing the work, his piece serves as a new form of engagement to question the stereotype through the piece he creates. Ah Kee, while referencing an interaction between his Aboriginal family and a white Australian anthropologist, suggests a future of Aboriginality of and for Aboriginal peoples. He asserts pride in his heritage to his children and through them to an audience who may be white, but also may be Aboriginal. It can serve as a call to action, for other Aboriginal peoples to declare, "Blackfella me [too!]." Finally, Boyd references the painful slave history in Australia, a relatable experience for the descendants of slavery globally. The enactment is between Aboriginal, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The history should not be lost because it is not acknowledged.

This paper began with the Carrie Mae Weems series, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. The crying expresses the physical action of displaying sadness and sorrow for how the world that has been has led us to the world in which we now live. Andrew, Ah Kee, and Boyd might not cry, but like Weems, they force us to reconsider lost or forgotten images. Contemporary Aboriginal artists, like contemporary African American artists, have the agency and platform to point out historical injustices. By reusing ethnographic and archival

²⁰⁰ Langton, "Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...", 1-86.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 81.

photography, contemporary viewers are not privileged with forgetting. Instead, we look at Ah Kee's ancestors' faces, an Aboriginal chief and an idyllic scene on Pentecost Island, and we remember that these distinct moments stand in for a whole history of maltreatment, racism and othering of Aboriginal peoples.

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ILLUSTRATED FIGURES



Figure 1.

Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, 1995-1996
Chromogenic color prints with sand-blasted text on glass, 3 of 36 Toned Prints
28 works: 26 3/4 x 22 in, 4 works: 22 x 26 3/4 in, 2 works: 43 1/2 x 33 1/2 in



Figure 2.

Leah King-Smith, *Untitled 11* from *Patterns of Connection*, 1991-1992
Stereotype photograph, 131.4 x 105 cm



Figure 3.
Rover Thomas, Aboriginal Flag, 1971

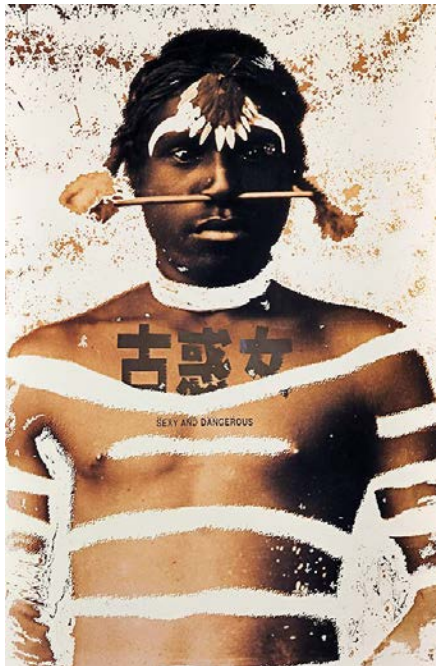


Figure 4.
Brook Andrew, *Sexy and Dangerous*, 1996
Computer generated image on synthetic polymer resin, 146 x 95.6 cm

