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**In the Midst of the Breakers**

On his journey Joseph Banks witnessed what we now call

surfing and described it as follows;

***"In the midst of the breakers 10 or 12 Indians were swimming who whenever a surf broke near them divd under it with infinite ease, rising up on the other side; but with their chief amusement was carried on by the stern of an old canoe, with this before them they swam out as far as the outermost breach, then one or two would get into it and opposing the blunt end to the breaking wave were hurried in with incredible swiftness…….. We stood admiring this scene for full half an hour, in which time no one of the actors attempted to come ashore but all seemd most highly entertained with their strange diversion."***

This exhibition displays artists who produce work in the Australian landscape and has been organised in response to the exhibition ***Joseph Banks: A Great Endeavour*** (Feb 14th – May 11th 2014) which has been made possible by a grant from the *Heritage Lottery Fund* and is on show in the adjacent Collection museum.

The artists in this exhibition create artwork in a political environment where the Australian landscape cannot be divorced from its contested history.

The notions of land ownership, rights of use and spiritual landscapes are still at the forefront of Australian post-colonial politics and relationships with indigenous people.

Both artists use the movement of the human body, and the rituals in sport to explore personal and cultural relationships with the Australian hinterlands. The exhibition draws connections between the notions of the explorer discovering new lands, embarking on journeys through unknown terrain, and the sportsman discovering new routes through the landscape.

The video works in this show allow us to see the vast savage beauty of the Australian landscape but also questions who, if anyone, claims rights or attempts control.

Both works are being represented in The Usher Gallery after being presented in the Australian pavilion, Venice Biennale 2009.

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**LARGE ROOM *Cant Chant***

 **Vernon Ah Kee**

 Three channel digital video 2009

Ah Kee's work *Cant Chant* looks at surfing to bring up issues in modern Australian culture. Once viewed by Joseph Banks in the 1700s as a beautiful spectacle undertaken by aboriginal peoples, surfing has in modern times come to stand for something completely different. In today's Australia surfing has a hidden side of overtly laddish or ' bra boy' culture, mainly white surf gangs have in recent years made aboriginal Australians feel unwelcome in an environment which was once theirs. Ah Kee as an aboriginal artist looks at the parts of Australian culture where aboriginal faces and voices are hidden from view and asks why this is the case.

The surf board in the video is knows as a dead board, it has been waterlogged and no longer floats.  The destruction of the boards, some covered in indigenous patterns, acts as a reminder of the destruction or removal of aboriginal culture and its struggle to find recognition in modern Australia.

Ah Kee takes on iconic subjects such as the beach and casts a critical eye on their special role informing Australian identity.

AUSTRALIA, AS A COUNTRY, AS AN IDEA, AS AN IDEAL, AS A SOCIAL-POLITICAL SYSTEM, THINKS OF AND BELIEVES ITSELF, DESPITE ITS HISTORY OF RACISM AND EXCLUSION, TO BE ESSENTIALLY GOOD; I OF COURSE DISAGREE. THESE DRAWINGS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT ARE MY EVIDENCE.

***Vernon Ah Kee, 2004***

*Vernon Ah Kee was born in 1967 in Innisfail, Queensland, and is a member of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples. This work by Ah Kee represented Australia at the 2009 Venice Biennale in the group exhibition Once Removed.*  [Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney]

**SMALL ROOM  *Interceptor Surf Sequence***

 **Shaun Gladwell**

 Digital video 2009

The figure 'surfing' on the car triggers memories of Australian films such as Mad Max and Pricilla Queen of the Desert. Films showing the vast empty outback explored and endured, by characters who overcome and conquer the landscape. It is a representation that is at odds with the aboriginal spiritual understanding of the land.

Gladwell is interested in sports as a way of understanding the landscape around him. His art presents extreme sportsmen as explorers, taking spiritual journeys through the urban environment. Ignoring the architecture and urban planning put in place to control our flow through the city, the men and women in Gladwell's works find their own routes and move freely through the landscape.

This video work is taken from a series of filmed performances by Gladwell, all are urban experiences which have been relocated into the rural outback. It uses traditional forms of perspective from landscape painting to allow us to contemplate or lose ourselves in the outback.

How do we locate ourselves in a landscape with no boundaries? How can we feel in control in a space so empty?  Is the outback as extreme as the city?

**We have chosen this work as a counterpoint to Vernon Ah Kee's work in the next room. The two artists understand that the Australian landscape has been contested throughout history. A history of violence, oppression and disputes about whom, if anyone can claim to own a land which is sacred.**

*In 2009 Gladwell was the Australian War Memorial's official war artist, assigned to the Australian Defence Force in Afghanistan and in the Middle East.* [Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane]

