

OCTOPUS 18
MOTHER TONGUE
CURATED BY
KIMBERLEY MOULTON

JOI ARCAND
NAKIA CADD
MEGAN COPE
VICKI COUZENS
LISA HILLI
KIRSTEN LYTTLE

Mother Tongue is presented on the lands of
the Woi Wurrung Peoples, Always Was
Always Will Be Aboriginal land.

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Foreword

Gertrude is proud to be present the 2018 iteration of the *Octopus*, a series of exhibitions supporting curatorial experimentation, this year contributed by Yorta-Yorta woman Kimberley Moulton. *Octopus 18: Mother Tongue* draws focus on the practices of First Nation female artists to recognise their vital ongoing political, cultural and social contributions. In spite of all hurdles, and there have been and remain many, the commitment of these artists to represent their cultures through the lens of womanhood, remains not one of choice, but of responsibility. If the future is female, and I believe this to be true and just, then it might rightly be suggested that the future of agitating for Indigenous rights may be a shared and collective responsibility driven by strong female voices.

As an exhibition series, *Octopus* has been and continues to be Gertrude's embedded platform to support curatorial experimentation and extend new possibilities in exhibition making, each year engaging a leading Australian-based curator to develop a project. In 2018, Gertrude has been honoured to work with Kimberley to present *Octopus 18: Mother Tongue*, expanding on from her work as Senior Curator of South Eastern Aboriginal Collections at Melbourne Museum, independent curator and a prolific supporter and advocate for the advancement of Indigenous cultures worldwide.

Mother Tongue has been assembled and commissioned around the power and capacity of language to

embody and communicate complex ideas, histories, geographies and community matrixes. In many traditional First Nation communities, language has been predominantly an oral tradition, passed down from generation to generation. In many cultures ravaged by processes of colonisation, these traditions have faced persecution through the historically systemic banning of Indigenous languages. The result of this tragic suppression over generations has been to, almost irreparably, hinder the transference of cultural knowledge of the languages within which it is embedded. *Mother Tongue* takes as its focus this trauma and seeks to positivise the reclamation of language as central to better connecting our futures and histories.

Gertrude would like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to all of the participating artists, Joi Arcand, Nakia Cadd, Megan Cope, Vicki Couzens, Lisa Hilli and Kirsten Lyttle, for their rigorous and powerful contributions; to Kimberley Moulton for her insightful conception and critically engaged development of *Mother Tongue*; and to Jon Broome and his team at Proclaim, who have been the generous principle supporter of the *Octopus* series since 2001. *Ngoon godgin. Whakawhetai ki a koe. Kinana'skomitina'wa'w.* Thank you.

Mark Feary
Artistic Director
Gertrude Contemporary

Lisa Hilli with Julia Mage'au Gray & Sunameke
Identify Me, 2016
video, 4 min 5 sec
Courtesy of the artist
Image courtesy of Christo Crocker



Mother Tongue

Kimberley Moulton

What are the languages you speak? Does it come from the country you were born, is it the language of the colonisers or First Peoples? Was your language taken away or forced to the tongue of your Ancestors by invasion and plunder? Many layers of knowledge, power, place, history and loss are embedded in the languages we speak, perform and expressed through the physical.

When we consider language in Melbourne we must look to the First Peoples of Australia. Locally we must acknowledge the Woi Wurrung Peoples whose land this exhibition is situated on and the Kulin Nation who make up the five language groups of Melbourne and surrounding areas who have been here, forever. We must also step out of the Western systems of learning, the English and colonial understandings of what language is. For tens of thousands of years the languages of this country have been spoken, sung and drawn into the land on our bodies and our cultural objects. The language defines country - over 250¹ languages were spoken pre-invasion with Victoria holding 38 different language groups, each of which had various dialects that connected a person to their nation, boundaries and your kinships ties to each other and your neighbours.

First Nations knowledge of how language connects to body, land and sky is not limited to that of Australia and the artists in *Mother Tongue* represent knowledges from Gunditjmara/Kirrae Whurrong, (Western Victoria), Dja Dja Wurrung (Central and North West Victoria) Yorta Yorta (North East Victoria) Aotearoa (New Zealand), Turtle Island (Canada) and Papua New Guinea.

