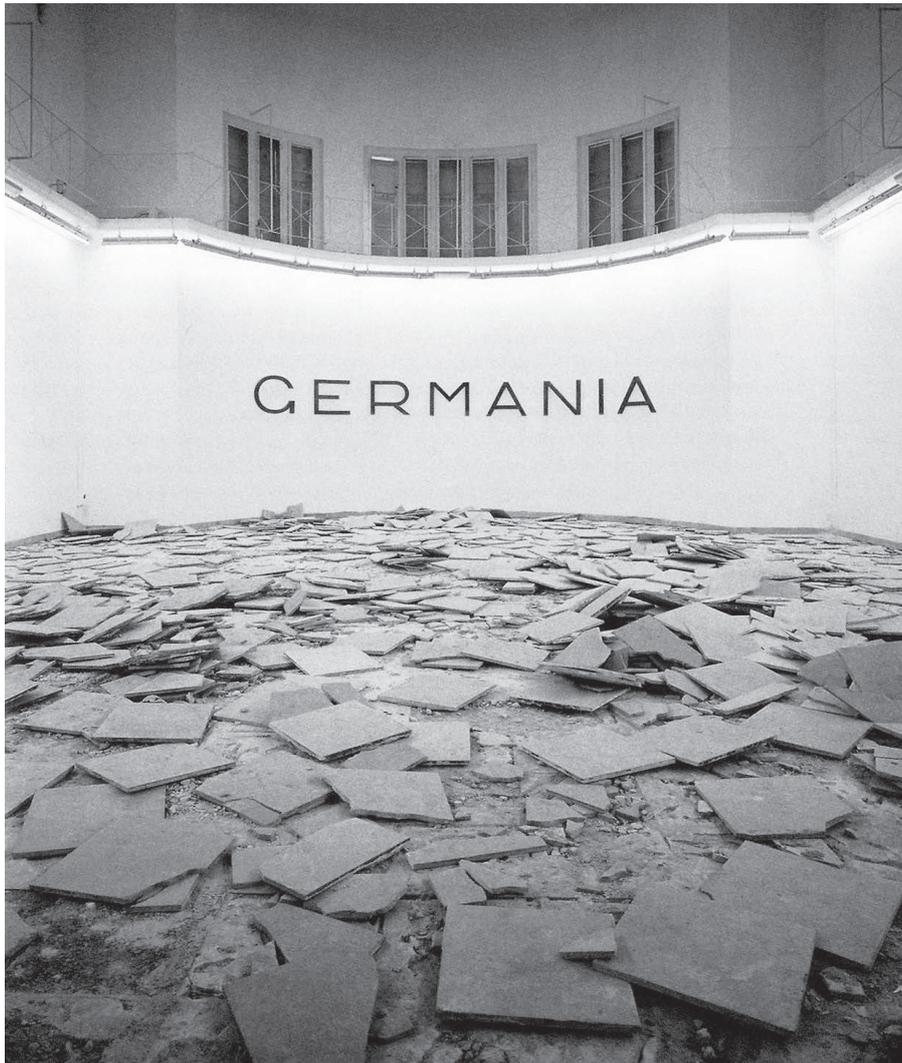


ADAM GECZY

# Race to at Venice



In the 1993 Venice Biennale, for the German Pavilion, Hans Haacke had the concrete floor jack-hammered with the word “GERMANIA” in a font inescapably reminiscent of the 1930s, emblazoned in bold hard letters centrally on the facing wall. The arc wall gloomily illuminated at its upper rim, was the only specific build for the site, the rest was just a destroyed mess that paid homage to the history of bombed cities in Germany at the end of the Second World War. It was also the wilful desecration of the pavilion that had been proudly refurbished by Hitler and a fillip to the other buildings that had been made and still more planned and not achieved during the Third Reich. More universally it was a work that spoke to the hubris of overweening nationalism, and the price to be paid by imposing state will onto culture. Most strikingly, Haacke’s act of artistic creation was an act of vandalism that was also state-sanctioned. We all know that a cryptic characteristic of capitalism is that it likes to be admonished so that it can absorb that disapproval for its own profit. This artwork was far more than perverse self-excoriation and in hindsight it continues to stand as a corrective to much of the art that has been shown at Venice, before and since. For although there have been many specific national and historical references, it nonetheless prompts reflection upon how the Venice pavilion functions for each country, and the willingness of any country stake its share in its own trauma and remorse.

