



historycouncilnsw

ANNUAL HISTORY LECTURE 2021 - UNSETTLED

PRESENTED BY LAURA McBRIDE & DR MARIKO SMITH, AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

for

The History Council of NSW, Inc (HCNSW)

Further details about this lecture can be found on the HCNSW Website:

<https://historycouncilnsw.org.au/whats-on/events/annual-history-lecture-2021/>

This production is also available for viewing as part of the History Week 2021 playlist on the HCNSW's YouTube site: <https://youtu.be/41ogjajkeDw> where it has been split into chapters for easier viewing.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Stephen Gapps ([00:00:10](#)):

The Annual History Lecture is produced by the History Council of New South Wales every year in History Week, a state-wide celebration of all things history, which aims to engage communities around New South Wales and beyond with the vitality, diversity, and meaning of history and its practice. In 2021, due to the COVID-19 situation, we moved the Annual History Lecture out from History Week and recorded it with the support of the Australian Museum. And that's not the only change. In its 26th year, the History Council of New South Wales is excited to present the Annual History Lecture in a different format. Instead of a formal lecture, this year's event is a conversation between the Australian Museum's Laura McBride, Director of First Nations and Dr. Mariko Smith, Manager of First Nations Collections and Engagement. Laura and Mariko will discuss their curatorial and historiographical approaches to developing and delivering the ground-breaking Unsettled exhibition, which is on display at the Australian Museum in Sydney until the 27th of January, 2022.

Stephen Gapps ([00:01:14](#)):

Now they will also reveal the powerful process of presenting a First Nations led exhibition about the legacy of colonization, about constructions of Australian history, and the importance of truth telling to realize change. The Australian Museum is the oldest public museum in the country and well on the way to mark its 200th anniversary in 2027. The creation of the Unsettled exhibition with its focus on truth telling as told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves has enabled the Australian Museum to reflect on its own history as part of Australia's colonial legacy.

Stephen Gapps ([00:01:51](#)):

With this year's History Week theme, From the Ground Up, Unsettled supports and amplifies the theme being one of the most culturally significant exhibitions to be mounted in Australia this year. So I'm





historycouncilnsw

pleased and honored to hand over now to the speakers of the 2021 Annual History Lecture, Laura McBride and Dr. Mariko Smith.

Laura McBride ([00:02:16](#)):

[foreign language 00:02:16]. My name is Laura McBride and I'm a Wailwan and Kooma woman and Director of the First Nations division at the Australian Museum.

Mariko Smith ([00:02:24](#)):

[foreign language 00:02:24]. My name is Mariko Smith. I'm a Yuin woman with Japanese heritage and the Manager of First Nations Collections and Engagement at the museum. I'm also an Honorary Associate in the School of Literature, Art, and Media at the University of Sydney.

Laura McBride ([00:02:40](#)):

We would like to acknowledge the Gadigal and [Gadigalean 00:02:42] as the custodians of the land on which the museum stands. And we pay our respects to their country, ancestors, and elders. We dedicate the Unsettled exhibition to the people and other beings who keep the law of this land, to the elders and traditional owners of all the knowledges, places, and stories within this exhibition, and to the ancestors and old people for their resilience and guidance.

Mariko Smith ([00:03:06](#)):

We advise Aboriginal and Torres Islander viewers that this presentation includes names and images of people who have passed away.

Laura McBride ([00:03:14](#)):

We really appreciate this opportunity to share our insights into the experience of building this exhibition from the ground up. Our journey began in the context of the lead up to the 250th anniversary of Lieutenant James Cook's east coast voyage in 1770. Many cultural institutions were planning their 2020 exhibitions to mark this event.

Mariko Smith ([00:03:35](#)):

The Australian Museum was in the position to host yet another Cook exhibition, focusing on the man himself and the role he has said to have played in the foundations of what is now known as Australia. However, under the leadership of Kim McKay, the museum's director and CEO, and the executive leadership team, the decision was made to appoint a First Nations curator and for Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples to have a proper right of reply through this exhibition. Historically First Nations perspectives on colonial history are often downplayed or ignored.

Laura McBride ([00:04:13](#)):

As the First Nations curatorial team, with Mariko as the assistant curator, we undertook extensive community consultation from the very start to ensure we accurately represented the views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and developed this exhibition in a culturally





historycouncilnsw

appropriate way. This feedback would direct and inform our exhibition objectives, themes, topics, content, and the associated programming. 805 First Nations peoples from all across Australia responded to the short survey, which sought their opinions about the Australian Museum's progress on indigenous engagement, what they really thought of Captain Cook, as well as what they did and did not want to see in an exhibition responding to the 250th Cook Anniversary.

Mariko Smith ([00:04:59](#)):

To develop this exhibition in a culturally appropriate way and accurately represent the views of First Nations peoples on the Cook Anniversary, we undertook community consultation to define what themes and topics we would cover. We spoke to many individuals and communities and received 805 formal responses in the consultation phase. Significantly, these consultations made it clear that First Nations people did not need another show about Cook. He's but a small footnote in Australia's true history. Instead, we needed to take this opportunity for truth telling.

Mariko Smith ([00:05:34](#)):

The consultation had three highest ranking categories, colonization and its effects, to detail Australia's origins and foundations, and addressing the false constructed history that is pervasively shared in society.

Laura McBride ([00:05:49](#)):

This was determined from categorizing 40% of responses which used various descriptors, such as true history, the truth, or truth telling about Cook and Australian history. And even though we had already described the initiative on the survey documents as First Nations led, it appeared very important for community to keep reinforcing loud and clear that First Nations perspectives and experiences needed to lead this exhibition. For example, one respondent noted, "The truth about what happened, not the fairy tale story. Aboriginal people to tell the story we did not welcome Cook with open arms."

Mariko Smith ([00:06:27](#)):

[Mob 00:06:27] told us that they did not want to be defined by the likes of Cook and colonizers. He seems to operate more so as a marker of time for beginning of colonization. As one of our respondents eloquently put it, "Cook is but a small footnote in a more expansive history where First Nations have been here since time immemorial."

Laura McBride ([00:06:49](#)):

Instead, the community asked us to take the opportunity for long overdue truth telling about our shared past. It is clear to First Nations people that we live in a legacy of this past, and this has privileged some but left others disadvantaged, resulting in social inequity. Recognizing this is an important step towards a better shared future and can only be done if we discuss this nation's history truthfully together and listen to First Nations voices.

Mariko Smith ([00:07:17](#)):





historycouncilnsw

Through this, we had the opportunity to address some of the big questions around self-representation in public histories and museums. This raises many lines of inquiry around whose history or histories are we dealing with? Who can tell these stories? On whose authority? Are we representing or rewriting history? A key provocation for this presentation is the idea of speaking for ourselves, whether this is inside, outside the authority of institutions, or entirely on our own terms.