Language is an intrinsic part of self-identity and expression, it grounds us in our cultures and is part of the continuum of cultures against the invasions of First Peoples lands. For some, language also represents the removal and attempted assimilation of First Nations peoples worldwide, the absence of fluency within the landscape and the curriculum makes visible the attempt to destroy that cultural connection.

Many First Peoples are in the process of reviving and reclaiming language and artists play an important role, in not only integrating language in their work both working to revive and share this cultural knowledge, but to critique of the attempted Linguicide (the death of a language). Bringing First Nations works that feature and consider language into the white cube of contemporary art institutions is integral to challenging the canon of what is considered for these spaces and what should belong in a museum or 'cultural' centre. First Nations work even if contemporary in production and discourse often gets questioned in contemporary spaces and assigned to museums or the historic past with notions of authenticity and the western art canon determining what space is white (I mean right) for them.

Mother Tongue features six First Nations female artists that speak to forms of language and the modes it manifests. Looking to and beyond the oral form of communication the artists re-inscribe their Mother Tongue into the work and consider language both as a sense of cultural identity and what it means for the country they live and work.

Megan Cope
Wurrung, 2013
projection on country
Courtesy of the artist and This Is No Fantasy,
Melbourne
Image courtesy of Daniel Gardezabal

Megan Cope is a Quandamooka woman (North Stradbroke Island) in South East Queensland. Her site-specific sculptural installations, video work and paintings investigate issues relating to identity, the environment and mapping practices. In Megan's projection on her country she illuminates the traditional name of this area in Jandai Language which is called *Bummiera* (2018) also known as Brown Lake. Making visible what has been spoken for thousands of years, Bummiera is a reminder that Sovereignty exists beyond the coloniser's names.

The Sovereignty that has not been ceded is strongly represented in the work of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory woman Joi Arcand. In her series *Here On Future Earth* (2009) Joi addresses the absence of her Cree language in the built environment by inserting it onto buildings, billboards and buses in a future imaginary space. Photographs of a sleepy country town in Turtle Island now visually hold the language of its First Peoples, it is a statement of activism but it shouldn't be, this is a rectification of what is right and who should be the authority.

Photographer and weaver Kirsten Lyttle is a Melbourne based who's Iwi (tribe) is Waikato, (NgatiTahinga, Tainui A Whiro). Kirsten's work *Tangata Whenua/Not Tangata Whenua* (2018) is a poetic mediation of acknowledging her place as a visitor on the Wurundjeri Country alongside her Ancestry, *'In Te Reo Maori (the Maori language), tangata whenua, describes the local indigenous people born of the land (literally of the placenta of the land). My ancestral homeland, where I am tangata*

whenua, is Aotearoa (New Zealand). As a Maori-Australian artist I am part of a diaspora; separated from the land of my ancestors by ocean. The traditional custodians of the land on which I live are the Wurundjeri people of the greater Kulin Nation. I live, work and make beside Merri Creek in Northcote, a site of significance for the Wurundjeri. This series of handwoven photographic prints attempts to respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, the beauty of this place and the knowledge that I am not tangata whenua here'.²

Through artists acknowledging place and the diasporic flow of language and knowledges between First Nations peoples there is also a critique of the attempt to silence, and the resilience to revive.

The works of Lisa Hilli weaves a language between photography, video and textiles and considers both the resistance to the institutions that hold her peoples cultural material and the attempt to silence their voices. In her work *Identity Me* (2015) Lisa attempts to resist and liberate the 'individual and collective identity from the confines of museum and Western categorisation'. This multi-layered work deconstructs notions of the black female body, the institution and voice, *'It is not uncommon to find Pacific objects of beauty and significance in museums and galleries far from the place that they originate. This work also aims to replicate a similar experience of discovering objects within museum displays or stores, but inherently being aware that something isn't right or it's out of context. The audio effect of white noise alludes to the sound of the distant ocean, yet is used to signify the frustration and*

discomfort of being silenced and not having a voice or platform to present an alternate perspective of your own culture. The metaphorical use of the frame represents psychological and historical references to the exotification of female Pacific bodies through photography and defiantly returning the gaze'.³

The recovery of language is an important practice to First Peoples of Victoria. The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages⁴ has been the peak body for language revival in the state since 1994 and the research, education for schools and publications on language have seen the revival of language rise.

