# MONSTERS

# trent jansen

DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY

# M O N S T E R S

## AUSTRALIAN MYTHOLOGY, NATIONAL IDENTITY
## AND THE DESIGN OF AUSTRALIAN MATERIAL CULTURE

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2017

UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

# CERTIFICATION

I, Trent Jansen, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Trent Jansen

01 May 2017

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ABSTRACT

This studio-based thesis develops a speculative theoretical framework to assist in the design of quintessentially Australian objects. Through both project-driven and academic research, the thesis has sought to identify several core signifiers in the discourse of Australian national identity and material culture. The aim was to design furniture pieces inspired by those components of uniquely Australian culture that might resonate with a large percentage of Australians.

Using material culture theory as a foundation, this body of research surveys a broad selection of pre- and post-colonial Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian artefacts, concluding that the most geographically unique examples of material culture made in Australia are pre-colonial artefacts made by Indigenous Australians. Simultaneously, this thesis analyses a set of core narratives most broadly associated with Australian national identity, discovering that these national myths are culturally exclusive, forgetting large components of Australian society. This thesis then suggests a group of culturally inclusive creature myths that proliferated around the time of colonisation and could potentially be inclusive national myths.

Several creative outcomes have been generated in response to this thesis, but the core creative works are interpretations of two Australian creature myths. These include four furniture and object design interpretations of pankalangu, a creature myth from Western Arrernte culture in Central Australia, three furniture and object design interpretations of the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, which has British origins prior to the departure of the First Fleet and two furniture design interpretations of the bunyip, a myth with origins in both colonial and Aboriginal culture.

This thesis is dedicated to my late mentor,
Massimo Morozzi – January 28th 1941 – April 10th 2014.

And my beautiful daughter Arie, born March 20th 2017.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

associated with this thesis, helping me to evolve these objects to better represent the themes and ideas raised by this research project.

# PREFACE

Since my introduction to furniture and object design as an undergraduate student, I have learned of, taught about and experienced firsthand the championing of modern and post-modern design movements, as well as cooperatives which are still too young to yet be labelled as movements. Many of these movements are built around the unique but synergistic approach of a small group of practitioners, and it is the unified presentation of these philosophically and aesthetically aligned practices to a captive design audience – usually at one of the many design fairs on the international schedule – that gives these movements the weight needed to capture the attention of an international design audience. Individually these like-minded practitioners are likely to be lost in the noise of designers spruiking their wares, but together they are a movement.

When considering the modern and post-modern cooperatives and movements that fit this description such as Bauhaus, American Modern, Scandinavian Modern, Italian Modern, Memphis and Droog, there is another common characteristic: each of these groups either began as a national movement, or are named according to the nation from which they originated. Just as the work of a group of unique like-minded practitioners is more likely to impact upon the international design community than an individual, it seems that movements which form within national boundaries are more easily understood and embraced by international design audiences.

In the last century there have been many talented modernist and post-modernist Australian designers generating furniture and objects for national and international markets, but there has not been a uniquely Australian movement in design. Australian designers have not managed to convert the unique elements of Australian material culture into a contemporary design movement that has engaged international design audiences in the same way as, for example, Bauhaus,

Memphis and Droog. And to me the reasons for this seem obvious. Firstly, instead of focusing on the purposeful generation of a uniquely Australian design approach, Australian designers have been content to heavily reference the design of other great national movements. And secondly, Australian designers have in large part worked individually, exploring individual approaches and opportunities, rather than rallying around a uniquely Australian approach and harnessing the weight that can be derived from a group of unique, like-minded practitioners exposing their work together.

With the above in mind, this studio-based thesis is an experiment that takes itself seriously as a design idea. Speculative, and often ironic in its investigation of the cultural material linked to Australian identity, the thesis asks if there are uniquely Australian ideas, attitudes and assumptions that might form the foundation of an Australian approach to design.

Some traditional components or signifiers of Australian culture are used as inspiration for designed objects, testing the potential for generating uniquely Australian artefacts. The written thesis critically analyses several of these test cases. These include: the *Make Do Collection* (see page 156), influenced by the Australian bush legend; and the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* (see page 166), *Bunyip Sofa* and *Armchair* (see page 172) and *Pankalangu Collections* (see page 182), influenced by colonial and Indigenous creature myths. Test cases that were not exposed to critical analysis include: the *Tidal Collection* (see page 232), influenced by the Australian beach myth; the *Jugaad with Pottery* and *Jugaad with Car Parts Collections* (see page 236), used to test the specificity of the make do myth; and the *Solstice Collection* (see page 234), used to test the influence of geographically unique natural influences in shaping Australian bush furniture.

These works provide a suggested direction forward in the purposeful generation

of uniquely Australian artefacts. It is my hope that a small group of Australian designers can unite under a cohesive design approach that will embody recognisably Australian ideas or narratives, gaining recognition for the generation of a national style that can sit alongside Bauhaus, Memphis and Droog as a historically significant shift in the international design consciousness.

# CHAPTER ONE

## FOUNDATIONS FOR AN AUSTRALIAN DESIGN MOVEMENT

## Introduction

In recent history, influential groups of German, Italian, American and Scandinavian designers have built innovative national furniture and object design movements – i.e. furniture recognised for its national character, its Danish-ness, Dutch-ness or German-ness, etc. – thereby gaining global recognition for their contributions to the international design community. While many other countries have their own colloquial making traditions, few have managed to transform these traditions into contemporary design approaches. Australian design conforms to this scenario, with its practitioners unable to establish a cohesive and unique vision for the creation of contemporary Australian artefacts. Australian designers have thus not experienced the same critical acclaim as those co-founders of German, American, Scandinavian and Italian movements.

This absence of an Australian design movement is not due to a lack of specifically Australian making traditions. Over the centuries, Indigenous inhabitants and European colonisers used native materials and developed making techniques to create artefacts with a style that was unique to this place – though rarely were these people intending to imbue their objects with a national ethos, an Australian-ness. This thesis asks how such making traditions could be combined with an Australian ethos to develop a contemporary furniture design movement, especially at a time when the making techniques employed by craftspeople and manufacturers, and the cultural values that influence Australian designers, are becoming increasingly homogenous in a globalised industry.

In the pursuit of a uniquely Australian approach to contemporary design, it is necessary to identify foundational aspects of Australian-ness that might influence the design process. However, like all national identities, Australian identity is an illusive idea, as the specific combination of components that constitute it are constantly evolving in discourses that address the emotional and political desires of

the day such as print cultures or the internet (Anderson 1991). To further complicate the definition of Australian-ness, the emergence of these notions cannot be dated, as they materialised incrementally over the decades of the late nineteenth century and continued to evolve as the myths that shaped Australian identity developed. Given the murkiness of defining national identity, it is not possible to offer definitive answers to the origins and components of Australian-ness. Instead this thesis intends to question the nature of Australian art and design precedents in order to establish a potential foundation for a new and unique Australian design movement.

Lastly, in its search for a design approach that embodies Australian national identity, this thesis seeks to establish a national style, as opposed to a nationalist style. This body of research aims not to use a nationalist lens – establishing a narrow ethnocentric view of Australian cultural identity, and using this limited definition to exclude those who fall outside of its range. Instead, this thesis will adopt a national – or what Jürgen Habermas called postnational, by which he meant an identity that addressed the multinational and transnational discourses of the contemporary world [1] – approach that offers a broad interpretation of Australian cultural identity, and searches for common cultural foundations among those individuals and communities who identify as Australian. By establishing a new Australian approach to design, based on an open and inclusive interpretation of Australian identity, the resulting artefacts will embody components of Australian culture that might appeal to a large portion of the community, engaging a broader postnational cross-section of the Australian population.

---

[1] In 1987 Habermas observed that 'A change in the form of national identity' was emerging in as various economic and cultural forces diminished the nation state's former 'level of integration' and 'sovereignty'. This new form, which he named 'postnational state identity', was he said a multicultural and multinational polity. (ürgen Habermas, The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (London: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 249–67. This quote p. 253.

## Definitions

From the outset, this research calls upon some complex categories – complex because of the ideological assumptions behind them. Such categories include Australia, Australian, Australian history, Indigenous Australian and colonial Australian. Each needs to be defined before it can be used to build an argument.

In addition, it is not possible to speak about the geographically specific character of existing artefacts without discussing material culture theory. This term must also be defined before it can be used to direct this research.

## Australia – the Continent

The word Australia contains a number of complexities; David John Carter (2006) explains that this seemingly self-evident word, referring to a 'geographical place defined by recognised borders', is in reality more complex than it seems. Australia is presently also a 'geopolitical territory governed by the Australian federal government' in an age ruled by nation states. Not only defined by the borders that enclose it and the laws that govern it, Australia is also defined by its history; it has a temporality. The continent was first called Australia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when European empires rather than nation states governed the world. By the end of the century it hosted a collection of six British colonies. Also living upon this continent at the beginning of the nineteenth century were between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people, divided into about 270 Indigenous language groups and many more clans, though by the end of the century their population was greatly reduced. They had no name for the continent (Carter 2006, p4).

In this research, the term Australia will refer to both the continent and the geopolitical territory governed by the Australian federal government within internationally recognised borders as they exist today, and will also be used as a general term for the place, people and culture.

## Australia – the Idea

This body of research finds its focus in the idea of Australian identity and, as such, historical ideas of Australia are as important as its geographic location and legal boundaries.

The large number of Indigenous communities that existed on the continent prior to British colonisation, and the limited territory covered by each clan, meant that these communities did not have concepts of a single continent and modern geo-politics. Pre-modern entities, says Anthony Giddens, had imprecise frontiers, while modern nation states have fixed policed borders. The threat to pre-modern entities or nations usually comes from within – from rival clans – whereas the threat to the nation state comes from beyond the border (Giddens 1985).

The continent only gained a single name and border in the early nineteenth century, when for the first time it was circumnavigated and accurately mapped, by Matthew Flinders in the early stages if British colonisation. The first European explorers to navigate and map regions of the continent were unaware of its complete geography. As was usual at this time, European explorers looked to classical precedents. The ancient Romans had generally called the mythical southern continent *terra incognita* – 'unknown land' – but in the early fifth century, Roman scholar Macrobius named the south pole *Australis* (Macrobius Unknown), which is Latin for 'south'. When European explorers began to map a southern landmass in the sixteenth century, they invariably named it *Terra Australis* or 'southern land'. After all, it was no longer incognita. Shortly after Abel Tasman's second voyage south in 1644, the largely mapped western half of Terra Australis was named *New Holland*, while the unchartered eastern portion remained Terra Australis. In 1770 Cook named the east coast of the continent *New South Wales*, claiming it for the British King. On a map prepared in 1804 after his circumnavigation of the continent, Flinders named the whole continent *Australia*,

and this rapidly became its accepted name after the publication in 1814 of his book *Voyage to Terra Australis*, which was based on his journals.

It is possible to piece together some understanding of the way in which convicts and other settlers conceived of occupied regions, during the crucial early period of Australia's colonial history. The first groups of British settlers to arrive in New South Wales, prior to the time around 1814, understood that they lived in a settlement town called Sydney in the British colony of New South Wales, and it seems that they maintained some conception of the location of New South Wales and its proximity to other regions. For example, David Hunt gives an account of a group of Irish convicts who escaped Sydney in 1792 intending to walk to China, which they thought was a mere 150 miles to the north (Hunt 2013). While their understanding of distance in the region was inaccurate, it seems that they possessed some conception of the geographic placement of this new colony within the known landmasses of Asia.

As the colonisers spread, they named or renamed the places that they settled, and their conscious understanding of occupied country changed. New colonies were established: for example, Hobart in 1803 on the island of *Van Diemen's Land* – so named by Abel Tasman in 1642. The colonists who settled in Hobart prior to 1814 first understood their placement in a settlement town in the British colony of New South Wales. After 1814, as Flinders' new name for the continent was slowly adopted, settlers in Hobart began to understand their location in the colony of New South Wales, on the continent of Australia.  In 1825 Van Diemen's Land became a British colony in its own right, independent from New South Wales. The island was renamed *Tasmania* in 1856 shortly after convict transportation ceased (Boyce 2008).

As I have sought to demonstrate, names are powerful identifiers. Did the growing

consciousness of Australia as the name of a place after 1814 change the way colonists thought of themselves? According to Scott, Flinders had hoped to officially name the continent Australia, and had referred to the continent in this way in all of his correspondence post 1804. While preparing his book *A Voyage to Terra Australis* for publication in England, Flinders corresponded with Sir Joseph Banks, informing Banks of his intention to refer to the continent as Australia. Banks and the book's publisher, *Arrowsmith*, opposed this modification, and Flinders was compelled to fall back on the name Terra Australis (Scott 1933, Mundle 2012). But he did include an indication of his aspiration in a footnote in the book:

> Had I permitted myself any innovation upon the original term, it would have been to convert it [Terra Australis] into Australia; as being more agreeable to the ear, and an assimilation to the names of the other great portions of the earth (Flinders 1814, p3).

Unbeknown to Flinders, however, he possessed a powerful ally who shared his opinion on the naming of the continent. Governor Lachlan Macquarie made his first reference to the name Australia in a letter to Lord Bathurst, penned on April 4, 1817. In this letter Macquarie acknowledged his receipt of Flinders's charts of Australia, underlining the word Australia for emphasis. And on December 21, 1817, Macquarie wrote to Secretary Goulburn, this time explicitly communicating his desire for the country to be named Australia (Labilliere 1878, Scott 1933). This letter marks a turning point in the popular adoption of the term; once the governor began to implement this new name, the population seems to have followed suit.

Evidence of the adoption of the name Australia by settlers of, and visitors to, the country can be seen in the way in which the continent and its colonies were documented textually in the years that followed. In 1825, for instance, a judge on the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Barron Field, Esq. F.L.S., appears to

have had some confusion around the naming of Australia. In the preface to his *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales*, Field demonstrated an understanding of the distinction between New South Wales and Australia, speaking of the former as the colony and the latter as the continent. However, Field alternated between the terms *Australia* and *New Holland* (Field 1825). If this document were an account of the average settler or visitor to New South Wales, this inconsistency could be simply seen as confusion or uncertainty among the general population. Field was an educated public official, though, who was preparing an official document for Earl Bathurst. As such, this inconsistency seems to suggest a deeper confusion, or at least indicates the interchangeable nature of the two terms within Australian language at this time.

A decade after Macquarie first used the term Australia, Peter Miller Cunningham showed trepidation in naming the continent in his memoir. His 1827 book is titled *Two Years in New South Wales*, but within the text he refers to the colony as 'New South Wales (or Australia, as we colonials say)' (Cunningham 1827). The words adopted here suggest that while there was still some confusion around the distinction between the naming of the colony and the continent, popularity for the term Australia was growing among the colonists. The ambivalence in these texts may also reflect the author's uncertainty about which name would assume dominance.

By 1827 Australia had become a popular name among colonists, but did they think of themselves as Australians? Similarly, was there a political idea of Australia as a governed state, engaging in political relationships with other governed states? Furthermore, was there an understanding of Australia as a place with a unique and separate culture from Britain? If not, when did these ideas begin to proliferate within the local population?

According to JB Hirst (2010), Australia is unusual in its search for nationhood. Hirst asserts that Australia is now a nation with citizens who recognise their nationality as Australian, but unlike in most other nations there is no definitive date of conception of this nationhood (Hirst 2010). By looking closely at the significant events that punctuate Australian history, it may be possible to identify changes in nationalist sentiment among colonial citizens, so as to map the evolution of Australian nationhood. According to Hirst, well into the nineteenth century the colonial citizens did not think of themselves as Australian, New South Welsh, Victorian or South Australian; they were British and saw themselves in this way (Hirst 2010, p246). But so too did Scots and Englishmen.

Native-born settlers were more likely to see themselves as Australian or people within the British Empire, W. C. Wentworth concluded his poem *Australasia* in 1822 (then Australasia was commonly used as a substitute for Australia):

> And Australasia float, with flag unfurl'd.
> A new Britannia in another world (Wentworth in Hughes 2010, p365).

While Britain saw itself as a multinational empire, and encouraged its colonies to be self-governing, it did not seem to matter to either the colonial office or the average colonists whether they thought of themselves as Australian, British or for example Victorian. By the second half of the century, when most of the colonies were self-governing, all these terms were being used depending on the context. What hurried the change to 'Australian' was the 1901 decision of the colonies to federate, not popular nationalist or separatist sentiment.

The first serious discussion of federating the six colonies came in the 1880s (Trainor 1994, Birrell 1995, Hirst 2010) and the majority of accounts of early federalist activism emphasise the agency of politicians or radical groups. One of the primary

motivators was a convention assembled, at the behest of the British Government, in Sydney in 1883 to host initial discussions on the subject (Trainor 1994). However, despite these significant political movements, according to a *Bulletin* article published at the time, there was 'scarcely a scintilla of evidence that the public at large care a jot about it' (Unknown 1883). Trainor also claims that federation did not attract significant public support during this time (Trainor 1994). And Birrell supports this sentiment in his assertion that initial efforts toward federation lacked popular support as late as 1891, contending that these early efforts were instigated and led by Henry Parkes and a group of colonial politicians (Birrell 1995). In other words, the federation of the Australian colonies was a top-down rather than a grassroots movement.

Nevertheless, there was wide support for self-government, and the growing number of native-born settlers increasingly thought of themselves as a distinct Australian British group. The Australian Native Association was a major advocate (Trainor 1994); it had been established in 1871, and as early as 1880 had committed itself to supporting the federation of the colonies, and its public discussion over the two decades that followed helped to solidify the idea of Australia. For example, The *Bulletin* published such an article in June 1898:

> Australia is our own country, and the pride in united Australia will be the safeguard of our own country ... Who has never thrilled with passionate exaltation that, come what may, he is part of Australia and she of him; that his life has been fed at her generous sources; that his spirit is impregnated and coloured by her spirit; that the destiny of himself and his children is inextricably involved with the destiny of this hostile, mysterious, magnificent island.

> The appeal is to Australians, not to calculating self seekers. And it

is to Australians who are worthy of their opportunity and of their country that the challenge comes to stand up for the promise of a nation, for the indissolubility of a race – for Australia (Unknown 1898).

The article suggests that the term *Australian* had entered the common vernacular, and that a community was beginning to identify itself using this name.

The date usually sited as the birth of the Australian nation state is January 1, 1901, the day that federation resulted in official confirmation of the Commonwealth of Australia at a ceremony in Centennial Park, Sydney. However, the idea of Australia and Australians preceded the creation of the nation state. Nevertheless, historians remain undecided about when Australia actually attained nationhood, mainly because nationhood is such a slippery concept. Birrell names the residual power of imperial law and the inclusion of the governor-general as the Australian head of state as inhibitors to the establishment of a fully independent Australian nation. Others suggest a number of possible alternate dates as the foundation of the Australian nation, including the appointment of the first Australian ambassadors in 1939, or the legislative independence that came with the adoption of the Statute of Westminster in 1942. And in 1969, High Court Justice Garfield Barwick announced Australia's independence as a nation, although he too could not pinpoint when it occurred (Birrell 1995). According to Barwick, Australia had no single narrative of independence around which to rally; independence was not seized from an oppressor at the birth of the nation, instead it came incrementally over an indefinable period, leaving the Australian community without a cause for celebration nor a day on which to celebrate (Barwick 1975).

There is no agreement that dates the commencement of Australian nationhood – either as a fully independent nation state or as a sentiment. However, for the

purposes of this research I will assume that by the 1890s a threshold had been crossed in which the majority of inhabitants of the Australian colonies began to think of themselves as Australians, albeit as Australians in the British Empire. Well into the twentieth century, though, many Australians saw no contradiction in thinking of themselves as British and Australian, just as Scots saw no contradiction between their Scottish-ness and their British-ness (Krishan 2003).

A similar problem exists in relation to Australian design. The transition to Australian art and design is complicated to date, as there is no definitive threshold on which Australian artists, designers and makers began to identify as Australian, and there is no single idea of Australian-ness to shape this creative output.

## Australian History

*Australian history* is a vexed term. On one hand, Australia is often described as a young country – this view implies Australia's history began with the arrival of British settlers to the continent. On the other hand, Australia is regularly referred to as an ancient place, with an Indigenous Australian heritage that stretches back, at best estimate, roughly 60,000 years before the arrival of the British (Carter 2006). Bain Attwood (2005) argues that the former view was used to forge a nation on ideals of British-ness and mateship. In this version of Australian history, convicts were taken from their homeland, forced to occupy an alien land and struggled on the frontier to build a nation. This account celebrates Australians of British decent as being triumphant against devastating odds – quintessential Aussie battlers (Attwood 2005). William Edward Hanley Stanner (1969) sees this British version of Australian history as being incomplete. This is a history that not only fails to mention the relationships that formed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people post colonisation, but does not acknowledge Indigenous Australian history at all (Stanner 1969).

Narratives that focus on both Australia's British and Indigenous pasts are now often included in Australian history (Carter 2006). This research will use the term Australian history to draw upon both versions of the nation's past, speaking about them individually and collectively as differing lenses on the same subject.

## Colonial Australia and Colonial Australian

According to the Australian Government, Australia's colonial period began on January 18, 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet to Botany Bay and the establishment of the colony of New South Wales. The eventual six Australian colonies then federated into a nation state on January 1, 1901, thus marking the end of Australia's colonial period (Government 2013). Thus, Australia's colonial period began on January 18, 1788 and ended on January 1, 1901. References to colonial Australia will refer to the specific colony in question, or the Australian colonies, rather than the generic name of Australia, which only became a political entity after 1901.

*Colonial Australians* are those men, women and children who lived in one of the six Australian colonies during the colonial period.

## Aboriginal Australian and Indigenous Australian

As with the term *Colonial Australian*, the terms *Aboriginal Australian* and *Indigenous Australian* are affected by time. Prior to the period around federation, when *Australian* developed meaning, there was no grouping word that could be used to refer to all individuals within this group – though when *Australian* was first used early in the nineteenth century it often referred to Aborigines not the colonists. I will use the terms Aboriginal Australian and Indigenous Australian in accordance with the Australian Bureau of Statistics guidelines below.

In common language, the terms Aboriginal Australian and Indigenous Australian

seem interchangeable, but it is important to understand the correct context for each term, so to acknowledge the many groups of people represented by these idioms. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines the term Indigenous Australian as 'a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and who is accepted as such by the community with which the person associates' (ABS 2010).

When referring to a specific Indigenous group, where the name of that group is known, it will be used. When referring to Aboriginal people of non-Torres Strait Islander descent, where the name of that specific Aboriginal group is not known, the term Aboriginal Australian will be used. Lastly, when referring to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the term Indigenous Australians will be used.

## Mythology

According to the Oxford Dictionary, *Mythology* is 'a collection of myths, especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition'. A Myth is either 'a fictitious or imaginary person or thing', or 'a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events' (Oxford University Press 2015).

This research project will view myths through the lens of the latter definition, as this thesis is not concerned with judging the truth or non-truth of folklore. The focus of this research project will be the social and cultural implications of these stories and their relevance in identifying the value systems of various groups, pre and post colonisation.

## Research Questions

What constitutes an Australian artefact? What are the cultural ideas and values that constitute an Australian identity? How can contemporary designers learn from existing Australian artefacts and elements of Australian culture to develop a method for creating new, uniquely Australian material culture?

## Research Aim

This research aims to understand the material and technical influences that shape artefacts originating in the continent now known as Australia, as well as the culturally specific values that influence the practice of making these artefacts. This research will form a foundation from which to develop and implement a method or series of methods for designing and making contemporary Australian objects.

## Research Objectives

This research identifies a sample group of artefacts made in the continent now known as Australia under varying circumstances and influences to determine the elements that make these geographically specific artefacts unique to this place. Significant art and object-making practices, which aim to represent or embody Australian-ness, are analysed and critiqued in order to determine the validity of their claims. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the methods of practice and the influence on making that have resulted in artefacts that most accurately represent or successfully capture elements of local cultures. These findings form the basis of a method for making Australian objects.

This research also investigates the ideas, beliefs and values at the foundation of Australian culture, comprehending some of the narratives that embody these characteristics of Australian nationhood. Common themes are identified, and these elements of Australian narratives are used as possible inspiration for the design of Australian objects.

An introduction to the research topic has been given in Chapter One, outlining the main research question as well as the overarching aims and objectives. Chapter One has also provided relevant definitions for some of the crucial terms used in this research.

Chapter Two consists of a survey of pre- and post-colonial artefacts originating in the continent now known as Australia. This chapter employs material culture theory to interrogate the chosen artworks and functional objects. Material culture theory is also used to critique significant art and object-making practices that aim to represent or embody the essence of Australia, to determine which of these practices are successful in doing so, and why.

Concurrently, Chapter Two investigates the ideas, beliefs and values that underpin Australian culture, exploring some of the broadly disseminated narratives that serve as repositories for these elements of Australian nationhood. Importantly, this chapter identifies the myths behind many of these narratives and examines the racial and cultural separation that is perpetuated by these myths.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology adopted in this body of research. This method will be used to process information gathered in the previous chapter, developing a strategy for the design of new Australian material culture.

Chapter Four firstly consists of the critical analysis of existing contemporary designed objects that are inspired by elements of Australian identity. Secondly, this chapter provides images, detailed rationalisations for, and critical analysis of, the Australian objects created as a result of this research. Chapter Four also provides comprehensive documentation of the design development and production stages of each object.

Chapter Five provides a comprehensive summary of the works made as a result of this body of research.

## Limitations

### Defining Australian Culture and Material Culture

From the outset it is important to articulate the impracticality of defining a culture in its entirety. It is not possible to study every facet of an identified culture, and this must result in the inclusion of some cultural attributes and the omission of others. Similarly, it is not possible to study every example of material culture generated by a community. There are simply too many. The collection of ideas and artefacts chosen for inclusion in the study, therefore, are subjective (Spradley 1972). However, subjectivity is axiomatic to studio-driven projects.

In this case, according to the research methodologies discussed in Chapter Three, information will be coded and subsequent research directions adopted according to the bias of the researcher. This approach will ensure the focus of the thesis interests the researcher and has the potential to inspire remarkable practice-based outcomes.

### Subjectivity of Australian Artefacts

It is a major goal of this research project that the practice-based outcomes are discernibly Australian. However, there are three areas of subjectivity that will influence this discernibility: firstly, those aesthetic elements that are discernably Australian to the author may not be interpreted in this way by every audience. Secondly, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1 (see page 2), Australian identity has subjective componentry and will manifest differently in each viewer. And finally, as discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 24), material culture is not a clear communicator of cultural values, and will be easily misinterpreted by an audience.

Chapter Two discusses the subjectivity of Australian identity, concluding that this idea of identity varies within the mind of each person. It is possible to identify some foundational narratives that shape commonplace notions of Australian-ness, but Australian-ness retains a strong individual element. This is especially the case today, in post-colonial multicultural globalised Australia – as Habermas suggests in his notion of postnational identity (see page 3). Thus this thesis does not make claims about the universality of various aspects of Australian-ness.

Chapter Two examines the ambiguous nature of material culture as a transmitter of cultural values, concluding it is another subjective practice. The discussion is focused on the subjective nature of deciphering an object made in the past in order to comprehend the cultural values of the person or persons responsible for its fabrication. However, this subjectivity is relevant when discussing the legibility of contemporary artefacts designed to embody contemporary cultural values, as the comprehension of these artefacts will remain open to interpretation by each individual. This is true for the objects designed as part of this research project; they will be understood as Australian by some, but not by others.

In Chapter Four, pre-existing designed objects, as well as those objects designed in conjunction with this body of research, are examined according to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture* (see page 230). This taxonomy was developed as part of this research in order to summarise key components of Australian identity elucidated by this research. Just as the connection between national identity and designed object is subjective, so too is the analysis of objects generated as part of this research, according to the taxonomy. Thus the taxonomy is a guide to the approach I have taken, and is not intended as final statement on the conditions of Australian-ness or Australian-specific values. While this project asks questions about Australian identity, it is for the purposes of developing an approach to, or even school of, design, and not to fashion a blueprint of

nationalism. This body of research uses this experimental framework to identify and analyse components of Australian material culture that are likely to be read as Australian, however the Australian-ness in all aspects of these research outcomes will be open to unique interpretation by each individual.

# CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE OF GEOGRAPHICALLY SPECIFIC ARTEFACTS AND
CULTURAL IDENTITY

## Material Culture Theory

This research ultimately endeavours to develop a system for the creation of Australian design. In order to create culturally specific objects, it is first necessary to understand whether cultural characteristics can be embodied within an object. Jules D Prown postulates that it is in fact possible to identify the 'values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions' of a cultural group at a particular point in time, based on the analysis of the artefacts that that group has created during the same period (Prown 2001, p70). If it is possible to read these cultural characteristics in an artefact, it may also be possible to purposefully design an artefact that exhibits culturally specific characteristics.

How does Prown analyse artefacts, and what information can this analysis unearth about the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the community that made them? Prown provides a clear example in his analysis of American neoclassical objects (Figure 2.1) of the late eighteenth century. According to Prown, these objects provide insight into a period in America when the population distrusted the value of art, seeing it as a luxury and as a stepping-stone to 'extravagance, vice, folly, effeminacy, corruption, and, ultimately, national decay' (Prown 2001, p64). Prown selects one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, John Adams, as a representative of the American values during this period; he identifies these values in a letter written by Adams to his wife from Paris in 1778. In his letter, Adams wrote, 'I cannot help suspecting that the more elegance, the less virtue, in all times and countries' (Adams in Prown 2001, p64). According to Prown, the abstract simplicity and non-luxurious nature of neoclassical American objects were a direct response to these attitudes – they were 'aesthetically sanitized art made for John Adams and his contemporaries' (Prown 2001, p64). This example provides a clear link between an identified attitude and a concurrent style, but is the relationship between these elements always so clear?

Figure 2.1 - Side Chair, Neoclassical, Salem, Massachusetts – Samuel McIntire, mahogany, pine, ash, cherry and ebony, 100 x 47 x 55.2cm, c. 1790-95.

There is, however, some conjecture among theorists around the accuracy of knowledge obtained about a society, based on the artefacts that have been created by that society. Prown postulates that the analysis of the characteristics of an artefact can provide us with a greater understanding of the time, place and culture in which it was made (Prown 2001). Conversely, W David Kingery (1996) questions the validity of this type of analysis, pointing out the subjective nature of an individual's interpretation of any piece of material culture (Kingery 1996). And Prown himself refers to material culture as 'the mute heritage of things' and as 'disappointing … communicators of historical fact', admitting that facts are more clearly communicated through written documentation (Prown 2001, p53 and 93).

For this reason, the study of a culture is often conducted through literary sources, by deciphering the written histories, literature and public and private documents of a community in order to develop a broad understanding of that culture. However, in reality until 1950 more than 55% of the world's population was illiterate (UNESCO 2006), with some communities falling well below this global average. As such the percentage of community members contributing to the written record of many societies before this time were in the minority. On the other hand, objects are created and used by a large percentage of the population, and therefore offer potential insight into the lives of a larger portion of any given population (Glassie 1978). Furthermore, within any society at a given point in time, there are universal beliefs so widely held that they remain unstated in literary records. As such, these values are not evident in the written histories and literature of a society, but evidence of these ideals can be seen in the actions of a community – in the way in which something is made or produced and articulated through its style (Prown 2001).

Importantly, not every object made within a community will represent the values of the group as a whole. But if a style is representative of the commonly held

'subliminal and unconscious' (Prown 2001, p53) values that proliferate within a community, that style would be widely adopted, infiltrating the characteristics of a broad range of the objects made by that community (Kingery 1996). An artefact made in this style would also be one that is concerned with human activities, being used within the community as part of the function of human life (Prown 2001). When this is the case, the artefacts produced by that community stand to represent the society at large, and could therefore provide a broad record of the unspoken values of that society.