Laura McBride ([00:07:50](#)):

Now, more than ever, there are calls for cultural institutions to be more active in these important public conversations around justice, whether this is social justice or climate justice. How do we, as First Nations people, first and foremost, followed by our careers as museum workers, navigate our community informed best industry practice approach across tensions in the divides between the personal and the professional?

CHAPTER 2: ABOUT THE CURATORS

Mariko Smith ([00:08:18](#)):

So, Laura, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Laura McBride ([00:08:19](#)):

Sure. I was born on Gadigal country to a Wailwan and Kooma father and an English mother who migrated here with her family at 16 years of age. I grew up between Coonamble and Sydney undertaking my schooling here in Sydney and living with my mother and three months of the year living with my family in Coonamble. From a young age, I knew that I wanted to work closely with First Nations cultures and always had a passion for history, science, and museums. Before being appointed into the role of Director of First Nations, I had worked at the Australian Museum for the previous 11 years in the education programming and exhibition teams. Through my various exhibitions, public programs, and projects, I've provided a bridge between the Aboriginal community, the museum, and its audiences who are keen to learn from First Nations peoples about the cultures and what they have to say on critical issues affecting our communities like climate action and sustainable living.

Laura McBride ([00:09:14](#)):

I see myself as a facilitator of voices rather than creating things in isolation or through consultation. Collaboration and more accurately co-design is the model I have used across my professional work. Museums have historically been contentious places for Aboriginal people, and they often still don't trust institutions like the Australian Museum who have taken their objects, voices, and even bodies, using them to define the narrative about us. How we have been represented over time is how we are perceived. And considering we mitigate false and negative stereotypes on a regular basis, it is vitally important that First Nations peoples are involved the representations of themselves, their cultures, and their histories.

Laura McBride ([00:09:59](#)):





historycouncilnsw

The Australian Museum's First Nations team plays a critical role as facilitators of these voices, giving them an influential and authoritative platform at the museum. We help provide access and pathways to First Nations peoples and cultures. My vision as director includes creating self-determining models across the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Pacifica cultural and archeological collections. It's about prioritizing and amplifying First Nations voices so that these communities represent themselves and their cultures within the museum. But how about you, Mariko, can you tell us a little bit about yourself now?

Mariko Smith ([00:10:37](#)):

Oh, thanks Laura. I was born on Darug country in Western Sydney and later moved north to the central coast. Growing up in a multicultural household from a young age, I gained an appreciation of the complexities of identity in contemporary Australia. As a child, I learned more about Japanese language and culture from my mom's side. And as I grew older, I connected more with my dad's extended Aboriginal family from [Lapa 00:11:01] and the south coast. I often feel like I challenge people's perceptions of Aboriginality by just existing. I've always loved learning about history from when I was little. I also learned about how history is complex and needs a nuanced approach in how we engage with it. So like I vividly remember in primary school learning about Captain Cook pretty much every year. And I got to say, I did get obsessed researching everything I could about his background and life history.

Mariko Smith ([00:11:33](#)):

I look back at that time and reflected on how no meaningful Aboriginal perspectives were offered to us students beyond say making Rainbow Serpent chore card on the pavement at school. And there was very little scope for us to critically engage with Cook and his legacy. I now see me being directed to focus solely on Cook like that was a former brainwashing. Aboriginal peoples and cultures were portrayed as primitive and no longer relevant. It should be about presenting a more balanced, complete picture of our shared history from a range of perspectives that are not merely represented in distilled simplistic ways. From my experience learning and practicing law, to teaching at university, and now specializing in GLAM, so galleries, libraries, archives, and museums, visual sociology, indigenous cultural resurgence, and public history, I seek more critical engagements with the institutions and systems in place in Australia.

CHAPTER 3: NAMING THE EXHIBITION

Mariko Smith ([00:12:33](#)):

So Laura, ultimately the first thing that the public engaged with in regards to our exhibition is the title itself, so Unsettled. And I think we need to start from there.

Laura McBride ([00:12:50](#)):

That's right. So we had already set our themes and topics for the entire exhibition before we actually knew what we were going to call the exhibition itself. And we had worked with an amazing company





historycouncilnsw

called IndigenousX and our staff and their staff came together and brainstormed a series of titles, but essentially Unsettled was the strongest and Unsettled has many connotations. Australia wasn't peacefully settled. Relationships between First Nations peoples and Australians is still uneasy. Our history is unresolved.

Mariko Smith ([00:13:26](#)):

That's right, and our relationships with the environment, if you only just look back at the 2019, 2020 bush fires and as well as human created climate change, our relationships with the environment is also unsettled.

Laura McBride ([00:13:40](#)):

Absolutely. So after 250 years of occupying this country, the relationship between newcomers and the environment is unstable. And When we first started discussing the title across the museum, there was a small amount of pushback from particular staff that thought that that might be a divisive title, which for us I can't quite understand. But then there were reflections by other staff who said, "Well, unsettled, that fits with me. I'm going to feel really unsettled walking through this exhibition." And that made us think about out the ways in which the visitor really centers themselves even in a truth telling exhibition where our people are finally getting to have their say on most.

Mariko Smith ([00:14:31](#)):

That's right. I also see unsettled is a state of being, but also like as a verb is unsettling. So I think it's wonderful how it just plays on so many levels.

Laura McBride ([00:14:42](#)):

And some of the content of the exhibition may be unsettling, but it's actually the truth. And we can't hide from that. And unsettling histories or stories can make us think about new things and new ways to move forward.

Mariko Smith ([00:14:56](#)):

And to have these important conversations is a provocation, but also an inspiration and a motivation.

Laura McBride ([00:15:08](#)):

So the Unsettled exhibition is just to encourage audiences to have the ability to consider histories and perspectives that they might not know. And so the objects that were used in the introductory section raise questions or inform people about particular things that might go against stereotypes or representations that they may have thought about Aboriginal people, culture, or history. One of these objects that we include in the Unsettled exhibition is the Manly mogo. This is mogo meaning stone axe in the Sydney language. The mogo was handed over to a young girl in Manly very early in the colony.

Mariko Smith ([00:15:54](#)):

Yeah, 1830s, I recall.





historycouncilnsw

Laura McBride ([00:15:56](#)):

It's one of two only hafted stone axes within museum collection, so it's a rare object having come from Sydney. Why we included this particular object is actually not because of the incredible nature of the Manly mogo itself, but the fact that Manly was named after the manly and physical prowess by, well, what's that guy's name? I'm terrible with colonial governors.

Mariko Smith ([00:16:23](#)):

The Governor Arthur Phillip.

Laura McBride ([00:16:25](#)):

Governor Arthur Philip.

Mariko Smith ([00:16:26](#)):

The first governor of Australia.

Laura McBride ([00:16:28](#)):

And so he himself had named Manly Cove that particular term, not only because of the physical prowess of average men in that area, but because when they came into that Cove and the men on the shore were trying to get them to land so that they could engage them in a fight and tell them to move away, get off their country, they weren't welcomed, they hadn't been welcomed, when the long boat wouldn't come in, they actually just dropped their spears and started swimming out to the boat. And he described that as very manly behavior. This goes against stereotypes of Aboriginal people needing salvation, for instance, or the fact that Aboriginal people weren't well kept or didn't have their own societies or laws and knowledges. And so, in particular, that's why we use that object.

