

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

FLOATING: AN EXHIBITION OF ARTWORKS AT THE FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE BY DUTCH-AUSTRALIANS

Nien Schwarz

Juanita Sherwood calls for decolonization with “every Australian to examine the impact colonization has upon their past and present in order to formulate a future that does not reinstate the past ... a discourse [informed by] ... a balance of truths and histories.”¹

PRELUDE

I cherish an early photograph by Richard Woldendorp taken in 1966 at Brooking Springs cattle station in the Kimberley, Western Australia. Two Aboriginal women, both in flowered dresses, are on a veranda. One woman is heading inside with a clothes iron. The second woman has a commanding presence; she stands next to seven double mounds of white bread dough. The caption on the back of the photograph reads ‘White loaves (cook)’.

The cook looks strong, determined, yet tired. She is not young. Although her body is directed towards the house in which she works, she’s looking intently in the opposite direction, beyond the veranda, towards bright sunshine. What does she see, what is she thinking? Why did Woldendorp photograph her? The contrast of the white floral print against the cook’s black skin and the puffy white dough in the blackened bread tins is striking, both formally and metaphorically. I treasure this photograph; it is a daily reminder of this country’s complex history, and as a Dutch-born citizen, who has become an Australian citizen, I have become part of this history. We will return to this image later.

INTRODUCTION

At Edith Cowan University where I teach in Perth, Western Australia, we occasionally have international exchange students from Amsterdam coming to study Visual Arts for one semester. I like to quiz them, just a little bit, about colonial and twentieth-century Dutch history. I’m curious about what younger-generation university students from The Netherlands might think or understand about Dutch encounters in Australasia, about the smattering of Dutch place names along Australian coastlines, and about the post-war exodus of Dutch citizens who sought refuge and were accepted as immigrants in such geographically far-flung corners of the world. The students express amazement at my questions, admitting little knowledge or interest in Dutch offshore history. Inevitably, they politely steer the conversation towards their creative interests and desire to experience Australian Aboriginal culture first-hand.



Figure 1
Richard Woldendorp, *White Loaves*, 1966
Courtesy: Nien Schwarz.

In 2005 I wrote ‘Dutch artists in Australia: Artiesten in Australie van Nederlandse oorsprong’ a chapter for the book edited by Dr Nonja Peters, *The Dutch Down Under 1606-2006*. This book contributed to ‘Australia on the Map 1606 — 2006’, an international event marking four hundred years since the first recorded (or extant) charting of the Australian continent by Europeans, who happened to be Dutch. In my essay I introduced the visual arts practices of fifteen nationally and internationally prominent artists of Dutch birth or descent. While conducting interviews with the artists, I was deeply impressed by their carefully expressed accounts of their identities, philosophical orientations and humanist concerns. For the most part, these artists migrated to Australia as children and arrived by ship. Collectively they recounted memories of leaving fragmented war-torn Europe and entering into radically unfamiliar landscapes and previously undreamed-of experiences in nature. Although an umbilical cord of nostalgia stretches back to the mother country, especially with respect to food and Renaissance art, these artists have embraced Australia and its diversity and complexity with truly open arms.

As an extension of the research for the book chapter, and as a means to further dialogue with the artists spatially, visually, materially and conceptually, I invited several of the WA-based artists to participate in a thematic exhibition conceived to explore each artist’s concept of a response to ‘floating’. Some focused on Dutch seafaring history, others chose Australia’s history of immigration by boat, and a few renegotiated pieces of their personal puzzles from an aerial perspective. The artists either made new artworks specifically for the exhibition or chose appropriate existing works.

In the following pages I describe the artworks in the exhibition *Floating* by artists Hans Arkeveld, Aadje Bruce, Rinske Car, Theo Koning, Rick Vermey, and Richard Woldendorp. I also explore how these artists have come to embody this place Australia. Occasionally I return to Woldendorp’s photograph of the cook as a device/catalyst to further consider Australia’s complex cross-cultural histories, palpable sometimes as an undercurrent, and, at other times, as a crosscurrent.