In conclusion, it is clear that written histories provide an explicit account of the conscious cultural characteristics of a small cross-section of a given society, while material culture can provide a less specific indication of the sub-conscious cultural ideals of a broad portion of that community. As such, the comprehension of both the written and material culture of a community can provide a holistic understanding of the society in question.

## Material Culture and the Decorative Arts

Given that this research is specifically focused on the design and creation of nationally specific furniture and objects, it is important to understand the way in which material culture theory affects the decorative arts.

When identifying the inherent values of a community based on its material culture, it is simpler to deduce those values from an object whose function is not too complex. A chair, for example, is limited in the arrangement of its elements, combining a horizontal surface for sitting on, with a framework to hold that surface above the ground, and a vertical plane to support the sitter's back. Many types of chairs have been made throughout history, using countless styles and forms of adornment, but because of the simplicity and consistency of the functional configuration of a chair, the main variable element is the style used to give shape to

that function. In this way, the style of a chair can be isolated from the function, and judged as the separate and culturally specific act of the maker (Prown 2001). If these stylistic choices are common within the material culture of a community, they will reflect something of the values of the social group.

Prown provides a clear example of the way in which this theory functions in practice in his study comparing the throne of a Bamileke ruler from West Africa (Figure 2.2) with a Philadelphia chair from the United States of America (Figure 2.3). Both chairs combine a seat with bracing below and a vertical plane to support the sitter's back, and while both chairs are characterised by elaborate carving, the stylistic disparity of these carvings expresses the contrasting values held by the two makers. According to Prown, the technique and subject of the different carvings express culturally specific attitudes that are important enough to these individual cultures to warrant their painstaking expression in carved form (Prown 2001).

The Bamileke and North Americans who made these objects were separated by time, distance and culture, and therefore the social values influencing these two objects have resulted in artefacts that are stylistically dissimilar – but the physical distance between these two communities has affected more than social influence. The making skills of, and materials available to, the makers have varied greatly through time and across continental barriers.

Natural materials such as timber and stone are dispersed throughout the world according to regionally specific climatic and geological conditions. The combination of these conditions at a specific point in time, or throughout a prolonged period, will create the perfect environment for a specific tree to grow, or a type of stone to form.

Sydney basin sandstone is one such material: it was formed by an ancient river that

Figure 2.2 - Bamileke throne – Bamileke People, Cameroon, material unknown, date unknown.

Figure 2.3 - Philadelphia chair – Unknown maker, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States, mahogany and yellow pine, 99 x 60 x 54cm c. 1765-1775.

flowed 230 million years ago from eastern Antarctica through a vast flood plain that once occupied the land where Sydney now sits (Flannery 1999). This sandstone was created by a unique natural phenomenon, one that will never again occur exactly as it did then. The result is a material that is specific to this region of Australia, and when used in the creation of artefacts, it provides a unique character that no other stone artefact will possess.

Similarly, vegetation grows according to specific climatic and geological factors. The parana pine, for example, is a sub-tropical conifer that grows in the Andean region of South America. This tree will only grow at altitudes above 1600 feet and prefers sandy soils (Fermor 1944), and provide a unique making resource for the people living in this region. Similar to Sydney basin sandstone, the specific colour, grain and workability of this timber will give artefacts made from it specific characteristics that will be at least marginally different to those made from other species of timber growing in other regions. When a culturally specific artefact is made using a material that is unique to that region, the resulting object will be both unique in its design and materiality when compared to those from other communities.

Just as materials can be regionally specific, so too can the craft techniques used to shape and assemble those materials. In his research of pre-colonial Aboriginal Australian stone implements, Frederick D McCarthy (1940) identified hundreds of tools made by different communities. In some instances these implements and the techniques used to make them are unique to a broad region, and in other cases implements are specific to a single location.

McCarthy gives many examples of regionally specific artefacts, including the largest axes produced in Australia and made from pecked and polished slabs of basalt in the Cairns–Atherton region, and the brachina percussion stone, an elongated

hammer found in South Australia and Kangaroo Island (McCarthy and Australian Museum. Trust. 1976). While similar artefacts were made in other regions of the continent, the unique making techniques employed in the construction of these particular examples result in formal and functional peculiarities that are specific to the people who made them.

Regionally unique making techniques are not exclusive to isolated groups, such as those analysed by McCarthy. Geographically specific making techniques also evolve in non-isolated, densely populated countries like Japan. Ikat weaving, for example, is a popular weaving technique in Japan, whereby yarn is tied and dyed before it is woven. While the origins of this technique are uncertain, it is thought that ikat weaving, or similar weaving techniques, began in the region around India before making its way to Japan via Indonesia (Tomita 1982). This is an important point, as it shows that culturally unique making techniques can evolve from existing methods imported from distant places.

Jan and Noriko Tomita (1982) have identified 10 regionally specific Japanese ikat weaving techniques. Despite the dense population of Japan and its proximity to other Asian nations, each technique makes use of specific dying and weaving methods that are not used in other regions of Japan. Itajime Gasuri is one such method, whereby weaving yarn is clamped between two pieces of engraved board, allowing the die to only penetrate the relief sections of the board, leaving the clamped sections uncoloured. Orijime Gasuri is another example – the use of a specific loom results in the fine dotted pattern unique to the regions of Miyako and Okinawa (Tomita 1982).

The evolution of making techniques seen in the ikat weaving of Japan is of particular relevance to the design and construction of contemporary artefacts. Designers and makers working in the twenty-first century are not as isolated as

pre-colonial Aboriginal Australian tool makers, but live in a connected world where making techniques are shared and, for the most part, no longer remain unique to a specific maker or cultural group. Yet contemporary makers can learn from the ikat weavers of Japan and develop new making techniques by appropriating and altering those traditions that are already part of their diaspora. This process may provide new regionally specific making techniques that can aid the design and creation of new material culture.

Regionally specific materials and making techniques combine to offer more than relative uniqueness. According to Prown, the values of a community manifest in the style of the artefacts that proliferate in that community. The physical characteristics that result from a regionally specific material or making technique contribute to the final aesthetic and style of the artefact. As such, the choice of material and method for making are stylistic considerations, and when these two elements are widely used by a specific group of people, they become further embodiments of the values of that community.

## Factors of Culturally and Geographically Unique Material Culture

The foundational theory for this research is Prown's material culture theory, but additional factors are added for their relevance to the analysis and creation of culturally and geographically unique material culture.

For this research, the creation of culturally and geographically unique material culture relies on the following five factors:

### Style

It is possible to identify the 'values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions' of a cultural group at a particular point in time, based on the analysis of stylistic characteristics that proliferate the artefacts created by that community at that time (Prown

2001, p70). If it is possible to read these cultural values in an artefact, it may too be possible to purposely design an artefact that exhibits culturally specific characteristics.

## Materiality

The use of regionally specific materials contributes to the stylistic uniqueness of artefacts when compared with those made using materials specific to other regions. In addition, this stylistic consideration is a further embodiment of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the cultural group, adding to the unique style of the resulting artefact.

## Unique Making Techniques

The use of regionally unique making techniques also contributes to artefacts that are stylistically unique when compared with those made using methods specific to other regions. Again, this stylistic consideration is a further embodiment of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the cultural group, adding to the unique style of the resulting artefact.

## Evolved Making Techniques

The making techniques adopted by a particular cultural group do not need to be invented by that group in order to be unique, but can evolve from pre-existing local or foreign techniques to create a new and unique method. As above, this stylistic consideration is a further embodiment of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the cultural group, adding to the unique style of the resulting artefact.

## Verbal and Textual Accounts of Communal Values

By Prown's own admittance, understanding the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a community through the analysis of their artefacts is a highly

subjective practice. Alternatively, the values of a community can be very clearly understood when articulated explicitly in verbal or textual records. As such, it may be necessary to survey relevant newspaper articles, literature, film and television news broadcasts to better understand the cultural values of a given community.

## Australian Material Culture

Culturally unique artefacts are shaped by the values of, materials available to, and making techniques used by the individual or community who made them, but how are these artefacts named? If a society with an underlying set of common values, such as the Bamileke, creates an object, and that object stands to represent the inherent values of that community, it follows that this object should be named after that community – a Bamileke artefact. This theory is simple when applied to communities with a single and isolated name and set of values, but few communities are truly isolated from the influences of others. How does this categorisation change when the values, ideas and attitudes of separate but proximate communities influence one another? And how do we name material culture when the name of a community and its inherent values are expanded to include many cultures as a result of globalisation?

Before colonisation, the continent now known as Australia was made up of as many as 270 individual Indigenous language groups and many more clan-based communities. Related clan groups mixed socially for trade, ceremony, marriage, etc, and some artefacts, such as pearl shells and songs, were traded over wide areas. As a result, the cultural systems, traditions and objects of proximate pre-colonial Indigenous Australian communities were influenced by one another. Despite the varied circumstances surrounding the cultural mixing of numerous proximate Indigenous Australian communities, each clan group developed some unique cultural characteristics. In some instances the cultural variation between proximate communities was marginal, while in others it was vast. Often this differentiation

was exemplified by unique aspects of language, ritual and/or law (Butel 2003).

The material culture of proximate groups of people often evolved together, as makers from both groups learned from one another through generations of developing material culture. However, the specific adoption of internal and external influences in the evolution of a particular community's artefacts is unique to that community. Artefacts made by the Pairrebeenne people of northeast Tasmania, for example, are the physical manifestation of their culture. In some instances these artefacts originated in other Tasmanian Aboriginal communities and were adopted by the Pairrebeenne. In other cases the makers of these geographically unique artefacts learned from proximate groups and adopted similar making techniques and material use. Just as the naming of a specific Indigenous Australian community is used to differentiate the set of cultural values, ideas and assumptions at the core of that society, the same name can be used to differentiate the material culture made by that group of people, according to the same set of values, ideas and assumptions. The generations of evolving Pairrebeenne objects stand to represent the inherent values of that community at the time of each object's creation, and therefore take on the same name as that community – Pairrebeenne artefacts.

Just like the Pairrebeenne, 21st-century Australians use a single term to bind a group of people under one name – in this case, Australian. The comparative isolation of the Pairrebeenne community makes it relatively simple to identify unique cultural influences and their resulting material culture, but the analysis of Australian material culture has become increasingly complex. As discussed in *Australia - The Idea* (see page 5), it is not possible to identify a date when the people living in Australia first began to see themselves as Australian, and as such it is equally problematic to pinpoint a date when the artefacts that they made began to embody uniquely Australian values. To add further complication, Australia has always been a culturally complex society. During the early years of colonisation,

the continent was home to Indigenous and British communities, but since then people from all corners of the globe have inhabited Australia. Given that the blend of cultures now comprising Australian culture is infinitely complex and impossible to decipher, what values shape contemporary Australian material culture, and what name should be given to these artefacts? Does influence from the many cultures that make up contemporary Australian society result in a homogenisation of Australian artefacts? If so, should these homogenous objects be labelled as Australian, or are they simply international artefacts? The multicultural nature of contemporary Australia does not necessarily mean that Australia is void of a recognisable, universal culture, it simply makes the components of this culture more difficult to identify. If a designer or maker were to purposely attempt to make Australian artefacts, what facets of contemporary Australian society could be used to influence this material culture?

In order to understand the timing and influence of Australian values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions on the design and construction of a broad number of objects, this research will begin with a survey of artefacts made by two cultural groups, over two distinct periods of Australian history – Indigenous and non-Indigenous occupants of the continent now known as Australia, pre and post colonisation. Both Indigenous Australians, pre and post colonisation, and non-Indigenous inhabitants of the six colonies and the Australian nation state have influenced current Australian cultural values. The relative isolation of pre-colonial Indigenous Australians meant that in some instances communities developed unique making techniques and stylistic characteristics. These techniques, as well as the materials to which they gave shape, were traded and shared between communities, sometimes complicating the categorisation of artefacts according to the specific society of origin. However, at the very least, pre-colonial artefacts made by Indigenous Australians employed techniques and materials that originated Australia. In contrast, as the cultural mix has grown post colonisation, it becomes

increasingly difficult to identify the origins of the cultural influences shaping many local artefacts. In turn the practice of categorising colonial and Australian material culture grows in complexity. Does this hybridisation of culture result in artefacts that embody the emerging values of a continually evolving community, one that combines Indigenous and non-Indigenous materials, making techniques and stylistic characteristics in a hybrid material culture?

Understanding cultural values through the analysis of made artefacts can be a subjective process. As such it is necessary to explore other records of Australian cultural values. This study will survey relevant newspaper articles, literature, film and/or television news broadcasts that document some components of an Australian value system, with the aim of identifying universal aspects of Australian culture identified by scholars, historians and journalists. Considering the literary nature of these accounts, this study will focus on conscious cultural characteristics of, and influences on, local communities.

### Pre-colonial Indigenous Artefacts

### Tasmanian Aboriginal Vessels

Baskets (Figure 2.4) and water-carrying vessels (Figure 2.5) made by Tasmanian Aboriginal women are examples of geographically unique functional objects made by Indigenous Australians. In the catalogue essay that accompanied the *Tayenebe* exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (2009), Julie Gough and Jennie Gorringe (2009) discuss one unique element of Tasmanian Aboriginal basketry – the distinctive *s-stitch* twist technique used by Tasmanian Aboriginal women in the transformation of local fibres, including irises, lilies, rush, sedges and reeds into functional objects (Gough, Gorringe et al. 2009, p3).

Gough and Gorringe also discuss another vessel of particular peculiarity made

Figure 2.4 - Baskets - Tasmanian Aboriginal People, material unknown, c. 1910.

by Tasmanian Aboriginal women that captured the curiosity of French explorers Nicolas Baudin and François Péron in 1802. During the explorers' voyage to the island now known as Tasmania, they came across a kelp water-carrying vessel, constructed out of a folded leaf of focus palmatus (durvillaea potatorum) pinned together with a wooden skewer. Péron observed the rarity of this thick sea kelp, and the objects that were made from it, and recognised that this was the only place that he had seen this material (Gough, Gorringe et al. 2009).



Figure 2.5 - *Water Carrier* - Jacqui Langdon, bull kelp, 2009.

Tasmanian baskets and water-carrying vessels were not only shaped by the unique making techniques and materials used by Tasmanian Aboriginal women, they were designed to perform specific functions. These vessels were used to carry seafoods such as crayfish, mussels and abalone, along with land resources including stone tools, bone points, lead ore, tubers, fern root and grass tree resin (Gough, Gorringe et al. 2009). It is clear that these pieces of material culture were designed according to the resources, needs and making capabilities of Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

In their essay, Gough and Gorringe discuss the uniqueness of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and the way in which this culture has acted upon the objects included in the exhibition. They postulate that the natural environment of Tasmania and the unique materials found in this environment, along with specific functional requirements of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, have shaped a series of objects that reflect a connection to country and community (Gough, Gorringe et al. 2009). These are objects shaped by a specific geographic location, the materials available in that location, and the beliefs, ideas and functional requirements of the people who made them.

## Central Australian Tjurungas

Another example of a geographically unique cultural object to originate in the continent is the *tjurunga* – made, decorated and cherished by Northern, Southern and Western Arrernte people from the area now known as Central Australia. The name of these important artefacts, according to Carl Strehlow (1927), has uniquely ancient roots within the Arrernte language, evolving from the antiquated and presently unused Arrernte word *tju*, meaning concealed, and *runga*, most commonly used to suggest a ceremony (Strehlow in Spencer and Gillen 1927). While these artefacts can take many shapes and forms, the tjurungas of greatest significance are generally oblong-shaped tablets, mostly made from stone (Strehlow 1947) or mulga wood (Strehlow in Spencer and Gillen 1927), often with a slightly

dished profile (Figure 2.6). Tjurungas are highly symbolic objects, inscribed with designs that fall loosely into three distinct categories: zoomorphic – 'Having or representing animal form' (Press 2015); phytomorphic – 'Having or represented with the attributes of a plant' (Mirriam-Webster 2015); and geometric – 'Characterised by or decorated with regular lines and shapes'. Depicting the primary object or protagonist of an associated creation story, these designs are applied using one, or a combination, of four methods:

1)      Incision with a possum tooth, still attached to the animal's lower jawbone.

2)      Painting with charcoal, pipeclay or ochre.

3)      Decoration with bird down and plant matter – usually added only for use in sacred ceremonies.

4)      Rubbing with grease (Spencer and Gillen 1927).



Figure 2.6 - Stone tjurunga of the rain or water totem - Spencer and Gillen, presumed to be a photograph, 1927.

Arrernte tjurungas are shaped by influences unique to Arrernte country in the region now known as Central Australia. These artefacts often feature the protagonists in Arrernte creation stories – plants and animals that are, in many cases, limited to that geographic region. By taking inspiration for the decorative motifs that adorn their tjurungas from flora and fauna in their region, Arrernte people have ensured that the resulting artefacts will be geographically unique. Since colonisation, artists and crafts people, from Frederick William Tod (Figure 2.7) to Les Blakebrough (Figure 2.8), have taken inspiration from native Australian flora and fauna with varying degrees of success. However, as Margaret Preston asserts, 'Taking native flowers, etc., of any country and twiddling them into unique forms will never give a national decorative art' (Preston in Butel 2003, p57). Is it possible for a contemporary designer to reinvigorate this strategy, developing



Figure 2.7 - *Occasional Table* – Frederick William Tod, Queensland Maple, 75 x 95cm Diameter, 1926.
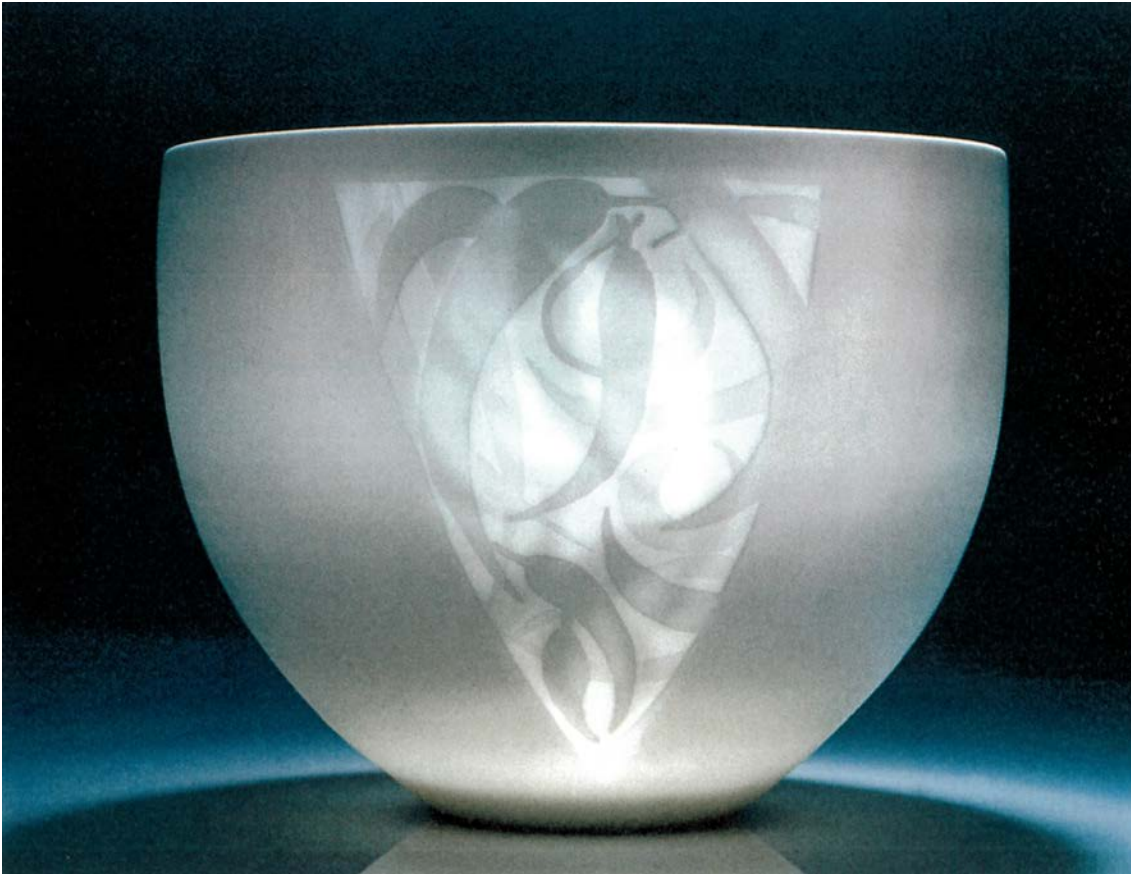
Figure 2.8 - *Large Bowl (Forest Floor series)* - Les Blakebrough, unglazed Southern Ice porcelain, shellac resist, 20 x 25cm, 1999.

an innovative method for the adoption of influence from the geographically unique plants and animals that inhabit the Australian landscape? Perhaps a new and unique exploration of these quintessentially Australian phenomena would yield artefacts that are as uniquely Australian as Arrernte tjurungas, while being culturally relevant to a broader cross-section of contemporary Australians.

The uniqueness of Arrernte tjurungas is not only due to the motifs that adorn their surfaces, it is in large part attributed to the geographically unique materials used in their creation. Given the proliferation of the mulga tree (Agricultural Research Service 1974) and the abundance of stone in the region now known as Central Australia, it is reasonable to assume that tjurungas are made from materials collected in the vicinity of the maker. In accordance with material culture theory,

the relative geographic uniqueness of these materials, when compared with timber and stone from other locations, will have some distinct stylistic influences on tjurungas made from these specific materials.

In addition to the culturally specific surface adornment and geographically unique materials, the methods used to craft Arrernte tjurungas are another significant contributing factor to the uniqueness of these artefacts. The abstract designs that adorn these objects are applied, not with a napped adze – the tool of choice for many other Indigenous Australians prior to colonisation – but a possum incisor, still housed within the dead possum's jawbone. This unique tool of choice creates an incision that is discernable from that of a stone adze (Mountford 1943), and therefore stylistically unique to this artefact. These unique making techniques, along with the geographically specific materials mentioned above give shape to the resulting tjurunga, contributing to a stylistically unique artefact.

While the adornment, materiality and making techniques used to give shape to tjurungas influence the resulting artefact in a significant way, the single greatest influence on these objects is the ancient belief system that inspires their creation and shapes every formal and decorative decision of their makers. According to Arrernte tradition, the Alchera refers to the distant ancestors of the Arrernte, as well as the mythic period in which they shaped Arrernte country (Spencer and Gillen 1927). According to Strehlow, Spencer and Gillen, Arrernte people believe the original tjurungas to be the final form taken by some of these ancestors at the end of the Alchera (Spencer and Gillen 1927, Strehlow 1947).

Within Arrernte society, individuals are assigned a tjurunga on the day of their conception. This tjurunga is allocated according to the place where the mother of the unborn child first becomes aware of her pregnancy. This place in the landscape will be, in some way, connected to the Alchera story of one of the Arrernte spiritual

ancestors, and an elder within the community will assign a tjurunga based on this significance. The assignment of a specific tjurunga is not arbitrary; it is made under the assumption that the spirit ancestor who resides in this place has impregnated the mother, thus making the unborn child a direct descendant of that spirit ancestor. As a result, the unborn child is now bound in a totemic relationship with that spirit ancestor, and the animal associated with it. For example, if the unborn child is assigned the tjurunga of the bandicoot ancestor, *Karora*, the child is bound in a totemic relationship with all bandicoots, charged with the responsibility of caring for the bandicoots within their territory (Spencer and Gillen 1927, Strehlow 1947).

The tjurunga assigned to each individual is therefore a symbol of his spiritual beliefs, obligations to his territory, and totemic position within the community. According to Strehlow, the tjurunga is the shared body of a man and his totem, an idea best expressed in the following sentence: '*Nana unta umburka nama* – this is your body. Each man has thus two bodies, one of flesh and blood, the other of wood and stone' (Durkheim 1912, Strehlow in Spencer and Gillen 1927, p555). The tjurunga represents the core beliefs and totemic identity of each individual, and tells the Alchera story of the ancestor at the centre of that identity.

The inscriptions and adornments made on the surface of the tjurunga are abstract depictions of the spirit ancestor's Alchera story (Mountford 1943). Unlike the figurative visual narratives documented by some other Indigenous Australians, the inscriptions made on Arrernte tjurunga are of a geometric, abstract nature. According to Spencer and Gillen, concentric circles inscribed on the surface of a tjurunga could represent a gum tree in which the spirit ancestor resides, while on another tjurunga very similar concentric circles will represent an animal – the spirit ancestor himself (Spencer and Gillen 1927). While the reasons for this abstract, geometric style are not clear, it is possible that this mode of adornment facilitates

the obscurement of culturally sensitive information from non-initiates, given the secret and sacred nature of these stories. Those who have been initiated into these stories are able to recognise the narrative in these abstract depictions, but for those who are unfamiliar with the associated narrative, the tjurunga communicates nothing. The result is a style of adornment that is unique to Arrernte people, making these objects distinctive to these communities in this specific geographic location.

The tjurunga is an Arrernte person's most sacred possession. These objects are of such great importance to the individual owner and the community at large that the tjurungas of each spirit ancestor are kept in a separate cave, known as the Pertalchera or Arknanaua (Spencer and Gillen 1927). Here they are monitored and cared for by the principal elder of that totem (Durkheim 1912). According to Strehlow, one can only understand the degree of importance placed on these objects by watching individuals sit for many hours, respectfully handling their tjurungas, and in some instances weeping at the deep significance of these objects and the profound depth of spirituality that they represent. This sentiment is supported by Emile Durkheim (1912) as he recalls witnessing the extreme grief expressed by an Arrernte community whose tjurungas were stolen by white men. The community adorned themselves in white pipeclay, a practice usually reserved for mourning the death of a clan member, and wailed in intense lamentation over their loss for a period of no less than two weeks (Durkheim 1912).

Tjurungas are likely among the most ancient example of material culture still in use today. The succinct embodiment of the complex network of myths, beliefs and values that constitute Arrernte spirituality, they are the talismans that represent this multifarious and unique system of beliefs. Western Arrernte tjurungas are also the manifestation of those beliefs as the final physical resting place of many of the most important Arrernte spiritual ancestors. These objects are the perfect

distillation of Arrernte culture, intimately woven into the core beliefs, rituals and ceremonies of that community.

Tasmanian Aboriginal water-carrying vessels (see page 36) and the tjurungas of Central Australia are clear examples of culturally and geographically specific material culture. These objects were/are created using materials, making techniques and stylistic motifs that are geographically unique to their respective regions. However, when attempting to learn from these artefacts in an effort to create contemporary objects that embody the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of present-day Australians, one crucial difference is clear: these two groups of Indigenous Australians lived in relative isolation compared with the majority of contemporary Australians. These communities met, traded and held ceremonies with proximate communities, but their exposure to alternative cultural influences was relatively limited.

Conversely, contemporary Australia is a loose idea, complicated by the indefinable emergence of Australian identity, and the many religions, belief systems, traditions and social structures adopted by those who call themselves Australian – the majority of whom have migrated to this continent from all corners of the globe, amalgamating to form one very complex, hybridised postnational contemporary culture. As such, any attempt to design new objects that can stand to represent every facet of contemporary Australian culture is, as discussed in the *Limitations* section (see page 17), impractical and unachievable for a single designer/researcher conducting a single research project. However, contemporary Australians share certain commonalities that predate the complexities of present-day Australian culture. While the average Australian may not be aware of Tasmanian Aboriginal water-carrying vessels or Central Australian tjurungas, most have experienced some exposure to Indigenous culture and spirituality as well as the materials, animals and plants that have given shape and function to Indigenous artefacts.

Furthermore, many will know of more common examples of Indigenous objects, such as the boomerang or bull-roarer, that were/are given shape and function by geographically specific influences. As such, perhaps it is possible for a contemporary Australian designer to learn from the influences that shaped pre-colonial Indigenous Australian artefacts, drawing upon the foundations of Indigenous Australian cultures and spiritualities, and the materials, animals and plants that pre-date the complicated hybridisation of colonial and Australian culture. By taking influence from these familiar components of Indigenous Australian culture, the resulting objects will express ideas that are common within the Australian vernacular, shared by many Australians.

Having discussed some examples of pre-colonial Indigenous artefacts and their potential influence on the purposeful design of new, culturally specific objects, it is necessary to understand the way in which post-colonial, non-Indigenous artefacts might influence this same endeavour. Some of the earliest such products are the sketches and paintings made by British visitors and settlers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. What do these two-dimensional works tell us about the potential for an artefact to represent the qualities of a place? At what point does art made by British colonists cross the threshold from British-ness to Australian-ness?

## Colonial and Post-colonial Non-Indigenous Artefacts

### Colonial Picturesque Painting

Since 1770, when Joseph Banks and the artists on Cook's ship began to document the unique flora and fauna they found in Botany Bay, amateur and professional artists have endeavoured to depict native Australian vegetation, wildlife and landscape on paper and canvas. Robert Dixon (1986) suggests that early colonial painters were unable to capture the local landscape because the geography of New

South Wales did not conform to the picturesque conventions in which they were trained (Dixon 1986). They were accustomed to painting under a system that had been developed to represent European landscapes according to the scientific and aesthetic precepts of the time. The fact that the style was used by British painters as a system for documenting the British landscape in a manner that was accurate and faithful according to British sensibilities, casts doubts on the Australian-ness of their art, even though this early colonial art usually appears in Australian histories as the first Australian art.

As British colonial painters became more familiar with the native flora, fauna and landscape of the colony, some began to discard elements of their training, adapting their style to more accurately document what they saw. When discussing John Glover's work (Figure 2.10), Bernard Smith (1985) states that Glover's Tasmanian



Figure 2.9 - *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove* – Unknown artist (based on drawings by Thomas Watling), oil on canvas, 91 x 121cm, 1794.

landscapes depend less on the picturesque conventions of his English work, instead they rely on the empirical observation of specific features of the local landscape, and thus, argues Smith, represent the beginnings of a distinctive colonial vision (Smith 1985).

However, regardless of Glover's ability to accurately document the landscape of an Australian colony, is this enough to claim his Tasmanian paintings for Australian art? Smith claims that Glover's work crossed a threshold into Australian material culture. But Glover was in his sixties when he migrated to Australia, having spent the majority of his career painting British landscapes according to a European style. Furthermore, Glover did not himself identify as Australian; instead, like most of his colonial compatriots, he considered himself an Englishman. Critically, the culturally specific values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of Glover, including



Figure 2.10 - *Patterdale Landscape With Cattle* – John Glover, oil on canvas, 76.8 x 114.6cm, 1833.

empiricism, did not originate in Australia, and looked elsewhere for inspiration. Therefore, can the work of John Glover and other colonial painters of the time be considered reliable examples of Australian material culture, conclusive enough to inform the intentional design of new Australian material culture? Or will later sources of Australian material culture, generated by artists and designers who identify as Australian, guided by Australian values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions, be a sounder source of inspiration?

## Australian Impressionist Painting

As discussed in *Australia – the Idea* (see page 5), by the late nineteenth century the term Australia had entered the common vernacular, and individuals were beginning to refer to themselves as Australian. This is the point when artists began to express a national consciousness. While the artists who organised the famous *9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in Melbourne in 1889 claimed adherence to Impressionism – the latest European art movement – they announced in the media their commitment to 'the development of what we believe will be a great school of painting in Australia'. In 1916, participating artist Frederick McCubbin wrote that the colonial painters 'were all imbued with the spirit of Europe', and for that reason were un-Australian: 'All these pioneer pictures leave us cold, they inspire us with no love and with very little interest, beyond the spectacular. They might belong to any country, so little are they Australian' (McCubbin 1986, p83-85). The first full history of post-colonial Australian art, William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* published in 1934, makes the case that Australian Impressionism was the first school of Australian painting (Moore 1934) and this remains a popular sentiment among the Australian public despite most histories of Australian art beginning with the arrival of British colonists 100 years earlier.