Mariko Smith ([00:17:17](#)):

Well that's it because Philip and others in the first fleet, they would have been familiar with the writings of Cook, Sir Joseph Banks and others on the endeavor, where they wrote about Aboriginal people as being these, it's like weaklings, passive cowards who would just run away. And then this contrasted with Phillips' direct experiences with Aboriginal men. And so I think even back then, people just would have been thinking very differently and have different perspectives. So, that was a great story. We just wanted to draw that out and share that with the public.

Laura McBride ([00:17:52](#)):

We should talk about the fact that this is the first exhibition that I've curated that has a linear order. And it's also the first exhibition I've curated in third person. There were two reasons for this. There is so much information that people don't know about their own history. We had to put it in an order by which they could understand it or map it out with at least some anchors within their own history or understanding. Cultural exhibitions don't need a beginning and an end necessarily, so we've never had a narrative order or a beginning and an end to an exhibition.





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([00:18:25](#)):

Yeah, like a single entry and exit point where I think, Laura, of your previous exhibitions like Garrigarrang: Sea Country or GADI, there was multiple pathways for visitors to engage with the themes and the topics, where with Unsettled, because it's got that sort of historical base and that chronology, 1770, 1788, other dates, it just became a more sort of linear chronological order.

Laura McBride ([00:18:56](#)):

And while we're speaking about this way in which we use this toolkit of curation or curator tools, the reason why we chose to also write this exhibition in third person, which is pretty standard for most exhibitions and cultural institutions, museums-

Mariko Smith ([00:19:14](#)):

The voice of authority, isn't it? It's the museum speaking.

Laura McBride ([00:19:17](#)):

That's right. But in our exhibitions, we usually use first person to give audiences the understanding that Aboriginal people are still here and still in control of their narratives. But we reverted back to third person for this exhibition because we didn't want this exhibition to be an us versus them. So we wrote this exhibition in third person and it is factual, it is up to the standard of all the other exhibitions that we do at the Australian Museum. And so we felt that was the best approach to take so there would be no us versus them in regards to the Unsettled content. So leading back to, that is why the next theme that you enter is Signal Fires.

Chapter 4: Signal Fires

Laura McBride ([00:20:03](#)):

Signal fires itself is an immersive experience. We worked with communities between the south coast and Sydney to capture their views on Cook, the 1770 event from the shore and from the shore only. So signal fires are deliberately lit fires at certain locations, which are an emergency warning system to people in the area, but also neighboring communities that something's just not quite right. Within each section, we facilitated the voices of those people who are entitled to tell these stories. My family, for instance, is not from any coastal areas and so my role was as facilitator. And for instance, within the signal fires section, each object or story told within that section comes from a descendant of someone who lit the signal fires or whose family hold the stories of those signal fires.

Mariko Smith ([00:21:01](#)):

We could talk about how we curated the content. So, you Laura, through your previous exhibitions, but also with this one, you curated through community. And then I guess from my perspective with my background in academic research and history, I tended to curate from the archive, so I guess we interpret that as historical documents.





historycouncilnsw

Laura McBride ([00:21:28](#)):

I wanted to be sure that if I was undertaking what we were calling a First Nations perspective and First Nations led, that I wasn't led by colonial archives or records. I wanted to genuinely make sure that we were bringing our perspectives to the forefront. I was actually down at Uncle Max Harrison's house when he first told me the story of The Fighting Westwind and around near Ulladulla, was it? Okay. So he was telling me [crosstalk 00:21:56], he was telling me that before arriving in Sydney, that Cook actually tried to make landfall before but everybody came together and sung up The Fighting Westwind, danced up The Fighting Westwind. And when I left Uncle Max's house, I was driving back to the museum or coming back to the museum and I rang Mariko and said, "Can you just go and have a look at the records and see if there's any alignment whatsoever?"

Mariko Smith ([00:22:22](#)):

Yeah. So, I just hopped onto the computer because it's pretty good now that a lot of these historical records are now digitized, so we need to ensure more funding to make sure we could do that more. And I looked at Cook's endeavor journal and looking around in the mid to late April period when he was cruising up these coast and there was an entry from the Sunday, the 22nd of April. And he has talked about seeing the smoke of fire in several places near the sea beach.

Mariko Smith ([00:22:57](#)):

But also he said when we first discovered this island in the morning, I was in hopes. So Cook was in hopes from his appearance that we should have found shelter from the ship behind it. But when we came to approach it near, I did not think there was even security for a boat to land, but this, I believe, I should have attempted had not the wind come on shore after which I did not think it's safe to send the boat from the ship as we had a large hollow sea from the Southeast rolling in upon the land, which beat everywhere, very high upon the shore, and this we have had ever since we came upon the coast.

Mariko Smith ([00:23:35](#)):

So I feel like that really correlated with what Uncle Max was saying to Laura. This is how Living Legacies, the name of this immersive experience came about, is referencing that these are the descendants, they are telling and living these stories that are from the past, but it's part of our living legacies today. So Amanda Jane Reynolds, who's a Garrigarrang woman who leads Stella Stories works very well. And over a long period of time has worked extensively with south coast community members, have produced this beautiful film.

Laura McBride ([00:24:13](#)):

Signal fires really focuses on that 1770 event when Cook mapped the east coast of Australia, but really invasion came in 1788. Now, Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples, both groups actually compound those events. 1770 and 1788 is one in the same. So Cook might have mapped the east coast and 18 years later, Philip?





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([00:24:42](#)):

Yep.

Laura McBride ([00:24:43](#)):

Comes back with the first fleet. But essentially it's Cook who's invaded. It's this man who's taken everything from us. And that is because Cook was actually celebrated not in the early colony, but really in the late 1800s, early 1900s. You see Cook start to emerge as this figure, as this hero. So that leads us into our next section, which is Recognizing Invasions. Invasions did happen in this country across every sovereign nation. Can we first quickly speak about the Kaurareg people and their story, which I believe is completely not that well known, considering the significance of the site.

Chapter 5: Recognising Invasions

Mariko Smith ([00:25:32](#)):

Well, that's it. I mean we kind of know indirectly about them through the name of Possession Islands. So this island that's like just off the west side of Cape York or what is now known as Cape York from the mainland. And this is the island where Cook wrote that on the 22nd of August, 1770, that he landed there and he got the flag or his crew got the flag and they basically hoisted up the colors and claimed the east coast because for the west coast they could not claim because of the Dutch navigators who've previously been there, but Cook claimed the east coast in the name of George III of Great Britain. So we only really know about this island that's just been renamed as Possession Island.

Laura McBride ([00:26:20](#)):

But most people would think that possession of Australia was taken at La Perouse, right?