Floating

My involvement in the curatorship of *Floating* was inspired by an earlier exhibition initiated by Dr Nonja Peters and curated by Rinske Car. In 2002, *Transpositions: Contextualising Recent Dutch Australian Art*, featured works by fourteen artists of Dutch descent living in the vicinity of Perth. They were: Hans Arkeveld, Aadje Bruce, Rinske Car, Madeleine Clear, Lieneke de Rover, Andrew Hayim de Vries, Theo Koning, Nien Schwarz, Frank Talen, Leah van Lieshout, Elsje van Keppel, Robert van Koesveld, Rick Vermey and Richard Woldendorp. *Transpositions* developed out of meetings with participants of the Dutch Cultural Heritage Group established by Peters to question the sociology of migration. In the catalogue foreword Car explains:

To transpose is to change places. Transposition in music means to re-write or play in a different key. Music when transposed is

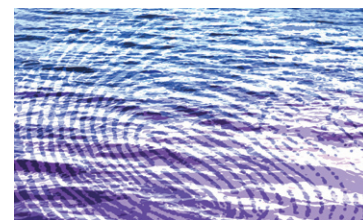


Figure 2
Rick Vermey, *Swell*, 2005
Courtesy: Rick Vermey.



Figure 3
Rick Vermey, *Terra Incognita*, 2004
Courtesy: Rick Vermey.

not merely higher or lower but is altered in mood and colour by the new key. The Dutch are no strangers to changing places. They have witnessed waves of migration into Holland and have emigrated themselves.... The exhibition seeks to document how the work of these artists reflects a shared cultural heritage that is shaped and reshaped by the individual artists' dialogues between two places; a space between poles that is altered in mood and colour by a new key.²

The production of the *Transpositions* exhibition, catalogue, and accompanying sociological display was contributed to by the Australian Netherlands Society of Western Australia (ANSWA), Curtin University of Technology, WA Museum Link, and Edith Cowan University. The collaborative project was exhibited in the WA Museum for four weeks. Between 2003 and 2004 the project, including twenty-five artworks, toured with 'Art on the Move' – a member of the National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS AUSTRALIA), – to the following regional centres: Mandurah, Geraldton, Kellerberrin, Katanning, Esperance, and Narrogin. 'Art on the Move' also developed an education pack for primary and secondary school visitors to consider and learn about migration and notions of personal, cultural and national identity.

The exhibition *Floating* surfaced four years later, in May 2006, at the Fremantle Arts Centre by invitation of Gallery Manager Thelma John. *Floating* was eloquently welcomed and officially opened by local Nyungar elder, Marie Thorn. Thorn speaks frequently on behalf of Aboriginal interests and at events that publicly acknowledge original Nyungar owners and custodians of this land. She provided a highly insightful rendition of local Aboriginal history and welcomed Dutch immigrants to her country. She requested also that we collectively care for this land that we now share. Thorn's inclusive approach to welcoming foreigners implies wearing the mantle of stewardship, the necessity of acknowledging social and political injustices and jointly negotiating interruptions past, present and future. Instead of an exhibition catalogue being provided, Professor Richard Read gave a lecture titled 'Violence and tranquility in the Golden Age of Dutch painting'. Additionally, a contextualising essay I wrote and sets of seven postcards (for seven seas and seven artists), each featuring an image from the exhibition, were offered to the public. These postcards travelled outwards from Fremantle to friends and family around Australia and overseas, with many destined for addresses across the Netherlands.

THE ARTISTS

Rick Vermey

Through his mixed media paintings and prints, artist Rick Vermey responded to the concept of 'floating' by revisiting his mixed heritage. Known for subtly critiquing 'the myths and legends of popular culture' (both Australian and Dutch), Vermey speculates 'on themes of individuality, ideology, colonial

history, national identity, political ambiguity, and social dislocation'. *Swell* (2005) depicts an expanse of ocean overprinted with a large single fingerprint. Vermey prompts us to ponder what it means 'to be an island nation, "girt by sea"' and whether 'as a country largely populated by immigrants, the journey across water from overseas may well be the one defining act in the making of Australia's identity.'³

Vermey's *Terra Incognita* (2004), in stark black and white, makes reference to the wrecking of the Dutch ship *Batavia* in 1629 off the coast of Western Australia. This image too is overprinted with a fingerprint, but in this instance the fingerprint, as a universal marker of personal physical identification, refers to Vermey's Dutch ancestry. He raises the question of whether the stranded passengers of multiple Dutch shipwrecks off the coast of Western Australia were this continent's first asylum seekers. Although this southern landmass was to the best of our knowledge uncharted by Europeans at the time, the Dutch clearly understood this was occupied country. Research into transmission of genetic diseases, alludes to the possibility that there may have been survivors of Dutch ships who co-habited with Indigenous people along the central west coast of Western Australia.⁴ Viewed in this context, Vermey's fingerprint suggests another way of seeing the history of this country. In any case, *Terra Nullius* it clearly was not! A blank canvas is what many later visitors to these shores wanted to see, chose to believe, and blindly and cruelly put into widespread practice.