How do the claims made for the Australian Impressionists stack up? Ian McLean (1998) argues that Impressionism was 'no less or more internationalist than its

predecessors', stating that the symbolic and realistic methods adopted by Australian Impressionist painters were in line with international art practices (McLean 1998, p53). There was nothing particularly Australian about the Impressionist artists' camps established around Sydney and Melbourne during this period; McLean asserts that these artists were 'not just embracing the Australian sun but a Nietzchean cult which their European counterparts also followed' (McLean 1998, p63). In many respects, this was yet another imported art, in both style and spirit.

When considering the Australian-ness of this movement, it is necessary to consider the political climate at the time. The emergence and proliferation of the Australian Impressionist movement occurred around the turn of the twentieth century, at a time when ideas of Australian identity were also emergent in the common vernacular (see page 12). Unlike their predecessors, local artists working in the Impressionist style were likely to have identified as Australian, lived according to Australian attitudes, ideas, values and assumptions, and in turn generated material culture that was shaped by these Australian influences.

However, as discussed in *Australia – the Idea* (see page 5), the emergence of Australian identity is murky, taking place over several decades, and beginning with Australians defining their nationhood under the British Empire – identifying as both British and Australian. It follows, therefore, that Impressionist painting generated during this period would be influenced by both Australian and British sensibilities. The second-generation Australian Impressionist painter Sydney Long accused the first generation of Australian Impressionists of focusing on the pleasant elements of the Australian landscape, in painting palatable seascapes and orchard scenes. Long lamented that they ignored those places where typical Australians resided, and called for an artistic practice that could capture the 'feeling' of Australia. According to Long, Australian artists of this period failed to evoke the history of Australia in their work, and could not express the 'lonely and

primitive feeling of the country' (Long in Smith 1975, p267). For Long, these omitted Australian characteristics were nonspecific elements, associated with the spirit of place.

While the Impressionists appeared more Australian than earlier colonial painters, and certainly saw themselves this way, their Australian-ness was quickly cast in doubt by Sydney Long and others who followed him. The Impressonists did cross a threshold into Australian-ness around the turn of the twentieth century if for no other reason than this is what they intended, but lingering doubts remain as to the Australian-ness of the work that they created.

### Margaret Preston

Writing in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, at the height of the British Empire but at a time when World Wars I and II were severely eroding its prestige and raison d'être, Margaret Preston (1946) went further than Long, saying that the key to an original Australian art form lay in the combination of Indigenous Australian ideas and Western artistic training (Preston in Butel 2003). According to Preston, the fundamentals of the environment and the spirit of the country can be learnt from Indigenous Australian art, and a uniquely Australian art form could result from this education (Preston in Butel 2003). She was highly critical of existing Australian art and design, insisting that Australia could admit to having no design of its own and criticising those who 'twiddle' native flowers into forms, insisting that this could never amount to a national decorative art (Preston in Butel 2003, p57). In her work, Preston knowingly evolved the techniques that were learnt as part of her Western training – exchanging, for example, the 'regulation yellow-colour sunlight' for a cooler alternative in order to capture her subject with greater accuracy. In an attempt to learn from Indigenous Australian painting, she simplified her palette and use of form to emulate the simplicity of her country. Preston also rejected the use of 'dancing' colour and began to use blocks of light and shadow, so as to make

the image appear flat and large (Preston in Butel and Art Gallery of New South Wales. 1986, p56).

Preston spent many years studying Indigenous Australian material culture and native fauna in her attempts to emulate identifiably Australian characteristics, but how Australian is her work? As discussed in Chapter One, during the early twentieth century many Australians identified as being both Australian and British, and there is no clear endpoint to this hybrid nationality. Coincidentally, it was during this time that Preston called for an Australian approach to painting that would hybridise Australian Indigenous and Eurocentric techniques. While



Figure 2.11 - *Still Life: Fruit* – Margaret Preston, oil on canvas, 43 x 53.3cm, 1941.

Australian artists had crossed a threshold into Australian-ness at the turn of the century, and Preston saw herself as Australian and purposefully endeavoured to paint in an Australian style, there is still a lingering Eurocentricity in her articulation of that style.

The hybridity of Preston's practice does not imply a failure to implement a uniquely Australian style of artistic practice, it merely illustrates the complexity of Australian culture and the impossibility of defining contemporary Australia, separate from those other cultures that have migrated to the continent over the past 60,000 years. Preston's approach was an embodiment of Australian culture during this time, finding form within a Western art paradigm and accurately depicting Australian-ness as an entanglement of Australian and European sensibilities. The complex web of influences on Australian culture has only further entangled since Preston's time, and as such the hybridity of Preston's practice remains relevant to a contemporary designer endeavouring to embody current interpretations of Australian identity in new designed objects. However, it is important to analyse Preston's practice more closely, and identify areas where she may have more fully acknowledged contemporaneous components of Australian culture and allowed them to influence her work.

Preston learnt from Indigenous Australian material culture, but purposefully treated this process as a technical, aesthetic exercise, avoiding any inclusion of spiritual or religious content (Butel 2003). A crucial characteristic of material culture is its ability to embody the beliefs, ideas and values of a culture. By neglecting the spiritual foundations of Indigenous Australian material culture, Preston overlooked a core component of the beliefs of Indigenous Australians and a formative influence on the creation of those artefacts. Preston's work does not benefit from the deep understanding of Australian land and culture that is held within Indigenous Australian artwork. While her work emulates some of the

aesthetic calling cards of these artefacts, it does not communicate the underlying spirit of the country that can only come with a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and spirituality. If an artist or designer is to fully comprehend the material culture of any social group, it is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underpinning culture that has shaped those artefacts. Moving beyond Preston's example, and in alignment with the fifth factor of material culture theory – verbal and textual accounts of communal values (see page 32) – this research will prioritise the comprehension of documented cultural components at the foundation of Australian culture, using these ideas as inspiration for the design of new Australian artefacts.

## Lin Onus

One example of a recent post-colonial Australian artist whose practice has been influenced by both the physical and spiritual characteristics of Indigenous Australian culture is Lin Onus. Born in 1948 to an Indigenous Australian father of the Yorta Yorta nation and a Scottish mother from Glasgow, Onus was heavily influenced in his life and art by both sides of his bicultural heritage and upbringing (Leslie 2008). According to Margo Neale (2000), Lin Onus felt a strong affiliation with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian communities – he grew up in Deepdene in Melbourne, but felt a spiritual connection to his cultural homeland, Cummeragunja near the New South Wales–Victoria border (Onus, Eather et al. 2000).

In the 1980s Onus began to use his work as a means of communicating the frustration that he felt with his inability to access cultural components of his Yorta Yorta heritage, and aggressively critiquing the colonising culture he felt was responsible for eradicating much of this culture. It was during this period that Onus began to depict jigsaw puzzle pieces in an Australian landscape scene (Figure 2.12), but in these works the puzzle pieces do not fit their adjacent recess. Onus

Figure 2.12 - *Barmah Forest* - Lin Onus, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 183 x 244cm, 1994.

regularly used the unsolvable jigsaw puzzle as a metaphor for the piecing together of lost heritage, the loss of culture and the absence of connection to country that resulted from his experience of assimilation (Leslie 2008).

Onus's *And on the Eighth Day…* (1992) (Figure 2.13) is another work with deep political motivation. This acrylic on canvas depicts two angels flying above an Aboriginal landscape, signified by concentric soakage circles. Each angel is cloaked in the Union Jack, and both angels hold the tools of colonisation in their hands. One angel holds a gun, a lamb and a coil of barbed wire, symbolising genocide, land being fenced off, and Indigenous Australians being denied access to their ancestral country. The second angel holds a bible and a toilet duck, signifying the assimilation of Indigenous cultures into the single religion of Christianity, and

the meaningless pursuit of consumer culture (Leslie 2008); Onus called the toilet duck a symbol of white people's 'preoccupation with unimportant things', and was bemused by the fact that the average Australian is 'totally unconcerned with the real issues, yet [they] can be driven into a frenzy [to think] that there might be some germs lurking in an area of the toilet where nothing but fresh water is ever encountered' (Onus, Eather et al. 2000, p21). Onus's feelings of resentment toward Australia's British colonisers are clear in *And on the Eighth Day...* It is dominated by ominous clouds, as these angels of death inflict the evils of colonisation and assimilation on an Indigenous landscape and all that occupy it.

In 1986 Lin Onus met Jack Wunuwun of the Yolngu nation from Maningrida, Arnhem Land, and this encounter transformed Onus's life and artistic practice



Figure 2.13 - *And on the Eighth Day...* - Lin Onus, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 182 x 245cm, 1992.

(Radok 1997). Onus was welcomed by the community and adopted into the local kinship system, exposing him to cultural traditions that he had not been able to access through his Yorta Yorta heritage, and replacing the language and ceremony that colonisation had taken away from his ancestors (Leslie 2008). This new access to the traditions of an Indigenous culture not so severely eroded by colonisation, enriched Onus's personal life and informed the conceptual and visual foundations of his art making. As part of this newfound kinship system, Onus was offered aspects of Yolngu culture that he could incorporate into his artwork (Onus, Eather et al. 2000, Leslie 2008). Between 1986 and 1996, Onus made 16 journeys from his home in Victoria to Maningrida, and with each trip back to his new community Onus was granted permission to make use of culturally significant, imagery and symbolism in his work, his palette growing with each visit (Leslie 2008).

One Arnhem Land motif that would have an important influence on Onus's work was the traditional *rarrk* (cross-hatching) pattern that is so closely associated with Top-End Aboriginal art. Rarrk makes use of red and yellow ochre as well as black and white earth pigments in the creation of a lined pattern, painstakingly painted by hand. An elder usually teaches this technique, and the rarrk style of one artist will generally be unique when compared to that of another. In many cases a rarrk is specific to a family group, and members of the associated community will recognise a family's rarrk based on the specific use of colour, line and composition. Onus was taught the raark technique by Jack Wunuwun, and began to use this motif as a symbol of Aboriginal culture in his work (Leslie 2008).

This new knowledge enabled Onus to broaden his ability to observe and record his interpretations, using Arnhem Land imagery and painting techniques in combination with his existing style to capture his new conception of Indigenous and non-Indigenous life in Australia (Onus, Eather et al. 2000). Stephanie Radok (1997) asserts that Onus began to use his photo-realistic style in combination with

depictions of Australian native animals, an ochre palette and the cross-hatched style of Arnhem Land rarrk designs to create works that communicated the importance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-existence in Australia. Onus's later work began to explore the notion that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian societies might reinforce and sustain one another, representing this co-existence through a harmonious use of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous painting techniques within a single artwork (Radok 1997).

One example of Onus's efforts to communicate this co-existence can be found in *Fruit Bats* (1991) (Figure 2.14). In this sculptural work, Onus hung 95 painted fibreglass fruit bats on a Hills Hoist, each fruit bat decorated with Onus's signature rarrk motif (Leslie 2008). This sculptural work brings together two culturally specific stereotypes, with origins in two disparate Australian cultures – the rarrk fruit bat from Arnhem Land Aboriginal culture, and the Hills Hoist from non-Indigenous suburban Australian culture. According to Victoria Lynn (2008), the Hills Hoist is the 'quintessential symbol of urbanised Australia', and its use alongside rarrk fruit bats suggests a fusion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian culture, pointing out the interconnected nature of these two cultural groups (Lyn in Leslie 2008, p266).

As a result of works such as this, Onus's renown as a conduit between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian culture grew. According to Neale, Onus's use of imagery from traditional and more contemporary Indigenous origins, in combination with motifs derived from Western art, intimates a desire to reconcile cultural disparities. Neale argues that these actions were a reflection of significant societal issues during this period, and as such Onus was exploring components of Australian identity at this time (Onus, Eather et al. 2000). Donna Leslie (2008) supports Neale's views, suggesting that Onus did more than simply combine Western and Indigenous Australian traditions; rather, Onus fashioned a bridge

between these two cultures, committing his life and artistic practice to the reconciliation process, an ideal that is infused in his work (Leslie 2008). Lastly, Ian McLean (2000) asserts most succinctly, 'we are one mob, one voice, one land, and this ... is the legacy of Onus's art' (Onus, Eather et al. 2000, p46).

Onus's work is the result of a fusion of two methods of art making. Stylistically, Onus is clearly influenced by the aesthetic systems of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artistic practices, merging a photo-realistic style, the result of a Western art education, with elements of traditional Arnhem Land Aboriginal art-making



Figure 2.14 - *Fruit Bats* - Lin Onus, 95 fiberglass polychromed batts, polychromed wooden disks and Hills Hoist, 250 x 250 x 250cm, 1991.

practice. This confluence was not an accident; instead Onus purposefully pursued this combination of image generation as a means of communicating his position of social, political and cultural affiliations within both cultures. These disparate styles were adopted by Onus to convey the incongruent but connected nature of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions that he held on both sides of this cultural divide.

The convergence of these two styles in Onus's work was facilitated not only by the use of Indigenous and non-Indigenous painting styles, but through the adoption of materials and techniques that belong to each of these two culturally specific art-making practices. On the Aboriginal side of his practice, Onus used ochre and earth pigments, along with traditional Arnhem Land techniques, including rarrk, to give shape and substance to this Indigenous form of cultural expression. Concurrently, on the non-Indigenous side of his practice, Onus combined a photo-realistic style with acrylic paint on canvas to give shape and consistency to this Western archetype of cultural expression.

Unlike Margaret Preston, who was only influenced by the technical, material and aesthetic characteristics of Indigenous Australian art, Lin Onus had learned from and adopted material, technical, aesthetic and spiritual components of Indigenous Australian art making. Throughout the later parts of his career, Onus was slowly exposed to a growing number of motifs, each with a specific relevance within the spiritual beliefs and social systems of the Yolngu people. Onus was taught how to use these motifs, and came to understand the significance of each new image within Yolngu culture. As he began to use these motifs in his work, Onus's painting and sculpture adopted a spiritual depth that was previously lacking; his work was now, in part, the physical embodiment of Yolngu belief systems. This work was Yolngu material culture. When Onus then combined this newly adopted style with his customary photo-realistic method, and began to combine imagery typical of both

Arnhem Land artwork and Western art practice, his work began to represent the cultural values of both communities. Just as Onus was a person of mixed cultural heritage, his work was now hybrid material culture, a series of artefacts that communicate the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of two disparate Australian cultures.

## Capturing Australian-ness in Art

To accurately represent the physical qualities of Australian subject matter, artists from other cultural backgrounds learned to evolve their techniques and visions beyond that which was learnt as part of their formal training. These methods originated in other parts of the world, as systems for capturing the objects, vistas and people of those places, and could not be used to accurately capture Australian subject matter without further adjustment. Each generation slowly sought to adjust their art practices imported from elsewhere until, at some point, a threshold was crossed and the art appeared to become more Australian. I have suggested that this threshold was not crossed in the colonial period, but the important point is not when the threshold was crossed but that since colonial times artists have recognised the need to adjust their Western styles to their experiences of their new habitat.

This is in line with material culture theory discussed earlier in this chapter; Prown suggests that evidence of the values of a community can be seen in the actions of a community – in the way in which something is made or produced and articulated through its style (Prown 2001). This was the case with the colonial picturesque and Impressionist painters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as with Margaret Preston and Lin Onus; all of these artists altered their style in order to capture the physical nature of the colonies or Australia. This change in style results in an evolution of material culture and is evidence of a new set of cultural values.

There is another factor at play in the work of Margaret Preston and Lin Onus. Both adapted styles that originated from places other than Australia, and adopted a unique method that was influenced by a uniquely Australian style and/ or spirituality. Margaret Preston took inspiration from Indigenous Australian painting, adapting her Impressionist style to emulate this practice. Similarly, Lin Onus adapted his realist style to incorporate the motifs of the Yolngu people. Preston, as a modernist, was influenced by the aesthetic aspect of Indigenous art alone, while Onus incorporated aspects of Indigenous spirituality in his work – but both artists were influenced by the material culture of Indigenous Australians in the generation of new geographically unique artefacts. Perhaps Indigenous art in all its forms, both ancient and contemporary, is the strongest thread of uniquely Australian artefact making, and perhaps this is the most fertile site of inspiration for Australian designers seeking to create uniquely Australian artefacts.

Furthermore, when art is made as an expression of culturally significant beliefs, the analysis of these influences can give access to some of the most fundamental values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of that community. Beyond the analysis of social values within the artwork of a specific community, Onus's work shows that it is also possible for an artist to transmit his/her social, cultural, political and/ or personal values through their artwork. In this way, if artists so choose, they can communicate the position of themselves or others within the multitude of contexts associated with Australian identity.

## National Furniture and Object Design Movements

How does a national design movement begin? One model might begin with the work of an individual or small group that is considered to represent something of the values of that community, such that the broader community embraces it. Alternatively, do the instigators of national design movements draw on art and design movements from the past, movements that have evolved to embody the

values of their culture?

In order to answer these emerging questions, this research will analyse two national design movements that have been embraced both by their nations of origin and the international design community.

## Contemporary Dutch Object Design – Droog

When considering the cultural values embodied in Australian material culture, it has been necessary to analyse some of the earliest known Australian artefacts, in order to understand the way in which Australian cultural values have shaped the evolution of our making practices. Aaron Betsky and Adam Eeuwens (2004) have adopted a similar approach in order to understand the cultural values that have shaped Dutch material culture for the last four centuries. According to their research, Dutch material culture is largely shaped by an attitude that was born with the nation, one that is closely tied to the old Dutch saying – 'God made the world, but the Dutch made Holland' (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004, p84).

The destiny of Dutch national identity was shaped by people living in the Low Counties in the southern region of the area now known as Holland. In the tenth century, the Franks, Frisians and Saxons who occupied these regions were loyal to local lords who owned the land on which they lived. By the thirteenth century the people occupying these southern regions were living under the French Empire, until the Flemish uprising against the Francophiles, and their defeat of the French army at Courtrai in 1302. This event is credited with the fortification of a cultural bond between people of this region, and the stirring of a Dutch nationalism. By the Middle Ages, villages began to form in these southern areas of Holland, and in these centres Dutch culture thrived in the form of art, poetry and music, distinctly divergent from other regional expressions of culture (Barnouw 1948).

However, the Dutch provinces then bore the brunt of southern religious and political oppression, this time at the hands of Philip II of Spain. In 1568 William the Silent led a resistance in the northern provinces of Holland, that eventually resulted in Dutch prevalence over the Spanish, and in 1581 the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands was established. Peripheral wars with Spain continued over the 70 years that followed until 1648 when the Dutch Republic was recognised as an independent nation. It was at this time that, outside of Holland, the Dutch people began to be seen as a collective entity (Parker 2002).

Today, two thirds of Holland's landmass has been reclaimed from the sea; a complex series of dykes and canals keeps the North Sea out and allows the land to be inhabited. As a result the Dutch view their world as malleable – they made it and they can manipulate it at will (Ramakers and Bakker 1998). According to Betsky and Eeuwens, this ability to control nature has established a desire within Dutch people and artists alike to control everything (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004). Renny Ramakers (1998) cites the work of Piet Mondrian as an example of this phenomenon. In Mondrian's view, absolute beauty would only prevail from the total dominance of humans over nature, a plan that was prototyped in the composition of line and plane in Mondrian's paintings (Ramakers and Bakker 1998). This desire for control has fostered an inward focus in Dutch artists, resulting in work that seldom comments on the outside world. Dutch artists may reference other places and cultures, but for the most part (as in their relationship with the sea) they attempt to keep it out, or use it only under extreme control. As a result, Dutch painting, for example, is not a window onto the outside world, but a map or a mirror; it reflects a Dutch reality back to a Dutch audience in an altered form, as a commentary on the nature of that culture and its lived reality (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004).

This insular commentary is a defining characteristic of Dutch art, and it is this approach to creativity that formed the foundation for a design movement

that, in the late twentieth century, delivered truly Dutch material culture to an international design audience. Assembled by Renny Ramakers and Gijs Bakker in 1993, *Droog* was a collection of young designers with similar creative focuses (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004). This group of designers worked with archetypes in the search for a new design practice that could help communicate a human alternative to the rational, modernist Dutch design industry (Wanders 2013). According to one of the original Droog designers, Marcel Wanders (2013), there was something Dutch about what Droog was doing (Wanders 2013). Betsky and Eeuwens elaborate on this idea, postulating that the continuation of an insular and reflective Dutch artistic practice made the work of the Droog designers feel Dutch (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004). Just as generations of Dutch artists had done before, Droog designers were using an inward focus to analyse and critique the previous era of Dutch design (Dutch Modernism), as well as the lived reality of the Dutch people. Their creative output communicated their thoughts, critiques and commentaries on these Dutch phenomena, initially reflecting these observations back to a Dutch audience (Ramakers 2002).

In many instances the work created by Droog during the 1990s explored ideas, materials and techniques that were the very antithesis of modernist ideals and values. Droog designers used materials and techniques that were more closely associated with craft than industry, resulting in idiosyncratic objects that did not have the machined perfection of modernist objects. According to Ramakers, Dutch design was no longer focused on the expression of style and technical perfection (Ramakers 2002). Instead it was a form of communication, created as a vehicle through which to voice opinions on meaningful subjects from global politics to history (Betsky and Eeuwens 2004). According to Ida van Zijl and José Teunissen (2000), 'communication with someone assumes that you speak their language' (Zijl, Teunissen et al. 2000, p168). By adopting forms derived from domestic objects that had been used for centuries – such as simple timber chairs, vases and ceramic

sinks, which are automatically associated with certain functions and emotions (Zijl, Teunissen et al. 2000) – Droog designers including Marcel Wanders, Hella Jongerius and Jurgen Bey were communicating in a universal language. As a result the audience was not distracted by the form of the object, and was able to more easily interpret the central idea that the designer aimed to communicate.

Jurgen Bey, for example, is compelled by the poetry of discarded objects, and in his 1999 work entitled *Kokon Furniture* (Figure 2.15), he explored the possibility for renewing unloved artefacts (Ramakers 2002). This body of work combines discarded tables and chairs, wrapping groupings of these furniture archetypes in an elastic synthetic fibre (Bey 2014). In doing so, Bey transformed a cluster of old, damaged furniture into a new product. The resulting objects exhibit a pristine outer skin, smoothing out the defects of the old objects that lie beneath and rendering their faults unnoticeable (Ramakers 2002). Kokon Furniture is an example of highly critical Dutch creative output, critiquing modernist and contemporary societal obsessions with newness. The underlying objects are not new, but by masking these objects in a taut, young and blemish-free skin, Bey has commented on the superficial nature of modernist ideals and highlighted the inherent honesty and character of old objects that exhibit evidence of use.

In many cases the adoption of an archetypal form or making technique was a strong component of the desired narrative in a Droog object. It was common for Droog designers to comment on their new departure from modernist practices by combining a shape or technique from the past (an element associated with nostalgia) with a technique or material from the cutting edge of design technology (associated with a modernist approach) (Antonelli in Ramakers and Bakker 1998). Marcel Wanders's *Knotted Chair* (Figure 2.16) is a clear example of this philosophy in practice. Wanders refers to the 1960s by using macramé to give form to a high-tech carbon fibre cored rope, in the creation of a chair that pairs an idiosyncratic,

Figure 2.15 - *Kokon Furniture* – Jurgen Bey, found furniture and elastic synthetic fibre, 1999.

hand-making process with a technologically advanced material, usually associated with the machined perfection of modernism. In the tradition of Dutch creativity, the result both critiques the in-human nature of modernist objects and provides an object that is more human, closer to the imperfection of a hand-crafted object and therefore more likely to be loved by an imperfect human owner.

According to Ramakers, when Droog designer Tejo Remy claimed 'I don't want to design' (Ramakers 2002, p158), he was protesting against a modernist approach to design which prevailed in Holland in the early 1990s. Remy was highly critical of a Dutch design tradition that was focused on style and form rather than meaning, and in 1991 he designed *You Can't Lay Down Your Memory* (Figure 2.17) as a critique



Figure 2.16 - *Knotted Chair* – Marcel Wanders, carbon fibre core rope and resin, 71 x 62 x 52cm, 1996.

of the overproduction and overconsumption that he saw as dominating the Dutch design industry (Ramakers 2002). One of the most recognisable Droog objects, this chest of drawers was a collection of used drawers, held together using a large strap. As with so much of the Droog design collection, this object communicates the superficiality and soullessness of new modernist objects, demonstrating the truth and nostalgia that is attached to old objects, in the signs of use that are evident on their surfaces.

Dutch material culture has evolved through generations of insular critique, both of Dutch society in general and of the style and motivations of preceding generations of Dutch artists, designers and makers. This tradition has provided a strong foundation for Droog. Since its conception in the early 1990s, the Droog approach to designing has expanded beyond a core group of Droog designers and has flourished within the Dutch design community. As a result the Droog movement fulfils the first factor of geographically unique material culture – *style* (see page 31). By proliferating within the Dutch design industry, Droog can be identified as a quintessentially Dutch style.

Unlike many examples of geographically specific material culture, Droog objects do not use materials or making techniques that are specific or unique to their region of origin, and as such the Droog movement fails to fulfil the second and third factors of geographically specific material culture – *materiality* and *unique making techniques*. However, Droog designers have mostly adopted an approach that is discussed in the fourth factor of geographically unique material culture – *evolved making techniques* (see page 32). Many Droog objects are created through the evolution of an existing making technique, a method that can culminate in the invention of a new and innovative making process. In the case of Droog, it is not possible to say that these new making techniques are regionally specific, as they are often unique to a single designer, such as the addition of a carbon fibre core and resin impregnation

Figure 2.17 - *You Can't Lay Down Your Memory* – Tejo Remy, found drawers, 1991.

to a macramé object in Marcel Wanders's *Knotted Chair* (Figure 2.16), or the elastic synthetic fibre wrapping of archetypal furniture objects seen in Jurgen Bey's *Kokon Furniture* (Figure 2.15). These examples of technical evolution have contributed to the development of a regionally unique collection of material culture – Droog.

As identified earlier in this chapter, there are very few existing making techniques that are specific to Australia, but Australian designers could evolve existing making techniques in the invention of new Australian approaches to making.

If contemporary Australian designers could identify a similarly enduring national creative tradition, it might be possible to continue to evolve this tradition in the creation of new Australian material culture by learning from the Droog model. Contemporary Dutch material culture is the result of centuries of evolution, but colonial and Australian culture has not existed long enough to allow the development of a fundamental tradition for the creation of Australian artefacts. Instead, contemporary Australian object designers could look to the creative influences of an Australian culture that has shaped the continent for roughly 60,000 years. Indigenous Australian cultures possess evolved traditions that are strongly rooted in a local practice of artefact making. Perhaps the key – or one key – to a new Australian material culture can be found within pre-colonial Indigenous Australian creative and making practices?

### Modernist German Object Design – Bauhaus

For a researcher analysing Australia's design history, it is important to reflect on the way in which the developments of one generation of designers can dictate the direction of the next, in order to understand the way that previous generations of Australian design practice continue to affect contemporary Australian designers. And when contemplating national design movements, there is perhaps no modern movement more closely associated with a single nation than the *Bauhaus*.

According to Hugh Aldersey-Williams (2000), the design approach of the Bauhaus has proliferated German society since its birth in the early twentieth century, becoming the single most influential design movement to shape that nation (Aldersey-Williams 2000). However, the purist and highly dominant approach of the Bauhaus had its foundations in the proceeding German design movement, the *Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen)*, to which it owed many of its key philosophies (Campbell 2015).

The Deutscher Werkbund was formed in 1907 with the aim of bringing together German artists of all kinds under a single banner and with a single goal – to provide 'tasteful, accomplished, and economically competitive' German products. It was the philosophy of the Deutscher Werkbund that artists should no longer be viewed as frivolously creative. Instead the creativity of artists of all disciplines should be harnessed in the pursuit of technical innovation, and in the design and manufacture of products that might enable Germany to become a world leader in the making of quality consumer goods (Maciuika 2005, p8).

In the early twentieth century, Deutscher Werkbund became aligned with German nation-building goals, labelling its products as German style, and promising that, with its assistance, Germany could be a world-leading producer of quality domestic products. Under this aspiration, the Werkbund strove to create a modern style that was both innovative in its aesthetic and at the forefront of technological advancement and product quality. These ideals were so closely aligned with German national identity that, according to Campbell, at the height of German military success in 1915 and 1916, the Deutscher Werkbund was viewed as supplementary to the country's cultural domination (Campbell 2015). The Bauhaus continued this national pursuit, placing equal importance on the prowess of German ingenuity (Aldersey-Williams 2000) and aligning the quality of their design with that of the nation (Campbell 2015).

Perhaps the strongest tangible link between the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus came in the form of the founder and first director of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius. He was one of the leading members of the Deutscher Werkbund fraternity (Campbell 2015) and, together with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe who would join the Bauhaus at a later stage, was the most renowned of the Deutscher Werkbund architects. Gropius turned his attention to establishing the Bauhaus School in Weimar in 1919, founding some of the school's core philosophies on Deutscher Werkbund ideals. Gropius himself confirmed the significance of Deutscher Werkbund as a foundation for the Bauhaus movement, attributing many of the Bauhaus ideals to those of pre-war Werkbund (Campbell 2015). The Werkbund sentiment became a cornerstone of early Bauhaus philosophy, and it was the redirection of art into industry that underscored Gropius's first articulation of the Bauhaus motto: 'art and technology – the new unity' (Goldman 2009).

The Bauhaus movement evolved from the Deuscher Werkbund, developing from the strong foundation of German values found in Werkbund philosophy. Similarly, in the establishment of a contemporary design movement that embodies the values, ideas and attitudes of contemporary Australians, it may be necessary for practising Australian designers to evolve their ideas from previous movements founded by equally robust Australian values.

Australia does not have the long or intense industrial heritage of Germany, however there are some examples of Australian furniture and object design that are interesting to consider. Some of them were inspired by movements that originated in other places, reaching Australia in pattern books and magazines, while others seem to have been catalysed by specifically Australian influences. In both instances, it will be necessary to understand these pre-existing Australian industrial art movements in greater detail, in order to find one that might form the foundation of a new Australian design philosophy.

## Australian Furniture Design

### Colonial Australian Furniture

Like the painters who worked in the Australian colonies, colonial carpenters and cabinet-makers brought with them techniques and material knowledge acquired and practised in Europe (Fahy 1998). Given that many of these individuals were born and spent some of their formative years living in a European and/or British empire, they also brought cultural beliefs, ideas and values associated with imperial culture. What happened when the formal skills, material knowledge, beliefs, ideas and values of these craftspeople were brought into play in the Australian colonies?

According to Kevin Fahy and Andrew Simpson (1998), mainstream trends in Australian furniture design in the early years of New South Wales were entirely dictated by English fashion. Illustrations of the latest English furniture would reach the colony quickly in the catalogues and pattern books of large British furniture houses, and in many cases pieces of furniture were imported for the purpose of being copied by cabinet-makers (Fahy 1998). As such, the furniture being appropriated by these carpenters and cabinet-makers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were mostly examples of neoclassical, neo-Grecian, neo-Roman and neo-Egyptian furnishings of all typologies (Fahy 1998). Graham Cornall (1990) argues that furniture produced by craftsmen working in New South Wales according to British sensibilities exhibited limited local influences, and were instead proud statements of the unwavering British-ness of the owner (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990).

Examples such as the *Secretaire Bookcase* (Figure 2.19), made by a convict artisan for Lieutenant Governor King circa 1803, and *Chest of Drawers* (Figure 2.18), made by Lawrence Butler circa 1805, are two of the countless examples that exhibit features of late eighteenth-century British furniture regularly found in catalogues and

pattern books from this period (Fahy 1998).



Figure 2.18 - *Chest of Drawers* - Lawrence Butler, casuarina, scrub beefwood, yellow aspen, cedar, brass, 100 x 109 x 52cm, 1805.

Figure 2.19 - *Secretaire Bookcase* – Unknown convict, casuarina, rose mahogany, ebony, glass, wool, 168.5 x 78.5 x 50cm, 1803.