Mariko Smith ([00:26:24](#)):

You'd think so because that's where the first landfall, so on the 29th of April. So like I think, what? Six months or so earlier, you'd think that would've happened then. So there's a lot of these sort of inconsistencies or things that just kind of don't add up. And so why would it be all the way at August in this particular island that possession was said to have happened? And this island is known by many names including Tuidin. And we have been told this from senior men from the Kaurareg First Nations people. So we worked very closely with Uncle Waubin Richard Aken, who is a senior man of the Kaurareg First Nations people. He's also the appointed tribal historian. So just such a privilege to speak with Uncle Waubin and learn from him.

Mariko Smith ([00:27:13](#)):

And he was telling Laura and I about how Cook did not land on their island. We also looked at Sir Joseph Banks' journal as well and he talks about these 10 warriors being on the shore watching them. And so nine had lances, so that means spears, and one had a bow and arrow set. And when we talked to Uncle Waubin, he was saying to us that, yes, the warriors were watching because they knew that this ship was





historycouncilnsw

going to come, they had the warnings from what he called the black feller internet, so with the signal fires, but also messengers.

Laura McBride ([00:27:51](#)):

Message sticks.

Mariko Smith ([00:27:52](#)):

Message sticks and messengers who were coming up the coast. And they knew something was coming so they were waiting on the shore. And they were waiting for their leader to give the signal, basically, if these strangers were to disembark and try and arrive on the shore, they would have attacked.

Laura McBride ([00:28:11](#)):

So you have Matra and you have Banks who are keeping really solid records across the whole journey. And yet the account of possession on Possession Island, on the island itself, doesn't seem to be in their records. So there's several things here. There are different accounts, but the fact that people don't even know that Australia's possession took place on this island off the west coast of Cape York in itself is a reason why we really need to look at why are we not looking at our own histories? Why do we not know this as indigenous Australians or non-indigenous Australians, this history more openly?

Mariko Smith ([00:28:52](#)):

We do reflect upon how it is a contested history. So we call this sub-section the beginning, in this recognizing invasion section contested possession, because there are various accounts of this one event and these accounts don't necessarily corroborate, they can conflict, which is what you see here when Uncle Waubin said they did not land because what would have happened is they would have sped them. And Cook in particular, they would have, it's for sure Laura, they would've just cut off his head and boiled it and then they traded with Papua New Guinea because there was a lot of that connections with the other cultures and peoples from New Guinea to Melanesia, Asia as well. And so that's something a lot of Australians didn't realize. They just thought Australia was just sitting here until Europeans came. It was just in isolation, no one ventured beyond where there was all these intermarriage and trade networks in play. People in Asia and the Pacific knew about the people in these lands.

Laura McBride ([00:29:55](#)):

So the recognizing invasion section then goes on and deals with primarily what we see as colonial records and voices because in this particular theme and topic what we were addressing was back to the consultation where First Nations people asked us what went on between 1770 and 1788 and why did they think they had the right to come here and do this?

Mariko Smith ([00:30:22](#)):

It's interesting that there are people who think that Cook came with the first fleet in 1788, but in fact he was dead, I think, nearly nine years before. So when he died in Hawaii in 1779. And 1779 was also a year that the British parliament were debating about convict transportation because they had this like big





historycouncilnsw

social problem of convicts and the prison hulks and running out of space for this big population. And at the time with the American Revolutionary War. And so there's all these factors that kind of played into the decision of why New South Wales was picked as a British colony. And so, because, yeah, [inaudible 00:31:05] just asking why was this decision made and why did it take to 18 years? And I think there was a lot of this geopolitical context that played too.

Laura McBride ([00:31:14](#)):

What I think we should talk about here is the complete erasure of James Mario Matra who Matraville is named after. Most people-

Mariko Smith ([00:31:24](#)):

I taught Laura that.

Laura McBride ([00:31:26](#)):

Matraville High School, Matraville, the suburb. And then we find out that really it's Matra who [crosstalk 00:31:34] more so than Cook, was a key player in the colonization of Australia and for really quite personal, specifically personal purposes.

Mariko Smith ([00:31:43](#)):

And that's something that we draw out with this plans for colony section. So having Sir Joseph Banks' testimony to the 1779 Bunbury parliamentary committee on convict transportation, but also on Matra's own proposal that he brought to the table to British parliament. And we show an example of what is an agenda note from a British cabinet meeting where Matra wanted to bring this up.

Laura McBride ([00:32:11](#)):

Can you speak a little bit about the discrepancy between banks records when he was on the Endeavour Voyage versus then what he wrote to support Matra in the British parliament several years later?

Mariko Smith ([00:32:22](#)):

Oh, that's right. I think particularly the example about the quality of the soil. And I was looking at when I was at State Library of New South Wales undertaking research, I came across Andrew Tink's papers. He did a lot of research on Lord Sydney. So, yeah, it was interesting to see how he was writing about how Banks in his journal wrote about Botany Bay and the soil was like a sandy soil. He didn't think that a lot could be grown in it. And then you compare that to his account to this Banbury parliamentary committee where he was talking it up and just saying it is great. It's really great quality soil. I think he mentioned the Mediterranean, like it was like Mediterranean quality or something and that yeah, just really talked it up in complete contrast to how he described it initially.

Laura McBride ([00:33:17](#)):

So very much we're often told Australia is a population of convicts and it was harsh for convicts to come here and this was essentially the beginning. But really Australia was selected because land was needed.





historycouncilnsw

It was in a good position of the world in trade for spices, was mentioned also in these parliamentary records. And so we need to think about what were the circumstances going on and stop trying to place this false narrative. When Matra first wrote to parliament about all these issues, it was actually the parliament that wrote back and said, "Can you include convicts in your application as a priority because they're just," what was happening is the prison hulks were blocking other ships from coming in and blocking the economy that was needing to go on within London. We should also like the Kaurareg people's story, is we should understand this history. It's the fact that Australian colonization also occurred because of the American Revolutionary War-

Mariko Smith ([00:34:20](#)):

So that's it, and that's Matra's story, like he's a family of American loyalists. And so that was like what Laura was saying, his initial proposal was around we're in a situation like in the late 1770s, early 1780s where Great Britain is at risk of losing its, I think it's 13 colonies in America, and you've got all these people who are panicking about we need somewhere else to colonize and to go. And so Matra thought, well, this is great. We're in New York. We need to find somewhere else to go. And I remember traveling to somewhere called New South Wales and this is going to give me some good kudos in The British Society and so he proposed that. But then yeah, like Lord Sydney came back to him and [inaudible 00:35:06] Sydney came back and said, "Can you please incorporate, I think your proposal has more chance of success if you incorporate a solution for this growing convict population issue."

Chapter 6: Fighting Wars

Laura McBride ([00:35:22](#)):

Something that came out really quite strongly in the consultation material was telling the truth about the wars. Wars were fought in this country. People fought for their families, their homelands, and their cultures. Fighting Wars is then the next section of the Unsettled exhibition, where we specifically look at the fact that the definition of war itself and defined what that is and where were wars fought in this country.