Vermey explains that the heavy pixelation of *Terra Incognita* alludes to 'our contemporary context of rapid, digitally downloaded, vicarious experiences', and that the oversized pixels are intended to 'obscure immediate recognition of the pictorial content'. This is 'a perceptual device' frequently employed by Vermey to engage viewers in 'both physical and intellectual acts of seeing'. Is Vermey suggesting that what we see is what we want to see or what we are conditioned to see? Born in Perth of an Australian-Welsh mother and Dutch father, Vermey perhaps also grapples with the vicarious experience of absorbing a dislocated British heritage, its overprinting of Aboriginal Australian cultures, and a personal Dutch heritage that, although partially embedded psychologically early in life, only in adulthood became a first-hand experience, geographically and culturally. He states: 'I believe internally we occupy an undiscovered place somewhere between a mythic Wide Brown Land and an equally mythical Motherland.'⁵

Theo Koning

Theo Koning exhibited several works. *Images of Port Fremantle (Boats)* (1990-94) is a variety of boats, ships and swimmers assembled from driftwood and colourful flotsam and jetsam. Varying in scale and detail, to suggest both near and far on the horizon, the vessels, for recreation and cargo, articulate his home of Fremantle as an active port of call to seafaring nations, visitors, and immigrants from around the globe. Owned by the City of Fremantle,

this work is a favourite amongst locals who strongly identify with the set of floating local iconography.

Many people in Australia with Dutch heritage have a pair of real or toy clogs somewhere in their possession and Koning, being a collector of specific wooden objects over many years, has many. In *The Dutch Fleet* (2006), Koning set several Dutch wooden clogs adrift in a child's inflatable green plastic wading pool. The clogs, some in pairs and others single, were either natural-size or smaller souvenir types painted red or yellow. Some were decorated with traditional motifs of windmills, sailboats and even bootlaces. For four weeks, more than thirty clogs floated across and around the implied Earth. Some eventually became waterlogged and sank. The possible innuendo with Dutch feet/fleet was whimsical, yet psychologically charged. And which fleet might Koning refer to? The Renaissance fleet of spice-trading tall ships that started to chart the Australia's coastlines more than one hundred fifty years before the British, or the fleet of post-war passenger ships such as *Johan van Oldenbarnvelt*, *Willem Ruys*, and the *Sibajak* (the ship Koning's family arrived on) which transported almost five hundred thousand Dutch migrants to Australia? Or perhaps Koning was making reference to a museum display he once saw in The Netherlands, of wooden box lids nailed to the bottoms of clogs so that people in waterlogged areas could stay afloat above the muddy water, much like snowshoes on soft snow.⁶

For many, *The Dutch Fleet* was a poignant expression of how some objects, despite being marginalised and embedded with a kitschy sort of nationalistic popular culture, can in another context take on a very personal association. How often do we experience a floating or drifting sensation, particularly when we face family responsibilities both here and in the Netherlands or elsewhere? As we zigzag our way back and forth across the equator, what is shed or lost each time, and what is gained? What do we carry with us as gifts from Australia and what do we bring back with us from The Netherlands? What informs our choices, and what do others give us via their perception of our 'Dutchness'?

Like *The Dutch Fleet*, Koning's *Constructed City* (2006) is assembled out of various blocks of recycled wood and domestic wooden objects; it is also circular in form and invites the viewer to circumnavigate an imaginary globe or city in curiosity, recollection, or even suspicion. Italo Calvino's book *Invisible Cities* was Koning's springboard for this work.⁷ It is not hard to imagine explorers returning to port and reporting to a king, queen, or to other major investors, highlights of the journey and visual descriptions of unusual faraway places. Of course, in the telling and the retelling of these accounts, the descriptions become increasingly distorted to the point where mythical constructions begin to emerge. Memories are also reconstructed with each re-telling. Perhaps this is why Koning prefers to construct his city out of wooden blocks that can be easily disassembled, transported (even floated), and constantly reconstructed into new cities and associated stories.