Similar to the picturesque painting of this period, each of these objects takes major influence from styles originating in the European birthplace of their maker (see page 48). However, there is one characteristic evident in many of these artefacts, which makes their classification more nuanced than that of picturesque painting. Many timber furnishings made during the early years of colonisation were made



Figure 2.20 - *Chest of Drawers* – Unknown maker, cedar and whalebone, 1840.

from materials that were indigenous to the colonies. Given the significance of geographically unique materiality in the creation of geographically unique material culture (see page 32) this is a characteristic that cannot be ignored when attempting to decipher the cultural origins of this furniture.

McPhee is able to provide one such example of colonial cabinetry that exhibits notes of exoticism. *Chest of Drawers* (Figure 2.20) was made in Tasmania circa 1840, and though its design is largely based on British cabinetry of the time, the 'architectural proportions' and use of whalebone knobs and finials make this a unique example of colonial furniture, according to McPhee (McPhee 1982). This object also exhibits one of the major characteristics of mainstream furniture made in the colonies during this period: its use of native timber, in this case cedar (Fahy 1998).

Initially it would seem that the materiality of an object only affects the colour and finish, rather than the form. One would primarily assume that the form of an object made, for example, according to British ideas, attitudes and assumptions would be totally dictated by these values, ever present in the mind of the maker. However, varying materials offer differing degrees of workability, and while it is possible for a craftsperson to realise the entirety of their vision in some materials, other materials are more difficult to work with, restricting the form that the craftsperson is able to achieve. There is evidence that Australian hardwoods were of a quality that did not respond to typical European carpentry tools and techniques. According to Russel Ward, timbers found in the colonies differed greatly from European timbers. English workers were unable to manipulate this new timber, struggling to erect a simple fence (Ward 1978), let alone construct elaborate cabinetry to exacting neoclassical standards.

Colonial furniture crafted using these native timbers would be somewhat dictated

by these geographically unique materials. So, while the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the maker, and their intended vision, did not originate locally, in many cases the timber species influencing the final form of the artefact did. Unlike the picturesque works covered earlier in this chapter, these furnishings are in some small way influenced by the continent, and as such can be categorised as examples of hybrid material culture.

These assertions bring into question the naming of this material culture. Until now this genre of furniture has been commonly classified as *Colonial Australian Furniture*. However, this name does not describe the total influences shaping these artefacts. These artefacts should be named according to their European origins, with reference to the stylistic influence of the colonial materials that they employ. It is clear that a new name for these artefacts is necessary, but how should that naming system function?

In order to identify the most appropriate naming system, it is necessary to understand naming conventions used to describe historic furniture styles. In order to accurately discuss furniture designed and made in the past, scholars generally adopt a naming system that identifies the period, place and/or style of the piece in question. A scholar may use one or all of these categories, depending on the level of specificity required. The most rudimentary use of this system is seen in the broad name assigned to the furniture made in a specific place, during a specific time, identifying the place and period of production – for example, *Nineteenth-century British Furniture*. To discuss the design more specifically, it is necessary to introduce the style of the furniture into the name, identifying the place, time and style – for example, *Nineteenth-century British Neoclassical Furniture*. To discuss furniture with even greater specificity, it is possible to name the style more expressly – for example, *Louis XVI, Neo-Egyptian* or *Neo-Roman*, which are subcategories of neoclassicism.

It is not appropriate to adopt this naming convention directly when identifying furniture made in the colonial period on the continent now known as Australia. As acknowledged, these artefacts were made in one of the colonies according to imperial sensibilities, and as such, it would not be correct to simply name the place of their production, omitting the origins of their inspiration. In naming these hybrid artefacts, both the location of their inspiration and production should be designated, in order to accurately identify the origins of all influences shaping the design. Furthermore, the accurate naming of furniture made in the continent now known as Australia in the early decades of colonisation requires close attention. After 1788, but before 1803, only the colony of New South Wales had been named, and as such the material culture made within that colony must be named after the common name for that zone during this period. It was only after the time around 1817 that the name Australia was commonly used to describe the continent, and furniture made in Australia could be given the name *Australian*.

Yet another layer of complexity is added to this naming convention when considering the various nations from which visitors and settlers making furniture in Australia have originated. As with the original convention, these new names should first make reference to the time of production, followed by the place of inspiration and either the colony of production (1788–1817) or Australia (post 1817) – for example, *British Empire/New South Welsh Colonial Furniture* (pre 1817) or *British Empire/Australian Colonial Furniture* (post 1817). Finally where it has been identified, the style of the design should be stipulated – for example, *British Empire/New South Welsh Colonial Neoclassical Furniture*.

When does this ambiguity around the inspiration and site of production cease? When do Australians begin to design material culture? When can the empire of origin be excluded from the naming system, and when can furniture made in Australia be named Australian Furniture? As discussed in Chapter One the

emergence of Australian national identity was slow and uncertain. Throughout the nineteenth century those people living in the Australian colonies identified as belonging to the British Empire first (even the few being born in Australia also identified with the Empire) and Australia second, and it was not until after World War II that these ideas began to shift. Therefore, the vast majority of furniture made in Australia during the nineteenth century was made by individuals identifying as Australian Britons, making material culture according to the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of an Australian culture, but one that was first of all British.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the use of Australian materials in the construction of furniture had some influence on the manifestation of these objects, and this influence is noted by naming such artefacts as hybrid material culture. A piece of furniture that was primarily shaped by the functional necessities of producing and existing in Australia may exhibit qualities of Australian material culture. Are there other specifically Australian influences affecting the making of some artefacts made in Australia that might tip the scales of hybridity, bringing further discernable Australian influence to the making of those objects? Despite the fact that nineteenth-century objects were not made by people identifying as Australian, is it possible to pinpoint examples of hybrid Australian material culture that were designed according to the practicalities faced by these makers, while living and making in Australia?

## Colonial Australian Bush Furniture

During the nineteenth century the Australian frontier was forged as squatters and selectors moved across the open country, claiming parcels of land on which to settle and develop industry that might sustain the colonies. In the harshest of conditions, these individuals worked in great isolation, clearing the bush and transforming it into grazing land. All comforts were set aside during the first years of settlement,

Figure 2.21 - Timber cutter in Victorian forest – Unknown photographer, c. 1880.

as men and women worked long hours and saved any available money for the purchase of livestock and the most basic supplies (Hooper and Hooper 1988).

According to Cornall, the lifestyle adopted by many was crude, isolated from civilisation and the many conveniences that come with it (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990). Russel Ward (1962) supports this view, arguing that the frontier population was so sparse that amenities of any kind were virtually non-existent. Ward suggests that this lack of service fostered a particular character trait in many frontier Australians, whereby men and women living in these circumstances were forced to improvise to survive. Many relied on local Aboriginal knowledge. For the frontier Australian, this meant some degree of skill and knowledge in all necessary trades, and an ability to create solutions to problems that potentially threatened their life and livelihood, using the scrap materials and simple tools available (Ward 1962).

Their rudimentary survival skills were often turned to the task of making furniture, inspired by the urgent necessity for adequate seating, eating and sleeping arrangements. Some of the most commonly constructed objects on the frontier were crude furnishings, made by individuals with no formal training (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990). The resulting objects bore little or no resemblance to furnishings being made by trained cabinet-makers in the cities and, according to Toby and Juliana Hooper (1988), these objects were honest and free in their construction, created only according to necessity and liberated by the lack of stylistic restriction surrounding their invention (Hooper and Hooper 1988).

Bush furniture was made to emulate some of the most basic European furniture typologies – a chair, for example, was made by joining legs and a back to a seat. Because of deficient tools and a lack of formal training, only the simplest woodworking techniques were employed. Many of these skills were translated from those learnt in the construction of simple frontier houses (Cornall, McAlpine et

al. 1990). Techniques such as stick-and-slab construction and wedge joinery began to govern the specific form of Australian bush furniture (McPhee 1982, Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990).



Figure 2.22 - *Red Gum Table* – Unknown maker, red gum, nineteenth century.

*Chair* (Figure 2.23), made by an unknown selector, bushman or forester circa 1900, was found near Aberdeen in the Upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales and, according to McPhee, is a prime example of 'rustic furniture'. McPhee calls this object 'a splendid example of the art of improvisation', and suggests that the chair back was made from a found tree branch. This chair combines the use of an unusually shaped material with an unorthodox making technique – the back of the chair has been strengthened with the use of iron bolts (McPhee 1982, p38), an over-engineered solution that intimates the maker's lack of formal training in furniture making.

These examples of Australian bush furniture (Figures 2.22, 2.23, 2.24 and 2.25) have been heavily shaped by Australian influences. While furniture made by trained craftsmen took on the stylistic emblems of their imperial training, these examples of bush furniture did not emulate any style. They were made according to a

Figure 2.23 - *Chair* – Unknown maker, found tree branch, 1900.

diasporic understanding of European furniture typologies, an encultured memory of furniture once seen in the empires, but did not emulate any one style. These typologies did not originate in Australia, but these objects were made from raw materials that were found or felled locally, the style being dictated by the shape of a chosen branch or root. Their basic components were largely unaltered elements of nature that were shaped by the specific environmental conditions they experienced



Figure 2.24 - *Eucalyptus and Elm Chair* – Unknown maker, eucalyptus and elm, c. 1870.

Figure 2.25 - *Chair* – Unknown maker, unknown timber, c.1840.

during a lifetime of growth in a particular location, somewhere in the Australian bush: a shift of growth direction to receive more sunlight or water; stunted growth during times of drought; regeneration after a bushfire.

The severe conditions of the Australian frontier shaped a set of priorities for the colonisers, and the ability to improvise solutions using immediately available resources were necessary for survival. The objects they created were fashioned using any means possible, not without care, knowledge or love, but with little concern for fashion. Hooper and Hooper argue that 'the very crudeness of this furniture is a reflection of the harsh and difficult lives of those who made it' (Hooper and Hooper 1988, p13). The only priority was in the construction of a functional object in a short period of time, using as few resources as possible (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990), so not to take away from the time and resources required for endeavours more closely connected to survival. As discussed in Chapter One, during the nineteenth century those people living in Australia identified as Australian Britons, and as such the frontier objects they constructed were made according to the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a hybrid identity, shaped by peculiarities of the Australian frontier lifestyle, and the uniquely Australian materials employed in their construction. These are hybrid Australian objects, with a greater weighting of Australian influence than that exhibited by Australian colonial furniture.

According to Cornall, Australian bush furniture was unlike any other furniture in the world (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990); however, care must be taken not to romanticise this furniture or be overly patriotic in our enthusiasm for it. It was shaped by unambiguously Australian influences: made with unique materials that were formed by the natural processes of the Australian bush; motivated by the isolation of the Australian outback and the resulting need to use improvised materials, tools and making techniques; and constructed using what limited skills

and knowledge the maker had acquired while building a house or working on a cattle station on the Australian frontier. It is true to say that the materials found in Australia and used to make these specimens of bush furniture were unique to the continent, but was the improvisation that came with isolation a uniquely Australian phenomenon?

According to Cornall, furniture made under these influences was not unique to Australia. Peasants in parts of Europe made similar rudimentary furniture during the Middle Ages, and the frontier conditions of Canada and the American West closely resembled that of Australia, inspiring similar specimens of frontier furniture (Cornall, McAlpine et al. 1990). George Neumann (1984) lists two such North American styles, known as *Primitive* and *Pilgrim*, the latter being common during the period from 1650 to 1720. As with Australian bush furniture, both styles are described as unrefined and crudely made, the former made by settlers with little resources, and the latter exhibiting oversized, disproportionate components (Neumann 1984). As Kovel and Kovel have noted, the bed frames made in the Pilgrim style during the seventeenth century were made according to the memory of those seen in Europe, fashioned to provide only the simplest needs of a bed (Kovel 1965), with no extra time or resource expended on frivolous decoration or novelty – characteristics that again echo the influences and motivations behind Australian bush furniture.

When comparing North American settler furniture and Australian bush furniture, the similarities are clear. However, given the extreme isolation under which much of this furniture was constructed, in both Australia and North America, and the vast distances between these sites, it is evident that makers in these locations were not learning from one another. So, how did such similar material culture develop in complete isolation across continental and temporal divides? One possible explanation is that the style of settler and frontier furniture was influenced by the

conditions in which it was made as well as the specific geographic location of its creation. Both the Australian and North American frontiers offered an abundance of natural materials including timber, animal skin, stone and grasses. However, these places were lacking many other resources required in the refined construction of any man-made structure: a variety of well-made and maintained tools, industrial fasteners, glues and consistently prepared materials, etc. The similarities of these conditions in Australia and North America meant that makers in both locations were working in very similar conditions and, as a result, the furniture that they crafted was patently similar.



Figure 2.26 - *American Tree Formed Seat* – Unknown maker, tree branch, c. 18th Century.

Whether or not the furniture made on the Australian frontier during the nineteenth century was unique does not detract from the inventiveness of the pieces and the relevance of these artefacts in embodying the Australian condition of this particular time and place. Unlike the Australian picturesque and Impressionist painters, the majority of makers responsible for these objects developed an isolated style with no formal training, a style shaped by the specific influences of the place in which they lived and the lifestyle they led. This was a major evolution of material culture, embodying the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of this specific group of Australians, making do on the frontier during the nineteenth century.

## Mid Twentieth-century Australian Furniture Design

In the mid twentieth century, a new international approach to design reached Australia, ushered in by a small group of Australian furniture designers including Grant Featherston and Douglas Snelling (Watson 1989). According to Anne Watson (1989), Featherston and Snelling were two of the most influential and successful designers working in Australia during the post World War II period, but Kirsty Grant (2014) insists on adding another name to this exclusive list: the internationally regarded sculptor Clement Meadmore. Furnishings designed by Featherston, Snelling and Meadmore during the mid twentieth century are some of the most highly recognisable and eagerly sought-after pieces of furniture ever produced by Australian designers (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014), but were these iconic designs Australian? Did these objects embody the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of Australian society? Or were these furniture pieces the interpretation of a series of ideals that originated in other parts of the world and part of a growing internationalism?

## Grant Featherston

Grant Featherston was one of the most successful and prolific furniture designers

Figure 2.27 - *Pennsylvanian Fanback Windsor Chair* – Unknown maker, ash and pine, c. 1780.

working in Australia during the mid twentieth century (Powerhouse Museum. and Watson 2002), and according to Grant there was seldom an issue of *Australian Home Beautiful* published in the 1950s that did not feature some of Featherston's furniture (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). Featherston's *Contour Range* went on to be considered an icon of mid twentieth-century Australian design (Ellwood in Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014), gaining such popularity with architects and their commissioners alike that, at the end of the 1940s, 'no contemporary house was regarded as complete, at least by its designer, without a pair of Featherston chairs before the bagged brick fireplace' (Clerehan in Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014).



Figure 2.28 - *DA1 Armchair* – Ernest Race, timber, polyurethane foam and wool, 73 x 100 x 84cm, 1946.

Figure 2.29 - *Contour Chair* – Grant Featherston, timber, polyurethane foam and wool, 74 x 93 x 80cm, 1950.

According to Grant, Featherston's practice was largely influenced by the modernist principles of László Moholy-Nagy and Walter Gropius, designers hailing from the Bauhaus School in Germany, who developed the ideal 'design for life'. This ideal was about designing according to a series of priorities that amalgamated the technological, economic, social, psychological and biological imperatives behind the process of designing. This process endeavored to organise the cultural, social and emotional structures that govern human behaviour, in the hope of developing designed outcomes that might facilitate a society of cooperative, civilized human beings (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). The influence of this design philosophy, originating outside of Australia, meant that the beliefs, ideas and values that underpinned Featherston's design practice were German in immediate origin, not Australian. But how did this affect the objects that Featherston designed? Is the foreign influence on Featherston's furniture evident in the form, function and materiality of his furniture pieces?

Figure 2.30 - *Cognac Chair* – Eero Aarnio, fibreglass, polyurethane foam and wool, 1967.

Figure 2.31 - *Stem Dining Chair* – Grant Featherston, fibreglass, polyurethane foam and wool, 71 x 56 x 54cm, 1969.

Beginning with Featherston's most influential work, the *Contour Range*, it is not difficult to identify the formal and material influences that helped shape Featherston's work. The *Contour Chair* (Figure 2.29), for example, is a high wing-backed armchair with polyurethane padding, wool upholstery and timber legs. This armchair is part of a lineage of European- and American-designed, high wing-backed armchairs that were designed using the same or similar materials throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The form, materiality, functionality and stylistic detailing of Featherston's *Contour Chair* does not differ greatly from Ernest Race's *DA1 Armchair* (Figure 2.28), for example, which was designed in 1946, four years before Featherston produced the range.



Figure 2.32 - *Organic Armchair* – Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, black ash, polyurethane foam and wool, 82 x 72 x 67cm, 1940.

Figure 2.33 - *Television B210H Contour Chair* – Grant Featherston, timber, polyurethane foam and wool, 80 x 70 x 77cm, 1953.

The modernist ideals that proliferated within design communities in America and Europe during the mid twentieth century shaped Featherston's practice and affected the physical nature of his work. Looking through Featherston's catalogue of work, it is clear that many of his furniture pieces fall into typological themes that were being explored by foreign designers during this period. For example, the *Stem Chair* (Figure 2.31), designed in 1969, was the result of experimentations with the production of an organic form using fibreglass, a technique that Charles and Ray Eames had used since 1949 (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). This piece exhibits a form, function and stylistic detailing that does not differ greatly from Eero Aarnio's *Cognac Chair* (Figure 2.30), for example, designed two years prior. Similarly, Featherston's *Television B210H Contour Chair* (Figure 2.33) is part of a lineage of low upholstered armchairs that feature a hole in the lower back of the chair. There are obvious aesthetic, functional and material similarities between this chair, designed in 1953, and the *Organic Armchair* (Figure 2.32), for example, designed by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen 13 years earlier.

## Clement Meadmore

Clement Meadmore was another of the most highly regarded furniture designers working in Australia in the mid twentieth century. Like Featherston, Meadmore was constantly featured in the Australian design media (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). Meadmore designed a collection of lighting and furniture objects prior to becoming a major figure in international sculpture in the 1950s (Keep in Osborne and Lewis 2012).

The first hint of foreign influence on Meadmore's furniture design comes from Meadmore himself, who openly listed American and Italian mid twentieth-century furniture as his main stylistic influences (Atkins in Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). As with Featherston, the specific influences shaping Meadmore's furniture design can be seen more clearly when his work is analysed alongside

similar furniture typologies, designed in other parts of the world during the same period. Meadmore's *DC601A Chair* (Figure 2.35), for example, is in line with other wire chairs designed during the same period in terms of style, functionality and materiality. There are obvious similarities between the *DC601A Chair*, designed in 1957, and the *DKR Wire Mesh Chair* (Figure 2.34), for example, designed by Charles and Ray Eames six years before.



Figure 2.34 - *DKR Wire Mesh Chair* – Charles and Ray Eames, steel wire, 82 x 48 x 52cm, 1951.

Figure 2.35 - *DC 601A Chair* – Clement Meadmore, steel wire, 92 x 41 x 54cm, 1957.

Similarly, the *Meadmore Principal Coffee Table* (Figure 2.37) is one example of the many wire-base coffee tables designed throughout Europe and America in the mid twentieth century. There are clear similarities between this table, designed in 1958, and the *LTR Table* (Figure 2.36), for example, designed by Charles and Ray Eames eight years prior.



Figure 2.36 - *LTR Table* – Charles and Ray Eames, steel wire and plywood, 39 x 34 x 25cm, 1950.



Figure 2.37 - *Meadmore Principle Coffee Table* – Clement Meadmore, steel wire and plywood, size, 1958.

## Douglas Snelling

Douglas Snelling may not have been the most prolific of the mid twentieth century designers working in Australia; however, according to Grant, he was the first to successfully take a line of furniture into mass production. Snelling began to manufacture a line of chairs and tables sometime around 1946, when he was not able to find good, locally made furniture that suited the style of his modern interiors. The resulting *Snelling Line* became so popular that in many instances orders would outpace production, and Snelling was not able to supply the great demand for his work (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). As with Featherston and Meadmore, Snelling was a popular mid twentieth century Australian designer, claiming in some of his promotional material that his Snelling Line was 'truly Australian and practically suited to Australian living conditions' (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014, p4).



Figure 2.38 - *Risom Lounge Chair* – Jens Risom, maple and webbing, 129 x 105 x 180cm, 1941.

When considering the features of Douglas Snelling's furniture, the design lineage of his work is clear. One of the more distinct features of the *Snelling Line* is its webbed upholstery, an element that reflected the work of European designers such as Alvar Aalto and Bruno Mathsson, who had begun to use similar strapping to reduce the bulk of upholstered furniture in the 1930s (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014). Furthermore, it is difficult to ignore the strong similarity that exists between Jens Risom's *Risom Lounge Chair* (Figure 2.38), designed in 1941, and Douglas Snelling's *Snelling Line Chair* (Figure 2.39), designed five years later. However, the international influences on Snelling's furniture go beyond simple stylistic appropriation. Snelling authored the remark that furniture was 'purely equipment for easier living – for seating, eating, storing', a quote that, according to Grant, is a discernible allusion to Swiss modernist Le Corbusier's portrayal of a house as a 'machine for living' (Grant and National Gallery of Victoria 2014, p4). This reference suggests that the philosophical underpinning of Snelling's work



Figure 2.39 - *Snelling Line Chair* - Douglas Snelling, timber and Saran webbing, size, 1946.

does not find its origins in Australia; rather, the design ideals that shaped Snelling's furniture originated with Le Corbusier.

Featherston, Snelling and Meadmore took clear influence from the ideologies and portfolios of influential modernist designers practising in other parts of the world. The resulting material culture developed by these three Australian designers, among others, is therefore not the physical manifestation of uniquely Australian cultural influences, except in the sense that at this time Australia became more exposed to, and part of, an international ethos. This spirit embraced design principles based on an aesthetic of truth to materiality and industrialised production, a universal rather than regional character. These objects embody a series of modernist ideals that proliferated globally during the mid twentieth century. If these design principles reflected ideals held by sections of the Australian community, their values not only originated in Europe but also embraced a postnational cosmopolitan ethos, and therefore offer little inspiration for a designer seeking a national sensibility.

These conditions are reminiscent of a scenario discussed earlier in this chapter, in the section entitled *Colonial Australian Furniture* (see page 75). This section examined a group of furniture designers and makers, operating in the colonies during the early nineteenth century, who took strong influence from British furniture, often copying directly from the pattern books of British furniture designers. These objects embodied a colonial association with the values of British culture, and were emblematic of the imperial identity of those living in the colonies.

It seems that Australian furniture designers and makers are part of a long tradition of taking influence from, emulating or sometimes openly copying philosophies and designed objects originating in other parts of the world. In the nineteenth century, colonial furniture designers and makers referenced and copied British furniture

design. And in the twentieth century, Australian furniture designers were again heavily influenced by the ideals and material culture of American and European designers. So when will Australian designers break this pattern?

## Verbal and Textual Accounts of Australian Identity

### Australian Mythology

The analysis of Australian material culture earlier in Chapter Two dictates that material culture can provide a non-specific indication of the sub-conscious cultural ideals of a broad portion of a community, while written histories provide explicit accounts of the conscious cultural characteristics of a smaller cross-section of that society. So what are the Australian beliefs, ideas and values spoken about in Australian literature? Is it possible to identify a core set of national values within a population originating from many different places, living in contrasting socio-economic contexts, with alternate religious and spiritual beliefs, and across a broad range of age groups? And is it necessary to define Australian identity entirely to develop a design philosophy that originates in Australian values? Or is it possible to focus in on specific elements of Australian identity, components of society that represent a portion of our understanding of Australian culture?

Richard White (1981) is sceptical of the many attempts made to define Australian identity and capture its essence. In White's opinion there is no true Australia waiting to be found, and national identity is an invention (White 1981). On the other hand, Benedict Anderson (1991) supports the existence of national identity as an imagined community, existing in the consciousness of its population (Anderson 1991). What is clear from both White and Anderson is that there is no one idea of Australia, but that ideas of Australian identity exist in the minds of each individual.

Is it possible to identify those beliefs, ideas and values that are most commonly understood as being Australian? Are there some common narratives that are considered by a large portion of the population to be Australian? David Carter (2006) says that national symbols and ceremonies are disseminated to the population by the media, educational institutions and political organisations (Carter 2006). Given the percentage of the Australian population exposed to these entities, there is some consistency in the national rhetoric consumed by Australians. Carter lists narratives and ideas such as the *Anzac tradition* and the *bush legend* and the *pioneering spirit* as some of the symbols of Australian identity that are transferred to the Australian community at large (Carter 2006).

## The Bush Legend

Russell Ward (1978) gives character to the *bush legend* and the pioneering spirit when he speaks of the colonial or Australian bushman of the nineteenth century, whom he describes as being a coarse but practical individual, who swears and drinks heavily but usually feels no compulsion to exert himself physically, unless disaster calls for it. Ward lists familiar Australian traits, saying that these men were 'great improvisers', generally willing to 'have a go', but were ever eager to proclaim that the solution to a problem was 'near enough', inspiring the 'she'll be right' mentality often associated with the Australian spirit. According to Ward, these characteristics were embodied in a generation of men that found employment in the colonial or Australian outback during the nineteenth century, living semi-nomadically as they moved from station to station working as drovers, shepherds, stockmen, station hands and shearers (Ward 1962, p1).

Graeme Davison (2005) sheds some light on the origins of the bush legend and the pioneering spirit, saying that the two writers who did the most to secure the admiration of the pioneers within Australian society, Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson, did so toward the end of the nineteenth century, when this era

of Australian history was coming to a close (Davison and Brodie 2005). Grace Karskens (2013) gives a similar account; referencing Russel Ward's popular book *The Australian Legend*, Karskens says that Ward projected ideals backward from the 1960s, identifying points where the bush legend had shaped Australia retrospectively (Karskens 2013). Both Davison and Karskens argue that ideas of the bush legend and the pioneering spirit were created from a removed vantage point, as a nostalgic idealisation of the Australian bush. Davison calls the pioneering legend one of our 'most powerful national myths' (Davison and Brodie 2005, pX).

It is clear that the Australian bush legend is built largely on nostalgia, exaggerating some facets of life on the frontier and omitting others completely. A crucial omission to this Australian myth is the contribution to life on the frontier made by Indigenous Australians – a role which, according to Karskens, is often omitted from tales of the frontier. In reality, the success of rural endeavours and the very existence of the resulting bush legend owe a great deal to Aboriginal Australians. Pastoral stations relied heavily on Aboriginal labour and were known to stop functioning completely when Aboriginal workers left the station en masse for ceremonial business. These workers were seldom paid for their labour, usually being rewarded with rations of tobacco (Karskens 2013). This lack of financial reward, coupled with an omission from mainstream frontier narratives, has meant that Aboriginal people are not recognised in national myths for their contribution to pastoral industries.

## The Anzac Tradition

The *Anzac tradition* is another of the broadly known national narratives listed by Carter (Carter 2006). Mark McKenna (2010) alludes to the difficulty of attempting to define the Anzac tradition by saying that there are few stories which have been so frequently moulded to fit the agenda of successive generations. According to McKenna, the Anzacs were first depicted in the early twentieth century as a group

of ruthless killers on the battlefields of Gallipoli, but by 1940 their image had shifted to that of a group of 'cool and confident killers'. The common view had changed yet again by the 1990s, when the Anzacs became known as a group of courageous young men, whose qualities would well inform those of the nation (McKenna in Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010, p120).

The battle that began at Anzac Cove on April 25, 1915 was part of a larger campaign that saw Britain and its allies attack Turkey in a tactical attempt to open up passage to the Black Sea. Contemporary Australians often think of this campaign as involving only Australian and New Zealand forces, but in truth there were far more British, French and Indians than Australians in Turkey during this period. Despite the importance of the Anzac tradition within Australian culture, Sean Brawley (2013) says that the military campaign that initiated the Anzac tradition was an 'unmitigated disaster'. After the initial landing, the Australians and New Zealanders were only able to penetrate a kilometre or so inland before being overcome by the Turkish resistance. The remaining forces spent the nine months that followed clinging to a small stretch of coast, until the Allies withdrew in December 1915 (Brawley 2013). Despite the failure of the campaign, at a speech at Gallopoli's Ari Burnu cemetery in 1990, then Prime Minister Bob Hawke proclaimed that the feats of the Anzacs were proudly linked to the character of the Australian nation (McKenna in Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010). So how did such a disastrous military campaign become a proud moment in Australia's history and a significant characteristic of national identity?

McKenna explains that during the 1980s the nationalist movement in Australia had been searching for a new foundation for national character, one that could give Australia an independent sense of nationhood, separate from Britain. With the Anzac tradition, this movement found a story that would give Australia the Bastille Day or Fourth of July that it had yearned for, a day that would separate Australia's

national identity from its imperial past and provide a romantic national story (McKenna in Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010).

Despite its origins in a campaign that did not occur in Australia, the Anzac story is an Australian legend that was delivered to the nation by politicians and the media, deliberately crafted to provide the 'true site of the nation's founding moment' (McKenna in Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010, p121). According to McKenna, the Anzac tradition has been so widely adopted by the Australian people that it is now our most powerful national myth (McKenna in Lake, Reynolds et al. 2010).

Similar to the bush legend, the Anzac tradition is largely fabricated, using exaggeration and a selective memory to inflate an unimportant and unsuccessful military campaign into a story that is a worthy foundation for national character. Again, a crucial omission of the Anzac tradition is the responsibility shouldered by Indigenous Australian soldiers during this legendary strike on Gallipoli. According to Glen Stasiuk (2005) more than 400 Indigenous Australian soldiers served in World War I, and over 3000 soldiers of Indigenous descent fought in World War II, but because of the poor record keeping of state and federal governments, the average Australian is largely unaware of the participation of Indigenous servicemen and women in the protection of Australia during the World Wars. Notwithstanding the fact that Indigenous soldiers have shared in the toil and hardship of every Australian war and peacekeeping mission since the Boer War, Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander soldiers have been generally excluded from the Anzac tradition (Stasiuk 2005).

After risking their lives fighting Australian wars, those Indigenous service personnel who survived were not given the same rewards as their white counterparts. At the conclusion of World War II, returning war veterans were granted blocks of land for their service, except when they were Indigenous. White

ex-servicemen and women were given a hero's welcome by a grateful Australian public. Aboriginal ex-service personnel were not. (Stasiuk 2005).

Indigenous Australians remained largely unrecognised for their war service, excluded from the Anzac tradition until the celebration of 100 years of the Royal Australian Army in 2001. During this service, for the first time, Indigenous soldiers past and present were recognised, and those Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander soldiers who died in any one of Australia's wars were commemorated with the playing of a single didgeridoo (Stasiuk 2005). This gesture was an important first step toward the inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the common Anzac narrative, but this single action does not quickly undo their previous exclusion from one of Australia's most formative myths. This commemoration, along with others that have taken place since, has signified the willingness of the federal government and the Returned and Services League (RSL) to include Aboriginal soldiers as part of the Anzac narrative, but national myths do not evolve quickly and it will take time for this new chapter in the Anzac tradition to be accepted by the average Australian.

It is clear that the narratives of the bush legend and the Anzac tradition were shaped by consecutive generations of Australians, according to the social and political agenda of the day. But there is another pervasive Australian legend that has even earlier origins – dating back to the very first years of British colonisation. It is the convict legend.

### The Convict Legend

New South Wales was established as a convict colony in Sydney in 1788. Convicts were transported from England and Ireland for the following eight decades, during which period approximately 160,000 men, women and children were transported. According to Karskens, the early period of colonisation – from 1788 to 1820 – was a

phase in which the majority of convicts lived relatively independent lives, working and living as though they were free. Karskens writes that the colony of New South Wales was not actually founded as a gaol, instead she calls it 'a new society' where the convicts were supposed to become farmers (Karskens 2013). In this 'rather extraordinary late eighteenth-century social experiment', both men and women were sent to New South Wales, with the intention that they would pair up and have children (Karskens 2013).

