EAST COAST ENCOUNTER
Exhibition Tour:
Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery, 28 February 2015 - 24 April 2015
Gold Coast City Gallery, 1 May 2015 - 7 June 2015
Caloundra Regional Gallery, 1 July 2015 - 16 August 2015
Redland Art Gallery, 11 October – 22 November 2015
Hervey Bay Regional Gallery, 4 December 2015 - 31 January 2016
ArtSpace Maccay, 28 January 2016 - 13 March 2016
TYTD Regional Art Gallery, Ingham, 11 March 2016 - 7 April 2016
KickArts, Cairns, 11 April 2016 - 15 May 2016
Cooktown, 1 June 2016 - 30 July 2016
Pinnacles Gallery, Townsville, 23 September 2016 - 30 October 2016
Caboosture Regional Art Gallery, 19 November 2016 - 21 January 2017
Lochyer Valley Art Gallery, Gatton, 1 February 2017 - 30 March 2017
Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, 1 April 2017 - 30 June 2017

Exhibition Information:
John Waldron, Blue Sky View
Tel: 0468 453 362       Email: john@blueskyview.com.au
www.eastcoastencounter.com.au
Map illustration: Peter Hudson

East Coast Encounter has been developed by the University of the Sunshine Coast and assisted by the Sunshine Coast Council, Museum & Gallery Services Queensland, Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth, the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland and the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.
There is a gulf between the ship and the shore, myths and misunderstandings strewn on the wind, so many opportunities and so much humanity lost in translation. The contrast in perceptions of Captain James Cook’s 1770 voyage in the Endeavour along the eastern coastline remains as strong as ever after almost two and a half centuries: hero or villain, discoverer of the Great South Land or dispossession of the oldest continuous human society?

In 2010 a group of artists, songwriters, historians and film-makers began the East Coast Encounter project to explore Cook’s voyage through Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. Sitting around a campfire at Kalkarindji in the Northern Territory where the Gurindji leader Vincent Lingiari had led the struggle in the sixties to regain control of the land claimed by Cook in 1770, some of us traded stories about just how far the exploits of this lowly born English sea captain had travelled. From Yin country on the south coast of New South Wales, around Cape York and across northern Australia, the man and the myth have fused into a powerful legend, full of meaning still for Aboriginal people. Peter Hudson believed that with open hearts our merry little band could paint some different pictures through encounters of our own.

In the ensuing period the East Coast Encounter group journeyed far and listened to Aboriginal stories that cast Cook’s four months and four group journeyed far and listened to Aboriginal stories that cast Cook’s four months and four

# Foreword

Jeff McMullen

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We all tried to imagine the view from the ship and from the shore. Cook could recognise the majesty of the Great Barrier Reef, writing in his journal “a reef such as one speaks of here is Scarcely known in Europe. It is a Wall of Coral Rock rising almost perpendicular out of the infathomable ocean.” Yet the great navigator had only a superficial grasp of the Aboriginal mastery of their environment and gave himself little chance of enlightenment because his usual method of diplomacy was to reach for the musket. Cook did not understand traditional law, how the land held the people and social customs regulated the harvesting of plant food and the hunting of game.

The profound misunderstanding at Endeavour River could have ended in tragedy after Cook again opened fire on Aboriginal people who were angry at the crew for not sharing some of the many turtles they had taken aboard. It was the skilful diplomacy of the Guugu Yimithirr in laying down their spears that produced the only temporary reconciliation on the east-coast voyage. The local people feel rightful pride that they had demonstrated an ability to settle a dangerous confrontation. Cook sailed away but others soon would follow. The contest for land and Aboriginal survival soon would begin in earnest.

At Possession Island, off the northernmost tip of Cape York, a group of us clambered ashore from our small boat. Kuku Mutji artist Arone Meeks immediately filled his canvas with an effusion of nature’s richness, blue coral sea, white sandy beach and the gleam of wetlands. Peter Hudson and Euan Macleod crouched in the shade painting the feelings evoked here as much as the landscape. Shane Howard wandered alone on the shore, a new song filling his mind. It was here, marked only by a small concrete monument, that James Cook planted the British Flag and changed everything. All you hear now is the cry of the birds. Aboriginal people were cleared off this island many decades ago. It could have been called Dispossession Island.

Through these art works, songs and sharing of stories we cannot sweep away the European ascendancy that gave us the convenient deceit of *terra nullius*. Yet the enormous symbolic importance of Cook to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the widespread non-Indigenous view that his encounter with the First Australians is the foundational event of a modern nation, invites us to re-examine history with an eye for fresh detail and a keen ear for the voices on the shore. Through art we create an opportunity to close the space between us.
Badtjala Song

Translated by Gemma Cronin

for all Badtjala descendants

On 20 May 1770, as a gentle southerly breeze blew, the HMB Endeavour sailed along the coast of K’gari/Fraser Island. Cook observed ‘a number of Indians’ on a high bluff and so named it Indian Head. He also saw people and fires in other places nearby.¹ The passage of the Endeavour was viewed by Badtjala people, who had followed the ship all the way from the island’s southern end. They passed on a rich description of the event through oral history and song. Badtjala linguist Gemma Cronin has translated the following song in modern orthography, telling of the encounter. The dangerous ‘rainbow serpent place’ refers to a shoal just north of Indian Head.²

2. Conversation with Gemma Cronin and ‘Corroborees of the Aborigines of Great Sandy Island’, written and translated by Edward Armitage, of Maryborough, Queensland, 1923, in F. J. Watson, Vocabularies of Four Representative Tribes of South Eastern Queensland (Queensland), vol. XVIII, no. 34, 1944, pp.66-71. Armitage provides an earlier translation of the song as well as another telling of Matthew Flinders’ landing on the western side of the island.

