

# Impact

Michael Cook

Fiona Foley

Taloi Havini

Angela Tiatia



9 May – 30 June 2017

## **Impact**

The word impact has a multiplicity of meanings; as a noun it gives a sense of force, of collision, the action of one object hitting another, or the powerful effect that something has on a situation or person. As a verb it describes the act of striking, or having an influence on something or someone. Whilst the word has connotations of devastation or violence, it is also more ambiguous, inviting interrogations of infiltration, sway or power. An apt description of the central theme of Impact: colonisation.

Colonisation is a process in which one people claim sovereignty over another, asserting control over not only their lives and lands, but the resources of the land which become viewed as commodities. Indigenous peoples' relationships to that land become irrelevant in the pursuit of capital. Land is remade into ownable property, from which Indigenous peoples need to be separated, for while they and their creation stories connect them to the land colonisers can never truly own it<sup>1</sup>. As a member of the colonised peoples of this country, in my experience colonisation is not an event of the past, we do not exist within a 'post-colonial period'; it is happening now right across the world, and Indigenous peoples, lands and rights actively continue to be colonised.



Within the wider exploration of the impacts of colonisation, narratives of dispossession, isolation, conflict, gender, race, climactic devastation, and consumerism accompany the discussions. The four artists in this exhibition, Michael Cook, Fiona Foley, Taloi Havini and Angela Tiatia all explore variations of these themes. Very few Blackfellas would struggle to relate strongly with one or more of these works.

A certain stillness can be sensed in the works as the art pauses to ask questions of the viewer: What if we stopped doing it like this? What are you prepared to give up to change things? Are we really prepared to lose this? In this brief sojourn the artworks demand action. Please stop removing our children. Please stop mining our lands. Please stop shattering our families. Please stop destroying our environments. They ask the viewer to reconsider these concerns from a human perspective, instead of through the politics of debate or measurement. These are not theoretical questions for the people experiencing these impacts; they are real, every day.

Whilst a sense of loss is emphatically felt from each work, within that experience there is also resilience. Although some may refer to Indigenous cultures as having been 'lost', this is not the case; through colonisation Indigenous peoples' lives were

dispersed, their lands were forcibly taken, and relationships purposefully shattered<sup>2</sup>. They were not 'lost'. Our families and ancestors faced these forces with incredible and beautiful resilience, and they resisted them, continuing to pass on Knowledges and practices often in hidden ways until it was safe for them to re-emerge. Indigenous Lore and Knowledges are grounded in Country, they are built on relationships, not only with people or objects, but with the cosmos, ideas and everything around us. Our Knowledges and Lore remain intact as living relational practices<sup>3, 4</sup>. Until the land and descendants of the land no longer exist, our culture always was, always will be. Not lost, just sleeping, concealed, waiting.

At the other end of colonising is decolonising. Michael Yellow Bird describes decolonisation as "creating and consciously using various strategies to liberate oneself from, or adapt to, or survive in oppressive conditions"<sup>5</sup>. He goes on to say decolonisation is the restoration of "cultural practices, thinking, beliefs and values that were taken away or abandoned but are still relevant or necessary for survival and wellbeing. It is the birth and use of new ideas, thinking, technologies and lifestyles that contribute to the advancement and empowerment of Indigenous peoples". Within these works are acts of recognition of the impacts



of colonisation and the feelings of loss from each artist – yet despite these effects they also continue to tell their stories, in doing so propose resistance, cultural reclamation and restoration.

The very act of art making states: we are here, we are strong, we have voices. And in this manner these four artists are themselves on the decolonising journey of liberation and survival.

---

Danièle Hromek is a Budawang woman of the Yuin nation, a spatial designer and artist, and a lecturer and doctoral candidate at UTS writing on the Indigenous experience and comprehension space.

#### Notes:

I write the above with thanks to the following, and countless other, Indigenous knowledge holders, thinkers, makers and doers. I am especially grateful to my ancestors, who did whatever it took in order that I could be here to write this today. I am only here by standing on their shoulders. I carry their stories.

<sup>1</sup> Tuck, E. & Yang, K.W. 2012, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-40.

Eve Tuck is Unangax and an enrolled member of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Alaska, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Behrendt, Larissa in Pihama, L., Behrendt, L. & Lee-Morgan, J. 2016, 'Indigenous Theory and Methodology Workshops', personal communication, Sydney, NSW, Australia.

Larissa Behrendt is a Eualeyai/Kamillaro woman.

<sup>3</sup> Moreton-Robinson, A. & Walter, M. 2009, 'Indigenous Methodologies in Social Research', in A. Bryman (ed.), *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, VIC, Australia.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson is from the Goenpul tribe, part of the Quandamooka nation on Stradbroke Island in Queensland, Australia. Maggie Walter is descendant of the trawlawoolway people from North Eastern Tasmania, Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, S. 2001, 'What is an Indigenous Research Methodology', *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 175-9.

Shawn Wilson is Opaskwayak Cree, from Manitoba, Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Yellow Bird, M. 2008, 'Postscript - Terms of Endearment: a Brief Dictionary for Decolonizing Social Work with Indigenous Peoples', in M. Gray, J. Coates & M. Yellow Bird (eds), *Indigenous social work around the world towards culturally relevant education and practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT.

Michael Yellow Bird is citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes, from west-central North Dakota, USA.



List of works:

Michael Cook

*Mother*, 2016

Single-channel video, sound, 1:47 mins

Michael Cook

*Mother (Seesaw)*, 2016

Inkjet print on paper, edition 4/8

Michael Cook

*Mother (Rocking Horse)*, 2016

Inkjet print on paper, edition 4/8

Michael Cook

*Mother (Bicycle)*, 2016

Inkjet print on paper, edition 4/8

Courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer and  
THIS IS NO FANTASY + Dianne Tanzer Gallery

Fiona Foley

*Vexed*, 2013

Single channel video, sound, 13:18 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer

Taloi Havini

*Habitat: Konawiru*, 2016

Single channel video, sound, 3:43 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer

Angela Tiatia

*Tuvalu*, 2016

Three channel video, sound, 20:32 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery





Cover: Michael Cook, *Mother (Seesaw)*, 2016.  
Inkjet print on paper, edition 4/8

Top left: Taloi Havini, *Habitat: Konawiru*, 2016.  
Single channel video, sound, 3:43 mins (detail)

Bottom left: Michael Cook, *Mother (Rocking Horse)*,  
2016. Inkjet print on paper, edition 4/8

Below: Fiona Foley, *Vexed*, 2013. Single channel  
video, sound, 13:18 mins (detail)

Overleaf: Angela Tiatia, *Tuvalu*, 2016.  
Three channel video, sound, 20:32 mins (detail)



*Impact*

Michael Cook, Fiona Foley,  
Taloi Havini, Angela Tiatia

9 May – 30 June 2017

*Impact* is a Cairns Regional Gallery touring exhibition, originally presented in partnership with Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, 2016.

Catalogue essay: Danièle Hromek

Published by UTS ART,  
University of Technology Sydney

ISBN: 978-0-9942288-7-1


UTS Gallery  
UTS Building 6  
Level 4, 702 Harris Street  
Ultimo NSW 2007

Monday–Friday 12–6  
Saturday 12–4  
Free Admission

[art.uts.edu.au](http://art.uts.edu.au)

 [utsart](#)

 [utsart](#)

 [uts\\_art](#)