This does not coincide with the mainstream view of the colonial period. According to Karskens, powerful political opponents of transportation began to fabricate a new narrative of the penal colonies as early as the 1820s and 1830s, which equated it to the slave trade as part of an attempt to instigate penal reform. In 1838, the British Government commissioned the *Molesworth Report*, which labelled transportation as 'inefficient, morally corrupt, a lottery and, ironically, not severe enough'. While the colonists living in New South Wales knew that less crime and a burgeoning population had resulted from transportation, they also knew that their colony was a joke in England, and they were not content to be continually associated with vice, brutality and cruelty. Many joined the anti-transportation movement and assisted to further degrade the reputation of convicts (Karskens 2013).

According to Karskens, this was the origin of negative associations with transportation; during the decades that followed, the convict colonies did their best to forget and shroud their convict foundations. The story of New South Wales in particular was adjusted to omit the convict years, often jumping straight from Captain Cook to the pastoralists, with no mention of what happened in between. Karskens asserts that this was common up until and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when it was still 'a stain to have a convict skeleton in the family cupboard'. In the 1970s, however, this shifted, and an increase in interest in Australian history meant that having a convict ancestor became a 'badge of honour' (Karskens 2013).

It was not only political institution and popular opinion that persistently shaped an inaccurate view of the convict period, the media was heavily involved in disseminating incorrect versions of this period of colonial history. In 1870, Marcus Clarke wrote his bestselling book on this topic – *For the Term of his Natural Life*. Karskens asserts that Clarke, who was living a bohemian existence in Melbourne, had no direct experience of the convict period, and incorrectly depicted convicts in Tasmania as subject to terrible cruelty, floggings, slave labour and viciously inhumane treatment. In one scene in the book, convicts are strapped to a plough and forced to work a field, something that never happened in Tasmania. Clarke's novel, and the film that came later, were regarded as authentic and were used as educational resources, annealing this incorrect stereotype in the minds of many Australians. The stereotypical convict was animalistic; they were beaten down, poor and wore rags, and they were always associated with working gangs, the ball and chain, and merciless floggings by the red coats (British soldiers). Worse still was the common image of the female convict as sexually available, drunk and subject to violence. This stereotype is still perpetuated by the media; on October 16, 2006, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an article with photography depicting a buxom female convict being struck with a musket by a red coat. In reality, convicts looked like ordinary working-class people; they were reasonably well dressed and cared about their appearance. According to Karskens, the former and more common vision of the convict is a myth, created and incrementally adjusted by political organisations and the media to serve countless national agendas (Karskens 2013).

Like the bush legend and the Anzac tradition, the convict legend does not include Indigenous Australians – however, Aboriginal Australians do have a presence in this early colonial myth. According to Ruth Balint (2013), the prevailing narrative relating to Aboriginal people at the time of colonisation insists that the British annexed the colonies peacefully, as Aboriginal people had no understanding of what it was to inhabit the continent in a manner that constituted ownership. The

rationale behind this myth is used today by some to characterise the continent at the time of colonisation as *Terra Nullius* – 'without possession' (Balint 2013).

In reality, Indigenous Australians were not passively occupying the land, but were compelled, by their culture and for survival, to care for their country. Indigenous Australians systematically burnt the land in patterns according to the terrain, climate, and plant type, and with great consideration for every animal and insect species that lived in that ecosystem (Gammage 2011). After the arrival of Europeans to the continent, Indigenous Australians continued to occupy their land as best they could, engaging with settlers and pioneers and defending their sacred sites, waterholes and culture. These dealings are not included in much of the early literature on the colonial period and, as a result, occurrences such as these are omitted from popular mythology (Balint 2013).

Another aspect of early colonial life seldom included in popular discourse is the important role played by Aboriginal people in the shaping of New South Wales in the first years of settlement. When the colony was initially established the local Eora people kept their distance. By the end of 1788, the settlement in Sydney was desperately close to failure. With rations running low and early attempts at farming or catching food proving unsuccessful, Governor Phillip decided to forcefully encourage Aboriginal people into the settlement. According to Watkin Tench, Phillip intended to use these individuals for information on the procurement of resources that might sustain the failing colony (Tench in Stanner 1969).

In the 1790s, 'Sydney was an Eora town' (Karskens 2009, p351). It became common for merchants and officers to adopt Aboriginal children, and Eora men went to the hospital in the Rocks to have spears removed and injuries seen to. On the eastern side of Sydney Cove, Eora friends of Governor Phillip would often congregate in the gardens of Government House, or dine with the governor in the tastefully appointed dining room. And then, of course, there was Bennelong, whose house

on Bennelong Point was a common place for local Aboriginal men and women to stay while in the township (Karskens 2009). This common occupation of the early township of Sydney by Aboriginal men and women resulted in a community that was not only shaped by the British influences of the governor, officers and convicts, but one that was formed in part by the cultural practices and living habits of the Eora nation.

## The Aboriginal Myth

Indigenous Australians have occupied the Australian continent for upwards of 60,000 years and, as with any society or group of societies existing for a substantial period, Indigenous Australian cultures have moved through an incomprehensible array of evolutions and modulations during this period (Johnson 2014). And despite certain pre- and post-colonial cultural changes, Indigenous Australian culture remains a frozen relic within the common vernacular, trapped in the specific tribal existence that the British found when they came to colonise the continent. Grace Karskens (2009) supports these assertions, postulating that the traditions of Indigenous Australian life are commonly depicted as an unmoving phenomenon, an inert existence that is as equally without impact on the land on which it subsists as it is on the triumphs of human evolution (Karskens 2009).

According to Ruth Balint (2013), within common colonial narratives Aboriginal people were seen as a primeval and superstitious race, existing in a prehistoric manner before the coming of Western civilisation. However, these views were not restricted to the colonists, and there is no stronger evidence of this pervasive view of Aboriginal history than that seen in the depiction of Aboriginal culture during the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics in 2000 (Balint 2013). This event enacted a chronological dramatisation of Australian history, beginning with Aboriginal people in full ceremonial body paint and taking part in corroboree, and moved forward in time through significant white Australian milestones. The

performance did not return to the depiction of Indigenous Australians at later stages of Australia's history, ignoring every other contribution that they have made to Australian culture in subsequent centuries. This enactment of Australian history depicted the tribal existence as the single, static Indigenous Australian identity, telecast to the world, and reinforcing on an international scale, nearly two centuries later, the colonial myth of the stone-aged Aborigine.[2]

According to Bain Attwood (2005), there is logic to the proliferation of this false narrative within the Australian vernacular. Australian identity is largely built on myths of a settler history, as covered in the *Convict Legend* and *Bush Legend* earlier in Chapter Two, with a lens focused on the achievement of the British and their white descendants. According to these myths, white Australians are responsible for the grand developments producing the civilised Australian nation. In this narrative, Indigenous Australians are the antithesis of the British:

> The British were a civilised race; the Aborigines a savage one. The British were a populous people; the Aborigines were few. The British settled the land and created wealth; the Aborigines wandered over it and created nothing. The British had law; the Aborigines had none. (Attwood 2005, p15)

In this prevalent version of Australian history, the British and their white Australian descendants are progressive, and Aboriginal Australians were a prehistoric people with no role to play in the development of a contemporary,

---

[2] Sydney Olympics Opening Ceremony:
Segment Directors: Stephen Page and Rhoda Roberts
Designer: Peter England
Costume Designer: Jennifer Irwin
Choreographers: Stephen Page, Matthew Doyle, Elma Kris and Peggy Misi

advanced nation (Attwood 2005). In the 1910s, anthropologists rejected this fundamentally linear view of human development. According to Stanner, there is no linear hierarchy of social evolution, and these two modes of existence can be mutually exclusive iterations of societies on divergent trajectories (Stanner 2009).

There is another justification given for the static nature of the Aboriginal myth. For some, the solid foundation of an ancient order offsets the uneasiness that accompanies the constant change of modernity. An ancient theology, such as those associated with many Indigenous Australian cultures, is thought to hold the primordial and philosophical truths of the ancient Australian continent, allowing a settler race to truly know this place and live in harmony with it. However, this deep longing for a tangible link to an ancient history, associated with New Age thinking repeats the same stereotypical notions of the Aboriginal myth (Attwood 2005).

In contrast to these mythical interpretations of Indigenous Australian history, anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists and historians now recognise an Australian history whose narrative does not begin in 1788. This history frames Indigenous Australians as the first explorers of the Australian continent, acknowledging their vast and evolving culture that has occupied and formed meaningful spiritual relationships with the Australian landscape for upward of 60,000 years (Attwood 2005). Over thousands of years, they established intricate kinship and legal structures, successfully populated the most desolate corners of the continent, managed and cultivated the land and natural resources in ways that altered the ecosystem for their benefit, built architectural structures and named every significant place (Karskens 2009).

This relationship did not end with colonisation. Just as the Indigenous Australian narrative extends into the past beyond 1788, it also continues after this date. The cornerstone of the post-colonial Aboriginal myth is *terra nullius*, the term

used to justify British colonisation of the Australian continent – it didn't deny the existence of Aboriginal people, but it claimed that their occupation did not constitute ownership. This version of history, claiming peaceful settlement of the continent, has dominated popular sentiment for the majority of Australia's colonial history, resigning Indigenous Australians to a narrative that saw them fade peacefully into obscurity (Balint 2013). In fact, Aboriginal Australians did not surrender their land peacefully. According to Henry Reynolds (1996), conflicts between colonists and Aboriginal Australians were a common occurrence in different parts of Australia from the first weeks of settlement until the 1930s and 1940s, however these narratives are commonly omitted from mainstream narratives about Aboriginal people (Reynolds 1996).

Throughout Australia's post-colonial period, Indigenous Australian cultures, as with all living cultures, have continued their social development in response to ever-changing circumstances (McIntyre-Tamway in Harrison 2004). Stanner described the failure to recognise such development in Aboriginal society as its own sort of myth. It was, he said, 'a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape … something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale' (Stanner 2009, p189).

The bush legend, Anzac tradition, convict legend and Aboriginal myth are mythical accounts of Australia's past; like most national myths, Australian or otherwise, they bear little resemblance to the facts. While myths are based on historical events, they are not about preserving historical accuracy but about inventing an identity. What does it mean for the development of a national design ethos that four of the most prominent national myths eliminate or undervalue the crucial contributions made by Indigenous Australians, thus excluding them from national identity?

## Indigenous Australian Mythology

### Dreaming Stories

The term *Dreamtime* was first coined by Frank Gillen in 1894, in consultation with Arrernte elders (Macfarlane 2007). The term was Gillen's best attempt to summarise a period in local mythology that is attributed with the creation of all land formations, fauna, flora and ancestral lineage in Arrernte country.

*Dreaming Story* has become an all-inclusive term, used to categorise the creation stories of all Indigenous Australians. While broken into many language groups, much like European communities during the Middle Ages, Aboriginal groups across the mainland continent share a common mythic discourse that has been translated as the Dreaming, in which the Rainbow Serpent reigns supreme. While the particulars of Dreaming stories vary across the continent, they also share many common elements and, importantly, narrative structures.

### Karora – Arrernte Alchera Story (Appendix i)

The Arrernte term for the Dreamtime is *Alchera* (Spencer and Gillen 1927), and there is one Alchera story that is central to Arrernte beliefs – a story about *The Great Father* (Strehlow 1947).

This Alchera story describes Karora, the great Bandicoot Dreaming ancestor, who encourages his sons to over-hunt bandicoots, eventually depleting the population of bandicoots so heavily that there are no more to sustain him and his sons. Upon first reading it is difficult to see how such an abstract story with a meandering narrative could constitute any great meaning for Arrernte people. However, within this tale it is possible to identify values and information that are important to both Arrernte spirituality and survival.  Initially, this myth gives an explanation for the existence of the Ilbalintja Soak and assigns sacred status to the site. The

orchestrated mysticism surrounding this site is not arbitrary; the Ilbalintja Soak is a source of water, and water must be a highly respected resource for any desert population. This story guarantees that the Ilbalintja Soak will be respected by decreeing the site as sacred within local law, protecting this precious resource and ensuring the longevity of those who rely upon it.

Similarly, it is important for any desert community to understand the way that water moves from a soak into the surrounding landscape. The section of the story that narrates the movement of Karora's sons with the underground flood, from the Ilbalintja Soak to the nearby mulga thicket is almost instructional in nature. For a mulga thicket to grow, there must be water beneath the ground, and this water must travel from a local source. This section of the tale identifies a possible source of water even when there is no obvious source in the surrounding landscape. Again, water is of utmost importance to any desert community, and an intuitive understanding of water movement through the landscape is crucial for the survival of the Arrernte nations.

Some sections of this myth communicate information that is closely related to survival, while others dictate social structures and belief systems. One example of this can be gleaned from the nature of the relationship between Karora and his sons. Every morning Karora orders his sons to go hunting for bandicoots, and his sons obediently oblige, providing a moral example of the respect and deference that an Arrernte youth must show an elder, in particular a father. This aspect of the story attaches the attitude of respecting one's elders to an ancient, sacred story, evidence that this ethic is as old as existence and cementing these ideals as a foundational value of Arrernte culture.

There is one section of this narrative that exemplifies one of the core values of Arrernte culture. Each Arrernte initiate is assigned a totem and is charged with

the care of that creature, ensuring that equilibrium is maintained for the wellbeing of the local ecosystem, of which the Arrernte people are a major component. In the story, Karora's sons hunt so many bandicoots that eventually none remain for their survival. There is a clear totemic message in this section of the narrative, emphasising the extreme necessity for each member of Arrernte society to act as guardian over their totem. Descendants of Karora are assigned the bandicoot as their totemic animal, and as a part of their symbiotic relationship with this creature they are to learn from Karora's mistakes and ensure that bandicoots are not over-hunted.

There are many more lessons contained within this Dreaming story, which, when added to the vast network of Arrernte creation stories, contribute an immense amount of information to the survival mechanisms, social systems and cultural laws of the Arrernte people. These stories define and dictate every aspect of traditional Arrernte life, and therefore embody the traditional identity of this group of Aboriginal Australians.

### The Rainbow Serpent – Larumbanda Dreaming Story (Appendix ii)

The *Larumbanda* are a clan of the *Lardil* language group from Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and it is from this region that one particular story of the most well-known Indigenous Australian Dreaming ancestor originated – a local story of the *Rainbow Serpent*, describing his selfish behaviour and neglect of his sister and her infant child.

Like the story of the great father, this Dreaming story conveys values and information crucial to the survival of the Larumbanda people. In the narrative, the great river and waterhole are created by Thuwathu (Rainbow Serpent). The Rainbow Serpent's involvement in the creation of these important local water sources means that the river and the waterhole have been assigned sacred status

within the Larumbanda community, and are therefore treated with the care and conservation assigned to any sacred site. Their inclusion in this story ensures that these sites will be maintained, in turn guaranteeing that the Larumbanda people will always have access to fresh water.

Along with the identification of sacred sites, there are other lessons that can be taken from the Rainbow Serpent narrative that are equally crucial to the survival of individuals from the Larumbanda nation. The seemingly incidental account of Bulthugu as she wraps her baby in bark to keep her warm, provides a simple lesson for any member of the community – bark is an efficient insulator.

The inclusion of Thuwathu's many companions from a variety of animal species in the beginning of the story is linked to the totemic system that governs the laws and spirituality of many Indigenous Australian nations. By presenting an important spiritual ancestor like the Rainbow Serpent befriending the spirit ancestors of many other animal species, this Dreaming story demonstrates the importance of all species within the local ecosystem. This lesson ensures that all animals will be cared for equally so that the ecosystem as a whole can flourish, again ensuring the ongoing wellbeing of the Larumbanda people, who can only survive as a component of a healthy ecosystem.

The story of Thuwathu is still told to young Larumbanda men at a particular stage of their initiation, educating them on these and numerous other laws that bring order to their society. Above all other lessons, this Dreaming story exists to impart the importance of their responsibilities to their sisters' children. In this case, the actions of the revered ancestor Thuwathu are used as a cautionary tale, an example of how not to behave, cultivating behaviour that is in the best interest of Larumbanda society, and ultimately resulting in the improved survival of the Larumbanda people (Godden and Malnic 1982).

These Dreaming stories are central to every aspect of Arrernte and Larumbanda life and identity. And just as non-Indigenous colonial and Australian mythologies are for the most part exclusive of Indigenous Australians, these myths were not designed with non-Indigenous Australians in mind. For the most part, these stories do not shape the national or local identity of non-Indigenous Australians, as they are specific to the individual Indigenous nation to which they refer, and the land formations and animals that were/are the focus of Indigenous survival and spiritual beliefs in that location. In this way, stories such as *The Great Father* and *The Rainbow Serpent* hold little personal significance for the majority of non-Indigenous Australians, or those Indigenous Australians belonging to other nations with unique Dreaming stories. As such, these specific Dreaming stories do not form the foundation of national identity for the majority of Australians.

In drawing inspiration from Australian mythology, a contemporary designer will face similar issues to those encountered when drawing inspiration from Australian material culture (see page 33). In order to take influence from a myth or a network of mythologies that are relevant to all Australians, the chosen myth must be foundational, and therefore must originate from a period of time prior to the complicated hybridisation of contemporary Australian culture. However, as discussed in the *Australian Mythology* and *Indigenous Australian Mythology* sections of Chapter Two, most foundational Australian myths are culturally exclusive: non-Indigenous Australian myths excluding Indigenous Australians, and Indigenous Australian myths excluding non-Indigenous Australians.
Is there a mythology that is inclusive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians?

### Ethics and Ownership of Indigenous Australian Stories

As part of this research it is necessary to acknowledge the sensitivities that exist around the ownership of Indigenous stories in Australia. Some stories of

Indigenous Australian origin have been widely documented and published, becoming part of the public domain through literature and the media, while other Indigenous stories have remained relatively unknown to mainstream Australians; others are secret, unable to be revealed in the public domain. Only public stories which usually do not divulge too much detail should be referred to in design projects, and permission should be sought from the relevant owner to use stories that are specific to one place/person, even when these are public stories. No matter where a story is heard or read, stories with Indigenous Australian origins must always be treated with sensitivity and relevant consultations and ethical procedures undertaken.

However, according to Greg Lehman, an Indigenous scholar and member of the National Museum of Australia's Indigenous Reference Group, it is no longer acceptable for non-Indigenous Australians to 'place Aboriginal culture on a shelf, afraid to touch it'. This type of inaction only reinforces the divide that exists between these two cultures. Lehman says that it is crucial for non-Indigenous Australians from all creative backgrounds – musicians, artists, designers, etc. – to 'respectfully take Aboriginal culture into their own expressions of culture, and communicate these ideas to new audiences' (Lehman in Jansen 2014). This type of creative pursuit can begin to break down some of the barriers that exist between these two communities.

For the most part, this research project seeks to communicate public Indigenous stories that have been documented by others, using these stories to demonstrate their relevance to Indigenous Australian mythology and identity. In one case permission was gained from the relevant elder within the community from which the story originates. In all cases, all attempts have been made to treat these stories with the respect that they deserve.

## Hybrid Colonial/Indigenous Australian Mythology

### Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay and Bunyip

The previous examples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian mythologies highlight the potential for exclusivity within national narratives. But are there myths that combine both genealogies?

Robert Holden asserts that in the early years of the British colonisation of New South Wales, there were a series of myths that were embraced by both Indigenous and colonial people, a cultural crossover that he insists has retained its potent appeal to the present day (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001).

Holden is speaking in part of the mythical creatures that originated in both British and Aboriginal Australian folklore and were shared between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Sydney during the early years of colonisation.

After Captain James Cook's expedition to New South Wales in 1770, tales of dense, alien vegetation and fantastic native creatures spread quickly back in England. This seemed to be evidence that New South Wales was an imaginary world, occupied by unimaginable creatures, and these exotic tales captured the imaginations of the British people. The peculiarity of this new land was so extreme to the average Briton that the line between the newly documented flora and fauna and the fantasy seemed arbitrary. Long before the First Fleet of convicts left England bound for Botany Bay, a new mythical creature arose from the frenzy of stories of the new continent. This creature was known as the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay* (Figure 2.40) (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001).

Described as a savage giant nine feet tall, with a broad face and deathly eyes and covered in long, but sparse, wiry hair, the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay surely

Figure 2.40 - *Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay* – Unknown Artist, Print, 1802.

occupied the thoughts of some of the new British arrivals as they surveyed the bush of Botany Bay, or tried to sleep on their first night in the new colony.

Fears of this creature were thought to be legitimate when British settlers learnt of a creature called the *yahoo* or *yowie* from Eora people, their descriptions matching the widely circulated depictions of the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay. Stories of the yahoo, a creature that resembled a slender man, with long white straight hair, extraordinarily long arms and great talons (Unknown 1842), captured the imaginations of the new British settlers, and soon a fear of the yahoo became a common ground between Aboriginal people and British settlers. This fear of a gruesome and vicious creature gained its potency from the folkloric tales that were used to substantiate its existence. These tales were suitably vague, their lack of detail attributed to the fierce nature of these creatures and the assumption that no one had survived an encounter (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001).



Figure 2.41 - *The Bunyip* – Ainslie Roberts, 1969.

The yahoo 'became one of the very few Aboriginal legends to be embraced by the Europeans' (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001, p16), providing a catalyst for conversation between individuals from these two culturally disparate societies and forming some personal links between these communities. The word *yahoo* soon became interchangeable with *bunyip* (Figure 2.41), a name that resulted from a linguistic misunderstanding between Aboriginal people, who thought of it as an English word, and British settlers, who thought that it was a local term (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). The bunyip grew as a bicultural monster, a creature that came to represent the unknown aspects of the bush for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). This was one of the first myths to evolve out of a shared British and Indigenous culture, remaining to the current day a consistent component of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folklore.

Given that the bunyip has origins in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture, this creature can be perceived as a metaphor for the confluence of these two cultures. The circumstances around the naming of the bunyip make this myth an example of a shared, uniquely Australian folklore. According to Holden, the bunyip maintains its appeal to the present day, but is this story appealing enough to become a core element of Australian folklore, associated with Australian national identity in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian culture?

Much mainstream Australian mythology has the potential to embody the values of contemporary Australians from Indigenous OR non-Indigenous backgrounds, and could be adopted as the conceptual foundation of new Australian material culture. However, perhaps designers have a responsibility to select Australian myths that are culturally inclusive of Indigenous AND non-Indigenous Australians? The resulting designs may contribute to the dissemination of a new and inclusive Australian mythology, helping to break down some divides that, until now, have been perpetuated by the cultural narratives that are most closely associated with

Australian nationhood.

## Arrkutja-irrintja, Nyipi Barnti and Pankalangu

I have experienced first hand the potential that culturally inclusive myths have in clearing cultural divides between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In 2011, I met a Western Arrernte man by the name of Baden Williams and we talked about Central Australian mythology. This topic of conversation was able to excite our curiosity equally, providing a reason for us to meet, opening the lines of communication and affording us a common ground for conversation, a distraction from the vast cultural differences that exist between Baden and myself.

The mythology that founded our ongoing relationship was a series of creature myths that originated in Western Arrernte culture. These creatures include: *arrkutja-irrintja*, a female creature with a sweet smell, who is known to adorn herself with flowers and abduct young men, bringing them into a parallel dimension; *nyipi barnti*, a muscular being who is an assassin, killing trespassers on his land – nyipi barnti is known for his pungent smell and often abducts young women, also taking them to a parallel dimension; and *pankalangu*, a territorial creature who lives in the scrub and is totally camouflaged in the desert and the bush – the pankalangu can only move with the rain, and becomes visible when light catches the rain that falls from its body, defining his form in a sparkling silhouette (Jansen 2014).

These are not cross-cultural myths; their routes cannot be traced to a shared origin in Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture like those of the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay and the bunyip. These are Western Arrernte myths, but unlike the exclusive Indigenous Dreaming stories and the non-Indigenous Anzac, colonial and frontier myths covered earlier in this chapter, the stories of arrkutja-irrintja, nyipi barnti and pankalangu do not speak of the origins of a single people or culture. These myths do not give a focused account of the beginnings of Indigenous

life on earth, or the birth of non-Indigenous Australian culture. Instead they focus on place, locating these creatures within a specific landscape and building identity around their relationship with that landscape, as well as the natural elements and Indigenous communities that live in that place. With reference to local Indigenous communities, these stories give some insight into the cultural beliefs of Western Arrernte people, demonstrating the importance of country and the creatures that live in that country, but they also indicate the supernatural nature of some Western Arrernte beliefs. As a result, any individual interested in learning about these mythical creatures need only have an affinity with the Central Australian countryside, an interest in the creatures that live there, or a curiosity about local Indigenous culture and spirituality, to associate with these narratives and the creatures at their core.

The stories of arrkutja-irrintja, nyipi barnti and pankalangu may hold resonance for many Australians; despite the fact that only five per cent of Australians live in the outback, this is a place with which most Australians feel a conceptual connectedness, according to Hena Maes-Jelinek (1996). She describes the outback as a 'repository for Australian identity' (Maes-Jelinek 1996, p6). For those people who have a partiality for the Central Australian landscape and its natural, cultural and spiritual beauty, these myths may provide something of a link between Arrernte and non-Indigenous culture within the region. These myths may provide a set of narratives that are not absolutely culturally exclusive, and that are open and intriguing enough to invite interest from people outside Western Arrernte culture.

## Australian Identity

As previously acknowledged, it is important to articulate the impossibility of defining a culture in its entirety. This results in the inclusion of some cultural attributes and the omission of others. The collection of ideas that are chosen for inclusion in the study of a specific culture will therefore be chosen by the researcher

and based on his or her personal bias (Spradley 1972). However, it is important for the sake of this research to make some attempt to distil the Australian values uncovered in this chapter. By identifying common themes present in the chosen examples of colonial, Australian and Indigenous Australian material culture and mythology, it may be possible to isolate some core elements of Australian identity, with the aim of adopting these core values as the creative foundation for an Australian design process.

## Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture

Early in Chapter Two, five general factors of culturally and geographically unique material culture were established (see page 31). The remainder of Chapter Two was dedicated to analysing examples of colonial, Australian and Indigenous Australian material culture according to these categories, understanding the specific ways in which this material culture adheres to these five factors. As a result of this research it has been possible to develop a series of criteria to which Australian material culture should conform. This criteria can be used both to test designed artefacts for their Australian-ness, but most importantly to influence the design process undertaken when purposefully designing new Australian artefacts.

# CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIES FOR TESTING AUSTRALIAN-NESS

## Research Design and Methodology

### Research Design - Qualitative Longitudinal

National identity is a construct of the social world, and as such this research adopts a qualitative design as the appropriate lens through which to understand an individual or collective interpretation of the social world (Bryman 2004). This study analyses documentation relating to Australian national identity from before colonisation to the present day, and has adopted a longitudinal qualitative design, identifying the consistencies and contrasts that occur within this component of social perception over this period (Bryman 2004).

### Research Methodology – Theoretical Sampling

Under a qualitative longitudinal research design, this research uses theoretical sampling as its methodology for data collection, simultaneously collecting, coding and analysing data before deciding which data to collect next, in the formation of an emerging theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Initially, this study uses the first four factors of material culture theory (see *Factors of Culturally and Geographically Unique Material Culture*, page 31) to analyse documented accounts of the ways in which a selection of pre-colonial, colonial and Australian artefacts embody the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the community which they proliferated. A broad selection of pre- and post-colonial, Indigenous and non-Indigenous objects, artworks or creative approaches were selected, based on the availability of literature commenting on their relative regional specificity and embodiment of local values.

Research was collated that made reference to the geographic origins and the values that shaped each artefact or creative approach. In the case of painting styles that attempt to capture the aesthetic qualities of a pre-colonial, colonial or

Australian subject, this research referred to the degree of success of that style in depicting the subject accurately. This research provides clear information on the stylistic, material and technical origins of each artefact, as well as an indication of the composition of influences shaping each piece of material culture. Through the analysis of this information, it is clear which artefacts were shaped by a style, material and/or method that originated in foreign empires, and which were shaped by stylistic, material and/or technical influences that originated locally.

After initial data analysis, a fifth factor of material culture theory was added, based on Prown's admittance to the occasional inadequacies of the first four factors of material culture theory in endeavours to document the values of a chosen community. The fifth factor of material culture theory (see *Factors of Culturally and Geographically Unique Material Culture*, page 31) was used to analyse the colonial, Australian and/or Indigenous Australian values that are documented explicitly in verbal or textual records. Because of their broad dissemination within a specific cultural group, or the broader Australian public (see *Australian Mythology*, page 108), a group of Australian myths were selected for analysis in order to understand the values held within these narratives.

In order to understand the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian values held within culturally specific stories of colonial, Australian and Indigenous Australian history, six Australian myths were chosen as the subject of this research. Four non-Indigenous Australian and two Indigenous Australian myths were chosen based on the importance placed on these specific myths by expert theorists in the field of Australian mythology.

According to the adopted theoretical sampling methodology, this data was again analysed in order to determine the next research subject. Concluding this analysis it has been established that the six formative myths chosen for this study are

culturally exclusive, each influencing Australian identity in non-Indigenous OR Indigenous Australians, but in few cases offering a foundation for national identity for individuals from both cultural backgrounds.

The exclusive nature of prolific Australian myths then prompted research into formative Australian myths that are culturally inclusive and have represented some of the values of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Based on this aim, a selection of pre- and early-colonial creature myths (see *Hybrid Colonial/ Indigenous Australian Mythology*, page 127) were chosen for their documented ability to act as a conduit between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, representing some of the cultural values that proliferated both groups around the time of colonisation.

### Research Data Analysis - Qualitative Content

Given the theoretical sampling methodology adopted, data analysis has occurred in stages throughout the research process in order to identify a succession of research focuses in the development of an emerging theory. This data analysis has been conducted using a qualitative content method, whereby underlying themes are identified within the data collected, in order to isolate recurring ideas within the research (Bryman 2004). This information is then coded – sorted into categories according to these themes in order to provide a series of key concepts (Glesne 1992), components of an emerging theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

In this research the data gathered on Australian identity has been broken down into a series of themes (see *Australian Identity*, page 133). These concepts have then formed the building blocks of a theory that endeavours to articulate some of the components of Australian identity.

## Plan for Testing

The literature review conducted in Chapter 2 has resulted in the establishment of a *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture* (see page 230). In part, Chapter 4 will be dedicated to testing contemporary Australian design against these criteria. These same criteria will also be used in Chapter 4 to test new designs developed as a result of this research, determining the relative Australian-ness of these new artefacts.

# CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND CREATION OF AUSTRALIAN ARTEFACTS

## Practice

### Broached Commissions

The Broached Commissions are a Melbourne-based design collective that design and produce bespoke and artisan-made objects and furniture pieces. Their core activities are a series of internal commissions that use specific events in colonial and Australian history to inspire small collections of limited-edition objects and furniture pieces (Weis 2012).

The first such commission launched in 2011 and was entitled *Broached Colonial*, an exhibition of bespoke furniture and objects designed by six Australian and international designers, inspired by the Australian colonial period. According to the Broached Commissions creative director, Lou Weis, these projects were informed by a lengthy research process, whereby an expert on this period in local design, John McPhee, was engaged to inform the commissioned designers and direct their individual research efforts (Weis 2012).

For this first commission, designers Max Lamb and Charles Wilson adopted a similar approach in their interpretation of the colonial period. Both designers used the form and function of man-made and/or naturally formed objects as their core inspiration.

The elements of Max Lamb's *Hawkesbury Sandstone Collection* (Figure 4.1) took influence from objects used for seating in the early years of colonisation. Specifically these objects were influenced by: Mrs Macquarie's Chair located on a peninsular in Sydney Harbour; the form of eroding sections of sandstone along the Sydney shoreline; the logs that settlers used for sitting; and the root sections of fig trees found in Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. The resulting design pieces were made in Gosford, New South Wales, from Mount White and Wondabyne

Figure 4.1 - *Hawkesbury Sandstone Collection* – Max Lamb, Mount White sandstone, Bench: 1800mm x 300mm, Stool: 45 x 25cm, Table: 150 x 60cm, Steps: 80m x 20 x 80cm, 2011.

sandstones, using mechanised and manual carving techniques (Weis 2012).