Admittedly, Australia is not the only country which would disallow something like Haacke’s *Germania*. It takes enormous confidence for a culture to allow such a gesture which then poses counter-questions about how carefully each country’s pavilions are curated. Australia has a special position within these vexed issues. Would it allow an exhibition in Venice that openly excoriates its own heritage and culture? Perhaps not so in Venice, although there have been numerous domestic instances such as the three *The National* exhibitions (2017–2019–2021)<sup>1</sup> along with a regular schedule of exhibitions that feature Indigenous artists exclusively (*Tarnanthi* and the *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards*). There are therefore several issues at stake. There is plenty of rebarbative content in the above exhibitions, but it tends to be quarantined within a national discourse not allowed to blemish any external image. The first is the degree of tenor of complaint, dissent and division that Australia wishes to project to the outside world from these exhibitions, albeit that this “outside world” is a relative object, as this discord is almost wholly confined to Australia. The second is the pressure placed on curators to measure up to what are nonetheless fluid and obscure units that require a ‘balance’ of ethnicity. The third, in this balance is selective and measured, internal to the exhibition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists but which, for the most part, *proportionately* disavows Australia’s Asian and Middle Eastern population. It would be naïve not to say that these discrepancies are not agenda driven. It would be constructive to national discourse to have a frank debate about the extent to which Venice is being used as a vehicle for projecting a finely-tuned socio-cultural image, and to what extent it has, in the last two decades or more, as a way of ensuring that the same unnuanced myths of Australia continue to bubble on in the global popular conscience. But this is at the expense of artists who may call the effectiveness of selective aesthetic strategies, and this at the expense of other sectors—some who identify as minorities, others simply of mixed heritage and others not at all but whose work is decisively non-Anglo in orientation— who are made to be content to nip at the cultural edges.

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<sup>1</sup> See this journal Issue no. 10, 2021; <https://artdesign.unsw.edu.au/unsw-galleries/divan-issue-10>

These too have their own share of stories of dislocation and disenfranchisement. The presiding question, then, is: if curators run the risk of potential career-cancelling criticism if they exclude Indigenous artists, why is not the same criticism carried over to artists whose work is rooted in their Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds? The immediate answer has inevitably to do with profitability and perception, suggesting that ethnic redress within cultural frameworks is not only driven by ethics but also by cynical considerations of benefit. In terms of social kudos, turnstile numbers, fomenting mass masochist guilt, the Asian card is simply not ace-high.

Thus, from a cultural perspective – and this umbrella term can be taken to mean visual art or can be distended outward to other fields of activity from dance to music – it is as if Australian artists who identify with Asian or Middle Eastern ancestry are, with two isolated exceptions, apparently written out altogether from consideration of national representation at Venice. The exceptions have been isolated: Hany Armanious (born Egypt) represented Australia in 2011 and Simryn Gill (born Singapore) in 2013; there have been no other artists identifying with Asian descent since. A normative pattern of black/white, Indigenous/non-Indigenous has slowly established itself with the paradoxical effect of entrenching as opposed to ‘addressing’ oppositionality.

And it might also asked, what kind of Indigenous art might be favoured? Is there a discernible pattern of the kinds of Indigenous artists nominated to be shown at Venice over others. Arguably yes. These are artists who either identify as having traditional weddedness to land and lore or else “contemporary/urban” who present a pared down and safely oblique version of postcolonial critique. For the first—the “traditional” tribally-oriented artists—the violence of resentment is considerably toned down as it is lies encrypted within styles that, depending on the artist and the group, is purposely unavailable to non-Indigenous, non-initiated eyes. For the urban artists who work within the Euro-American idiom of “art” (there is no such a word or concept in traditional Indigenous culture), the standpoint is almost exclusively of resentment of having to communicate in a system of language and signs that have been imposed. Yet this is a domestic *ressentiment*. From a Venice perspective (to call it metonymically), there is no potential or politically feasible equivalent of *Germania* open to Indigenous artists inclined to like-minded heresies, such as, for example, Richard Bell or Gordon Hookey, who are known for their aggressive and confrontational perspectives of the unevenness of reconciliation. (On the other hand, and which it would be too digressive to go into any detail here, the combativeness of some artists, such as Bell and Hookey, which often tips into uncensored recklessness, is insulated from critique or any reasoned reprisal. For that any concerted attempt to do so would court negative consequences that would not be worth the effort in doing so.) On the opposite pole to Bell and Hookey are Indigenous artists for whom the etiquette of the art world establishment is strictly, if not slavishly observed, effectively institutionalizing Indigenous art into a charmingly tame, smilingly hale, and decorously picturesque entity. The omissions of Indigenous artists that purvey a cynical attitude to Australian culture are tacitly branded as inhospitable, fêted within their own country as a sign of social toleration and free speech but, as evidenced so far, non-contenders as ambassadors. These omissions are not structural, they are not an intentional effect of policy – or of any official policy – which in fact makes it more, not less, sinister.