Figure 4
Theo Koning, *The Dutch Fleet*, 2006
Courtesy: Theo Koning.

In four small drawings from 1984, we see Koning's rich imagination at work. *Boat Drawing 4* depicts a floating clog with a Dutch flag. On the front sail is drawn the likeness of a rough farmer type, which Koning describes as similar to those in van Gogh's *Potato Eaters*. In *Boat Drawing 2*, a little chap in a boat is swamped by a big shark. *Boat Drawing 3* shows a folded paper boat floating past a lighthouse, and *Boat Drawing 1* depicts a man's head surfacing from water with a boat on his head. One sail has a globe on it and the other the head of a person. Who might that person be?

Richard Woldendorp

In 1951 Richard Woldendorp was bound for Sydney from Indonesia on the *Johan van Oldenbarnvelt*, but changed his mind and instead disembarked in Fremantle. Quickly becoming aware of the unusual flora and fauna, and the visually and texturally striking forms, patterns and colours of coastal landscapes and the outback, he soon started using photography as a 'rewarding medium to develop a relationship with one's natural environment'.

The landscape has always meant a lot to me and more so as a professional landscape photographer. In Holland where I grew up it was predominantly a man-made landscape — the Dutch word is 'landschap', well used by the early Dutch and Flemish painters. I have been attracted to the Australian landscape because of its size and subtle differences — a sense of wonderment, how it all came about, the evolution of the landscape... On my arrival in the early 50s, very little had been recorded on film. Painters had given us their interpretations, often with a European flavour... I had seen photographs of Ayers Rock and the Great Barrier Reef, but there was a great deal in between waiting for general and personal interpretations to be made.

Woldendorp is now world-renowned for his iconic photographic landscape images of Australia and sixteen books have been published that feature his work. In *Floating*, he invites us to accompany him on aerial sojourns to capture some of the 'essence and reality' of Australia's urban, agricultural and bush environments.⁸

We travel with Woldendorp first to Queensland, where the little ship *Duyfken* explored Cape York Peninsula in 1606 and Dutch navigator Willem Jansz charted and named a few of the coastal features.⁹ We head to the flood plains of the Fitzroy River and slow down to float above a large flock of corellas. The interplay of small brown floating fragments of land, submerged trees, and reflective, meandering streams of water is mesmerising.

Traversing several centuries, we arrive over the present-day bronzed bodies and highly colourful beach cultures of Manly and Bondi. From this perspective, the scene is reminiscent of a Fred Williams painting. Heading further south we explore elegantly shaped islands and isolated sand-patterned estuaries of



Figure 5
Theo Koning, *Boat Drawing 4*, 1984
Courtesy: Johannus Koning.



Figure 6
Richard Woldendorp, *Ploughing in rocky farmland near Toodyay, Western Australia*, Courtesy: Richard Woldendorp.

the southeast coast. Then we cross the cold Tasman Sea. Pushing against air currents over cloud-shrouded peaks in Tasmania, we really start to appreciate the scope of Australia's geological and biological diversity. Drinking in more beauty than we ever thought possible, we head west and lurch against the strong westerly winds while hugging the sheer brown-red and white-layered cliffs along the exceedingly blue waters of the Great Australian Bight and then across Western Australia's Wheatbelt region, studded with tiny islands of remnant native vegetation.

In 2002 Woldendorp wrote 'I feel very much at home now'.¹⁰ He estimates that in a fifty-year period he has taken 155,000 colour and black-and-white photographs of Australia.

There are a million pictures out there. I am the only limitation. I can tune in and absorb the reality of the variations, combined with my way of seeing and my attitude. The older I get the harder it becomes, and the more I am drawn to nature. It is the creation of all life and matter that appeals to me now. Maybe I can make a small contribution to its well-being, which is in jeopardy.¹¹

In parallel with the exhibition *Floating*, Woldendorp was also invited to exhibit some of his earlier black-and-white photographs from the 1960s and 1970s which have seldom been publicly viewed. A selection of these portrayed his excursions into villages in Irian Jaya and the small towns, big inner city squares, and arid vastness of Australia. The Australian city images reflect a restless, crowded urban energy and modernist formality; much of the landscape is gridded and liberally dotted with suits, hats, and ties. In stark contrast is the image of the two Aboriginal women on the Kimberley cattle station who reach out to us across time.