Charles Wilson's Tall Boy (Figure 4.2) was influenced by the makeshift nature of colonial bush furniture, and agricultural structures such as windmills and water tanks. The resulting design was constructed from blackwood and was made by hand by a Victorian artisan (Weis 2012).

Man-made objects, created during the colonial period, influenced four of the six pieces designed by Lamb and Wilson for Broached Colonial. Prown's theory of material culture indicates that the stylistic characteristics proliferating among artefacts created by a cultural group at a particular point in time embody the 'values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions' of that group. Taking inspiration from colonial objects, both Lamb and Wilson have employed some of the

Figure 4.2 - *Tall Boy* – Charles Wilson, blackwood, 154 x 51cm, 2011.

stylistic characteristics of these colonial artefacts. In turn, some of the values that proliferated among the communities who designed, made and used the original objects will have transferred onto their newly designed counterparts. Accompanying these stylistic references are the native Australian materials used to create these new designs. As indicated in Chapter Two, the use of regionally specific materials contributes to the unique style of an artefact when compared with those made using materials specific to other regions. This stylistic consideration is a further embodiment of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the Australian community.

While these objects have adopted some of the physical characteristics of colonial Australian artefacts, they do not directly embody the values of contemporary Australia. Material culture theory indicates that an artefact will embody the values of the cultural group that it proliferates within. By taking major influence from Australian artefacts of the past, these examples of material culture blur the time period of influence. They were designed and made in 2010/11 using uniquely Australian materials, but many of their physical characteristics are derived from Australian artefacts made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Perhaps these pieces can be categorised as *Australian post-modern*, referencing Australian objects from the past in order to appeal to the retrospective sensibilities of current-day Australians.

Lucy McRae's *Prickly Lamp* (Figure 4.3) takes little or no influence from the artefacts created during the colonial period of the continent now known as Australia. This collection of lighting was informed by a current-day assessment of the conditions that faced female convicts living in the settlements of Sydney and Parramatta in the colonial period, and represents the metaphorical skin that women adopted in order to anneal themselves against the brutality of this time and place (Weis 2012).

Figure 4.3 - *Prickly Lamp* – Lucy McRae, timber, brass, steel and toothpicks, 150 x 200cm, 2011.

Unlike the work developed by Lamb and Wilson, these objects refer directly to current Australian feminist values, contributing to the classification of this work as new Australian material culture. However, given that all of the found objects (tripods and desk lamps) and materials (toothpicks and pigment) used to construct these objects are of unknown foreign origins, the style of the final artefacts have been substantially influenced by places other than Australia, making these objects examples of hybrid Australian material culture.

### Briggs Family Tea Service

There is one example within the Broached Colonial collection that uses all three strategies adopted by Lamb, Wilson and McRae. The *Briggs Family Tea Service*, which I designed, is influenced both by the cultural values and artefacts that proliferated among some colonial and Indigenous Australian communities during the colonial period, and uses materials that were geographically specific to these

communities. The *Briggs Family Tea Service* (Figure 4.4) is a series of biographical objects that represent a mixed British and Aboriginal Tasmanian family that was forged and defined by the turbulent nature of Van Diemen's Land during the early years of colonization, each object embodying a member of the Briggs family. This family represents a microcosm of the many varied aspects of colonial and Aboriginal relationships that were being forced and formed throughout the colonies during this period.



Figure 4.4 - *Briggs Family Tea Service* – Trent Jansen, porcelain, bull kelp, brass, copper, wallaby pelt, 50 x 30 x 30cm, 2011.

A teapot and a sugar bowl represent the parents, George Briggs of Dunstable in Bedfordshire, and Woretermoeteyenner of the Pairrebeenne people of northeast Van Diemen's Land. The physical characteristics of these two objects are defined by the hybrid life that Briggs and Woretermoeteyenner were forced to adopt in order to survive the cultural collision that affected Van Diemen's Land in the early days of the new British colony.

Briggs is a porcelain teapot, adopting a form that merges the elegant lid and spout of Worcester or Bow porcelain with a gnarly, organic body and handle, which reference both the roots that Briggs was forced to eat in times of hardship and the kelp that was so widely used by the Aboriginal people of the region. These forms portray the environment that Briggs must have struggled to survive in and the hybrid culture that he adopted in order to adapt to this forbidding place.

The sugar bowl representing Woretermoeteyenner evolved from the merging of an elegant Pairrebeenne kelp water carrier with a courtly handle and lid derived from the work of French and British porcelain houses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The grace of this combination represents Woretermoeteyenner as an important member of local royalty, a woman who did all that she could to adapt to a changing environment in order to survive and maintain her family line.

The milk jug and eldest daughter, Dolly Dalrymple Mountgarret Briggs, takes on the characteristics of both parents. Dolly's contact with her mother and her strong Pairrebeenne heritage is represented through her organically formed wallaby-skin body, while the adopted elements of her British ancestry are shown through the refined nature of her cast porcelain handles and spout.

The three teacups represent the other three children – Eliza, Mary and John Briggs. While John lived a relatively safe and prosperous life, Eliza and Mary spent their early childhood moving from one foster home to the next. Both spent periods living on the street, with Eliza ending up in a benevolent hospital, and Mary finding herself in prison for vagrancy. John grew to be an old man, but both Eliza and Mary died as young women at 21 years of age. These three objects use forms derived from traditional British tea services and Tasmanian Aboriginal water-carrying vessels, crafted in porcelain, brass, bull kelp and wallaby skin to represent the cultural

hybridity and life experience of each of these three younger Briggs children.

## Briggs Family Tea Service - Reflections

How does the *Briggs Family Tea Service* perform when tested against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture* (see page 230)? Can this series be considered an example of new Australian material culture, or has the historical narrative at the heart of this project inspired a family of objects that lack contemporary Australian relevance?

## Style

This work references the style of British tea services and Tasmanian Aboriginal water-carrying vessels, two groups of artefacts that proliferated in both British and Tasmanian Aboriginal societies during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Referencing these two highly specific artefacts, the *Briggs Family Tea Service* places its associated narrative firmly in a specific place and time – the only place on earth that these two cultures collided, and the only time in history that these specific artefacts were regularly being created simultaneously – Van Diemen's Land during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Combining these two styles in this way does more than simply place this story geographically and historically. According to material culture theory, the style of an artefact that proliferates in a specific community is the physical embodiment of the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of that community. As such the *Briggs Family Tea Service* stands to represent some of the social priorities held by individuals from both British and Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage during this period. Furthermore, the hybridisation of British and Tasmanian Aboriginal stylistic characteristics seen in the *Briggs Family Tea Service* represents the fusion of two sets of values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions, aligning with those individuals whom are of mixed British and Tasmanian Aboriginal descent.

As in the work of Wilson and Lamb, the specific influences listed above are stylistic elements that proliferated in British and Australian material culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Again, this reference to artefacts of the past categorises these objects as Australian post-modern, appealing to the retrospective sensibilities of some contemporary Australians. Furthermore, when referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, there are elements of narrative explored in the *Briggs Family Tea Service* that are also relevant components of contemporary Australian culture.

## Untamable Roughness

George Briggs worked as a whaler and sealer, living rough on Clarke Island and was often forced to eat fern roots to survive. When explorer John Boultbee came across a group of Eastern Straitsmen (a gang of sealers and whalers, of which George was a member) on the east coast of Tasmania, he recorded the following account in his journal:

> At night 2 sealing Boats came alongside with their crews consisting of 12 half-barbarous-looking fellows … the sealers … live very hard, frequently eating shell fish, & fern root, when they are unable to get other provisions, or to catch fish. They (in the Straits) wear their beards long & appear to have no inclination to keep themselves tidy: their general appearance is semi-barborous & they are people usually who are fit for no other employment. They wear a kangaroo skin coat, cape of the same & mocassins (a kind of sandal fastened with thongs of hide). (Boultbee in Begg 1979, p60)

Based on Boultbee's descriptions, the Eastern Straitsmen were untameable, rough characters of the Tasmanian straights.

### Cultural Hybridity

A major theme explored in this work is the cultural hybridity found in all members of the Briggs family – from George Briggs, who adopted some of the clothing, food and living habits of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, to Woretermoeteyenner who lived with a group of British men, adopting many of their customs, and learning to communicate with them in English. Lastly the children, Dolly, Eliza, Mary and John, were themselves of mixed Tasmanian Aboriginal and British heritage.

### Materiality

The cultural hybridity captured in this work is also communicated through the use of materials that were geographically specific to Britain and Tasmania. This work combines materials that were used in abundance in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as porcelain and brass, alongside bull kelp and wallaby pelt which were regionally specific resources of great cultural significance to Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Since the period of this narrative, porcelain and brass have become abundantly available to makers from all parts of the world, and as such their geographic specificity holds less potency today than it did at the time of the Briggs family. When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, there are two materials used in the *Briggs Family Tea Service* that remain relevant to the creation of contemporary Australian material culture - bull kelp from Shelly Beach in northeast Tasmania, and wallaby pelt from Tasmania, both materials being sourced from the Australian natural environment.

### Making Techniques

The Briggs Family Tea Service employs both the making techniques used by British porcelain houses and Tasmanian Aboriginal people during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Slip casting and glazing porcelain have, since this time, been made widely available to makers from all parts of the world, while the making

techniques of Tasmanian Aboriginal people are still geographically unique. When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Briggs Family Tea Service* uses a making technique that remains relevant to the creation of contemporary Australian material culture - shaping bull kelp by passing a skewer through the kelp, causing it to bunch into the shape of a vessel is a uniquely Tasmanian Aboriginal making technique (Figure 4.5).

## Evolved Making Techniques

The *Briggs Family Tea Service* employs existing traditional British and Tasmanian Aboriginal making techniques, but many of these have been developed in order to realise an artefact that is more efficient to make, or more functional to use. When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, there are some evolved making techniques that are relevant to the creation of contemporary Australian material culture.

*Evolved Making Technique # 1*: Traditional ceramic mold making would see a craftsperson carve the desired positive form from plaster by hand, with the use of some rudimentary measuring tools to judge the accuracy of the carved form against engineering drawings. While this is a relatively accurate method for plaster mold creation, it does not allow for error – if a mistake is made the model will need to be repaired and re-carved. Furthermore, this method does not allow a great deal of leeway for adjustment – if a small change is desired, the model would need to be re-carved. In the creation of the *Briggs Family Tea Service*, Rod Bamford, the ceramicist charged with realising this series of objects, used three-dimensional modelling software to model some elements of the tea service, before rapid prototyping them instead of hand-carving these components from plaster (Figure 4.7). As a result, the model could be judged on screen before being printed, reducing the need for adjustments. Where a small change was needed, the three-dimensional model could be amended virtually before being rapid prototyped again.

152

Figure 4.5 - *Water Carrier* - Jacqui Langdon, bull kelp, 2009.

The precision of this mold-making technique must influence the aesthetic of the final form. A hand-carved plaster mold, made manually by a craftsperson, will without exception contain slight idiosyncrasies, imperfections and asymmetries that are synonymous with hand-crafting. On the other hand, a rapid-prototyped model is created in virtual space, where absolute perfection and symmetry is

simpler to create than imperfection and asymmetry; in fact imperfection and asymmetry must be purposefully implemented in virtual modelling. As a result the aesthetic of an object realised through computer modelling and rapid prototyping will be more perfect and symmetrical.

*Evolved Making Technique # 2*: Traditionally, Tasmanian Aboriginal bull kelp artefacts were not sealed, meaning that they would soften when exposed to moisture, and harden when dried. This inconsistency meant that bull kelp could not be used in the creation of semi-industrial objects. As a result, the bull kelp to be used in the *Briggs Family Tea Service* would need to be sealed.
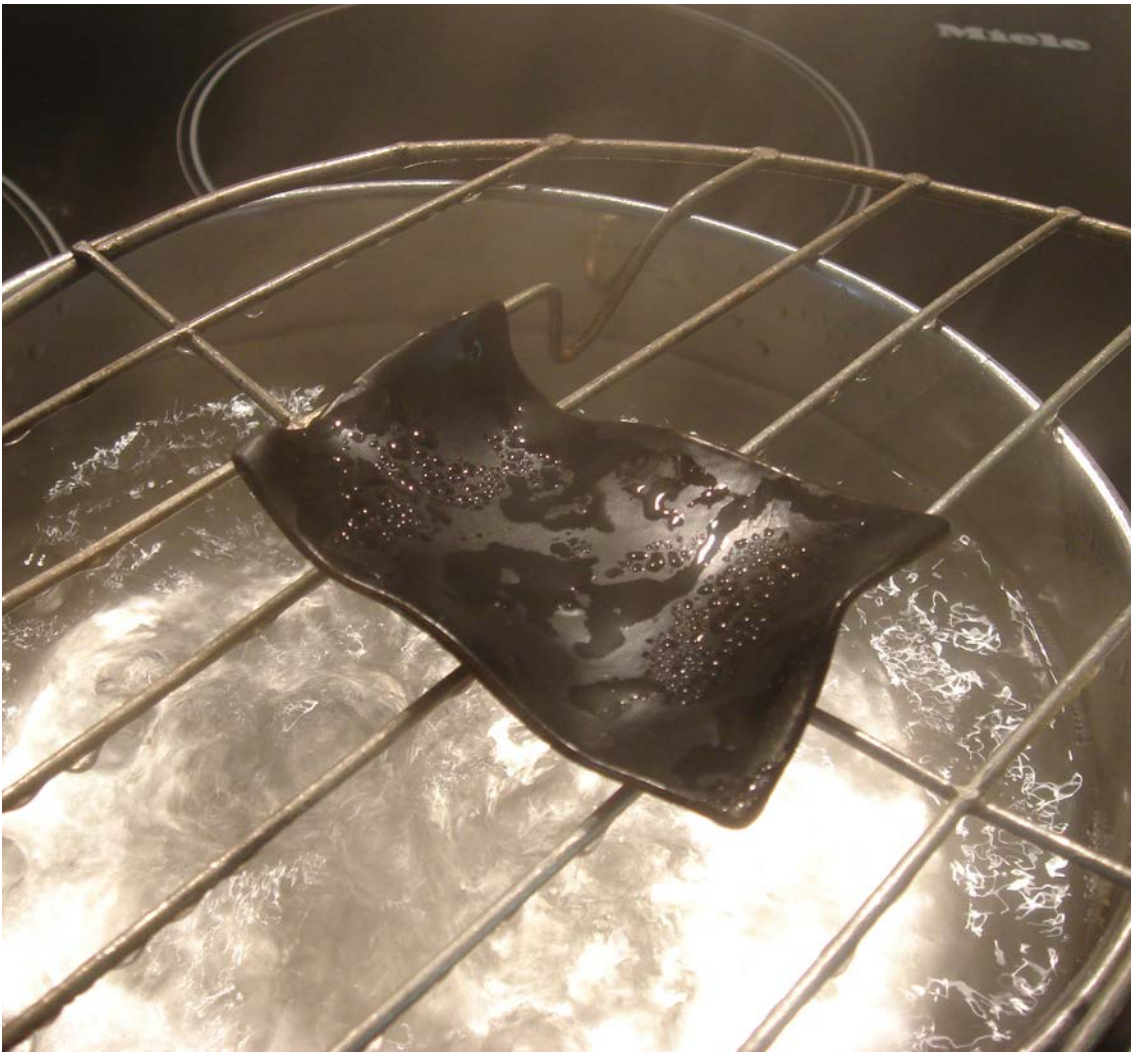


Figure 4.6 - Kelp sealant test – Trent Jansen, bull kelp and Feast Watson Spar Marine, 6 x 4cm, 2011.

Figure 4.7 - *George Briggs* model – Trent Jansen and Rod Bamford, plaster and ABS, 23 x 24 x 15cm, 2011.

Dozens of sealants were tested before a food-safe option was found that could form an impermeable barrier to prevent seepage (Figure 4.6). The chosen sealant was applied using a technique close to that used by Japanese lacquer-wear artists, whereby several layers of lacquer were applied with a light sanding in between each coat. The resulting kelp components exhibited a layer of lacquer with extreme clarity and a glossy finish.

When analysed according to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Briggs Family Tea Service* exhibits relevant attributes in all three categories of *Style*, *Materiality* and *Making Techniques*. As such the *Briggs Family Tea Service*, according to the criteria established by this body of research, must be considered an example of contemporary Australian material culture, relevant to present-day Australians, and representative of some of the characteristics of contemporary Australian identity.

Upon reflection an obvious question arises – how Australian is the *Briggs Family Tea Service*? If this collection of objects were aligned with more of the sub-factors of the taxonomy, would these objects be more Australian? If a contemporary Australian designer were to design, using the taxonomy as a checklist of sorts, would the resulting artefact be more Australian than the *Briggs Family Tea Service* and other examples of contemporary objects designed in Australia?

## Make Do - Testing Material Culture Theory

Of the three factors covered by the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the third factor (*Making Techniques*) must be questioned immediately when considering its relevance to the contemporary Australian designer. The third factor postulates that the use of regionally unique making techniques contributes to artefacts that are stylistically unique when compared with those made using methods specific to other regions. However, there are very

few identifiable making techniques that remain unique to Australian makers in the twenty-first century. The majority of mainstream making techniques used in Australia are used in all parts of the world, and as a result these ubiquitous skills will not provide a unique influence for contemporary Australian artefacts.

Because of the ubiquitous nature of making techniques in Australia and around the globe, it is necessary to test whether a piece of material culture remains geographically unique when using these internationally ubiquitous making techniques, and therefore only adhering to two of the three factors covered in the taxonomy. To test this I have designed an object that combines the first two factors – *Style* and *Materiality*. This object adopts a stylistic and mechanical element widely used in colonial Australian bush furniture – the *wedge*. During this period, the wedge was commonly used in joinery to hold found objects such as logs in place. I have designed a re-creation of the easily constructed benches that were commonly made during this period by combining a found log and four wedges to provide a surface for sitting (Figure 4.9). The Australian materials used to construct this bench are Tasmanian oak and Wondabyne sandstone. An example of this style of furniture can be seen in the illustration of a gold miner's tent (Figure 4.8).

How will the relative Australian-ness of the resulting artefact be judged? Perhaps it is important to manufacture other similar artefacts that can offer a comparison, allowing the viewer to judge the relative Australian-ness of one artefact over another. As such, a second series of benches was constructed according to the making habits associated with working as a contemporary Australian designer (Figure 4.10). Components of these objects were made outside of Australia, making use of foreign materials (Chinese granite and New Zealand wool) and internationally ubiquitous making techniques (timber joinery, upholstery and stone carving). Does the construction of a quintessentially Australian form using uniquely Australian materials result in an object that is recognisable as Australian

by the average Australian? Is this artefact more recognisably Australian than those made in other parts of the world, using foreign materials? Given the combination of quintessentially Australian style and materials used in the design and construction of this artefact, and if it is possible to make an object that is recognisably Australian using two of the three primary factors of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, this object should be recognised as Australian.

As an extension of this bench, a collection of objects was designed, employing the same wedge mechanism. This collection has been entitled the *Make Do Collection* and includes the *Make Do Bench* (Figure 4.10), *Make Do Seat* (Figures 4.11 and 4.13) and *Make Do Coffee Table* (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.8 - Georg Griffiths and Carle James Norgan tent – Eugene von Guerard, pencil on paper, 1853.

Figure 4.9 - *Make Do Bench* – Trent Jansen, rendering, 2014.

### Make Do - Reflections

When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, as intended the *Make Do Bench* complies with two of the three factors of the taxonomy.

### Style

Under the *Style* factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Make Do Collection* aligns with one sub-factor in particular.

### Untameable Roughness

The *Make Do Collection* takes influence from the bush legend and the Colonial Australian bush furniture that was made by individuals who lived in the colonial period. Frontier Australians were coarse individuals who swore and drank heavily, they lived nomadically, surviving in harsh, isolated conditions, with little time for fuss or ostentation. When a functional structure or object was needed, they used their few skills and makeshift tools to assemble a solution in the simplest and fastest way possible.

Figure 4.10 - *Make Do Bench* – Trent Jansen, Chinese granite and New Zealand wool, 240 x 48 x 45cm, 2014.

The *Make Do Collection* has been designed to reflect the roughness of these individuals and their methods of assembly. This collection adopts a log in reference to the found natural materials used by frontier Australians in the construction of simple furniture and architectural structures, as well as stone chocks, referencing stones that were used as weights to hold lighter elements in place.

## Materiality

The *Make Do Collection* has been rendered and made in two combinations of materials. The first renderings to be developed depict these objects made from Tasmanian oak and Wondabyne sandstone, two uniquely Australian materials. As such these renderings depict a series of objects that comply with the *Materiality* factor of the taxonomy. On the other hand, the first objects in the *Make Do Collection* to be made were constructed using a combination of Chinese granite, New Zealand wool and Tasmanian oak. As a result, these objects do not fully comply with the *Materiality* factor of the taxonomy.

160

Figure 4.11 - *Make Do Seat* – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian oak, Chinese granite and New Zealand wool, 240 x 54 x 78cm, 2014.



Figure 4.12 - *Make Do Coffee Table* – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian oak, Chinese granite and New Zealand wool, 150 x 100 x 40cm, 2014.

Figure 4.13 - *Make Do Seat* – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian oak, Chinese granite and New Zealand wool, 240 x 54 x 78cm, 2014.

## Making Techniques

The *Make Do Collection* adopts construction techniques that were used by frontier Australians in the construction of Colonial Australian bush furniture. However, the simple construction techniques used by frontier Australians to make this furniture are now commonplace, adopted by makers from all parts of the world. These making techniques are not uniquely Australian and, as such, the implementation of these historically relevant methods does not contribute to the relative uniqueness of the *Make Do Collection*. As intended, this use of technique does not conform to the *Making Techniques* factor of the taxonomy.

## General Reflections

Upon further observation of the *Make Do Collection* of objects, designed to test the three factors of the taxonomy, the *Make Do Bench*, made from Australian timber and sandstone, is perceptibly more Australian than the same object, made using Chinese granite and New Zealand wool. This may be because of the specifically Australian materials used to craft this object, but there are other unexpected but relevant observations to be made about this object. It seems that the Australian aesthetic of the sandstone and Tasmanian oak *Make Do Bench* (Figure 4.9) is enhanced by the exposed end grain and unprocessed nature of the log, when compared with the refined upholstery of the bench made using Chinese granite and New Zealand wool (Figure 4.10). The roughness of the first bench (Figure 4.9), when compared with the second (Figure 4.10), contributes significantly to its perceptibly Australian aesthetic. These perceptions of the object are subjective (see *Limitations*, page 17); however, when referenced against the taxonomy, this rough aesthetic aligns with the *Style* sub-factor of *Untamable Roughness*. This observation questions the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, suggesting that it is not simply important for an Australian artefact to be made from Australian materials, using making techniques that are geographically specific to Australia. It may also be important for the aesthetic nature of the material, given shape by an

adopted making technique, to align with one of the taxonomy's *Style* sub-factors.

Another observation arising from reflection on the *Make Do Collection*, not aligned with the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, is the importance of familiarity in the chosen form. This form was chosen because of its stylistic reference to Colonial Australian bush furniture (see page 82) and to the frontier lifestyle associated with the bush legend (see page 109), but this form is also a familiar entity within some portions of contemporary Australian society. The *Make Do Bench* is reminiscent of objects, often combining a log with concrete chocks, which can be seen in bush and beach-side car parks throughout Australia, as well as along the edges of school playgrounds. For some individuals, this familiarity brings an element of nostalgia to the way that the *Make Do Bench* is perceived, through its associations with these places of childhood education and recreation.

Both of these observations highlight the perceptibly Australian aesthetic of the *Make Do Collection*, and bring previously unacknowledged facets of Australian object making and Australian identity to this research. In particular, a rough material and adopted making technique may be important in the manufacture of these objects, or in the way that subsequent objects are designed and realised. For example, the clear glass top used on the *Make Do Coffee Table* (Figure 4.12) is a very refined element. In future iterations this clear glass might be replaced with smoked glass that is pierced by the stone components. This possible evolution bares obvious reference to the quintessential Australian campfire, and would see this piece develop in line with the roughness that is synonymous with an Australian aesthetic and Australian identity more generally.

### Make Do – Conclusions

Upon final consideration of these observations, the *Make Do Collection* rendered

in Australian materials is perceived as being somewhat Australian, certainly more Australian than the collection that was constructed using a mixture of foreign and Australian materials. Therefore an object that complies with the *Style* and *Materiality* factors of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture* but not the *Making Techniques* factor can still be perceivably Australian. By extension, this result suggests that it must be possible for a designer to create new Australian material culture using the *Style* and *Materiality* factors, while neglecting the *Making Techniques* factor.

However, in the case of the *Make Do Bench* rendered in Australian materials, it seems that the perceived rough finish of the material, potentially created through a combination of materiality and a chosen making technique, has contributed to the Australian-ness of the rendered object. This analysis is subjective, as discussed in the *Limitations* section in Chapter One (see page 17). However, this evaluation suggests that a making technique does not necessarily have to be geographically unique, or an evolution of an existing technique. Conversely, a making technique may be linked to one of the *Style* sub-factors and contribute to a piece of material culture that is perceptibly Australian.

## Australian Mythical Creatures

The creature myths that united Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians during the early years of colonisation were culturally inclusive myths. Can these myths form a component of the network of narratives that are disseminated to the broader Australian community, and contribute to the building of an inclusive national identity? Some of the practice-based outcomes of this research are a series of furniture objects designed to bring the stories of three such Australian mythical creatures to an Australian audience.

As discussed in the *Make Do – Reflections* section of this chapter (see page 159),

the aesthetic roughness of an object contributes to a feeling of Australian-ness in the object. This roughness is also a sub-factor in the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*. As such, a roughness of aesthetic will be explored as an important design characteristic in the development of these creature objects. The creature myths to be explored through design practice are those relating to the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay*, *Bunyip* and *Pankalangu* (see *Hybrid Colonial/Indigenous Australian Mythology*, page 127).

### Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Bed and Chaise Lounge

There are few recorded sightings of the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, but in those few it is described as an imposing creature that carries a thigh bone in one mitt and a club in the other (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). In developing designed interpretations of this large Australian mythical creature, a furniture typology was selected according to its comparative scale to the creature in question. As such, the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay has been interpreted as a bed. As the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay is an Australian native creature, the designed characteristics of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* (Figure 4.14) have been borrowed from documented Australian animals, with physical attributes selected to communicate the *hairy* and *wild* descriptors associated with this creature.

The *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* combines the soft midsection of a wombat, the hairy ears of a koala, the leathery skin of a goanna, and the long splintery hair of the Tussock moth caterpillar. The design for this bed was taken through many sketched iterations in order to evoke the specific hybrid nature of this creature in an object that resembled a large, wild beast. A computer-generated rendering of the final iteration was developed (Figure 4.14), but given the size and complexity of this object, it is uncertain as to whether this object will ever be physically made.

The *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* is influenced by Australian animals

including the wombat, koala, goanna and Tussock moth caterpillar, but this creature myth evolved in the folklore of the British, before the colonists arrived in Australia, and before the vast majority of them would have heard of or seen any of these native Australian creatures. In its subsequent interpretation, the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* (Figure 4.17), the development of the design took influence from its birth in the minds of Europeans. The pre-colonial image of this creature is essentially one that combined the characteristics of known European creatures – a large humanoid form covered in the long hair of a bear or sheep (Figure 2.40). As such, a European pelt was adopted as the base material, representing the skin of the beast. The European animal with the longest hair is the Icelandic sheep (Figure 4.15), and the pelt of this creature has been employed to create a long-haired foundation for the belly of the creature. Finally, the top surface of the chaise was upholstered using textural black leather, with strong remnants of pores and skin creases, providing a recognisable animal/creature association.
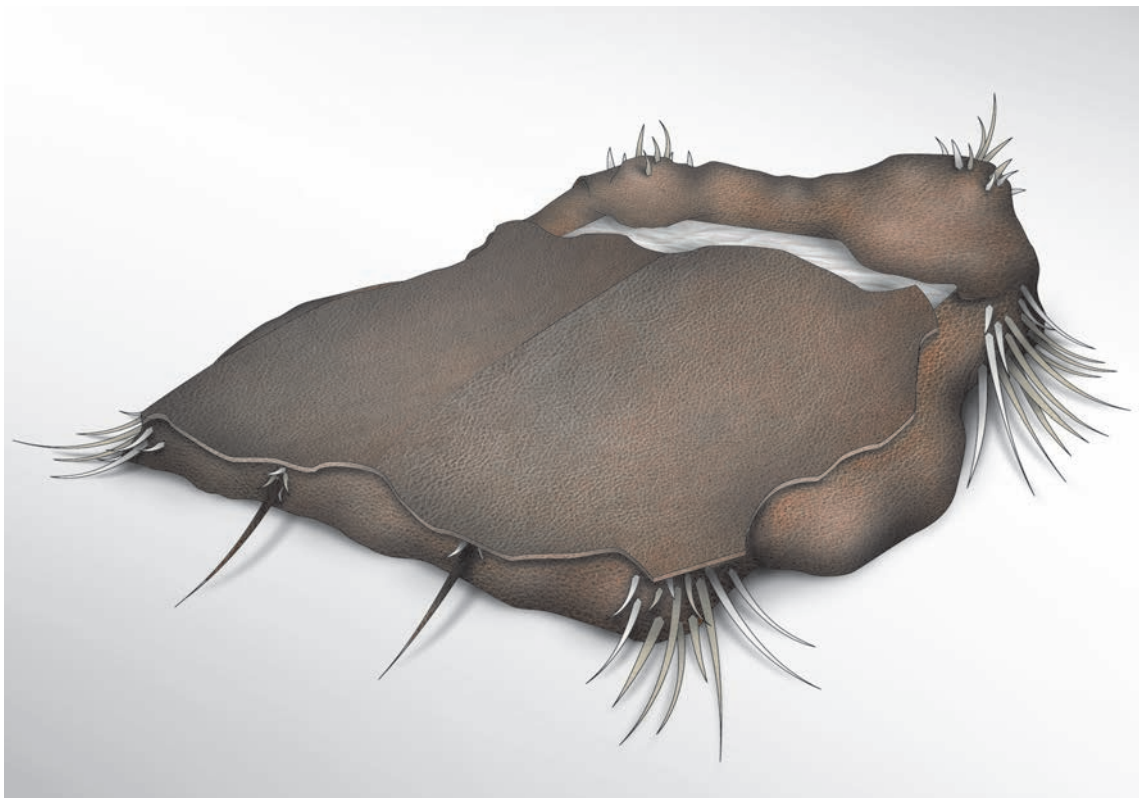


Figure 4.14 - *Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Bed* – Trent Jansen, computer generated rendering, 2014.

Figure 4.15 - Icelandic sheep – Thomas Quine, photograph, 2007.

As a hybrid creature, the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* must also take influence from a native Australian creature – in this case, the Tussock moth caterpillar (Figure 4.42). The spiky texture of this caterpillar inspired the leather bristles (Figure 4.16) that line the belly of the chaise. Multiple iterations of these bristles were developed in order to achieve the correct curve, length and splay, so to create a dense, wild thicket of bristles on the belly of the creature. The first iterations of these bristles were made from Australian vegetable-tanned buffalo leather, cut by hand and machine-sewn. These early iterations were scored, in order to allow the bristle to open and curve, and they were sewn with a copper-coloured thread. Testing was conducted in order to bring structure to the bristles, and to open up the two sides of each component, giving it breadth. For instance,

168

experiments with water and heat were conducted in order to open up the two sides of the bristle and to hold the leather in position. However, the most effective forming method was manipulation by hand, without water or heat.