## Race to at Venice



It adumbrates a contemporary cultural obsession in which every cultural group is the loser. There are further points of nuance here that exist well outside any (clandestine) attitudes of the art establishment, and that is the disinterest of Indigenous artists, relative to non-Indigenous artists, of pursuing the political agendas in their work in overseas markets. This leads to the conclusion that the orientation and scope of the content of these artists is more national-local than international. It also begs the question as to the degree of pressure exerted on Indigenous artists—exerted by their Indigenous peers and also non-Indigenous curators fearful of being branded as “racist” and who unrepentantly “mine black gold” as the saying goes—to appeal to an amorphous body of socio-historical guilt. Postcolonial narratives can be posited on a sliding scale, and there are countless tame versions as well that doff their hat to the expected ideology. To put this in plainer terms, what contemporary Indigenous art has taught us in Australia is that it is not genuine or authentic unless it engages in some form of dissent against the dominant non-Indigenous establishment, which then contributes to a culture industry of complaint. Such preconditions are further vitiated to the extent the complaint is also expected by non-Indigenous curators and audiences, so expected that it has become the sine qua non, of contemporary Indigenous art practice. This is the case even to the extent that any work that does not evince these themes is liable to be read as such, by default.

The cultural complaint-industry, as it might be called, is principally systemic of postmodern and now new millennial capitalist culture. That is to say that it is an index of the authenticity of a cultural product, especially contemporary art, that it voices some revisionist position that impugns the regnant system. It is precisely what the system wants and what it readily absorbs for its own purposes. It is worth recalling a comment that theorist Terry Eagleton made in a review of a book by Gayatri Spivak almost two decades ago: “Nothing is more vogueish in guilt-ridden US academia than to point out the inevitable bad faith of one’s position. It is the nearest a postmodernist can come to authenticity.”<sup>2</sup> This is therefore a model that recent generations of artists and audiences have grown up with and have come to expect. The demarcation of black and white is highly legible and intelligible, and conflict that is tested and expected. But for other minorities in Australia the same kind of bifurcation is less possible, not only because their artwork is not necessarily combative, nor can it take advantage of what is now a cultural habitus, which is to decry colonization. Asians, Middle Easterners *et al.* can be seen as all participating in the ongoing process of colonization, which is how migration can be conveniently misread. As seen from the expected narrative of guilt and repatriation, disenfranchisement and repression are simply not plausible as they are altogether imprecise signifiers of culture. Without loss or shame there is less to play with.

On the advent of Suzanne Cotter taking on the new director position of Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, on 13 February 2022, the national newspaper *The Australian* ran a short, deliberately provocative article headed, “White, male artists on notice: you’re boring.” Written by a white male, it reported the in-coming director as saying: “Today, if you are a white male artist, you are not so interesting. It doesn’t mean to say you’re not a great artist—I think it’s more that this isn’t what is relevant for people now. You have to think in a timely way.” Not only was the statement surprisingly asinine, what was equally astonishing was that it was made with impunity: no de-platforming, no public outcry, no reprisal or retraction. This lack of backlash had a twofold connotation: that it was met with sympathy, or that the public were far too bewildered and psychologically beaten into submission to want to react, since white (straight) men are very cheap cultural currency and sadly a universalized target. There was some noise on social media, which caused Cotter to offer more circumspect comments in reply.