Mariko Smith ([00:35:52](#)):

Yeah, that's right because I think that's something that people would just say, "Oh, well it doesn't fit the definition of war."

Laura McBride ([00:35:58](#)):

But it's interesting, isn't it, Mariko, with the fact that people say, "Well, in regards to this definition of war," but actually that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about an intention. We're talking about a military campaign, and Australia was colonized with a high amount of military.

Mariko Smith ([00:36:22](#)):

Well, that's it. Starting off as like a penal colony, but there was like a power military force. There's lots of books we looked at around this area and, yeah, like the strong military presence. And then the fact that





historycouncilnsw

he got the, I think the five colonial governors of Australia or New South Wales were military men. They all were distinguished records in the army. Just thinking of like Governor Macquarie who we deal with later on. I think he was in Colonial India. And so he applied a lot of those military tactics in how he engaged with the so-called hostile natives. And so we were looking at a lot of that language through material of the time, like there was newspapers which actually used the word war. So this is why it's a little bit funny when people just go, "It wasn't a war." But then you're like, "Well, they actually used the word war."

Laura McBride ([00:37:17](#)):

Well people living at the time, and not just some records, multiple records of people saying we are now at war with the Aborigines, just as the people in Sydney are. There are records from South Australia.

Mariko Smith ([00:37:32](#)):

[inaudible 00:37:32] land, Tasmania.

Laura McBride ([00:37:34](#)):

So there are many, everybody living at the time was describing their experience as in living in a war. And so, although Unsettled is a First Nations perspective, we include several sources that illustrate that as well as maps. So if we look at something like the mapping and the colonization of New South Wales out to the areas in which people were trying to farm and grow the economy, there are safe pathways that are blocked by logos that have spears to say don't go here, there are savage natives or savage Aborigines in the area still defending their territories. So they mark two main things, waterless country and where the Aboriginal people were still able to be defending their territories.

Laura McBride ([00:38:18](#)):

What's quite interesting is Bourke in far west New South Wales, when looking at this map, that on this map, Bourke is marked as Fort Bourke. And so there are these things that drop out of history, they're forgotten or they're deliberately forgotten.

Mariko Smith ([00:38:36](#)):

So Laura, let's talk about the first war, so the Sydney War.

Laura McBride ([00:38:40](#)):

Well that's what we focused on because each section, as we said, could be a whole exhibition in itself. Really we only have quite a small area to analyze each of these different topics. And so we thought we'd start with the first war, the Sydney Wars, which are the wars that raged across what's known now as the Sydney Basin. And this war went on for 29 years?

Mariko Smith ([00:39:02](#)):

That's right.





historycouncilnsw

Laura McBride ([00:39:03](#)):

So a very long war. A period of warfare and non-warfare. Diplomatic attempts were taken across this time. This is where you start to see Governor Philip?

Mariko Smith ([00:39:13](#)):

Macquarie.

Laura McBride ([00:39:13](#)):

Governor Macquarie start to give out breastplates at the native feasts in order to try and get people on site to establish a system of leadership where they would like to talk to one person instead of several different people, so the giving out of breastplates, the opening of the Native Institute, and a whole different range of things. But still Aboriginal people weren't conforming. And then we have particular heroes in this story such as Pemulwuy and Pemulwuy has such an important story. And there's a particular turning point in that Sydney War where Pemulwuy spears the colony's gamekeeper, McIntyre. And so we worked with some [inaudible 00:39:56] descendants, Raymond Timbery and Joel Deaves to recreate a death spear. So there are no death spears within museum collections that we know of. So the [inaudible 00:40:10] used colonial records, as well as speaking to their elders to recreate an object like the one used by Pemulwuy on that day to spear the colony's gamekeeper.

Mariko Smith ([00:40:23](#)):

And so some of the research we undertook was looking at some of the archeological writings about like what sort of material was used. So we did use some of those colonial documents to help up describe some of like, I think it's like [inaudible 00:40:39] shells, like a yellow substance which I think would be like resin from Gadi grass tree. And so we talked to the community members and provided this information, but then gave them that sort of autonomy. And it's part of that self-determining practices as well, like communities tell these stories so.

Laura McBride ([00:41:01](#)):

Well they have to take those colonial records, that information that was lost throughout the colonization process and then they have to put it back through their elders and their cultural lens to really interpret what's happening there. But this is a lot of how cultural revitalization is working within museums in regards to the revitalization of nawi making, which is the tide bar canoe from the east coast here, or possum skin cloak making, all very much the same coming in to use the collections themselves, archival records, as well as living cultural knowledge to be able to revitalize these cultural practices.

Laura McBride ([00:41:37](#)):

So there are other things that we look at within the Sydney Wars, other records, but really what I want to talk about here, because it leads us to our next section, is where we got at the end of that Sydney War. So the coldness that we're getting really, really fed up with this incredibly long war. We're at 26, 27 years, and we're about to come into quite a significant event which sets the pathway for the colonization of the





historycouncilnsw

rest of Australia. And so the governor and many other people are fed up. And so can you tell us what you found in the records, particularly around the Appin massacre?

Mariko Smith ([00:42:13](#)):

So yeah, I think 1816 is a really key year. So Governor Lachlan Macquarie, who we've spoken about how he was a military man, a very experienced strategist, and he wrote in his governor's memorandum and diary book of the hostile natives and just the problems they pose and how he has tried in frustration to really control and manage the situation by through trying to [inaudible 00:42:39] or so called negotiate with them, but then it's come to the point where there needs to be punitive action. And so he gave instructions to a number of military detachments to basically carry out punitive expeditions, which was to punish Aboriginal people who did not conform to what his societal order that he was trying to implement.

Laura McBride ([00:43:02](#)):

But within those records, Mariko, what we find is also some coverups, right? So we're looking at going out and what he would've liked to have seen or what he says he would've liked to have seen within his records is only those people that are not conforming, give people warning. But we know with the Appin massacre, in the middle of the night that there was no warning.

Mariko Smith ([00:43:26](#)):

That's right. So he gave very clear instructions to the three leaders of those attachments that were meant to go across the south west Western Sydney, that they were only meant to respond by firing if there was resistance, they were meant to spare women and children. So it was very clear, like he was trying to follow like this particular sort of rules of warfare. And with Appin, in regards to James Wallis, who led that through Southwest Sydney. They ended up carrying out a night raid and so what opportunity was there for the men, women, and children who were camping to offer up any resistance. And so I think you were reading also, Laura, about there was like a decoy camp that was-

Laura McBride ([00:44:15](#)):

Oh, absolutely. So Aboriginal people within the area would light fires that threw up high smoke and then they would actually camp around fires that were letting up little to no smoke. This particular group had moved around to those high fires and had missed the people camping at Appin but what had happened was a baby cried and it's the baby crying that led the group in for this night raid.