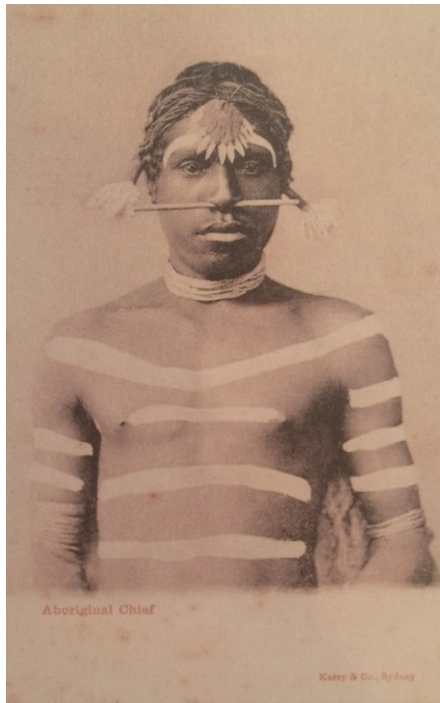


Figure 5.
Charles Kerry, *Aboriginal Chief*, 1888
Carte de visite

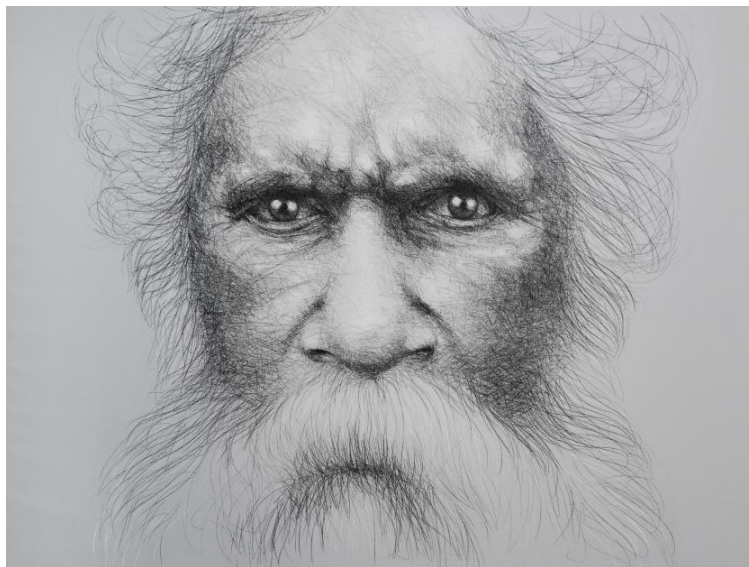


Figure 6.
Vernon Ah Kee, *Ideas of Barak*, 2011
Acrylic, charcoal, crayon on canvas, 180 x 240 cm



Figure 7.
Talma & Co. Barak preparing his corroboree painting for the Governor Sir Henry Loch,
1895, Photograph, 16.6 x 12.1 cm



Figure 8.
Vernon Ah Kee, *Neither Courage nor Pride*, 2006
Acrylic, charcoal, crayon on canvas, each 180 x 240 cm



Figure 9.
Vernon Ah Kee, *See Me*, 2006
Acrylic, charcoal, crayon on canvas, each 180 x 240 cm

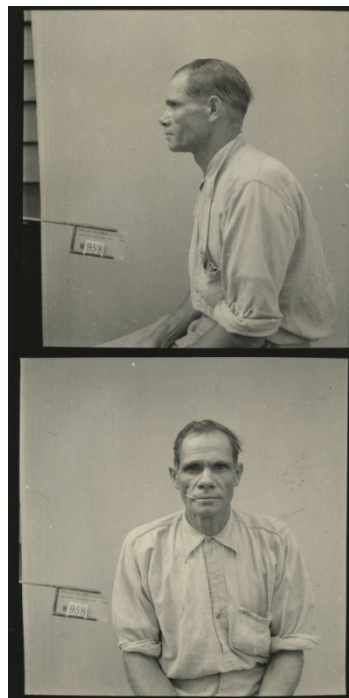


Figure 10.
Norman Tindale, *George Sibley, Palm Island, 25 October 1938*, 1938
Photograph, Courtesy of the Tindale Genealogical Collection



Figure 11.
Daniel Boyd, *Untitled*, 2014
Oil, Pastel, and Archival Glue on Linen, 315 x 223.5cm



Figure 12.
Daniel Boyd, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here*, 2006
Oil on canvas, 226 x 276 x3.5cm



Figure 13.
E. Fox Phillips, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay*, 1770, 1902
Oil on Canvas, 192.2 x 265.4 cm



Figure 14.
Daniel Boyd, *Untitled (HM)*, 2013
Oil and archival glue on linen, 245 x 167.5cm



Figure 15.
J.W. Beattie, *The beach at Lamalaïa, Raga - New Hebrides* from series *The scenery and peoples of the islands in the South and Western Pacific*, 1906
Sepia Toned Photograph, 15.2 x 20.1 cm



Figure 16.
Daniel Boyd, *Untitled* (Detail), 2014
Oil, Pastel, and Archival Glue on Linen, 315 x 223.5cm