It is a statement that should not go unobserved and its failure to be censured in any significant way means that it is emblematic of a set of contemporary conditions that have gained momentum since movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and the international trend of reassigning or tearing down monuments associated with a history uncongenial to the dominant narrative of the present. Critical race and identity theory tell us that there are perpetrators and victims, but more importantly that perpetrators exist even before one physical body can be found or positive verification made. It is a scattergun ontology of shame and vilification. One dramatic trait of these movements is that they are fundamentally *purgative*, on the level of flushing out of culprits accused and/or complicit in repression and abuses of power, but also on that of mass psychology, a cathartic expulsion of energy of behalf of wounded parties past and present. This means that these movements are more to be understood as strategies, or operations, that work on a collective level to flush out what is deemed harmful to the cause, while at a personal level to empower, or rehabilitate

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<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others*, London and New York: Verso, 2003, p. 158

## Race to at Venice



with the aim of a more fair and benign status quo. They are testament to countries with a right to free speech (or the fight for it), but the darker consequence of the need to shift priorities is to expect that other voices not aligned with the movement, or narrowly associated with what it seeks to eradicate, are discredited using the same universalizing bias that eventuated the protest in the first place. For many such movements are debilitated by their frequent belligerence and a tribalism that militates against diversity of opinion within their own ranks. In the quest for new grounds for authenticity, certain groups are actively sought out as ipso facto inauthentic.

It is now firmly established that the definitional difference between postmodernism and The Contemporary is that while the former dealt predominately with repositioning the terms of reference to modernism, the latter is more so focused on race and identity. Race and identity are highly volatile concepts however, as they typically veer into radical solipsism, which is another way of saying that they are so inward-focused, subjective and reliant on private languages that they can foreclose debate in one stroke. This focus has accelerated out of hand with development of social media (Facebook: 2004) and smartphones (Apple iPhone: 2007). One of the criticisms of identity politics is that there is a propensity for people to study themselves as opposed to the world (although it has admitted voice and image to many selves hitherto invisible). Yet this new visibility has its limits, as it is mass visibility which is the new techno-invisible, where everyone has an opinion but with a disproportionate number of people listening, suggesting narcissism en masse.

That everyone (with the right technology) has a right and site for asserting self has eventuated in an intensification of opinion but not necessarily a deeper inquiry into how these opinions came to be or how they ramify. For example, teen female deaths by suicide as a result of social media trolling and bullying is now in epidemic proportions (the social scientist Jonathan Haidt

is particularly helpful in enumerating and explaining this scourge).<sup>3</sup> The primacy given to subjectivity and identity without the tools to develop what subjectivity and identity consists of, namely being-in-the-world and the social is the cause for countless cases of misery.

This is not a digression. Refer back to the Cotter's statement of priorities given to race and gender at the expense of any philosophical concern about art's contemporary importance, a concern that is immanent to art since it historically became autonomous and secular. Or rather the questions over art's functioning and quality have been shelved in favour over primacy given to gender and identity, and added to that, age, if you are not a stand-out cultural celebrity. Identity becomes the sine qua non for decisions and policy from which then the criteria for desirability are determined. When Cotter invokes the power of the multitude of what constitutes "interesting" – it may have its bearing on a superficial set of criteria-based social pressures that appear to be the most visible and determined, but it is also a very convenient position to take from a curatorial perspective. For it means that questions over the ontology of art – which is indeterminate and perpetually changing – can be briskly elided to land squarely in what is only ostensibly sure because it is named. Nomenclature according to race and gender has now recently been officiated into many forms of communication especially in emails or in Zoom assemblies (she/her; them/they; he/him) which leads to more of a Pandora's box than a solution (not an imprecisely couched problem). In other words, identity can be assigned as much as it is perceived. The leap over the ontology of art is confirmed but also confounded by Cotter with the caveat: "It doesn't mean to say you're not a great artist." So-called "greatness" is built on several irreducible and abstract criteria in which relevance plays a central role. For an artwork to have value is for the ways in which it speaks to the past and to the present.