Artist Vicki Couzens has been integral to this revival for the state and in her language of the Gunditjmarra/Kirrae Whurrong peoples of the Western District. For close to four decades Vicki has played a pivotal role in the revival of cultural practice and language working both in the cultural continuation of possum cloak making and language revival and sharing her culture in contemporary arts space through her painting, installation and video. Vicki's work *Kooramookyan leerpeen-possum cloak song* (2018) integrates oral language, the written, the tangible and a possum skin cloak. Through audio soundscape Vicki sings to us the words of the possum song, that is written onto the wall. The gold line talks of women making a cloak and floating next to it is the cloak of possum skins, not yet with designs, it is like a book with blank pages, ready for the stories to be told and scratched into it.

The language of our Ancestors is a part of our identity and through the passing down of story and memory,

emerging Gunditjmarra, Yorta-Yorta, DjaDja Wurrung and Bunitj artist Nakia Cadd pays homage to her Matriarchs. The tins punctured with letters and kitchen cupboard is inspired by a story she was told by her Koorrookee (Nan) of her days living on the mission. The glowing language alludes to the Ancestral past that is fired within Nakia today and who strengthens and nourishes her.

Mother Tongue looks to meditate on past traditional notions of language and considers how the materiality of cultural practice and new media can communicate thousands of generations of knowledge. It is through these works we consider the First Peoples languages and why it is important to revive and retain, for the future and for the now.

1. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australian-languages>
2. Text from Kirsten Lyttle 2018.
3. <https://lisahilli.com/home-new/art2/identify-me/>
4. <http://www.vaclang.org.au/>

Thank you to the staunch women artists in this show, proudly continuing their language and honouring their Ancestors. It is because of you the future will have culture and strength. It has been an empowering experience working with Gertrude Contemporary for the *Octopus* series which is in its seventeenth year. Being the second First Nations curator I would like to acknowledge Yamatji Curator Stephen Gilchrist in being the first and paving the way for me and others in this space. Thank you to Mark and the Gertrude Contemporary team for all of your hard work and for working to ensure First Nations artists are represented in the gallery.

Joi Arcand

Nakia Cadd

Megan Cope

Vicki Couzens

Lisa Hilli

Kirsten Lyttle



Joi Arcand
Amber Motors, 2018
Here On Future Earth series
Inkjet glicee on cotton rag
Image courtesy of the artist

Nakia Cadd
*Koorrookee (grandmother), Ngeerang (Mother), Wanoon
Ngeerang (Aunty), Kakay (sister)*, 2018
cupboard, tin cans, tealights
Courtesy of the artist
Image courtesy of Christo Crocker

*Koorrookee (grandmother), Ngeerang (mother), Wanoon
Ngeerang (aunty), Kakay (sister)* is inspired by a story Nakia
was told by her Koorrookee (Nan). This story took place on
Gunditjmara country, South-West Victoria in a little town called
Greenvale. Her great, great grandmother, Mary Murray Rose, lived in
Greenvale where she would often be visited by the welfare. The
welfare were the people who would take away the children. But to
make sure that didn't happen, grandma Mary would trick them to
thinking the cupboards were full, by reusing the cans and filling
them up.

Nakia explains: 'Nutrients from food give us energy and strength, we
know that. But do we know or even recognise the people
who strengthen us? Those who've raised and grounded us as
individuals? These cans are not only a sign of strength and resilience
but recognise the women in my life who've loved, protected,
strengthened and supported me. This story is important to me
because it displays strength and survival. It showed me how strong
and smart my Elders and ancestors were during and post European
invasion. "Because of her we can" and in fact because of Grandma
Mary, I am here.'

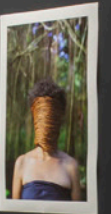




Bummeiera

Megan Cope
Bummeiera, 2018,
projection on country
Courtesy of the artist and This is No Fantasy, Melbourne.
Image courtesy of Christo Crocker

Bummeiera is the Quandamooka name for Brown Lake in Jandai Languge, the mother tongue of Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island).



