



Images:
cover:
Daniel Boyd
Governor no beard 2008
oil on paper
Purchased 2012
Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

above:
Liam Power
Land Bulk Study nos. 1-9 2013
acrylic on paper
Purchased 2013

overleaf:
Neridah Stockley
Customs House, Newcastle, Beach loudspeakers, Beach, Untitled and Tower 2011
etchings on paper
Gift of the artist 2012

All works Newcastle Art Gallery collection

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NOVOCASTRIA
10 MAY - 13 JULY 2014
NEWCASTLE ART GALLERY



Novocastria refers to the Latin *novo* (new) and *castrum* (fort or castle) and focuses particularly upon Newcastle, NSW. As a city located between coalmines, vineyards, ocean, and bushland and with a broad colonial and Indigenous history, the art developed in and around Newcastle is also unique, as is the role artists play to record, interpret, question and document the geography, history and culture of a place. The scope of works in this exhibition highlights that the Gallery collection contains some of the most important visual histories of Newcastle, played out in key areas, **Reimagining the colonial**, **The river and coal story** and **The city and the sea**.

REIMAGINING THE COLONIAL

The exhibition tells the story of an artist's legacy, with works of art by colonial storytellers such as Joseph Lycett and Richard Browne, depicting the burgeoning colony in the early 1800s. *Novocastria* also moves into the territory of the fanciful and the imagined, featuring a number of recent acquisitions by contemporary Indigenous artists such as Michael Cook and Daniel Boyd, whose appropriation of colonial European figures in their art questions the Eurocentric portrayal of colonised locations such as Newcastle in 19th century Australian art. Newcastle Art Gallery's seminal painting, Joseph Lycett's *Inner view of Newcastle* (c1818) is one such work that both uncovers a colonial outpost in its infancy, yet sets itself up for questioning by contemporary artists in the 21st century. Lycett arrived in Newcastle in 1815 as a convicted forger and was commissioned by Captain James Wallis, Commandant of Newcastle, in 1817 to document the growing settlement on the shores of Newcastle (Coal River).¹ Lycett's idealised visage of the colony in its relative infancy belies the hardened realities of Newcastle in this time, with fleeting reference to an existing Indigenous custodianship of the land.

Where Lycett's role as a convict artist was to present the burgeoning convict colony with an illusion of civility and European structure, contemporary Bidjara artist Michael Cook, usurps the figures and characters of colonisation in a series of stylised photographs. Cook's 2012 series, *Civilised* depicts male and female

figures in the colonial attire of the British, French, Dutch and Spanish. *Civilised #12* has an Indigenous protagonist adorned with Georgian era costume on a beach hoisting a Union Jack, with unbridled irony, where *Civilised #8* depicts a male figure in a traditional canoe, wearing Spanish uniform, 'landing' on a seemingly uninhabited shore. Added is delicate script citing historical records describing the Indigenous people of the region at the time written by European explorers. Where the notion of 'the noble savage' had currency in the 18th and 19th centuries, Cook further questions the validity of this in relation to his costumed protagonists.

Whilst artists such as Cook are questioning historical patriarchy and colonisation in their reinterpreted works, contemporary artist Archie Moore questions the retaining of Indigenous history and the mythologising of the ANZAC legend in a local context. In 2013 Moore was commissioned by Newcastle Art Gallery to visit Newcastle to create a body of new work and became intrigued by the site of the large KFC on Hunter Street, the former location of the Palais Theatre and a site unearthed to be an important cultural place for the Worimi and Awabakal peoples.² Moore became interested in this somewhat 'forgotten' aspect of local history and the added irony of a fast food franchise building its largest outlet in the southern hemisphere on this site. What resulted was *General Sanders vs Colonel Saunders*, a work questioning the 'prioritising' of history within Australian culture and the mythology of the ANZAC legend. Moore created a series of sculpted 'fast food' items such as



a container of fries, soft drink, and chicken from the pages of a book on the ANZAC campaign and the map of ANZAC Cove. As an Indigenous artist, Moore is questioning how one version of 'history' within Australia can have more validity than others and how the literal 'covering up' of Indigenous history and archaeology has been a major failing of Australian culture. 'Moore asks us what is a sacred site, who owns them, who has authority over them and access to them, and who assesses them for their value? In doing so, (Moore) challenges the audience to consider whether or not commercial development is of more value than a site that stood as an important symbol of a distant past'.³

THE RIVER AND COAL STORY

Emerging local artist Liam Power's large format paintings are highly sculptural works of art that through colour and shape represent the ubiquitous nature of the coal ship moving in and out of the harbour. As an everyday site to Novocastrians, these floating forms glide in and out of the harbour pulled by tugboat, where the sounds of ship's horns blasting are an ever-present part of the city's soundscape. Having focused on this subject matter in recent years, Power says,