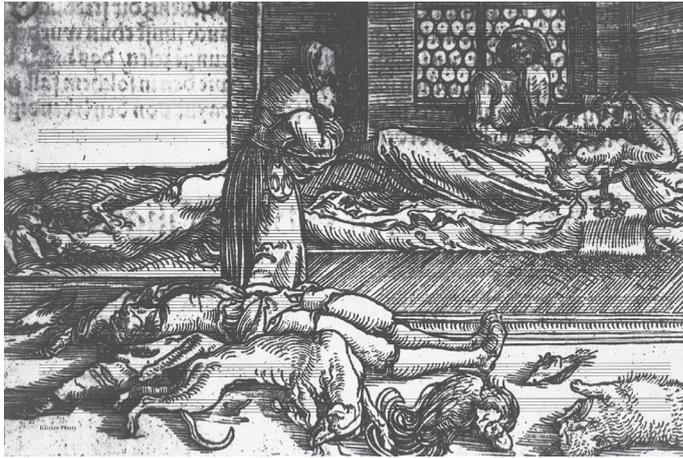
Aboriginal art, as art per se and not a set of conventions internal to ritualization, has several phases: 1970s: discovery; 1980s: growth and "acceptance" (with all the indelicacies that word inspires); 1990s: museification; 2000s: financial entrenchment and commodity boom (for the elite cultural stakeholders and almost exclusively white investors); 2010s and beyond: to position Aboriginal art into a place of central importance to Australian culture. The latter especially is a revisionary measure about giving voice to what had been excluded, but the obsessiveness with which it is put forward now has deleterious consequences. One is to sideline other minority groups, situating their plight as ancillary. And the degree of cultural importance invested in Indigenous art ought not be seen as wholly driven by egalitarian and ethical concerns, far from it.

The narrative is now a familiar one. The Indigenous people of Australia were gradually divested of their land and customs since British colonization in 1788. Their history of racial violence and eradication due to introduced illness is now well-documented. Indigenous art as it emerged gradually from the 1970s onward was a dynamic and forceful means of asserting their voice. I won't venture into a long history of its Westernization from Papanya in the Australian Western Desert region to the present day. By Westernization, I mean the (in this case) dot painting artworks were transposed using paints on boards or canvas. But depending on how far one wishes to take it, this transposition, which is dramatic, is already from the beginning a form of colonization: a devolution

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<sup>3</sup> See Louis Perry, 'The suicide rate among girls is higher than ever, as toxic social media becomes all-consuming', *The New Statesman*, 3 March 2021; <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/2021/03/suicide-rate-among-girls-higher-ever-toxic-social-media-becomes-all>; accessed 12 January 2022

Race to at Venice



of sacred and secret ritual stories and practices into a framework that is not simply formal but deeply historical and discursive—the ubiquitous Western tradition of painting.

It is perhaps the marriage of what, from an uninitiated and Western perspective, is a “primitive” style and that of familiar and near universal Western discourse that made Aboriginal art, as it gained popularity in the 1980s onwards, so congenial. Note as well that the first stirrings of Aboriginal art are based on traditional styles, ritual and lore. “Traditional” Aboriginal art as it is called, implies that the artist who produces it has direct contact to the languages, stories and rituals of his or her native land which, by assumption and implication, have been passed down for thousands of years. Traditional art, which to the Western eye is read through twentieth-century modernist abstraction, is in truth more like a form of writing, since it was through such configurations—what we would call designs—that were the main form of transmission of tribal stories that linked people to the land and their ancient ancestry. To begin with, the work of these artists was very pleasing aesthetically and wholly inoffensive and non-confrontational.

In many ways the milestone for Aboriginal art was *The Aboriginal Memorial*<sup>4</sup> of two hundred hollow (tree) “log coffins” exhibited in 1988 concurrent with the Australian Bicentenary celebrations. Conceived by one of the country’s most significant Indigenous curators, Djon Mundine, the work was intended as a riposte to two hundred years of white colonization. Made by forty-three artists from the Ramingining and neighbouring communities of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, its form is more figurative and aesthetically different from any Western modernist style, ensuring that it could be perceptually “othered” from its realization. At the time, each of the two hundred poles (log coffins) symbolized a year of colonization. As a memorial and a symbol of mass graves and loss the message was clear enough, but there was still a countervailing point of view of a richly aesthetic and elaborate set of “primitive” objects, as evidenced by the fact that it never became an incendiary political object. If anything, it has become more of an artefact than anything resembling a cultural rebuke. In 2000 it was shown at the Hermitage Museum in Russia, itself a structure that came into being at the expense of immeasurable human suffering. As one of the most outstanding works of art to have been made in Australia it is now an icon of the National Gallery of Australia’s collection in Canberra. *The Aboriginal Memorial* was first exhibited in a far more raw, direct way, using red earth to symbolize the country’s “red centre”. Viewers had to navigate their way via a designated pathway stained with the red dirt. In its following incarnation at the NGA’s entrance foyer the size of the installation was attenuated (the logs closer to one another) to accommodate it in the museum space, and the unstable and messy red earth was replaced with stones, like in the manner of floor decoration in a custom apartment block. At the time of writing it has now been moved to the central gallery on level one, the “heart” of the NGA where it was first intended to be installed. And while it is now seen as a national treasure, it is the very degree to which it is valued that is an index of its inertia. As very much a cultural artefact, it is yet another example of the paradox of monuments, that they induce amnesia more than remembrance. (The French artist Christian Boltanski, whose career has largely been devoted to Holocaust recognition, once said that the only memorial that he would think of creating would be one that needed daily attention, otherwise it would be consigned to the same oblivion as all others.)