Laura McBride ([00:44:46](#)):

But what I'm talking about the cover up in the records is the fact that writing back when they know this massive mistake has been made where we have women and we have children dying, but that's all covered up, but what's really interesting is we can look at the evidence within museums and from the three people that were hung in the tree, we know that one of those was a female.

Mariko Smith ([00:45:08](#)):





historycouncilnsw

That's right. So we presented various accounts. So you had Governor Macquarie's instructions, you had James Wallis' diary entry from that fateful night, but also how Governor Macquarie reported back to his superior, the Earl Bathurst. And also with, there was a young boy who later on in life he lived in that area and he was around like when the news of this massacre happened. And as an old man, he wrote his recollections about this event, and so William Byrne. And he wrote about that there were three bodies, not the two that Wallis had reported back to Macquarie. It was all these little discrepancies in play. And then also the way that Macquarie reported back to the Earl Bathurst was that Wallis met some resistance and that's why they responded in that way. But as we know, from the circumstances in a night raid, what resistance are people offering when they're sleeping?

Laura McBride ([00:46:09](#)):

So how did this set the pathway? How did this set the pathway for that tactic to be used, massacres as the key tool to be used across the rest of the colonization of Australia? So really, we are starting to see ourselves and maybe others as Appin as this real turning point on the types of ways in which the colonists then spread out across the country. So, diplomatic attempts had failed. They were taking too long. Things were too slow. And Aboriginal people were just not giving up their lands, their livelihoods, or their cultures. And so the Appin massacre essentially sets a pathway, doesn't it? For how the rest of Australia is colonized.

Mariko Smith ([00:46:50](#)):

That's it. And then you come up to the boiling point, which is Governor Macquarie's proclamation not long after the Appin massacre, which basically he's declaring de facto war on the Aboriginal people in New South Wales. And a lot of what he was stipulating in this proclamation around controlling the movement of Aboriginal people, it's all the hallmarks of later protectionist policies. So more of this way of just trying to strike out at all this resistance and just really suppress that. And yeah, so I think it really did indicate sort of the strategy at play, which as the colony expanded, the violence and the massacres that continued to follow. So that leads us into Remembering Massacres. So did you want to speak to us about this section, Laura?

Laura McBride ([00:47:43](#)):

Absolutely. Massacres are a completely unhealed element of conversation and communities. The fact that we live in societies and towns that where roads and bridges and different things, libraries or institutions are named after the people who perpetrated these massacres but are lorded as the heroes who set up these towns. So it's once again the different perspectives of history. Remembering massacres, we utilize the Newcastle University's team study. Would you like to just speak slightly about that study?

Mariko Smith ([00:48:21](#)):

Yes. So that's the massacre mapping project. So from those early years of the colony, 1788 up to the last documented massacre, which was, I believe 1929. And so the research team at University of Newcastle, they're going by documented massacres. They define massacre in a very particular way. I really





historycouncilnsw

encourage you all to look at their website where they've got the full sort of scope of what they were researching. But yeah, it doesn't include all the undocumented massacres, we just had to be mindful of that. But what is really powerful about how their data was being presented in the massacre map that's on show in Unsettled is the extent and the spread of the colony and then the violence that went hand in hand with it.

Mariko Smith ([00:49:10](#)):

So you see the map of Australia and then from those early years branching up like this Sydney was just concentrated, but then like because the [inaudible 00:49:21] land was colonized and then you see the violence and the numbers kind of spreading out there, but then particularly with New South Wales, you see from that turning point, it just expanded, it just blew up as they went [crosstalk 00:49:35]-

Laura McBride ([00:49:36](#)):

There was a quick rush over to the west coast where you see massacres pop up around Perth for instance, but then it's back to the east coast and then a spread. So essentially you can see that massacres align directly with the colonization of Australia, but the massacre map is data and data can work in many forms for particular people. Historians love data, scientists love data, but what do our visitors think? If they see this map light up red with all the massacres, are they really empathizing with that data? So right next to that, within the exhibition design, we actually have these images of landscapes where massacres occurred and what type of photography was used in those photos, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([00:50:24](#)):

So it was like this sort of infrared technology, because it is black and white photos that are just very stark. It's just not natural the way that all the landscape is just very starkly presented and it's unnerving actually to look at it. It's not quite like how we would see these places in every day. So I think our visitors would be reflecting upon this imagery by photographer, Brendan Beirne in his Dark Days photographic series and-

Laura McBride ([00:50:54](#)):

It's like an image of somewhere where you've gone on a holiday. It's an image of say your parents' property or it's, these are familiar sites. And so essentially we have the map and then we have these really familiar landscapes. And it just raises the question for those visitors, that the areas in which we live, work, and play have these hidden histories.

Mariko Smith ([00:51:16](#)):

That's right.

Laura McBride ([00:51:17](#)):

So that takes us to some of the other records that we include in this area. The fact that Aboriginal people are often told that well massacres, that was the time, life was hard on both sides, and that's just the way it was. Can you talk about the Myall Creek letter and why that's not necessarily the case?





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([00:51:39](#)):

So the Myall Creek letter was a Sydney [inaudible 00:51:41] writing back to a relative in England. They were following the 1838 trial of the people responsible for the Myall Creek massacre. And so this person had followed a trial but also eye witnessed the later executions. And even by that standard, like they knew it was wrong to kill innocent men, women, and children in basically cold blood.

Laura McBride ([00:52:06](#)):

Can you just tell us a little bit about what we found in Emily Creaghe's diary?

Mariko Smith ([00:52:11](#)):

So Emily Creaghe is someone who's celebrated as a trailblazer. So the first white woman to have vented west into what is the [inaudible 00:52:22] area. And she basically wrote about Aboriginal people in a way like describing these cruel acts towards, and whether it's tying up an Aboriginal woman or going to a homestead and seeing 40 pairs of Aboriginal people's ears nailed on the wall and the way she kind of responded to that it just normalized the cruelty towards Aboriginal people.

Laura McBride ([00:52:47](#)):

Within Emily Creaghe's diary, I just want to go back to the part where you've discussed the fact that a woman was brought in on the back of the horse tied up by a rope and they tied her to the tree, and the whole time she was trying to escape. Emily Creaghe was saying things like, "I don't understand why she doesn't like her new life. We've literally gone out there and got this savage and brought her onto the property where she's going to have a great life." Like they're the types of perspectives and representations that's still in a way are transformed. Why don't Aboriginal people learn to live like this? Or why don't Aboriginal people conform like this? So coming out of Fighting Wars and Remembering Massacres, there's a design pathway towards our next section. And in that area, we deal with two quite important points. The first I want to discuss with you is the concept of lest we for/get over it. Could you explain the piece that we included in this section about this?

Chapter 7: Lest We Get Over It

Mariko Smith ([00:53:49](#)):

So lest we for/get over it is this great illustration by artist Sam Wallman, which incorporates both lest we forget, as we know every year we always say, every year of Anzac Day making sure we always remember the sacrifices that were made by Australian men and women in overseas conflict to get over it. So that's something that Aboriginal people here constantly particularly around Invasion Day and when we're like Day of Mourning and remembering the people who have fallen with the frontier wars and massacres. So lest we for/get over it is like a combination just to show a bit of that sort of, I guess, the plot way of saying discrepancies but also like the hypocrisy as well.