*'Both the working harbour and the industrial areas surrounding Newcastle's historical coastline have been fundamental influences towards my painting practice. Whether it is the arch of container ships oxidised hull as it is escorted by tugs into harbour or the enamel grunge of corroded concrete and decaying architecture. The ambiguity of these isolated forms causes one to consider their intent. Totemic in structure they stand as placards for the synthetic and constructed'.*⁴

Novocastrian artist Andy Devine is also drawn to the hardened forms of the industrialised landscape in his works. His earlier series *South Gare Studies* (2010) feature gothic



and alluring night vistas of the industrial output along the Hunter River. His bitumous carborundum prints from the 2012 *Monolith* series are and an almost post-apocalyptic portrayal of the shifting forms and structures of the coal mounds on Kooragang Island. Where their existence is a highly contentious source of debate with issues like pollution and the volume of coal being mined, Devine's series have an air of high drama, foreboding and romanticism. He states,

*'The artworks are full of social and political content as well as being deeply personal explorations of the nature of dislocation and belonging, delivering what is a reflection of self. The romanticism that I find in industrial landscapes is often contrasted with the disturbing and moody atmosphere of the viewer's experience'.*⁵

Whilst Power and Devine's abstracted forms depict the activity of mining and coal commerce, they are noticeably devoid of any human presence. Noel Counihan's haunting social realist depictions of the people behind mining still resonate over 60 years after their creation in 1947.



Images:

left page:
Michael Cook
Civilised #11 2012
inkjet print on paper
Purchased 2013

Michael Cook
Civilised #6 2012
inkjet print on paper
Purchased 2013

centre page:
Archie Moore
General Sanders vs Colonel Saunders 2013
paper, repurposed book
Commissioned by Newcastle Art Gallery 2013

Andy Devine
Monolith #3 2012
carborundum intaglio on paper
Purchased 2012

right:
Noel Counihan
The cough...stone dust: The miners 1947/71
linocut on Japanese paper (a/p)
Purchased 1971

All works Newcastle Art Gallery collection

They portray key personalities of mining with titles such as *The wheeler*, *The miner*, *The cough...stone dust* and *In the shadow of disaster...the wife*, perhaps the most chilling and heartfelt of these dramatic monochromatic black and white linocut prints. These figures symbolise the fear in every miner of the dreaded 'cough' (black lung) and the eternal fear of mining disaster, a reality known all too well in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley since mining began in the early 1800s.

THE CITY AND THE SEA

Artist depictions of the growing city of Newcastle and the coastline are well documented in the Newcastle Art Gallery collection. Contemporary and local artists such as Neridah Stockley and Michael Bell continue the legacy of artists such as Margaret Olley AC, George Lambert, Shay Docking and Frank Hinder whose itinerant residencies in Newcastle, coupled with their own unique style of art making, have created some diverse readings of the beach, harbour and built environment of Newcastle.

Stockley, an Alice Springs based artist completed studies of some of the 'hidden' aspects of Newcastle, in a series of dry point images of the city completed during a residency in 2011 at The Lock Up Art Space. With each etching she presents a small 'vignette' of rooftops, the loudspeakers at Newcastle beach, the tower on The Hill and the Customs House clock. There is something of a magnetic affinity that Stockley has, despite her desert based origins, that captures the essence of Novocastrian sites known usually only to locals. Her companion works depict outlines of coal ships on the horizon, delicately celebrate the eternal presence of ships on the coastline outside Newcastle harbour. Similarly, Michael Bell's quirky illustrative response to Newcastle's Dog Beach offer a wry, tongue in cheek view of some of the areas most well-known by the city's canine population and their owners.

With work from the Gallery collection from locally and nationally significant artists, *Novocastria* is a visual mapping

of Newcastle – its geography, industrial and social heritage. It calls into question Newcastle's colonial history in relation to its enduring Indigenous heritage and the depiction of the industry and coastline that provides economic output and an ingrained attachment to the coastline for most locals. *Novocastria* also underpins Newcastle Art Gallery's enduring philosophy to represent and support artists from the region, a legacy that has been continued through the years and it is determined to pursue into the future.

Sarah Johnson
Curator

¹ John McPhee, *Joseph Lycett: Convict artist*, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney, 2006, p19

² University of Newcastle researchers and The Coal River Working Party have actively been investigating the archeological significance and cultural significance of this location to the Awabakal and Worimi peoples. Located at <http://coalriver.wordpress.com/2011/05/20/aboriginal-archaeological-report-for-former-palais-site-released/>

³ Archie Moore, Artist statement, May 2013, cited at <http://archiemoore.wordpress.com/>.

⁴ Liam Power, artist statement, *Land Bulk* series 2013, The Lock Up exhibition catalogue, March 2013, Newcastle. Source www.the.lockup.com.au and emails between the artist and Sarah Johnson Newcastle Art Gallery Curator, April 2013.

⁵ Andy Devine, artist's statement, *Mass* exhibition, Newcastle Art Space August 2012, source <http://northernclothcap.blogspot.com.au/p/mass-2012.html> and emails with the artist and Sarah Johnson Newcastle Art Gallery Curator, April 2013.