

## TOLARNO GALLERIES

DANIE MELLOR *The Landspace: [all the debils are here]*

25 August – 29 September 2018

Danie Mellor presents his first solo exhibition at Tolarno Galleries entitled *The Landspace: [all the debils are here]*.

Born in Mackay, Queensland, Danie Mellor's maternal Aboriginal family are descendants of Mamu and Ngadjon peoples whose country is in the Atherton Tablelands of tropical far north Queensland. His father's family emigrated from California to Australia in the early 1900s. Mellor's significant body of work exploring Australia's heritage through a very personal lens, has been recognised by major public museums.

In this new sequence of works, Mellor reimagines the landscape as *the landspace*, and in doing so opens up a new way of seeing history, ownership and possession of country.

"Reimagining the world as a *landspace* suggests we are in an enveloping environment, a world that has its past, present and future – its dreaming and landstory – unfolding as prescient and concurrent phenomena," Mellor says.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is *Landstory*, a monumental nine-panel photographic work. The blueprint for this piece is Sidney Nolan's nine-panel work *Riverbend* from 1964, which explored his preoccupation with landscape, mythology and history. On permanent display at the Australian National University, Mellor studied this piece over many years as a student and then lecturer, at the then Canberra School of Art. Nolan's *Riverbend* emphasises the importance of a critical and ongoing evaluation of history, the inherent possibilities of image making, and contemporary revisions of the past that reshape cultural perception.

Mellor's *Landstory* subtly combines his own recent photography of rainforest country – using an infrared photographic technique to reveal a light spectrum unseen by the human eye – with archival imagery from the same area, including that of late-colonial photographer Alfred Atkinson, active in the Cairns region of northern Queensland.

"Light embedded in archival imagery has travelled from the past, and now meets the light that is part of photographs I have taken in the present," Mellor says.

*Landstory* suggests something beyond ordinary experience, evoking an ancestral presence. The work creates a collapse in time – merging multiple strands of history, past and present – bringing to the surface the continuing presence of Aboriginal people, of a timeless landstory.

"In Australia, the experience of the landspace is often seen through the prism of colonialism and the tragic consequences for Indigenous people and culture," Mellor says. "The enduring presence and strength of that culture and people over tens of millennia however, is just as significant in our country's landstory. The space of country is now shared, but imbued with the presence of Aboriginal people, with ancestors and ghosts, our debils."

Alfred Atkinson photographed multiple generations of Mellor's Aboriginal family in his studio from around 1908, including his great grandmother, whom Mellor knew throughout his childhood and early adult life. A unique connection to the past. Atkinson received recognition as a sensitive portrait photographer, but he was also known for his postcard images of Aboriginal people in the environment of the rainforest.

"By incorporating historical imagery as part of a broader response to the theme of the work, I retrace not just the tracks and traces of early photographs, but reinstate people within the context of a landspace that is Aboriginal. The nature of the work also brings the reflection of viewers in to the space of each picture, and makes us an active part of the composition."

In 2013, Professor Marcia Langton curated *Debil Debil* at Carriageworks in Sydney, a group exhibition that included Mellor's major nine panel work *Bayi Minyirra*/recalling funerary ceremonies of rainforest people. Mellor's new exhibition evolves ideas explored in Langton's show, as well as appropriating a key line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. "Hell is empty, and all the devils are here." In Mellor's *The Landspace [all the debils are here]* the borrowed passage subverts and then realigns its cultural implications – we know this is not Hell, although it may have seemed it to early colonists, and it is not empty, as it was so declared.

The ancestors, our debils, are always here.

## **Danie Mellor Biography**

Danie Mellor has lived, worked, travelled and studied in Australia, England, Scotland and South Africa. His work is represented in international, national, state, regional, university and important private collections. He has won several major awards, including the 26<sup>th</sup> National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award in 2009, and the National Indigenous Ceramic Art award in the same year.

Mellor's works have been shown in significant exhibitions, including *Story Place*, Queensland Art Gallery and *Primavera*, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Culture Warriors* and *unDisclosed* at the National Gallery of Australia, and *Sakahàñ*, the inaugural international survey of Indigenous art at the National Gallery of Canada in 2013.

In 2014, the University of Queensland Art Museum hosted a 10-year retrospective of his practice, and a solo exhibition of his works *Primordial: SuperNaturalBayiMinyjirral* was shown at the National Museum of Scotland, as part of the Edinburgh Art and International Festivals. Recent projects have included Australia's largest public art project in a commercial building at 480 Queen Street Brisbane in 2015, and a major public art work of 600 square metres of photographically etched imagery in concrete as part of the landscaped redevelopment of Darling Harbour in 2016.

Major works were created for the 8<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial at QAGOMA in 2015, the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at AGSA and the Samstag Museum in 2016, and the inaugural Yinchuan Biennale *For an Image, Faster Than Light* held at the Yinchuan Museum of Contemporary Art in Ningxia Province, China.

During 2017 and 2018, Mellor's work was included in *Tracks and Traces* at the Negev Museum of Art, Israel. Two solo exhibitions were presented: *Proximity and Perception* at Cairns Art Gallery and *Pleasure and Vexation – the strata and spectacle of history* held at Pataka Art + Museum, New Zealand.

## **Upcoming**

*Weapons for the Soldier* APY Artists and Hazlehurst regional Gallery, NSW

## **2018**

*We are all connected* 30th anniversary exhibition, Campbelltown Arts Centre , curated by Adam Porter and Emily Rolfe  
*Life in Irons* Museum of Brisbane, Queensland

*Indigenous Australia: Masterworks from the National Gallery of Australia* Collectors Room, Berlin | Stiftung Olbricht (Olbricht Foundation) curated by Franchesca Cubillo and Kelli Cole

*Resolution / new Indigenous photomedia* National Gallery of Australia touring exhibition curated by Franchesca Cubillo and Kelli Cole [2017 – 2018]

Art Los Angeles Contemporary February 2018

*Proximity and Perception*, Cairns Art Gallery May-July 2018 curated by Ashleigh Campbell

*Pleasure and Vexation – the strata and spectacle of history*, Pataka Art + Museum, New Zealand May – August 2018, curated by Mark Hutchins-Pond, Kairuruku Toi Hou

## **2017**

Art Basel Hong Kong, Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

@50 Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

Sydney Contemporary, Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane

*Tracks and Traces* Negev Museum of Art, Israel curated by Emily Rolfe and Dr Dalia Manor with the support of Brian and Gene Sherman

*Framing Nature* McClelland Sculpture Park + Gallery, Victoria, curated by Simon Lawrie, Balnaves Curator of Australian Sculpture

*Primavera at 25: MCA Collection* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and touring through until November 2018

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