Laura McBride ([00:54:38](#)):





historycouncilnsw

The second piece in this space coming out of Fighting Wars and Remembering Massacres is an important piece for us to reflect on in regards to understanding our history. Colonization didn't happen in the distant past. In fact, colonization is still ongoing. Now, considering within the massacre mapping project that a significant amount of massacres were undertaken by police military soldiers, there's been no healing of that relationship in recent times. And that leads us into very similar issues we're having with deaths in custody and an average of a death in custody once every three weeks. Would you like to speak about the Tony Albert piece that we included to speak to this topic, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([00:55:22](#)):

So this Tony Albert Glassworks piece is based on an earlier photographic series he did called Brothers. He saw a group of Aboriginal men at a 2012 protest rally against police brutality with targets painted on their chest in red. And Tony was really struck by that imagery. And so through his photography and now his Glassworks he has represented this, and I think doing it in that glass pain sort of medium as well, it communicates that idea about the people who are being commemorated in that way, like in churches royalty and that having that image it's very striking.

Chapter 8: Surviving Genocide

Mariko Smith ([00:56:06](#)):

So, Laura, we're working now into the next section, which is Surviving Genocide. And so genocide is this word that a lot of people do feel confronted by. It's a legal term as well and it was really important to unpack what we mean by this. The fact is, genocide is what happened here in Australia. If you look at the UN definition of what genocide is, what happened in Australia fits all those categories.

Laura McBride ([00:56:36](#)):

That's right. So it was important for us to establish what definition we were working within. A major component of genocide is the removal of people from their traditional lands onto missions, reserves, and stations. This section features numerous objects, but I'd like to speak about one in particular that's connected to my family. My father was born in a fringe camp at Montkiela Bend in Walgett in 1957. Some people think that colonization and these events happened a long time ago, but I'm the first generation in my family to be born off missions and reserves.

Laura McBride ([00:57:17](#)):

His upbringing was in what our family would call a camp. And we felt it was interesting to start to explore some of those textures and feelings around what was going on on missions and reserves. My father and I collected tin from an old mission and my father constructed a miniature fringe camp wall to identify the types of houses and places and spaces that Aboriginal people were living in at this particular time. Within this section, we also talk about domestic servitude, the fact that Aboriginal people made the best with what they had, featuring some Hessian bags by [crosstalk 00:57:59] that's right. And so we look at multiple different elements of people's experiences on missions and reserves to give a more holistic





historycouncilnsw

story, but each object, exhibition, or quote within the show, we actually co-designed and facilitated that work with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Mariko Smith ([00:58:21](#)):

So the next topic we got is Stolen Generations. Now that is a topic that many Australians are familiar with.

Laura McBride ([00:58:29](#)):

That's right. And it's one of the more acceptable people can relate to it more in regards to specifically the genocide definition itself. In the same way in this section, we worked with surviving members of the stolen generation so that they could tell their stories. Each piece in the Stolen Generation section it's a touching first person story. And we were honored to present these stories, some of which we knew and some of which we learned through the Unsettled curation process. Quickly, I'll talk about Aunty Fay Mosely's painting, Ticket to Hell, which shows her and several of her siblings being taken to a train station and removed to central in the first instance, and then onto Kinchela Boys' Home and Cootamundra Girls' Home from there.

Laura McBride ([00:59:26](#)):

What was really important about this piece is that there's often this idea that Aboriginal children were taken for their own good. But if you look at someone like Aunty Fay mostly, whose father was a Rat of Tobruk, he had an exemption certificate, both her parents worked full time at the cannery, and her grandmother actually owned their own home. They were still removed even given all of the purposes for which the parents tried to adhere in the colonization process.

Laura McBride ([00:59:58](#)):

Aunty Fay describes it very briefly and quite interestingly in saying that, "It wasn't about giving me an education. I was an A grade student. They wanted to make me D grade," D for domestic service. So you can see that there are elements brought out in these individual paintings that we can do so more than a textbook on what might be the entire stolen generation. It's these personal stories that we find makes Unsettled so strong.

Chapter 9: Continued Resistance

Mariko Smith ([01:00:27](#)):

So now we're coming into continued resistance and this section refers to how we have always been resisting. It's never stopped. From artistic resistance to cultural resistance.

Laura McBride ([01:00:42](#)):

Political resistance, resistance across the frontier at the brunt of colonization across Australia. We deal with a range of different types of resistance and in particular ongoing resistance starting in 1788 continuing through to today in 2021.





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([01:01:02](#)):

That's right, Laura. And also we look at who gets commemorated in our history. So particularly through one of your favorite pieces, Blood Money, how that work communicates who we commemorate on our notes of currency and who we commemorate in our history, to how we can focus on the resistance fighters that we look up to?

Laura McBride ([01:01:26](#)):

Absolutely. Blood Money is one of my favorite pieces within the Unsettled exhibition. Blood Money is often used to describe money obtained at the cost of another's life. The Blood Money series by Dr. Ryan Presley explores the extent to which Australia's wealth has been built on a history of exploitation and violence. Arguably, the bulk of Australia's economy functions off Aboriginal dispossession. On some notes, the dollar value is replaced by the infinity symbol, a gesture to the ongoing and unquantifiable damage brought by colonization. The version of history represented on Australia's currency is primarily that of white settler figures. In contrast, Blood Money promotes important Aboriginal people testifying to their intelligence and resilience, their legitimate actions standing contrast to the many colonial myths that Aboriginal people were passive and lacked the will to resist colonial encroachment.

Laura McBride ([01:02:27](#)):

I first saw Dr. Ryan Presley's series of Blood Money at [inaudible 01:02:32] in 2019 and was just taken aback by them. I thought they were some of the greatest pieces of art that I've ever seen and bringing them into the museum and bringing them a little bit outside of that art gallery context was to associate each of these Blood Money pieces with a cultural object. Let's take for instance someone like Fanny Balbuk. There was the first time I had heard Fanny Balbuk's story. Fanny Balbuk is a resistance fighter, a Noongar woman from Western Australia. And we went to our collections, didn't we, Mariko? And could see if we could find the infamous digging stick, a Noongar digging stick to associate with this Blood Money piece. But actually we only found a metal [inaudible 01:03:22], which was unsuitable for us, wasn't it, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([01:03:24](#)):

Oh, yes, that's right. And so this was another opportunity for us because we wanted to work with communities and this was a really great opportunity to support communities in this way because Unsettled has that potential to really impact on socioeconomic outcomes as well. And so by commissioning a work from a Noongar artist, we were able to include [inaudible 01:03:49] and also make a really great network with [inaudible 01:03:52] as well who's a Noongar artist.