I look again at the aforementioned women in Richard's photograph, taken almost fifty years ago. The women would have witnessed vast swathes of traditional Aboriginal country and land management practices succumb to increasingly widespread and unsound forestry and agricultural practices. Whose land was it before the cattle station was established, and whose land was it now according to Australian law? In their lifetimes, these women would have experienced firsthand the massive social, cultural, and political upheavals that disrupted the forty thousand year old foundations of many Aboriginal families and communities across Australia. Where were these two women from, were they related, and what was their relationship to the land occupied now by the station? Were they local, or had they been forcibly removed from their families as young children by the Native Welfare Department and relocated to a mission school where parents were forbidden to visit and many Aboriginal children toiled for years to train as domestics? Were these women paid wages for their domestic services? If the station on which they were working was not in the country of their birth and language group, how did these women feel about trespassing on land that was not

theirs and traditionally cared for by a different Aboriginal language group and unfamiliar set of laws?

Hans Arkeveld

Hans Arkeveld's art frequently focuses on those caught trespassing on water. Perhaps his immigration to Australia in 1952 on the *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt* inspired him to explore the concept of vessels and migration and, coupled with his training in human anatomy, expanded his focus to include the embryonic and foetal stages of life when we float in the womb. His numerous drawings, prints, paintings, and finely crafted wooden sculptures frequently include vessels overloaded with passengers; whereas in other works, single individuals float nebulously in space and water.

Arkeveld's floating figures seem to battle fate or drift past destiny. The multiple ships with decks packed with human cargo, such as *Transmigration 90* (1990), and ships with cargo holds packed with stowaways, call out to us well before and beyond the media frenzy of SIEV X, the Tampa and Prime Minister Howard's false cry of children overboard. Arkeveld's work is a poignant reminder of the fragility of life and of our floating dependence during the first months of life and often later in life when we are too exhausted to care. En route, many of us lose the umbilical cord to the spiritual mother of life.

In *Pram* (1974), Arkeveld presents us with a sculpture of a foetus in a pram. Floating overhead and attached to the foetus by an umbilical-like cord or life-support tube, is a winged image like a dragonfly. It is difficult to determine whether the hovering entity is benevolent or destructive.¹² Do these wings presage escapism, forerunners of Arkeveld's winged humans who seek to flee from earthly demands or untenable situations? And what is the relationship between our body in one place and our thinking of another place?

When questioned about the pram, Arkeveld tells me he has six wooden row boats in his backyard. He used to have eight. He tells me he's waiting for the big flood and for the waters in local Jane Brook to rise. He's joking, but adds he read the Bible as a child and of course we are all aware of rising sea levels.¹³ I reconsider the two women in Woldendorp's photograph. What kind of impact did the Bible have on their lives? I then reconsider Arkeveld's pram. If these two women had children, what might this younger generation's relationship be to their families and their culture's spiritual beliefs?

Aadje Bruce

The palpable tension in Arkeveld's overcrowded boats and vulnerable children is echoed in Aadje Bruce's *Preserves* (1997), in which dismembered dolls' limbs are packed into small fish tins formally arranged into an uncompromising grid. Little toes and fingers tentatively reach out, perhaps testing the water. Is it safe? Where am I? Who am I? Is it safe to come out and is there any food? Bruce's collection of plastic, naked body fragments is not



Figure 7
Hans Arkeveld, *Transmigration 90*, 1990
Courtesy: Edith Cowan University.



Figure 8
Hans Arkeveld, *Pram*, 1974
Courtesy: Hans Arkeveld.

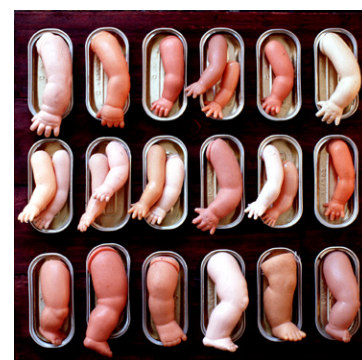


Figure 9
Aadje Bruce, *Preserves*, 1997
Courtesy: Doug Bruce.



Figure 10
Aadjie Bruce, *Domestic Bliss*, 2004
Courtesy: Courtesy: Doug Bruce.

imbued with childhood innocence, imagination, dreams, and role-playing. The fragments are anything but hopeful of a comforting and dignified life. *Preserves* reminds me that contemporaneously migrant children are locked into detention camps, sometimes for years. In the experience of racial, religious, or political persecution, the body and mind struggles to stay intact, whether young or old.