As will be discussed on page 183, many Central Australian creatures combine a camouflaged outer skin with hidden iridescent features. Thus, a later iteration of the design included a metallic copper thread on the underside of the bristles. This metallic copper stitching was designed to emulate this characteristic, hiding a reflective metallic feature on the underside of the bristle, so that it is only visible from certain points of view. This glistening underside was also adopted to bring about a further element of hybridity in the characteristics of this creature, and as a point of synergy with other pieces designed as part of the *Monsters Collection*. Upon consideration of this detail en masse, the metallic copper stitching was found to detract from the depth of shadow between bristles, and was replaced by black stitching in the final object.



Figure 4.16 - *Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* bristle test – Trent Jansen, vegetable tanned buffalo leather, 19 x 4 x 3cm, 2016.

The body of the animal is constructed from a perforated plywood carcass, covered in Icelandic sheepskin. The bristles are then attached to synthetic cord and applied by inserting this chord through the sheepskin and perforated carcass; the cord is then tied off on the frame of the object. After all 1000 bristles are attached, the top surface is upholstered with several layers of polyurethane foam and the final skin of leather.



Figure 4.17 - *Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* – Trent Jansen, icelandic sheep skin, leather, plywood, polyurethane foam, tasmanian oak, stainless steel and synthetic cord, 41 x 145 x 70cm, 2017.

Figure 4.18 - *Hairy WIld Man From Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* – Trent Jansen,
icelandic sheep skin, leather, plywood, polyurethane foam, tasmanian oak, stainless
steel and synthetic cord, 41 x 145 x 70cm, 2017.

## Bunyip Sofa and Armchair

The bunyip is generally described as a large creature that dwells in swamps and billabongs, and is often said to possess hybrid features – some say that it is half bird and half reptile, while others say that it is a combination of a reptile and a mammal, and so on (Barrett 1946). Similarly to the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge*, in developing designed interpretations of the bunyip, a furniture typology was selected according to its comparative scale to the creature in question. As such, the bunyip has been interpreted as a sofa and large armchair.

The physical characteristics of the *Bunyip Sofa* (Figure 4.19) have been designed according to the documented hybridity of this creature, taking particular influence from uniquely Australian monotremes. The *Bunyip Sofa* takes specific formal inspiration from hybrid creatures including: the platypus, which lays eggs and swims like a reptile, has the bill and webbed feet of a duck, and the fur coat and parenting habits of a mammal; the echidna, which lays eggs like a reptile, but suckles its young like a marsupial and is covered in fur like a mammal; and the emu, which is not technically a hybrid creature, but possesses the characteristics of two disparate species – the emu has the physical features of a bird, but runs at speeds usually associated with land mammals.

Upon reflection, the first design of the *Bunyip Sofa* successfully resembled a large, ambiguous creature, but this first design iteration lacked some of the characteristics identified in the research. Specifically, the bunyip is described as a hybrid bird, reptile and mammal. This first iteration used the scales of a reptile as a decorative motif on the large leathery body of a mammal, and while the scales were designed to be something of a hybrid between an emu feather and a scale, they are more recognisable as a scale than a feather (Figure 4.20).

Furthermore, while the repetition of the scale at varying sizes went some way to
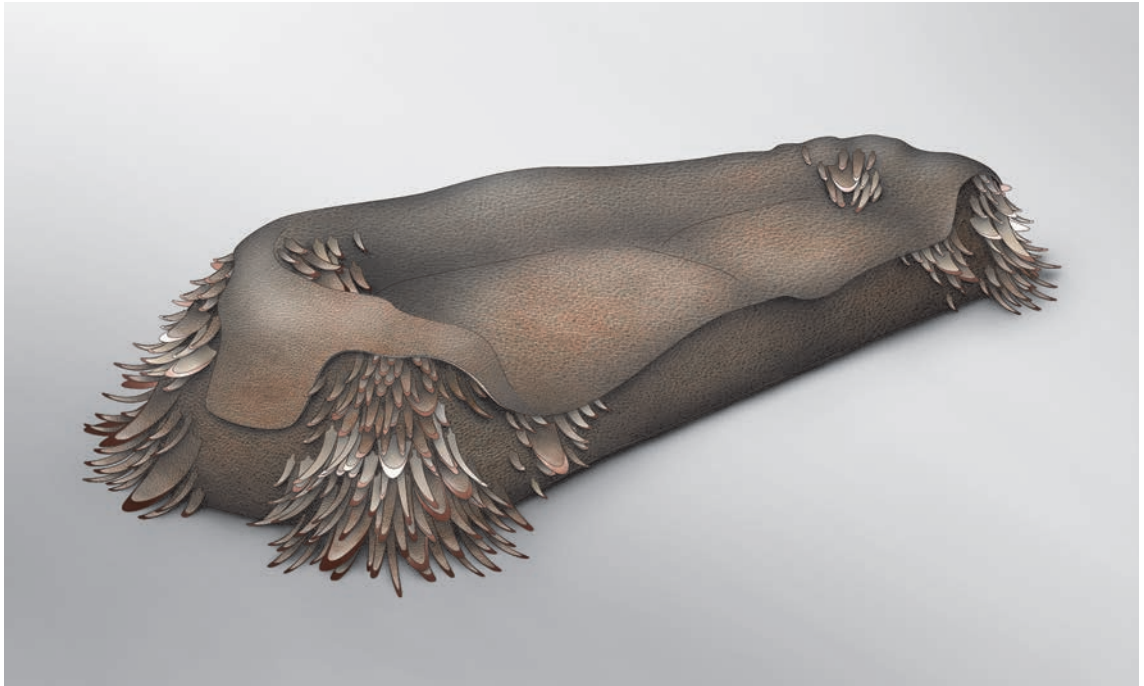
Figure 4.19 - *Bunyip Sofa* – Trent Jansen, computer generated rendering, 2013.

providing the feeling of roughness associated with Australian-ness, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the refined nature of each scale softened this roughness. As such, it was determined that, while the body of this first *Bunyip Sofa* iteration was communicating the concept well, the scale/feather elements required development.

The bunyip scale underwent design developments in order that it would: more closely resemble a feather; emphasise the hybrid nature of this creature; and enhance the aesthetic roughness of the overall object. Both synthetic (Figure 4.21) and natural animal furs (Figure 4.22) were trialled in conjunction with reptile skins (Figure 4.21 and 4.22) in order to experiment with the benefits of creating a hybrid scale/feather from hybrid animal skins. It was determined that the use of sea-snake skin, in conjunction with wallaby pelt, gave a particularly strange but beautiful result: strange because these two materials were so heavily contrasting in their colour and texture, and also because this iteration combined the skins of two disparate animals; and beautiful because this disparity was unexpected and somewhat poetic, and also because the colours and textures of these incongruent

materials combined in an aesthetically appealing manner. These materials were positioned so that the hair of the wallaby pelt resembled the grain direction of vanes found in a feather, and the sea-snake skin overlaid the pelt to create a flat, scalloped section resembling the plate of a scale. The result was a truly hybrid decorative motif.



Figure 4.20 - Bunyip scale test – Trent Jansen, leather, 20 x 11 x 1cm, 2013.

Upon further reflection, and upon consideration of such a visually complex element being repeated en masse across the surface of the sofa, it was decided that a simpler scale/feather was needed in order to achieve the desired aesthetic. It was also clear that a hard scale, made from brass, did not have the soft tactility that is usually associated with a sofa, and that a softer alternative should be developed. In the final redesign of the scale/feather for the *Bunyip Sofa*, many of the structural elements of previous scales (Figure 4.21 and 4.22) were adopted. However, the

aesthetic was simplified, and experiments were made with the creation of a scale that would feel soft to touch, while maintaining the structural integrity required both to appear pert and to withstand the physical demands of everyday use. This final scale (Figure 4.23) maintained the use of wallaby pelt as a visual reference to the grain direction of vanes in a feather, and as a way of bringing an aesthetic roughness to this component. This final iteration uses a powder-coated aluminium spine, which twists to provide tensile structure to each scale/feather. The final scale/feather is visually uncomplicated, allowing for its repetition en masse across the surface of the *Bunyip Sofa*. In addition, the final scale/feather maintains a visual roughness while still being soft to the touch – a tactile skin to the exterior surfaces of this creature object.



Figure 4.21 - Bunyip scale/feather test – Trent Jansen – leather, synthetic fur, leather and sea snake skin, 12 x 8 x 1cm, 2015.

Figure 4.22 - Bunyip scale/feather test – Trent Jansen – copper, wallaby fur, leather and sea snake skin, 12 x 8 x 1cm, 2015.



Figure 4.23 - Bunyip scale/feather test – Trent Jansen – Aluminium, wallaby fur and leather, 16 x 12 x 3cm, 2015.

While a great deal of time was spent experimenting through many iterations of the *Bunyip Sofa* and its componentry, none of these iterations culminated in a resolved outcome. Due to this lack of refinement, as well as the size and complexity of this object, it is uncertain as to whether it will ever be physically made.

A second version of the bunyip was designed under unexpected circumstances in April 2016. When presented with the evolutions of the *Bunyip Sofa* at the *Salone Internazionale del Mobile* in Milan, Valerio Mazzei and Leonardo Volpi – respectively the *President* of and *product developer* for Italian manufacturing house *Edra* – provided some creative direction for the piece. This direction was simple but profound; they asked me to consider this object in a singular way. Instead of creating complex textures with thousands of multifaceted components, they asked me to consider this as an object that distills one visual feature into a resolved form. Overnight the design of the *Bunyip Armchair* was developed through sketching (Figure 4.26 and 4.28) and reflecting on one hybrid creature in particular – the emu.

The emu was such a strong influence on the development of this object that an image of an emu (Figure 4.27) became the main point of discussion in meetings the following day. The *Bunyip Armchair* takes formal inspiration from the emu, the mound-like form of the object emulating the body of this large bird while it sleeps. As with the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, the bunyip is a hybrid creature – it grew from a linguistic misunderstanding between the British and Indigenous Australians, and evolved within both communities during the early decades of the colony of New South Wales. As such, designed interpretation of this creature should, as with the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Chaise Lounge*, take influence from both Australian and non-Australian creatures. The *Bunyip Armchair* takes textural influence from exotic mammals known to Europeans at the time of Australia's colonisation – its long, hairy coat is inspired by that of the Himalayan yak. Lastly, another element of Australian fauna is added to this fusion

Figure 4.24 - *Bunyip Sofa* test – Trent Jansen – Polyurethane foam, upholstery leather, plywood, pine, copper, aluminium, leather, wallaby fur and kangaroo fur, 2016.

Figure 4.25 - Bunyip scale/feather tests – Trent Jansen, various materials, various sizes, 2013-2015.

Figure 4.26 - *Bunyip Armchair* – Trent Jansen, pen on paper, 12 x 9cm, 2016.



Figure 4.27 - Emu – Unknown author, photograph.

of influences, the colour scheme adopted for the long fur coat of this creature was inspired by the red, dark brown and grey tones of a wallaby.

The intended function of this object was also influenced by the characteristics of Australian fauna; more specifically, the function of this object has been informed by the camouflaging texture and colour of many Australian animals. Just as the coat or skin of a wallaby or gecko enables it to blend into its environment, the fabrication and materiality of the *Bunyip Sofa* hides the function of the object. This piece is constructed by combining differing densities of memory foam, from very firm to very soft, creating sections of dense structure and soft cavity within the form of the armchair. The entire object is then upholstered using very long synthetic fur on an elasticised substrate. The resulting form is a hairy mound, similar in shape to that of a sleeping emu (Figure 4.27), with no apparent function.
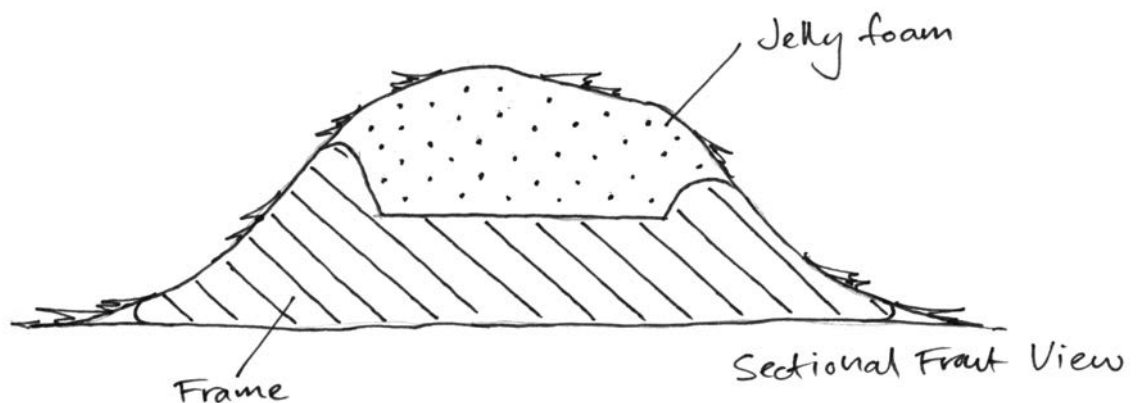


Figure 4.28 - *Bunyip Armchair* section – Trent Jansen, pen on paper, 12 x 9cm, 2016.

Figure 4.29 - *Bunyip Armchair* prototype – Leonardo Volpi, timber, polyurethane foam, wool and textile, 280 x 170 x 100cm, 2016.

However, when the user sits into this mound in a specific positions, the soft foam condenses and lowers the user down into a hidden seating position, which is supported by sections of denser foam.

When the user rises out of the armchair, the soft foam again fills with air, slowly expanding to its original mound-like shape, once again camouflaging the function of the object. Mazzei and Volpi liked the new *Bunyip Armchair* very much and agreed to begin prototyping this piece in their factory in Perignano, Tuscany.

### Pankalangu Collection

Lastly, the pankalangu is described by Baden Williams as a territorial creature that lives in the scrub and is totally camouflaged in the desert and bush. It is said that the pankalangu moves with the rain, only becoming visible when the sun or

182

moonlight catches the rain droplets that falls over its body, highlighting its form in a glistening silhouette (Jansen 2014).

The design of the *Pankalangu Collection* was informed by the description of the pankalangu as a camouflaged creature. This collection takes specific formal inspiration from those documented Australian native creatures found in the same region as the pankalangu (Central Australia), that are known to be camouflaged in the desert and bush, but have an iridescent feature that is highly visible when caught by the light. These light-catching iridescent features correspond with the rainwater that runs over the pankalangu's body, catching the light and defining its silhouette. The *Pankalangu Collection* takes formal inspiration from: Oedipoda caerulescens, locusts that are commonly found in Central Australia (Figure 4.31), which have an ochre-coloured, camouflaged exterior, masking a pair of beautifully iridescent blue wings; and the perente, which is also camouflaged by its desert-brown scales, but which exposes a shimmering lilac tongue when it opens its mouth to taste the air.

The first experiment in creating an object that would represent the pankalangu took direct influence from both the locust and perente, exploring surface details that combined an ochre-coloured exterior with an iridescent interior. These first experiments saw the development of a surface treatment with three-dimensional scale/wing-shaped elements that protruded from the surface. It was envisaged that these protruding shapes would cover the body of the pankalangu, as a reference to the way in which this creature only becomes visible when raindrops, falling over its form, reflect the light and highlight its shape. Crescent-shaped scales/wings were cut from Queensland walnut veneer, and were designed to curl up over time as the veneer dried, exposing an iridescent blue under scale/wing that would catch the light in a similar way to water. In the testing process, it was determined that these scale/wing details did not curl enough to noticeably expose the iridescent colour
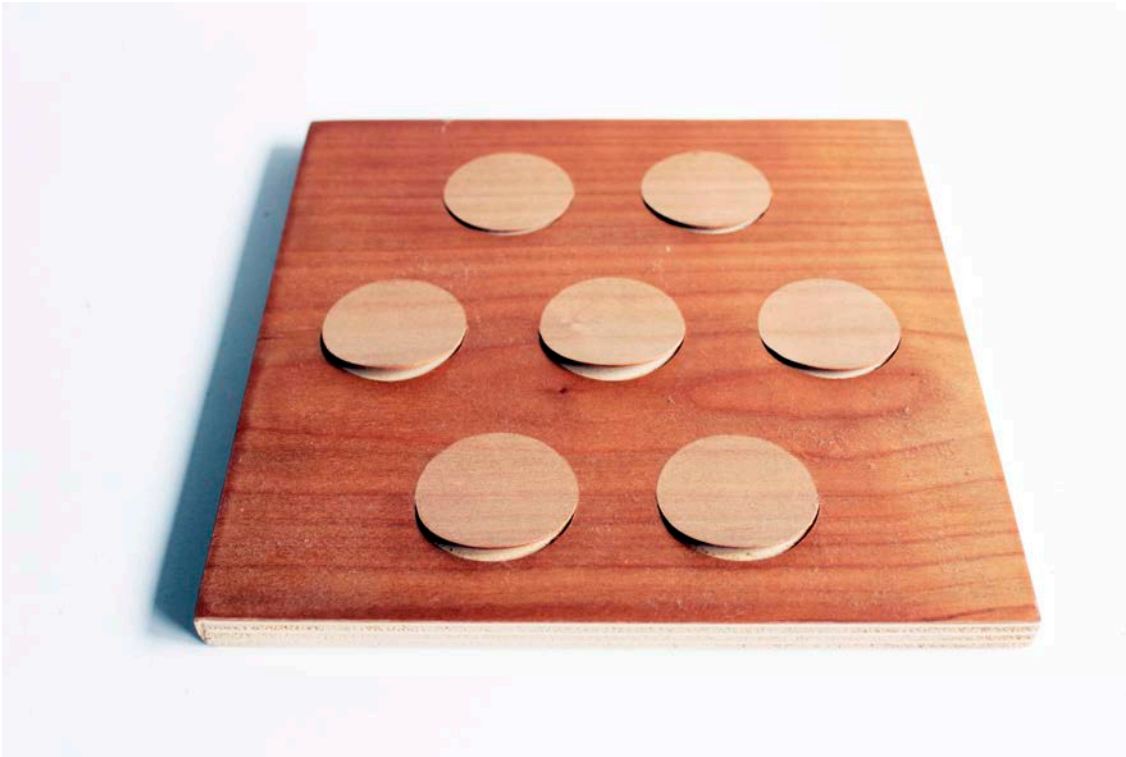
Figure 4.30 - Three dimensional marquetry test – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian oak and enamel paint, 25 x 25cm, 2010.

underneath, and that the drying process left the thin veneer susceptible to breakage (Figure 4.30).

A second round of testing replaced the veneer under scale/wing with a painted blue aluminium component (Figure 4.32). This aluminium element was strong enough to force the upper veneer layer to curl, and gave the surface treatment the strength needed for everyday use. The blue under scales/wings did reference the iridescent colouration of the locust and perente, and were able to catch the light in a way that was somewhat relevant to the pankalangu story, but the painted blue surface did not reflect light in the manner of water. Further testing replaced the blue aluminium under scale/wing with copper (Figure 4.33) in an endeavour to explore a less overt reference to the colouration of the locust and perente. Copper was also adopted because of its subtle reflective qualities, emulating the way that light reflects off water in the pankalangu story.
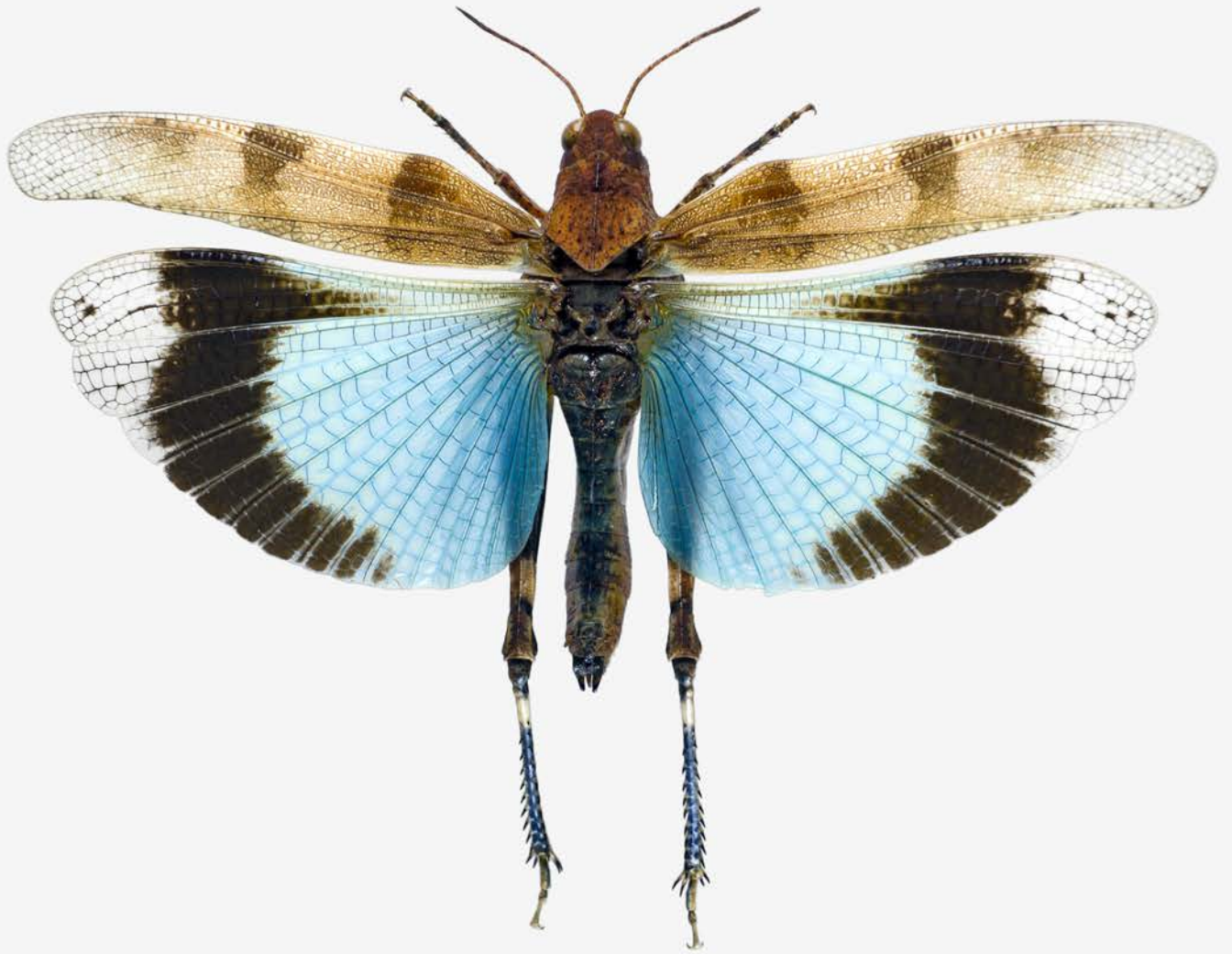
Figure 4.31 - *Oedipoda caerulescens* – Didier Descouens, digital photograph, 2011.

Figure 4.32 - Pankalangu test – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut and aluminium, 30 x 30cm, 2013.



Figure 4.33 - Pankalangu test – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut and copper, 30 x 30cm, 2013.

Further experimentation exposed an interest in employing another material on the upper scale/wing. It was important that this second material referenced the camouflaged nature of the pankalangu in the same way that the ochre-coloured Queensland walnut had in previous tests. Wallaby pelt was chosen as a material that would offer this camouflaging colouration, while providing a new exterior texture for the pankalangu surface treatment.



Figure 4.34 - *Pankalangu Wardrobe* – Tom Fereday, computer generated rendering, 2013.

While these surface tests were conducted, the scale and form of the objects within the *Pankalangu Collection* were considered. The pankalangu story from Central Australia does not provide any details pertaining to the size of the pankalangu. Subsequently, this creature was interpreted at three scales – a small object (side table), a medium-sized object (arm chair) and a large object (wardrobe).

The *Pankalangu Wardrobe* (Figure 4.36) was first to be considered. This object was interpreted as a towering creature that is camouflaged from certain vantage points; as the viewer moves around the object, light catches the copper under scales/wings and highlights the swelling form of this large piece of furniture. The *Pankalangu Armchair* (Figure 4.40) was interpreted as a moth-like creature, with thin legs and a hairy body. Once again, from certain vantage points, the copper scales/wings are hidden from view, but from others the silhouette of the chair sparkles, as the



Figure 4.35 - *Pankalangu Armchair* – Trent Jansen, computer generated rendering, 2013.
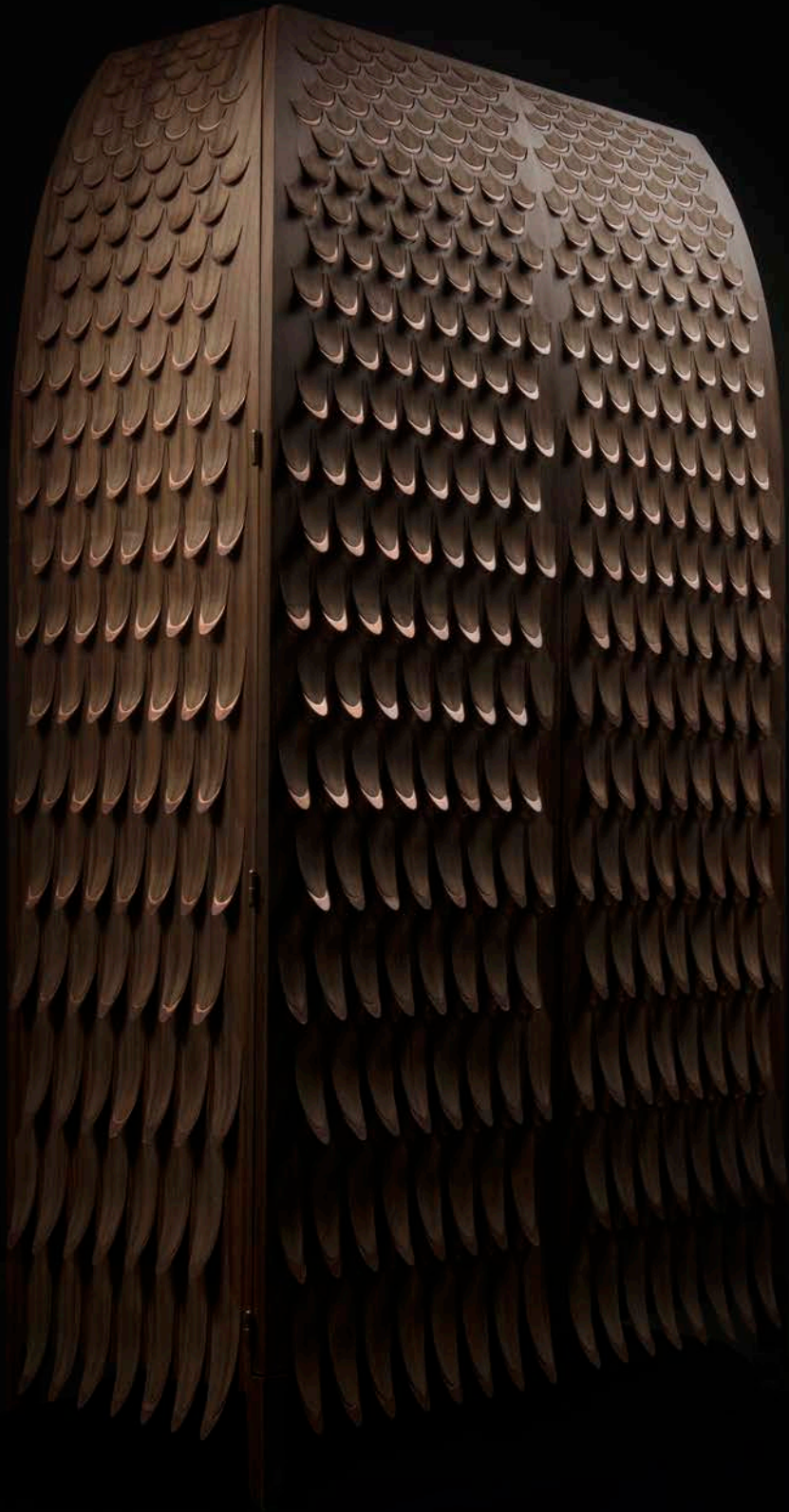
Figure 4.36 - *Pankalangu Wardrobe* – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut, copper, brass and molded plywood, 210 x 120 x 57cm, 2017.

Figure 4.37 - *Pankalangu Wardrobe* – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut, copper, brass and molded plywood, 210 x 120 x 57cm, 2017.

Figure 4.38 - *Pankalangu Wardrobe* – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut, copper, brass and molded plywood, 210 x 120 x 57cm, 2017.

Figure 4.39 - *Pankalangu Side Table* – Trent Jansen, Queensland walnut, copper, brass and molded plywood, 40 x 43 x 35cm, 2017.

Figure 4.40 - *Pankalangu Armchair* – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian wallaby pelt, plywood, copper, stainless steel, Austrian leather, polyurethane foam and PVC, 80 x 77 x 73cm, 2017.

Figure 4.41 - *Pankalangu Armchair* – Trent Jansen, Tasmanian wallaby pelt, plywood, copper, stainless steel, Austrian leather, polyurethane foam and PVC, 80 x 77 x 73cm, 2017.

copper under scales/wings are caught by the light. Lastly, the *Pankalangu Side Table* (Figure 4.39) takes on a form that is similar to that of the wardrobe, only smaller. This object functions in a similar manner to the wardrobe, but features small brass wheels and a large drawer, reminiscent of a huge mouth. The *Pankalangu Side Table* looks so tough it might roll up to you and bite your ankles.

The resulting *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, Bunyip* and *Pankalangu Collections* are all both functional objects and creatures. They are not designed to literally resemble creatures, nor are they created within the usual parameters of furniture design. Instead these objects subtly represent both influences simultaneously, as objects that communicate an important national narrative in an engaging and visceral manner, while serving as functional furniture pieces.

## Australian Mythical Creatures - Reflections

### Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Bed and Chaise Lounge

Before critiquing the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, it is important to acknowledge that this object has not been made, and it is not intended that this object will be made. This would be a large, bespoke object, and the financial costs associated with making this piece are too great at this point in time. As such, any reflections made on this object will be reflections on the concept and its associated computer-generated visualisation (Figure 4.14), and not the physical object.

When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* comply with all three factors of the taxonomy – *Style, Materiality* and *Making Techniques*.

### Style

Under the *Style* factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian*

*Material Culture*, the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* align with several sub-factors.

### Fear of Open Country

The *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* are inspired by a myth that first began in England before the First Fleet had left British shores, bound for Botany Bay. At this time Australia was seen as an imaginary world, occupied by unimaginable creatures and these exotic tales captured the imaginations of British people. The exotic nature of this new land was so extreme to the average Briton that a new fearful creature, the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, was invented to accompany this exoticism (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). This myth perpetuated the fear and trepidation associated with travelling to the other side of the globe and settling on a continent whose native inhabitants, plants and animals were completely different to those at home. This fear of Australia was a fear of the unknown, directly related to the *Fear of Open Country* that is part of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*.

### Untameable Roughness and Australian Flora and Fauna

The naming of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bad Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* immediately suggests creature interpretations that are untameable, the word *wild* in the titles being synonymous with this sub-factor. The design of this bed and chaise took purposeful influence from documented Australian fauna that are either wild in nature or aesthetic, although some of these creatures are more perceivably wild than others. All of the creatures that have influenced the design of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge*, excluding the Icelandic sheep, are technically wild – the wombat, koala, goanna and tussock moth caterpillar are not generally tamed or held in captivity. However, some of these creatures are more readily characterised as being wild, or as having a wild appearance.

The koala, a docile creature, is not generally considered to be wild or crazed in a manner that might be associated with a creature like the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay. However, the ears of a koala are covered in long, wild hair that have provided influence for the spindly components that extend from the head of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bed* and the underside of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Chaise Lounge*.