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<sup>4</sup> See Ian McLean, ‘The Aboriginal Memorial and the Militarization of Australian History’, *di’van | A Journal of Accounts* Issue 6 2019, pp. 48–61; <https://artdesign.unsw.edu.au/unsw-galleries/divan-issue-6>

## Race to at Venice



The history of *The Aboriginal Memorial* is in many respects the plight of all traditional Aboriginal art. It suffers from decontextualization and thereby misreading. This occurs on several levels which begins with the divide between Judeo-Christian and Euro-American perspectives and those of Indigenous people. To relieve the need for understanding and, from that commentary and judgment is no impediment but to the contrary, it comes as an enormous relief especially to the non-Indigenous curatorium who can play fast and loose, turning their active unknowing into something of a cultural fetish. Moreover, to forego the need to know is a convenient vehicle for strategies of reconciliation—that being the common term used for peacefully redressing the racial injustices of the past and present—as they are assurance that all such strategies are open, shallow and tokenistic. To put this another way, to include Indigenous artworks is to have the ‘deed done’. But in truth the obsession with inclusiveness is a continual deferral of the real event, for the utopian moment is devolved into the inert art object and any tacit, purported political objectives are quashed.

That there is plenty of material for the contemporary Aboriginal artist and just as much opportunity to show it is a doubtful advantage however, because the two integers of antagonism and opportunity are inherently self-cancelling. The anomie that is the ontology of the contemporary Aboriginal artist is built on an inherent cultural dissatisfaction, which, if consistent would also have to spread to the very opportunities themselves to be exhibited, to receive commissions, and so on. Richard Bell and Gordon Hookey present extreme forms of this contradiction. What is open for speculation but is seldom asked is whether the same degree of aggression in their work would be countenanced let alone tolerated (that is, simply given a showing) by a non-Indigenous artist. Yet it is also this unevenness between the critical responses to their work and others that exposes a curious paradox: Aboriginal art is critically quarantined to its own country, while being elevated to

disproportionate prominence. Instead of being called to task for simplistic generalization, or the lack of nuance that normally comes with overreach, critical responses have been and remain hagiographic and partisan, shrinking away from any form of critical analysis lest any negative comment be construed as racist. There is an obvious masochism here, albeit circumscribed within the limits of “art” which, however political it may be, is always different from direct, instrumental political action. In other words, self-excoriation is admissible within the insulated confines of elite culture. It would be beneficial to undertake a comparative analysis of critical assessments within Australia and internationally, from writers who are free of the same vested interests and threats of reprisal.

Thus, the role and dimensionality of Aboriginal art in the new millennium is arguably to safeguard a benign presence, and air of conciliation and redress, as a smokescreen or veil for their continued depredations. Measures of recognition through works of art are both tangible and oblique. This means that the presence of the art object represents a set of cultural and political objectives while such objectives remain abstract. It is this *quantitative* approach by the predominately white, or white-managed curatorium that lies at the heart of the historical disproportion of artworks shown in group exhibitions, to proportion of population. White-black dualities are now so entrenched in Australian culture that Asian voices are effectively edited out. There is no compelling narrative to do so—or rather there is no space for a commensurate narrative to germinate organically. This concern ought not to be considered in an isolated way as such, but as a serious misprision that effectively effaces third, fourth (and onward) terms to the cultural binary, to show that there are many more and many different kinds of divisions that would then make the national representation more *diverse*.