Domestic Bliss (2004), entailed Bruce installing a convoy of sixteen wooden toy wagons on the gallery floor. Each wagon piled as high as possible with a specific collection of everyday objects and utensils found in the home. The convoy is colourful and playful — almost inviting us to step between the wagons and pull one along. On closer analysis, we begin to query each wagon's selective cargo of baby soothers, plastic yellow ducklings, human hair, toothbrushes of many colours, plastic rings from milk bottles, and toddlers' shoes. A toy wooden soldier and an erect meat tenderiser travel in the opposite direction against this tide of humanity. Then we spot a wagon bristling with long handled meat forks and another brimming with dolls' limbs. Feelings of nostalgia float out the window. Is this a convoy of the lost, the stolen, the killed, and the forgotten: the innocence of childhood cut short in senseless crossfire? Across the room above Arkeveld's pram with foetus, the dragonfly hovers.

Rinske Car

The hearth or kitchen has traditionally been the centre of the family home. In the main gallery of the historic Fremantle Arts Centre are two large fireplaces. By flanking each side of one fireplace with a different life-size predominantly black-and-white photographic print, Rinske Car reflects both on the family she left behind in the Netherlands and the family she has created here.

The first image, *Bye My Loyalty* (2006), is of Car at South Beach, South Fremantle, with her extended Australian family. We see only their backs as they head from the beach up through the dunes. Car lags behind the others; her legs are hobbled by a large length of bright orange elastic. The orange colour is representative of the Dutch national colour and in this image she communicates that she feels pulled backwards by the mother country and its associated memories and family responsibilities.

On the other side of the fireplace is the second body-length image, *In Place of Language* (2006). Car, her children and grandchildren face the camera. They are outside but it looks as though they are posing for this image at home. Car, the matriarch in the centre, is radiant. The manner in which she openly and laughingly faces the camera suggests she has found inner peace and happiness, through her relationship with the next generation of her Australian-born family.

Car did not see herself as a migrant when she took assisted passage to Perth in 1970. To her, migration is associated with economic hardship and this



Figure 11
Rinske Car, *Bye my Loyalty*, 2006
Courtesy: Rinske Car.

did not fit her ‘happy-go-lucky attitude’ to travel in the direction of the other side of the world. ‘And yet’, Car recounts ‘I remember leaving Holland with a headache I can really never forget. Did I know deep down that I was somehow seriously stepping out of my box, jumping gates, fences, and rules for the first time?’¹⁴

In the same conversation Car reflects that she has no regrets about moving to Australia, but :

The transition into another language during my adult years has left me with a mild ongoing struggle ... English has eventually become embedded, but emotional distance persists. When translating ‘belonging’ into Dutch, the meaning of the word slips and floats away ... What happens when one language becomes overlaid with another?

Again I consider the women in Woldendorp’s photograph, which was taken close in time to the turning-point in Car’s personally-tailored destiny. Did the women in Woldendorp’s photograph speak the same language as each other? If so, were they allowed to speak their native tongue at the station in the presence of non-aboriginal people, or were they were forced, like so many others, to renounce their language and culture and assimilate under the pressures of the *Aborigines Protection Act 1905*? I asked Woldendorp some of my questions. He responded:

I was fascinated by the Aboriginal way of life and culture... Brooking Springs was particularly interesting because this was before the time when the Whitlam Government decided that anyone working on a station had to be paid standard wages. Before this the station owner looked after the community with food and accommodation. This included the women and children, all living on the station which was part of their tribal area. Hence the Aboriginal community at Brooking Springs, as it was on other stations in the Kimberleys, was quite large. After the new law was implemented most Aboriginals were forced to drift to the towns such as Fitzroy and others.¹⁵

Many Aboriginal Australian cultures have been irrevocably damaged by State and Federal policies.