Gabrin wuna’la yaneen, Areeram
Ngurigu’ni wing gung’nilung
Nyundal wun’yaamba dhal’ dahal’ tan’i, Gebeen banine
Moopoo gumbir’ Yim bundi burnee, Yausu dhan manirung
Yuang yangu moopoo gumbir, BWingunda
Tirjera da’da’da’ da’da’ da’ta’da’ mingilum minya’??

Strangers are travelling with a cloud, Areeram!!
It has fire inside, must be a bad water spirit.
It’s stupid maybe? It’s going directly to that rainbow serpent place.
This is the truth that I bring.
It is breathing smoke rhythmically from its rear, must be song men and sorcerers.
Coming up and going back with the wind at its rear, like a sand crab.
The sea carries this ship here, why??

Peter Hudson

Indian Head 2013
Watercolour on paper | Diptych. Top 12.8 x 41cm Below 33.5 x 44.5cm
Artist Peter Hudson recalls childhood memories of travelling with his family past the dark jagged forms of the Glass House Mountains and his father remarking that they were named by Captain Cook in 1770. For Hudson, the Glass House Mountains and Captain Cook became synonymous. However, he wondered if Cook had considered that ‘these mysterious looking mountains already had names – strange and beautiful names like Coonowrin, Tibrogargan, Tibberoowuccum, Ngungun, Turbulushi’. He realised that Cook could not know that these sites are resonant with stories and cultural significance. Hudson also wondered what Aboriginal people had thought of the Endeavour’s appearance and occasional engagements with Cook and his crew. These reflections formed the genesis of the exhibition East Coast Encounter, which seeks to re-imagine the encounters of James Cook and his crew with Aboriginal people in 1770.

Cook’s voyage along the Australian east coast has become central to national historical narratives. It precipitated European colonisation of Australia and consequently there are aspects of this expedition that resonate powerfully in our nation’s history. Cook has subsequently come to symbolise many different things, depending on one’s perspective. East Coast Encounter seeks to re-envision this seminal journey by employing creative practice to explore moments of contact during these encounters. Instead of presenting a literal history, the exhibition shifts the focus from a primarily Eurocentric perspective to imaginatively juxtaposing two world views.

East Coast Encounter also brings these events into the present by incorporating artists’ reflections on their relevance today and their responses to visits to significant contact locations involving sightings or landings. These include Kamay/Botany Bay, the Glass House Mountains, K’gari/Fraser Island, Town of 1770, Magnetic Island, Yarrabah, the clan area of Waymburr or Cooktown and the highly symbolic site of Bedanju/Possession Island. Visiting various sites has been a profound and moving experience for many of the participants. The resulting engagements with traditional owners, communities and places connected with the historical encounter have been central to the development of East Coast Encounter and inform the final works.

The exhibition features work by practitioners working across a range of art forms, whose creative practice explores aspects of country and culture. Additionally, the selected Indigenous artists broadly represent the key encounter language-group nations and regions. The accompanying DVD by Jeff McMullen gives further voice to the artists, records their encounters with significant sites and communities, and enables their varying viewpoints to sit together. The exhibition also draws on research with and within Indigenous communities. Badtjala/Gubbi Gubbi linguist Gemma Cronin has translated a song in modern orthography which refers to Cook’s passing of Indian Head on K’gari/Fraser Island, and makes a valuable contribution to understandings of Indigenous perceptions of Cook’s voyage. While the Endeavour is synonymous with Cook’s voyage, nawi (Indigenous bark canoes), were also central to the encounter. Thus, the inclusion of a nawi is important in balancing perspectives and in drawing attention to the historically under-represented area of Indigenous watercraft and the recent revival of cultural knowledge in this domain.

East Coast Encounter presents a shared story told from multiple perspectives, employing creative practice as a means of triggering discussion, imagination, curiosity, memory and a consideration of diverse points of view. In his essay “Captain Cook came very cheeky, you know” – ‘James Cook, an Aboriginal appraisal’, John Maynard examines Cook’s voyage and its impact from an Indigenous perspective. He explains how the encounter and subsequent colonisation have been interpreted and incorporated into Indigenous world views in ways that reflect flexibility, resilience and an ongoing connection with culture, despite the pain and dispossession that ensued. Neil Murray draws on the journals of Cook and Banks as well as Indigenous accounts to provide a succinct but eloquent overview of Cook’s voyage in ‘Sign of Habitation’. The title refers to Cook’s own words as he observed fires denoting the presence of Indigenous people, on the day he planted the British flag on Possession Island to claim the east coast on the basis of terra nullius.