The way that Australian culture has given primacy to artworks that are “representative” over ones that are provocative and potentially offensive to the etiolated status quo is evidence of this. To put this another way, to explore the most unwelcome issues that continue to beset Indigenous culture makes for some unsettling subjects and art that is disagreeable. The word used for artists chosen for Venice is that the artist “represents” the country in question. The history of this concept does not hark back to when Venice began in 1895, but rather more firmly and visibly after the Second World War. Before that national representation was far more nominal. It took Nazism to bring art and racial representation out of anthropology and ethnography into politics, to press cultural products into the service of asserting national superiority with clearly defined rules and standards. While divesting itself of the overtly nationalist and racial baggage, the Venice Biennale that re-emerged after Europe had begun to make sense of itself in the 1960s was one of national competitiveness. It has since been an opportunity to represent cultural capital. If we return to the introductory example of Hans Haacke, the main problem for Australia is the orientation of its cultural criteria, which means whether there is any prospect of broaching anything but a positive national image. The examples of Bell and Hookey begin to answer this question, as *they* present an image of Australia as “duplicitous, racist and banal”—whether this is true or not is open to debate and impartial comparison with other multi-racial countries with similar broad multi-cultural policies (translation: the Western Anglophone states of the UK, USA and Canada). It may be worth considering the *benefits* of such an approach as unpopular as it might be to the domestic domain: for the art world is driven by novelty and tends to reward flights of self-excoriation as courageous.

## Race to at Venice

To repeat, art, culture and capitalism as a whole thrive on condemnation, which it is all too apt to absorb. Hookey and Bell are founding members of an artist group known as proppaNOW, active since 2003.<sup>5</sup> Known for the audacity of their opposition to the (white) Australian establishment, it is indeed because of this audacity that they have become examples of capitalist culture's aptitude for absorbing its opposition. For proppaNOW and its associated artists are prey to their own brand: local Australian curators who need to spice up a group exhibition with political *ressentiment* will inevitably turn to them for support. To cite the concept of the Marxist theorist Georg Lukács, their political platform has become reified, objectified into a chattel for indiscriminate transaction for someone else's profit. Reification places subjects and their actions into a depersonalized chain of things that is alienated from any personalizing or liberating functioning. If the new MCA director's comments are used as any indicator—and they cannot be discounted as off-hand, they have symbolic merit as a cultural symptom if only because they roused next to no official opposition—then Australian artists will be increasingly judged along ideological lines of political self-interest.

If the more strident Indigenous artists are ruled out of the Venice equation on the basis of offending national sensitivities, perhaps the biggest losers are, as mentioned, the Asian and Middle Eastern artists. The Asian, specifically the Chinese, population has had decisive presence in Australia with an influx of labourers firstly in the 1840s and then as miners during the Gold Rush in the 1850s (at the same time of the Gold Rush in California). According to the 2016 census, 5.5% registered as Chinese, 2.8% Indian, 1.4% Filipino and 2.8% Indigenous. Further, it is noticeable that a sizeable number of Chinese artists, especially those that migrated to Australia, or those already studying who were allowed to stay following the Tiananmen Square massacre, have participated in numerous international biennales, for example Guan Wei, Ah Xian, Lui Xiao Xian and Xiao Lu amongst others. An incontestable fact is that the international representation of such artists, numerically proportionate to population, outstrips that of Indigenous artists, despite the latter's high exposure nationally. Notably, the main contingent of Australian Indigenous artists that continue to be exhibited in international biennales and festivals are largely traditional or deceased, as in the senior bark painters in Yirrkala, East Arnhem Land, who made the *Yirrkala Drawings* (1946-47), exhibited in the 2015 Istanbul Biennial curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.<sup>6</sup> Artists who identify with their Middle Eastern heritage such as Khadim Ali (Pakistan/Afghanistan) and Khaled Sabsabi (Lebanon) have established careers with distinguished bodies of work about dislocation, inheritance and memorialization that chimes with many of the themes operative in biennales over the last decade (Lahore, Sharjah and Lyon; and Sydney, Yinchuan, Kochi-Muziris, Sharjah and Marrakech, respectively).

That relatively large ethnic groups are downplayed in Australia to the point of invisibility in consideration of the most prestigious international exhibition venue is far more than a casual oversight. It speaks to a far greater divide in Australian culture in which otherness is structurally curated on the basis of saleable and serviceable narratives that speak to legibility and profit. The current primacy afforded Indigenous artists is not a positive move but a zero sum game of manipulation that will see them, again, in second place.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://proppanow.wordpress.com/about-us/>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://14b.iksv.org/participants.asp?id=71>