Kooramook-ee yan-an-wan!

weereentya weerangoo!
weereentya weerangoo!

parta-noong peem!
parta-noong peem!

maaran pama kooramook

maaran weeraka kooramook

thanambool karpa meeyt pooroyt

mayapa karraparr kooweeya meerreeng

mayapa kooramookyan

kooramookyan yoo-wa-ye

kooramookyan wampa-ye boopop-ye

kooramookyan marn

kooramookyan karndamarn

kooramookyan woorkngan

kooramookyan mooraka

kooramookyan karoopa

mayapa peeneeyt

Kooramook-too kooramook-too

kooramook-too kooramook-too



Vicki Couzens

Kooramookyan leerpeen (possum cloak song), 2018,
Possum Skin Cloak, kooramookyan leerpeen possum
song (audio and text)

Courtesy of the artist

Image courtesy of Christo Crocker



Lisa Hilli with Julia Mage'au Gray & Sunameke
Identify Me, 2016
video, 4 min 5 sec, and
In a Bind, 2015
photographic print
Courtesy of the artist
Image courtesy of Daniel Gardezabal



Kirsten Lytle
Tangata Whenua/Not Tangata Whenua series, 2018,
Digital print on Kodak premium lustre
Courtesy of the artist
Image courtesy of Christo Crocker

Curator and Artist Biographies

Kimberley Moulton

Kimberley Moulton is a Yorta-Yorta woman with a curatorial and writing practice which has engaged with many museums and contemporary art spaces. She is Senior Curator of South Eastern Aboriginal Collections for Museums Victoria at Melbourne Museum, focusing on the intersection of contemporary First Peoples art and cultural material in museums and de-colonial methodologies. Prior to this, Kimberley was Project Officer and Curator at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum between 2009 and 2015, and an Assistant Curator for the *First Peoples* exhibition at Melbourne Museum in 2013. Alongside her institutional curatorial roles, she has independently curated: *where the water moves, where it rests: the art of Djambawa Marawili*, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, Charlottesville, USA (2015); *State of The Nation*, Counihan Gallery, Brunswick (2016); *A Call From The West: The Continuing Legacy of Mr William Cooper*, Footscray Community Arts Centre (2016). She was also a co-curator for Artbank Sydney Social Day 2016, *RECENTRE: sisters*, City Of Melbourne Gallery (2017); and co-curator of *Next Matriarch*, ACE Open Adelaide and TARNANTHI Festival (2017). Kimberley has written extensively nationally and internationally on First Peoples art and culture and is an alumna of the National Gallery of Australia's Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Leadership Program 2010, British Council ACCELERATE program (2013), National Gallery of Australia International Curatorial Fellow at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Collection (2015), and a Victorian Curatorial Representative for the First Nations Exchange Program United States of America 2016, at the Venice Biennale (2017) and First Nations Exchange Canada (2017).

Joi Arcand

Joi Arcand is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory, currently residing in Ottawa, Ontario. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 2005. Recent solo exhibitions have been presented at Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff; ODD Gallery, Dawson City, Yukon; Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon; Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon; Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina; Gallery 101, Ottawa. Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including at the Winnipeg Art Gallery; Karsh-Masson Art Gallery, Ottawa; McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton; The Center for Craft, Creativity and Design, Asheville, North Carolina; Woodland School at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal; Ottawa Art Gallery; PAVED Arts, Saskatoon; and Grunt Gallery, Vancouver. Joi has been artist in residence at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon; OCAD University; Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art; Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity; and Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, Dawson City, Yukon. She has served as chair of the board of directors for PAVED Arts in Saskatoon and was the co-founder of the Red Shift Gallery, a contemporary aboriginal art gallery in Saskatoon. She was founder and editor of the Indigenous art magazine, *kimiwan* (2012-2014), and most recently curated *Language of Puncture* at Gallery 101, Ottawa.