Laura McBride ([01:03:56](#)):

At the back end of continued resistance, we have a really quite, I feel a strong self-determining piece representing particularly male ancestors and the role they played in resisting for us in essentially ensuring our survival. One work made up of three pieces by Jai Darby Walker. And I have been watching Jai undertake his artistic practice for a number of years and he has this amazing talent to be able to





historycouncilnsw

capture the look and feel and spirit of the old people. So there were these fantastic old warriors that when I saw them I said they have to go in Unsettled and I wasn't quite sure in what way or at one point, but that grew out of, because a lot of Unsettled developed as we moved along, didn't it Mariko? Having constant conversations and looking at our collections and working with certain artists. And this was a really good opportunity for us to also critique the Australian Museum and cultural institutions' role in how they define and represent our cultures. So, [crosstalk 01:05:03], would you like to speak on that a little bit, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([01:05:05](#)):

Yeah, definitely because I mean it's not just to expect the Australian public to embark on a journey of truth telling, our institutions need to be a part of this as well and the Australian Museum is no different. We need to critically reflect upon the Australian Museum's own practices of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples and cultures. And often when these great cultural object center museums they get decontextualized, stripped of all their cultural meanings. Often the information about how they were made and who by has just been stripped away and ignored, discarded. And once they come into sort of this museum registration process, they become simplified into something part of the taxonomy system. They become like a club, for example, where we are showing a display of so-called clubs, but these, we see them as law sticks and they're much more complex than just being classified as a our hunter, gatherer tool.

Laura McBride ([01:06:09](#)):

That's right. So in our collections, this series of law sticks is stored under the classification of hunter, gatherer tool and then club. Gives it a very savage and simplistic nature when in fact these are very complex, very detailed, engraved objects that we know weren't used for generally clubbing things. They fit well with these old men, these old ancestors at the back of the exhibition, and essentially the object and these people represented in these artworks have all been disenfranchised by this history and by collecting institutions such as ours.

Laura McBride ([01:06:50](#)):

Further to being classified in this way, these clubs are also listed with maker unknown. Often the individual was disenfranchised in the collecting process and maker unknown is one of the most common descriptions under who is the maker? There have been previous exhibitions and work completed by other first nations curators and people in the glam sector with this use of made by ancestor. We also now use that term because although we don't know who the maker is, we can at least respect them and acknowledge that that maker is an ancestor of people who are likely very much living today.

Chapter 10: Healing Nations

Laura McBride ([01:07:34](#)):





historycouncilnsw

How do you end an exhibition like this, right? Australia has a heavy history. It's a lived history for us and there's a lot of emotions involved, but there need to be some really positive outcomes that people think they can achieve.

Mariko Smith ([01:07:55](#)):

It's about empowerment. So empowering people, so both indigenous and non-indigenous to work together about how do we learn from this, a really difficult history and work towards a better present and a better shared future. Like it's about birthing a new Australia, essentially.

Laura McBride ([01:08:15](#)):

That's right. And in the lead up to Unsettled, we had been running some deep listening workshops with some of the community members from [inaudible 01:08:26], a cultural company that operates out of Central New South Wales. We found these incredibly valuable to our audiences. They're two-and-a-half hour experiences. And we thought if we could capture in some way that experience to end this exhibition on, we may be able to give people a space in which they can reflect but also take away some really important messages. And it was the community themselves. I believe 68 people worked with us on developing the last space of Winhangadurinya.

Mariko Smith ([01:09:07](#)):

So Winhangadurinya means deep listening, reflecting meditation. And so this is really, this part of Unsettled really shows me how great it is to be a curator, how we can pull together something like this, but it didn't happen in the museum space, we had to do it with community on country. And so that is what we did with Winhangadurinya going out to Central West New South Wales and working with a number of elders and community members from a number of nations.

Laura McBride ([01:09:40](#)):

We held women's workshops with the female elders, teaching us certain elements of culture, but also discussing the design of this space and what it would need to encompass. And then the men then did the same as well, didn't they, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([01:09:54](#)):

That's it. And everything had to be just right. So the designs had to be just right and accurate and appropriate. So working with the various elders the men and the women, but also even just collecting the materials, the wood itself, that was such a process as well, right, Laura?

Laura McBride ([01:10:12](#)):

Yeah, so to collect the [inaudible 01:10:14] country, we got the permission from senior elders from Wellington, the [inaudible 01:10:19] elders who wrote us a letter, well we wrote them a letter and they wrote us back a letter giving us permission to be able to collect the wood from their country for this purpose.





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([01:10:29](#)):

So where to now, Laura?

Laura McBride ([01:10:31](#)):

Well, I'm not sure it's a where to now question. I think that comes where people think that Unsettled was something at the beginning. Really, Unsettled is part of a larger strategy that the First Nations staff have within the Australian Museum, which is actually disruption. We talked about disruption as a strategy at the 2019 AMaGA Conference in Alice Springs. Not disruption in a bad way, but if we don't disrupt these systems within cultural institutions, then there will be no productive change. So Unsettled actually is in the beginning, it's more in the middle of the larger disruption strategy that we're undertaking here at the Australian Museum, but also we are being engaged by other community members, non-indigenous organizations to come and talk to us and meet with us about the types of work that we're doing.

Laura McBride ([01:11:26](#)):

So we would like to continue this strategy. So now that we've added in, we're essentially trying to neutralize that space, right? Because museums have never been neutral. So now that Aboriginal people have had a say on the Cook Anniversary and the legacy of colonization, I would like to see that we'd be just become much more self-determining across our natural history and science exhibitions. What about you, Mariko?

Mariko Smith ([01:11:52](#)):

Yeah, I think so. And I think it helps us rethink the way we interpret and engage with culture within these walls and the way we can help facilitate many ways learning as well. as, yeah, just rethinking how we classify and name objects and how we refer to them. So there's a lot of lessons here that I think visitors can take into their everyday lives as well. And if it's something that just helps prompt them thinking, oh, I guess I have to reflect upon how I talk about or think about our First Nations peoples and conversations with my family, friends, and co-workers.

Laura McBride ([01:12:35](#)):

Another thing I'll talk to about is, particularly for us is where to now is more that it is in this middle process of Unsettled is one part of what we do, really because when we step out of the building at five o'clock, we don't stop to be the Unsettled curators, we don't stop being First Nations, Aboriginal community members. And so the accountability as Aboriginal staff members never really ends. There's no stop and start. And that's how I would see Unsettled. Unsettled is part of a larger journey and I'm just incredibly privileged that we were able to facilitate the voices and achieve those themes and topics that so many people in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wanted from us. It's an incredible honor to be able to take part in this work when you know how many people before you have tried to achieve these same goals. So really we are just following in their footsteps and continuing work that has started essentially in 1788.





historycouncilnsw

Mariko Smith ([01:13:40](#)):

That's right.

For all inquires about this production, please contact: admin@historycouncilnsw.org.au

Visit our website for details of past Annual History Lectures: <https://historycouncilnsw.org.au/>

