

Meanjin Quarterly
Volume 74 Number 1 Autumn 2015

Meanjin 1 ²⁰¹⁵

The background of the cover features three large, expressive brushstrokes. A thick purple stroke starts at the top left and curves towards the right. A bright yellow stroke is positioned on the left side, pointing towards the center. A vibrant red stroke is located at the bottom, extending from the left towards the right. The strokes have a textured, painterly quality with visible brush marks.

Representing Absence

James Tylor

I WAS NEVER TAUGHT ABOUT Aboriginal history at school. The battles fought between the invading British colonists and local Aboriginal people never seemed to enter the classroom. There was no mention of the Black War in Tasmania nor any similar war or battle waged on the mainland, only romantic stories of Captain James Cook discovering Australia and the convict settlements of Sydney. It was only when I stepped out of the classroom and into the landscape that people told me stories of battles or massacres that took place there.

My daguerreotype series *Hopes, Dreams and Nightmares* was photographed in the potato-growing fields around Trentham. Here I was reminded of stories my non-Indigenous father told me about how early colonial farmers in Victoria would deliberately cover up Aboriginal burials and massacre graves by building a shed, farm house or planting a tree over such sites so that the ground couldn't be disturbed. I wanted to highlight the historic traces that these farming landscapes still hold.

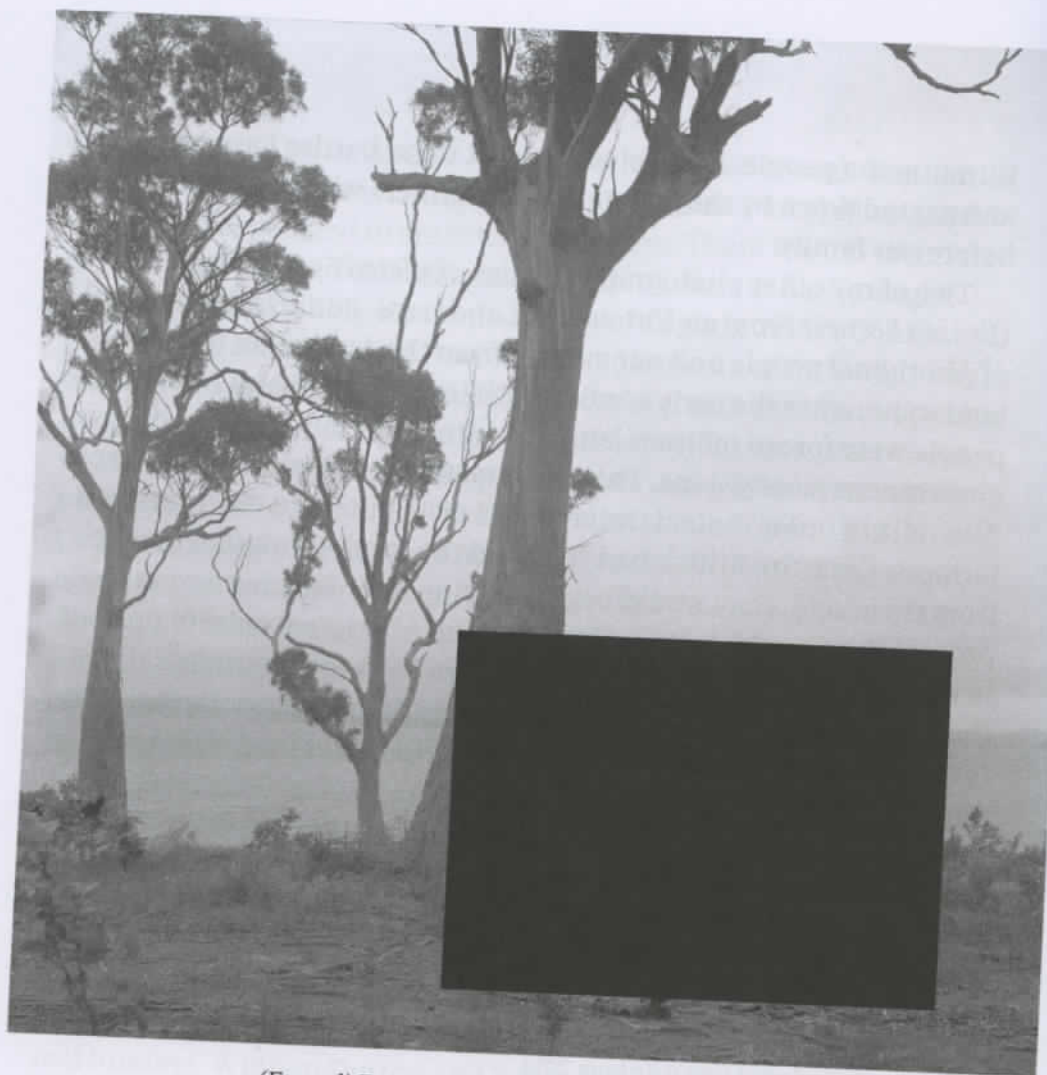
Whalers, Sealers and Land Stealers is a daguerreotype series in which I shot the plates with a 12 gauge shotgun and then superimposed images of my family's farm onto the plates. I wanted to address a personal story about my father's farm, which we acquired in the 1950s. Originally owned by the Gunditjmara people from what is nowadays south-western Victoria, in 1834 the land was illegally colonised (according to British law) by two whale and seal hunters, William Dutton and Edward Henty. Following the establishment of this illegal whaling colony, many people were massacred or removed from their land. Today my family's farm backs onto the Narrawong State Forest, which was the edge of William Dutton's land claim. Historically our farm was the front line of the colonial war between the invading British whalers and the

Gunditjmara people. Many stories about these battles have been told and passed down by the generations of farmers who had the land before our family.

Two of my other photographic series, (*Deleted Scenes*) and (*Erased Scenes*) *From an Untouched Landscape*, address the removal of Aboriginal people and our culture from the Australian farming landscape. After the early conflict with the British, many Aboriginal people were forced off their land and into Christian missions or government reservations. This was a tactic used by the British across Australia in order to steal the land and distribute it to newly arrived farmers. Once the British had removed the local Aboriginal people from their land, they would begin clearing it for farming and in the process they would destroy almost all the Aboriginal culture present in the landscape. In rural Australia I have been told countless times that farmers have deliberately removed or damaged Aboriginal sites for fear of their land being taken from them under land rights or native title.

As an Australian of Aboriginal and British descent I believe it is important to tell and pass on these stories about the British colonisation of Australia. Otherwise these stories will be lost, and without them future generations will be unable to fully understand and reconcile themselves with their past.

All the works included here date from 2014.



(Erased) From an Untouched Landscape #10



Whalers, Sealers and Land Stealers (The Well)



Whalers, Sealers and Land Stealers (The Whaler's House)