Nakia Cadd

Nakia Cadd is a proud Gunditjmarra, Yorta-Yorta, DjaDja Wurrung and Bunitj woman who grew up in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Her practice is mainly drawing and she creates strong designs that connect with her family lines and landscapes of her Countries. Nakia is interested in creating new ranges of babywear for community and excited about motherhood influencing her future artworks.

Megan Cope

Megan Cope is a Quandamooka woman (North Stradbroke Island) in South East Queensland. Her site-specific sculptural installations, video work and paintings investigate issues relating to identity, the environment and mapping practices. Megan's work often resists prescribed notions of Aboriginality and become psychogeographies across various material outcomes that challenge the grand narrative of 'Australia' as well as our sense of time and ownership in a settler colonial state. Most recently Megan was a finalist for the *Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize* and also undertook a residency in Paris with the Australian Print Workshop for an upcoming project titled *French Connections*. Her large scale sculptural installations have been curated into three major national survey exhibitions, *The National*, 2017, Art Gallery of NSW; *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, 2017, National Gallery of Australia; and *Sovereignty*, 2016, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

In 2016 Megan was commissioned to create new work for *Frontier Imaginaries*, QUT Art Museum and Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem. She also exhibited alongside Tracey Moffatt at Artspace in *Bereft*, a solo exhibition of sculptural and video work in 2016. In 2016, she was curated into a number of important institutional exhibitions including *The Fraud Complex*, West Space; *Another Day in Paradise*, Campbelltown Arts Centre; *Proppanow*, Footscray Arts Centre; and *Revisoning Histories* at Bundoora Homestead. Cope is represented by This Is No Fantasy, Melbourne and is a member of Aboriginal art collective *proppaNOW*.

Vicki Couzens

Vicki Couzens is a prominent artist from the Western Districts of Victoria. She is a descendant of the Gunditjmarra and Kirrae Whurrong clans and plays an active role in promoting the culture and language of her people. For close to four decades Vicki has played a pivotal role in the revival of cultural practice and language working both in the cultural continuation of possum cloak making and language revival and the contemporary arts space sharing her culture through painting, installation and video. A number of Vicki's works have been acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria and various Australian and international museums and galleries. Additionally, she has played an important role in major public art projects including *birrarrung wilam* on the bank of the Yarra River in Melbourne and a central role, as Artistic Director, of the state wide *Possum Skin Cloak* project which was presented during the Melbourne Commonwealth Games in 2006. Recently Vicki has been commissioned for a major public artwork for RMIT and showed in *Sovereignty*, ACCA 2016; *A Lightness of Spirit is the Measure of Happiness*, ACCA, 2018; and *From Will to Form*, Tarrawarra Biennale 2018.

Lisa Hilli

Lisa Hilli is a Narm (Melbourne) based artist whose practice investigates gender and body adornment through photography, video and textiles. Awarded with a Masters of Fine Art by Research from RMIT University. Lisa's works have been presented at the Centre for Contemporary Photography; Queensland Art Gallery and Melbourne Museum. Internationally her video and photographic works have been presented at Bozar Centre for Fine Arts Brussels and Framer Framed Tolhuistuin Amsterdam. Lisa is a 2018 Australian War Memorial commissioned artist supported by the Australian Government's ANZAC Centenary Arts and Culture Fund. In 2019 she will be artist in residence at the Helsinki International Artist Residency Program. Lisa's recent solo project *Trade & Transformation* was exhibited at Blak Dot Gallery.

Kirsten Lyttle

Kirsten Lyttle is a Melbourne-based artist and researcher who is of Maori descent. Her Iwi (tribe) is from Waikato, (NgatiTahinga, Tainui A Whiro). Born in Sydney, she spent her childhood in Wellington, New Zealand; and grew up in Melbourne, where she is still based. She has exhibited widely in Australia and internationally including at Indonesian Contemporary Art Network, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Galleria 291 Est. Rome, Italy; and Oedipus Rex Gallery, Auckland. In 2015 she went to Canada as the artist in residence as part of the *RMIT/University of Lethbridge, Indigenous Residency Gushul Studio*, Blaimore, Canada. She is currently a PhD candidate at Deakin University, where she also teaches photography in the School of Community and Creative Arts.

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Octopus 2018: Mother Tongue
Curated by Kimberley Moulton
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