Comparatively speaking, Dutch migrants to Australia have had a ‘fair go’, and they know it, even though some felt tremendous pressure to assimilate into Australian culture as seamlessly as possible. In stark contrast it was not until the 1967 referendum that Aboriginals were eligible to be included in the Commonwealth Census.¹⁶ Only in the decade following Richard Woldendorp’s photograph, *The Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* were introduced, to provide for the protection of places and cultural objects of significance to Aboriginal people. How have the Aboriginal people in the vicinity of Brooking Springs station fared? According to Patrick Sullivan, ‘During the 1980s, Bunuba people began to



Figure 12
Rinske Car, *In Place of Language*, 2006
Courtesy: Rinske Car.

reassert their identity. About one hundred speakers of the language survived at this time.’¹⁷

In the context of the Howard government’s refusal to apologise for injustices meted to Australia’s Aboriginal people, many of the artists in *Floating* felt that to celebrate ‘Dutchness’ was somewhat inappropriate. The general consensus was that like any other artist, Aboriginal Australian or otherwise, they were responding to historical sets of circumstances and personal experiences that were being shaped and reshaped within the context of living in contemporary Australia.

Conclusion

The multiple international events, publications, and exhibitions that acknowledge the four hundred years of connections between The Netherlands and Australia have now passed. Presumably the Dutch migrant community in Australia enjoyed and benefited from learning more about the history of the mother country and their collective migrant history in Australia. But at the same time, despite former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology, Australia’s inability to foster the well-being of many Indigenous Australians continues to fester.

In response to her own question: ‘What happens when one language becomes overlaid with another?’ Rinske Car responded ‘You do not question your own language; you speak it from within’.¹⁸ I’m sure that Marie Thorn, the Nyungar elder who opened the *Floating* exhibition, would concur. Through art as a visual language of personal and community expression, many of us mediate our place in the world as these six artists have done. Collectively, Rick Vermey, Theo Koning, Richard Woldendorp, Han Arkeveld, Aadjé Bruce and Rinske Car have exhibited in over 380 professional group exhibitions and, in a further 62 solo exhibitions. Clearly the Dutch migrant experience has made a significant contribution to the cultural diversity and visual strength of art in Australia.

It is uncanny. While writing this final paragraph, I received an ‘event alert’ email from the Australian Embassy in The Hague notifying of the exhibition *Brilliance* at the Aboriginal Art Museum in Utrecht. The city of my birth in the Netherlands has a museum devoted to the exhibition of Indigenous art from Australia, and in *Brilliance* Emily Kame Kngwarreye, and Dutch artist Maria Roosen are exhibiting side-by-side. Thus cultural understanding happens within and across boundaries.¹⁹



ENDNOTES

- 1 J. Sherwood, 'Who is not coping with colonization? Laying Out the Map for Decolonization.' P. S24.
- 2 N. Peters, R. Car and N. Schwarz, *Transpositions: Contextualising Recent Dutch Australian Art*.
- 3 R. Vermeij, written correspondence to author, 16 March 2006.
- 4 Gerritsen Rupert, 2006, *The Evidence for Cohabitation Between Indigenous Australians, Marooned Dutch Mariners and VOC Passengers*, in *The Dutch Down Under, 1606-2006*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Western Australia, pp.45-6.
- 5 R. Vermeij, R, written correspondence to author, 16 March 2006.
- 6 T. Koning, personal conversation with author, 28 October, 2007.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 N. Peters, R. Car and N. Schwarz, *Transpositions: contextualising recent Dutch Australian art*. Woldendorp artist page.
- 9 McCarthy Michael, 2006, 'Dutch Place Names in Australia', in *The Dutch Down Under, 1606-2006*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, Western Australia, p. 26..
- 10 N. Peters, R. Car and N. Schwarz, *Transpositions*, Woldendorp artist page.
- 11 R. Woldendorp, written correspondence, 30 October 2007.
- 12 H. Arkeveld, personal correspondence, 26 October, 2007.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 R. Car, personal correspondence, 24 October, 2007.
- 15 R. Woldendorp, written correspondence, 30 October 2007.
- 16 National Archives, *The 1967 Referendum*.
- 17 P. Sullivan, 'ICGP Researcher's case study overview: impediments to effective aboriginal service delivery by mainstream agencies in the west Kimberley, WA - a scoping project'.
- 18 R. Car, personal correspondence, 24 October, 2007.
- 19 P. Beilharz, 'Rewriting Australia' public lecture, University of Western Australia.

Figure 13
Negotiating a Dutch-Australian Identity
Rinske Car c2000.

Rinske Car is a Dutch artist who made Australia her home as an adult. She nevertheless constantly feels the pull of her Dutch roots, which she depicts here as a section of one leg of the overalls - cut off. Courtesy: Rinske Car.