The most extended interactions between Aboriginal people and Cook and his crew occurred at Cooktown, where the Europeans stayed for almost two months as repairs were made on the damaged Endeavour. It was here that each group observed the other and, through lack of understanding, the Europeans disrupted customary law. It was only through a significant act of reconciliation on both sides that peace and balance was restored. While historical accounts have focused on the landing at Kamay/Botany Bay, emphasis is given here to the more sustained and ultimately more successful encounter on Guugu Yimithirr country at present-day Cooktown. In ‘Ngarrbal-ngay waru? Ngubangadawirrirr’, Visitors who may need help, Eric Deeral describes the arrival of Cook and his crew – ‘boat people’ in a ‘strange large canoe’. He details the wisdom and courage of the elder Ngamu Yarrbaingu and the mutual acts of diplomacy that averted a crisis in relations between local clans and the visitors.

Eric Deeral and Albert Hornsby, in ‘Through Our Eyes’, add further perspectives to this account and note Cook’s good fortune in unknowingly caring the Endeavour in the clan area of Waymburr, which was ‘a place for mediation and settling of disputes’ where ‘no blood was ever to be shed. They also comment on the importance of communicating to current and future generations about this historical encounter as a shared story, and reflect on how different the outcomes might have been had Cook more fully recognised and understood the world view of the Guugu Yimithirr and Kuku Yalanji Ilma and other Aboriginal peoples. The Badtjala song, translated by Gemma Cronin, telling of the Endeavour’s appearance off K’gari,
emphatically asks: ‘The sea carries this ship here, why??’ East Coast Encounter explores Indigenous and non-Indigenous responses to this question and the past and present impact of the ensuing encounters, in order to better appreciate the diversity of views concerning this seminal event.

Through its collection of art, writing, historical material, film and song, East Coast Encounter presents an imaginative exploration of this shared story and allows differing world views to sit alongside each other. By enabling histories to be expressed in multiple ways and from varied perspectives the exhibition seeks to re-imagine this significant encounter in order to deepen the nation’s cultural dialogue and promote reconciliatory understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Garth Lena
Man and Woman in Canoe 2011
Steel and wood | 24 x 34 x 35 cm

1. Peter Hudson, Artist statement, East Coast Encounter, 2013.

Adam Hill and Dean Kelly at Kamay 2013
Photograph: Jeff McMahon

Garth Lena
Man and Woman in Canoe 2011
Steel and wood | 24 x 34 x 35 cm
James Cook has become a time-travelling bogeyman to Aboriginal Australia. Cook transcends time and space to wreak havoc across the continent upon the Aboriginal inhabitants over the course of the past 243 years. In this manifestation he represents white Australia in all of its guises including invasion, occupation, dispossession and the conducting of a symphony of violence. Does Cook deserve this label as the Navy grim reaper? In a counterpoint Cook remains in settler colonial history both misrepresented and mythologised. Additionally he has been incorporated into Aboriginal stories widely across the continent. It is timely to examine James Cook in all of his contradictions from an Aboriginal perspective.

As much respected Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has stated, in the conquerors’ history Cook and those like him “are the ‘heroes’, the discoverers and adventurers, the ‘fathers’ of colonialism. In the Indigenous literature these figures are not so admired; their deeds are not the deeds of wonderful discoverers and conquering heroes.” Nevertheless, in trying to unpack an Indigenous historical understanding James Cook was not your normal British Naval officer of the time period. Cook did not come from a privileged background. He had risen from humble beginnings with limited early schooling. He came up through the ranks and this in some way is reflected by the respect he carried amongst the crews that served under him. Cook’s background enabled him to have a view of the world that considered disadvantage and the realities of everyday living conditions. Some of his personal reflections in his ship’s log were for a long period of time overlooked, ignored, dismissed and erased. In a personal and highly revealing logbook account Cook reflected on the shocking inequality of living conditions in Britain, where raw sewage flowed through the streets, filth and disease was rampant and opportunities of bettering oneself were largely discouraged. In stark contrast Cook observed Aboriginal Australia as being a healthy paradise of equality:

“I: reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they live in a tranquility which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition. They have a good air to breathe and live in a temperate climate.”

The significant mountain known as Gulaga to the Yuin people on the south coast of New South Wales was the first Australian landmark named by James Cook. The Endeavour first sighted the Australian coast on 19 April 1770, and two days later he recorded in his journal: “At 6 we were abreast of a pretty high mountain laying near the shore, which, on account of its figure, I named Mt. Dromedary.” Yuin oral memory reflects a differing understanding of events:

In 1770, Captain Cook sailed past Gulaga and thought it looked so much like a camel that he named it ‘Mt. Dromedary’. That name can be seen as the first of the changes to come for our people. In those days the British sailed along our coast and claimed it as though we did not exist. Cook’s maps were very good, but they did not show our names for places. He didn’t ask us.”

Reg Mombassa
Jim Cook Mugshot 2013
Charcoal and coloured pencil on paper | 47 x 32 cm
Courtesy of Watters Gallery