Conversely, the tussock moth caterpillar (Figure 4.42) is a creature with a truly wild appearance. This caterpillar is covered in long splintery hair, or *setae*, that is charged with toxins, and in the case of the native Australian tussock moth caterpillar, this setae is known to cause severe skin irritation (Costa 2006). The dense, unruly and somewhat dangerous setae of this caterpillar has inspired the form and concentration of the leather spikes that protrude from the corners of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and the underside of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Chaise Lounge*, adding to the untamed aesthetic of this object.



Figure 4.42 - Tussock moth caterpillar – John Horstman, photograph, 2013.

## Cultural Hybridity

There is an element of cultural hybridity to this myth. The Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay originated in Britain, but upon arriving in Australia, colonial people learned of a local Aboriginal myth that was strikingly similar, that of the yahoo or yowie. In the eyes of colonial Australians, the existence of a similar myth within Aboriginal folklore legitimised this beast and made it all the more likely to be real. The Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, yahoo and yowie subsequently fused, becoming one bi-cultural myth.

## Materiality

As the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* has not been made, it is difficult to speak about the materiality of this object with any true conviction. It is, however, possible to speak about the material of this object in a speculative manner, and discuss the materials that would be used if the bed were to be made. On the other hand, the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Chaise Lounge* has been made, so the materials used in the construction of this object can be discussed in greater detail.

In order to comply fully with this factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, it is necessary for these objects to be made from as many materials originating in Australia as possible. Extensive research was conducted in order to find upholstery leather that was both made in Australia and of a high-enough quality to provide a beautiful and highly functional outcome. Unfortunately, no such upholstery leather is made in Australia, the most relevant leathers being grown and tanned in New Zealand, France and Germany. As such, the leather used to upholster the body of the bed and chaise cannot be an Australian material. The animal pelt used to line the underbelly of the chaise lounge has been chosen specifically because of its foreign origins. The foreign animal pelt that is applied to the chaise was chosen to communicate the European origins of this creature myth, and the Icelandic sheep is the European animal with

the longest hair.

The leather that is used to create the splintery hairs of the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge* needs to be of a stiffer, stronger quality than that used in the upholstery of the form. Leather with these qualities could not be sourced in Australia, and so a leather grown and tanned in New Zealand was used in the fabrication of these components. The timber used to make the frame and legs that support the upholstered surfaces of the bed and chaise is constructed using Australian-grown timbers.

As such, the resulting objects are made from some foreign materials and some materials originating in Australia, making this an object that partially complies with the *Materiality* factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*. This partial compliance is appropriate given the hybrid British origins and later Indigenous Australian confluence of this myth.

### Making Techniques

The *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* is essentially a large upholstered object. As upholstery is one of the many making techniques that have become readily available to designers from all corners of the globe, this is not, nor has it ever been, a specifically Australian making technique.

### Evolved Making Techniques

Mainstream upholstery may not be a specifically Australian making technique, but this mode of fabrication has been adopted in a novel way, evolving the technique beyond its usual method in order to provide an aesthetic for these objects that references the Australian fauna mentioned earlier in this chapter. Instead of simply covering foam in leather, this evolved upholstery process requires the leather skin of the object to be punctured with long leather bristles, that are then attached to

the frame underneath the upholstered surface. The result is a leather surface with long spikes of stiff leather protruding from the shell, emulating the hair of the tussock moth caterpillar. According to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, this evolution of technique contributes to the distinctive aesthetic of the object, and contributes to the overall Australian-ness of this object.

## Bunyip Sofa and Armchair

When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Bunyip Sofa* complies with all three factors of the taxonomy – *Style, Materiality* and *Making Techniques*.

## Style

Under the *Style* factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Bunyip Sofa* aligns with several sub-factors.

## Fear of Open Country

The *Bunyip Sofa* takes inspiration from a creature myth that was part of both Indigenous and colonial mythology in the early years of the colony. According to Holden, the bunyip came to represent the unknown of the Australian bush for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). This fear of the bush was a fear of the unknown, and was directly related to the *Fear of Open Country* that is part of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*.

## Untameable Roughness

The bunyip is a feared creature that lives in swamps and billabongs in the deepest corners of the bush. This is not a creature that can be tamed or domesticated; it is a wild, ungroomed beast that devours Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike

who enter its domain. The *Bunyip Sofa* has been developed to embody this wild character through the design of the body of the sofa, emulating the thick, folded skin of a large beast, and through the scales/feathers that engulf the surface of the sofa, using wallaby pelt to provide these components with a rough and unrefined profile. The *Bunyip Armchair* has similarly been designed to give shape to this wild myth, taking the form of a sleeping beast, covered in long, crazed hair.

### Australian Flora and Fauna

The bunyip is said to be a hybrid creature, combining the common features of mammals, reptiles and birds. Accordingly, the *Bunyip Sofa* has been designed to take formal influence from all three of these categorisations – the body of the sofa is designed to emulate the heavy, creased skin of a large mammal, while the scale/feather component uses marsupial skin to represent the grain direction seen in the vanes of a feather, and thick leather is used to denote the scale plates of a goanna. These disparate animal features combine to create a new animal whose features are reminiscent of many documented Australian creatures, resulting in an object that does not reference any one Australian animal directly, but feels inherently Australian nonetheless.

On the other hand, the *Bunyip Armchair* takes a more distilled approach to the creation of a new monotreme. The design of this object is a concerted attempt to develop a more refined hybridity between two disparate creatures, mixing the form of a sleeping emu with the long-haired pelt of a large, land-dwelling mammal. In its refinement, this object has not combined as many disparate characteristics as previous bunyip designs, but the result is a singular object that communicates the hybridity at the core of this myth in a distilled manner.

### Cultural Hybridity

As a creature myth, the bunyip evolved from the yahoo or yowie, an existing cross-

cultural myth discussed in Chapter Two (see page 129). The transformation of the yahoo into the bunyip was a cross-cultural evolution, whereby the yahoo provided a catalyst for conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with the word bunyip eventually resulting from a linguistic misunderstanding between Aboriginal people, who thought of it as an English word, and British settlers, who thought that it was a local term (Holden, Thomas et al. 2001). The bunyip was one of the first myths to evolve out of a shared British and Indigenous culture, and the word bunyip was one of the first bi-cultural Australian words.

## Materiality

As with the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, the *Bunyip Sofa* has not been made, and as such it is difficult to speak about the materiality of this object with any true conviction. It is, however, possible to speak about the material of this object in a speculative manner, and discuss the materials that would be used if the sofa were to be made.

In order to comply fully with this factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, it would be necessary for the *Bunyip Sofa* to be made from as many materials originating in Australia as possible. As with the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, extensive research was conducted in order to find upholstery leather that was both made in Australia, and of a high-enough quality to provide a beautiful and highly functional outcome. Again, no such upholstery leather is made in Australia, with the most relevant leathers being grown and tanned in New Zealand, France and Germany. As such, the leather used to upholster the body of the sofa is not an Australian material, and this element would not comply with the taxonomy.

Again, as with the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, the leather, wallaby pelt and kangaroo pelt that would be used to create the scales/feathers of the *Bunyip*

*Sofa* do not need to be of such a high quality as that used in the upholstery of the form. As such, Australian-grown and tanned leather and pelts can be sourced for the creation of these components. Similarly, the timber that would be used to make the frame that supports the upholstered surfaces of the bed could be made from Australian-grown timbers. The resulting sofa is one that would be made from some foreign materials and some materials that originate in Australia, making this an object that partially complies with the *Materiality factor of the Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*. As with the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge*, this partial compliance is appropriate given the hybrid British origins and Indigenous Australian confluence of this myth.

The *Bunyip Armchair* was not completed at the time of submission. As such it is not possible to know the nature of the final design, not is it possible to reflect on this design with any degree of accuracy.

## Making Techniques

Like the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, the *Bunyip Sofa* and *Armchair* are essentially large upholstered objects, and as suggested by the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, upholstery is a making techniques that is easily accessed by designers from most parts of the world. This is not, nor has it ever been, a specifically Australian making technique.

## Evolved Making Techniques

These objects have adopted mainstream upholstery in a novel way, evolving the technique beyond its usual method in order to provide an aesthetic that references the Australian fauna mentioned earlier in this chapter. Instead of simply covering foam in leather, the evolved upholstery process that would be used in the production of the *Bunyip Sofa* requires the leather skin of the object to be punctured, allowing the application of hundreds of leather scales/feathers,

which are then anchored to the frame underneath the upholstered surface. The result would be a leather surface with a highly textural plume of overlapping scales/feathers protruding from the shell, emulating the scales of a goanna or the feathers of an emu. According to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, this evolution of technique contributes to the distinctive aesthetic of the object, and contributes to the overall Australian-ness of this artefact.

Similarly, the *Bunyip Armchair* has adopted mainstream upholstery in a novel way. The upholstered surface of this object combines synthetic fur with an elasticised substrate, which is then applied to an object that combined sections of dense and extremely soft memory foam. These materials and making techniques combine to create a nondescript mound with a hidden seating position, whereby the user must sit into the soft back of the creature in order to be embraced by the chair within. According to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, this evolution of technique contributes to the distinctive aesthetic of the object, but unlike the *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed* and *Chaise Lounge*, these technical evolutions were not made in Australia. Given that this object was prototyped in Italy, and that these technical evolutions were Australian in design but Italian in implementation, can these evolutions contribute to the Australian-ness of this object?

In this case, the evolved making techniques used to make this object are cultural hybrids, realised as a result of the design and product development of individuals from two nations. As such, the *Bunyip Armchair* does not ratify the *Evolved Making Techniques* factor of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*. Given the mixed cultural origins of the bunyip (British and Indigenous Australian), and the Australian/Italian collaboration that developed and produced this design, perhaps it is appropriate to label this as an artefact of cultural hybridity.

## Pankalangu Collection

When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Pankalangu Collection* complies with all three factors of the taxonomy – *Style, Materiality* and *Making Techniques*.

## Style

Given that there is very little information published on the pankalangu, it is difficult to substantiate the alignment of this creature myth with the sub-factors of *Style*, but there are elements of this myth that suggest alignment of the *Pankalangu Collection* with several of these sub-factors.

## Fear of Open Country

In the small amount of information made available on the pankalangu, this Central Australian creature is described as a territorial being that is totally camouflaged in the desert and the bush. This description offers the suggestion that the pankalangu is capable of violence if an unwitting victim were to wander onto its land. Furthermore, this portrayal implies not only that the pankalangu is capable of protecting its domain, but that it is also a formidable adversary when challenged in its own territory, given that it is so well camouflaged in this environment. It follows that any individual in Central Australia, privy to this knowledge, would be fearful of open country, concerned that they might unknowingly wander onto pankalangu territory.

## Untameable Roughness

The pankalangu is an elusive creature that thrives in the heat and desolation of the Central Australian desert. Like the bunyip, this is not a creature that can be tamed or domesticated; on the other hand, this is a wild, ungroomed beast that is known to ferociously defend its territory against anyone who may enter. The *Pankalangu Collection* has been developed to embody elements of this wild and intimidating

character: the *Pankalangu Wardrobe* is designed with a towering stature, covered in scales/feathers that give this object the textured down of a wild creature; the *Pankalangu Armchair*, with its spidery legs and fur-covered scales/wings, is designed to resemble a stalking creature that might stealthily pursue an adversary; and the *Pankalangu Side Table*, with its large drawer and scaled/feathered surface, is designed to resemble a small feral creature that might hunt in a pack and make its attack on an antagonist's lower limbs.

## Australian Flora and Fauna

The three furniture pieces in the *Pankalangu Collection* take formal and conceptual inspiration from two animals commonly found in Central Australia – the locust and perente. The scales/wings that feature on each of the pankalangu furniture pieces reference the shape of the scales of a goanna, and the wing of a locust. These details also reference both animals in their colouration and patterning. Each scale/wing consists of a copper crescent concealed under either Queensland walnut or wallaby pelt, the copper component only becoming obvious when it catches the light. This detail was developed as a direct reference to the iridescent blue wing of the locust and the purple tongue of the perente, both body parts made strikingly obvious when caught by the light.

## Indigenous Australian Culture

Western Arrernte people, a community of Indigenous Australians from Central Australia, tell the pankalangu story that provides a foundation for the *Pankalangu Collection*. This story forms part of their culture, and therefore is a small component of Indigenous Australian culture more broadly.

## Materiality

When referenced against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Materiality* of the *Pankalangu Collection* yields mixed results.

The *Pankalangu Wardrobe* and *Side Table* are constructed using a number of materials, some of which can be sourced in Australia, and others of which cannot. The frames of both pieces are constructed from Australian-grown and manufactured, FSC-certified, hoop pine plywood. This material complies with the taxonomy and contributes to the Australian-ness of this object. On the other hand, the copper that is used in the skinning of the objects, as well as the brass used in the hinges and wheels, are not made in Australia – the brass being made in Italy, the hinges in Japan, and the wheels in India. Finally, the Queensland walnut used in the top layer of the surface detailing is an Australian native timber, conforming to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*. Significantly, Queensland walnut covers the vast majority of the exterior and interior surfaces of the wardrobe and side table. As such, this material is the most visible, giving the impression that these objects are largely constructed from Queensland walnut. In this case, the perception of materiality is in contrast with reality, resulting in objects that are observably made using a vast majority of Australian material. Given that the aesthetic of an object is largely shaped by its visual perception, and that the use of an Australian material in the construction of an object contributes to its Australian-ness, it follows that an object such as the *Pankalangu Wardrobe*, perceived as being made from Australian materials, will appear to be Australian.

When analysed against the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, the *Pankalangu Armchair* performs with similar results to the wardrobe and side table. This piece is also made from several materials, some of which can be sourced as Australian-made, and others that cannot. Again, the frame of the chair is made from Australian-grown and manufactured, FSC-certified, hoop pine plywood and, as with the wardrobe and side table, this complies with the taxonomy and contributes to the Australian-ness of the object. Conversely, the copper that is used to skin the underside of the armchair is made in Italy. As with the *Bunyip Sofa*, it was not possible to source high-quality Australian-

made upholstery leather to be used on the seat, and as such French leather was chosen for this element, not conforming to the taxonomy. Finally, the wallaby pelt that forms the final skin on the underside of the chair was grown and tanned in Tasmania, conforming to the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, and contributing to the Australian-ness of this object. Unlike in the *Pankalangu Wardrobe* and *Side Table*, the Australian material used to skin the *Pankalangu Armchair* is not visually dominant. The wallaby skin that encases the underside of the chair forms roughly half of the visible surface, with the other half being covered in French leather. As a result, this object partially conforms to the taxonomy, but the *Pankalangu Armchair* should have less of an Australian aesthetic than the wardrobe and side table.

## Making Techniques

As with the *Bunyip Sofa* and *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay Bed*, the *Pankalangu Collection* is created, in part, using standard making techniques. The *Pankalangu Wardrobe* and *Side Table* are made using typical timber joining methods, and the *Pankalangu Armchair* is constructed using a slot-joined, plywood frame in combination with welded and bolted stainless steel legs. The seating surface of the armchair is then upholstered using standard upholstery techniques. These making techniques are available to makers and designers from all parts of the world, they are not unique to Australia and, according to the taxonomy, they do not contribute to the Australian-ness of this series of objects.

## Evolved Making Techniques

On the other hand, there are elements of all three objects that conform to the taxonomy through the evolution of an existing technique into a new and unique method for making.

The *Pankalangu Wardrobe* and *Side Table* are characterised by the detailing that

covers the entire surface of both objects. This outer skin, designed to reference the wings of a locust and scales of a perente, is the innovative evolution of a decorative woodworking technique called *marquetry* (Figure 4.43). Marquetry employs timber veneer as surface decoration, whereby often intricate patterns are cut using a variety of veneer species in order to generate a pictorial surface detail. In the design of the *Pankalangu Wardrobe* and *Side Table*, a crescent-shaped detail has been cut with a computer numerical controlled router, creating incisions in a large panel of 0.9mm Queensland walnut veneer. In its application to the surface of the wardrobe and side table, this piece of veneer is laid precisely over a sheet of copper with accompanying computer numerical control router-cut incisions. The copper crescent shapes are then bent out by hand, creating what is essentially a three-dimensional, computer-cut evolution of marquetry.



Figure 4.43 – Example of marquetry – Dave Rose, unknown timbers, 2008.

The *Pankalangu Armchair* moves this technical evolution one step further. This piece replaces the layer of veneer, used in the wardrobe and side table, with a layer of wallaby pelt. Furthermore, the underside of the armchair is not a simple, single directional curve, like that of the wardrobe and side table, it is a compound curve – a curve that bends in more than one direction simultaneously. As such, the technique for making it needed to evolve further, in order to be applied to this complex surface. To allow for this curvature, while still using basic sheet-material construction, a faceted copper surface was created, with similar computer numerical control router-cut scale/wing details. An accompanying series of wallaby pelt pieces was then fixed to the surface of the copper sheet, bending with the sheet to create a second evolution of three-dimensional marquetry, replacing the timber veneer with wallaby pelt.

These making methods are the evolution of a traditional woodworking technique, using computer-aided cutting to offer a degree of precision and repeatability that cannot be achieved by hand. This evolution of technique conforms with the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, contributing to the uniqueness of these objects, as well as their perception as Australian material culture.

## General Reflections

At this point it is necessary to reflect upon a question posed in Chapter Two (see page 53). In this earlier chapter, Margaret Preston's criticism of craftspeople and designers who take influence from native flora and fauna was cited, and the question arose as to whether this practice could be reinvigorated by a contemporary designer and result in innovative design work. Does the furniture designed as part of this research deserve Preston's criticism, or has it explored these aesthetic themes in an innovative and contemporary way?

The *Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, Bunyip* and *Pankalangu Collections* are far removed from those examples of craft influenced by Australian native flora given in Chapter Two, which reference Australian native flora and fauna in a literal manner, often using direct depictions of these plants and animals to decorate the surfaces of furniture and crafted objects. The furniture pieces created as a part of this research mix subtle elements taken from the characteristics of Australian native animals linked to the specific story inspiring the design of each piece. These elements act as signs rather than full representations, and combine into a sort of language that acts as a visual allegory of the original story. Unlike the examples of Australian craft given in Chapter Two, these new furniture pieces do not simply recreate characteristics of Australian native flora and fauna, giving them form in a new material and applying them as surface adornment. These furniture objects are influenced by the characteristics of specific native animals, and these influences are exposed to extended design development and material experimentation in order to evolve these once clichéd characteristics into unique aesthetic elements. The resulting references still carry some of the core features of the original inspiration, but their aesthetic has evolved according to the sensibility of the designer.

One example of this process can be seen in the design of the scale/feather for the *Bunyip Sofa*. In the research material, the bunyip is often described as a hybrid between a bird and a reptile, among other categorisations. As such, the surface detailing on the sofa was designed as a hybrid of a feather and a scale. Inspiration was taken from emu feathers and duck feathers, as well as snake and crocodile scales, but the design of the scale/feather was taken through much iteration and material experimentation. As the feather evolved, its appearance diverged from that of any of the native animal feathers and scales that inspired the first iteration. The final scale/feather (Figure 4.23) does not resemble an emu or duck feather, nor does it resemble a snake or crocodile scale, but it does appear to be something of a cross between a feather and a scale, belonging to some Australian native creature, and as

such the final aesthetic is consistent with descriptions of the bunyip identified in the research.

## Australian Mythical Creatures - Conclusions and Enduring Questions

The pieces designed, rendered and made as part of the *Australian Mythical Creatures* component of this research comply with the three factors of the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, and as such should all be perceivably Australian. What remains unclear is which of the resulting furniture pieces is the most Australian, and why? Is the piece that conforms to the most *Style* taxonomic sub-factors the most Australian? In this case, all of the pieces created in this section of the research conform to four *Style* sub-factors, and should therefore be equally Australian. On the other hand, are some sub-factors of *Style* in the taxonomy more closely linked to Australian-ness than others? If this is the case, which sub-factors are the most Australian? Furthermore, as a result of the chosen research methodology and direction, this research has uncovered a limited number of *Style* sub-factors. What sub-factors have not been covered by this research, and are these neglected sub-factors more closely linked with Australian-ness?

The *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture* provides a method for designing new Australian material culture, but it does not allow the user to measure the Australian-ness of Australian material culture, or intentionally determine the degree of Australian-ness of designed artefacts.

## Conclusions

This thesis has sought to identify some of the ideas and experiences that shaped Australian artefacts and Australian identity more broadly, in order to aid the development of a speculative framework to assist in the design of quintessentially Australian objects. From the beginning, this research project has understood the complex and subjective nature of nationhood, and as such it has not aimed to

define Australian-ness definitively or objectively. Instead this thesis has sought to identify a range of important influences on Australian national identity and material culture, taking inspiration from those components of uniquely Australian culture that might resonate with a large percentage of Australians and others (e.g. tourists) interested in the idea of Australian-ness.

In order to discuss Australia, it was first necessary to establish a working definition for this term. Australia is firstly a 'geographical place defined by recognised borders' and a 'geopolitical territory governed by the Australian federal government', but more relevant to this research, Australia is an idea. Prior to British colonisation, the continent now known as Australia did not have a single name, instead it was divided into roughly 270 imprecise frontiers by its Indigenous Australian inhabitants. The continent as a whole did not gain a single name until 1804 when Matthew Flinders first penned the name *Australia* in his journal. However, it was not until the late 1820s that Australia became the popular name of the continent.

Given that this thesis has endeavoured to establish a model for the embodiment of Australian identity within contemporary artefacts, it has been necessary to establish an understanding of the evolution of this sense of identity. British colonists settling in Australia during the early years of colonisation, for example, identified with their British heritage, and did so well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Australia's path to nationhood was a complex one, as there was no single event to punctuate this shift, as with many other nation states. There is no agreed date on which popular sentiment shifted toward the independence of Australia as a nation, but sometime during the 1890s a threshold was crossed and many Australian inhabitants began to think as much in terms of their Australian-ness as their British-ness. It took the experience of the two World Wars for Australians to finally sever their British-ness. However, in a referendum in 1999, Australians voted against Australia completely severing ties with the United

Kingdom and becoming a republic. The broad period over which Australia found nationhood, initially under the British Empire, and eventually as an independent nation, free of British sentiment, makes dating the conception of Australian nationhood problematic. In reference to this research, the transition to Australian art and design is complicated to date, as there is no definitive threshold on which Australian artists, designers and makers began to identify as Australian, and there is no single idea of Australian-ness to shape this creative output.

One possible method for identifying the specific cultural values shaping this creative output is in the use of material culture theory. It has been employed to both identify the geographically unique characteristics of artefacts made in Australia, and also as a framework to speculate on the purposeful design of new, geographically specific artefacts. The former was used in the analysis of influences shaping artefacts originating in Australia, from pre-colonial Tasmanian Aboriginal vessels to mid twentieth-century furniture design. From these analyses, it was concluded that only the pre-colonial artefacts made by Indigenous Australians exhibit characteristics that are geographically unique to Australia. Every post-colonial artefact analysed as part of this research borrows characteristics from foreign movements in art or design.

Given this inability to identify uniquely Australian post-colonial artefacts, and the lack of a contemporary design movement that embodies a quintessential Australian-ness, it was necessary to look abroad to understand the nature of such artefacts and movements originating in other places. Through the analysis of *Droog* and *Bauhaus*, two national design movements known to embody geographically specific cultural influences in designed objects, it was clear that these movements were influenced heavily by preceding art and design movements that established trends in nationally specific art and design directions in Holland and Germany respectively. From these case studies, a determination was made that previous

movements in Australian art and design could incorporate specifically Australian influences that might impact the practice of designing new Australian artefacts.

Some of the earliest artefacts made in Australia are the tjurungas of the Western Arrernte people of Central Australia. Made using geographically unique stone and timber, these talismans are scored using the incisor tooth of a possum, still held in the jawbone of the animal, and are said to be the physical embodiment of Dreaming ancestors. Abstract depictions of these ancestors, as well as natural features of country, adorn the surfaces of these objects. These objects are the physical embodiment of a theology unique to this continent and, in many cases, unique to Western Arrernte country.

The tjurungas of Central Australia could be the foundation of an Australian artefact-making lineage that influences contemporary designers in the development of equally unique Australian artefacts; however, post colonisation, this lineage was disrupted by a series of artefact-making movements that appropriated influences from other places. The picturesque painters and colonial Australian furniture makers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth Centuries, Impressionists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the mid twentieth-century Australian furniture designers, were all influenced very heavily by movements from other places, adopting form, technique and materials that were not uniquely Australian.

Some practitioners however, were able to adapt these foreign movements, adopting a unique method that was more heavily influenced by an Australian style, site or spirituality. During the first half of the twentieth century, Margaret Preston took inspiration from Indigenous Australian painting and European modernism, adapting her Impressionist style to emulate this practice. Similarly, in the late twentieth century, Lin Onus adapted his Western photo-realistic style to

incorporate the motifs of the Yolngu people. The aesthetic aspects of Indigenous art alone influenced Preston, whilst Onus incorporated aspects of Indigenous spirituality in his work, but both artists were influenced by the culture of Indigenous Australians in the generation of new geographically unique artefacts.

The artwork and objects made or influenced by Indigenous Australians represent the strongest thread of geographically unique artefacts made in Australia. It therefore follows that Australian designers seeking to design new uniquely Australian objects could take influence from the artefacts and culture of Indigenous Australians.

Material culture is a mute communicator of culture, and its interpretation is too subjective to make it an accurate method for understanding cultural nuance. As such, along with a survey of relevant material culture, this thesis has reviewed some of the literary narratives that are most closely aligned with Australian identity. The *Anzac tradition*, *bush legend*, *Aboriginal myth* and *convict legend* are four examples of such narratives. These are mythical accounts of Australia's past, and bear little resemblance to the facts. While these myths are based on historical events, they are not historically accurate; instead they are inventing an identity. Significantly, these four most prominent national myths eliminate or simplify the crucial contributions made by Indigenous Australians, thus excluding them from national identity.

Similarly, the Dreaming stories of Indigenous Australians are the cornerstones of identity for these communities, but just as non-Indigenous colonial and Australian mythologies are for the most part exclusive of Indigenous Australians, these myths were not designed with non-Indigenous Australians in mind. For the most part, these stories do not shape the national or local identity of non-Indigenous Australians, as they are specific to the individual Indigenous nation to which they refer.

Looking beyond these examples of culturally exclusive Australian myths, this thesis has aimed to identify a series of myths that hold relevance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, forming part of an inclusive foundation of national identity. It is postulated that the creature stories traded between Aboriginal Australians and British settlers during the early years of colonisation might form part of such a foundation. Stories of the yahoo, yowie and Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay were circulated across cultural lines in the early years of the colony, eventually evolving into the bunyip, which seems to have been invented by both Aboriginal Australians and British colonists, a metaphor for the confluence of these two cultures. These are shared, uniquely Australian folklores that could form the foundation of an inclusive national myth.

Concluding this literature and artefact review, recurring themes were collated into the *Taxonomy for the Analysis and Creation of Australian Material Culture*, a framework that aims to structure this research in a system that might be easily referenced by a designer aiming to develop new Australian artefacts. This speculative framework is tested in Chapter Four, with each practice-based outcome tested against taxonomic criteria.

Finally, given the subjectivity of creative work, and the equally biased perception of national identity, this taxonomy and the Australian design developed as part of this research project will not be perceivably Australian to every viewer. This thesis and its associated creative outcomes have endeavoured to expose some of the common components of Australian identity and aesthetic, in the pursuit of an approach and visual language that would embody many aspects of Australian-ness to the majority. However, as with all creative work, these theories and designs remain open to interpretation.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## NEW AUSTRALIAN MATERIAL CULTURE

## Summary of Work Made

### Make Do Collection

Make Do Bench

Make Do Seat

Make Do Coffee Table

### Pankalangu Collection

Pankalangu Wardrobe

Pankalangu Armchair

Pankalangu Side Table

Pankalangu Bowl

### Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Collection

Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Chaise Lounge

Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Chandelier

Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Bowl

### Bunyip Collection

Bunyip Armchair

### Tidal Collection

Tidal Chair

Tidal Lounger

Tidal Sun Lounge

Tidal Round Dining Table

Tidal Round Coffee Table

Tidal Rectangular Coffee Table

Tidal Side Table

## Solstice Collection

Solstice Bench

## Jugaad With Car Parts Collection

Jugaad With Car Parts Side Table

## Jugaad With Pottery Collection

Jugaad With Pottery Stool

Jugaad With Pottery Side Table

Jugaad With Pottery Vessel

Jugaad With Pottery Low Tray

Jugaad With Pottery High Tray

Jugaad With Pottery Bowl

## Jugaad With Scaffolding Collection

Jugaad With Scaffolding Chair

## Summary of Work Designed, but not Made

## Make Do Collection

Make Do Shelving

Make Do Side Table

## Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Collection

Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay Bed

## Bunyip Collection

Bunyip Sofa

## Tidal Collection

Tidal Bar Stool

Tidal Rectangular Dining Table


## Solstice Collection

Solstice Stool

Solstice Round Table

Solstice Rectangular Table


## Jugaad With Car Parts Collection

Jugaad With Car Parts Bench


## Jugaad With Pottery Collection

Jugaad With Pottery Bench

# APPENDICES

**i - The Great Father – Arrernte Alchera Story**

'The Great Father ... Northern bandicoot myth ... tells the life-story of the famous gurra (bandicoot) ancestor called Karora ... [who] lived at a spot now known as the Ilbalintja Soak.

'In the very beginning everything was resting in perpetual darkness ... Karora ... was lying asleep, in everlasting night, at the very bottom of the soak of Ilbalintja; as yet there was no water in it ... Bandicoots began to come out from his navel and from his arm-pits ...

'And now dawn was beginning to break ... He burst through the crust that had covered him: and the gaping hole that he left behind became the Ilbalintja Soak ... In his great hunger he seizes two young bandicoots; he cooks them some little distance away, close to the spot where the sun is standing ... now evening is approaching ... Karora falls asleep ...

While he is asleep, something emerges from underneath his arm-pit in the shape of a bull-roarer. It takes on human form, and grows in one night to a full-grown young man: this is his first born son.

'The son is now sent by his father to kill some more of the bandicoots ... cooks them ... shares the cooked meat with his son. Evening has come again, and soon both are asleep. Two more sons are born that night to the father, from out of his arm-pits ...

'This process is repeated for many days and nights. The sons do the hunting; and the father brings into life an increasing number of sons each night ... soon father and sons have succeeded in devouring all the bandicoots ... In their hunger the father sends his sons away on a three-days' hunt ... But the vast mulga thicket is devoid of bandicoots ...

226

'The sons are returning, hungry and tired ... Suddenly something dark and hairy darts up ... a sandhill wallaby ... They hurl their tjurunga sticks after it and break its leg ...

'The astonished gurra brothers continue on their way home to their father ... He leads them back to the soak. They sit on its edge in circles, one circle around the other, ever widening out like ripples in disturbed water. And then the great pmoara flood ... engulfs them; it swills them back into the Ilbalintja Soak.

'Here the aged Karora remained; but the sons were carried by the flood under the ground to a spot in the mulga thicket. There they rejoined with the great Tjenterama (sandhill wallaby) ...

'Today, at that new ceremonial ground the natives point out the rocks and stones which represent the undying bodies of the gurra brothers which lie on top of the round stone which is said to be the body of Tjenterama ... Karora ... remained behind at his original home: he is lying in eternal sleep at the bottom of the Ilbalintja Soak; and men and women who approach the soak to quench their thirst may do so only if they bear ... bunches of green tjurunga boughs' (Strehlow 1947, p7-10).

## ii - The Rainbow Serpent – Larumbanda Dreaming Story

'When Thuwathu, the rainbow serpent, came up from the south (as the Larumbanda of Mornington Island know) he had with him his sister, Bulthugu the rock-cod, and her baby daughter Gindidbu the willy-wagtail. Thuwathu made camp at Jalga-Gindidbu. He and his companions, the spotted stingray, the bluefish, the travally, the bone fish, the seagul Garngurr and the bee, goanna, wallaby, turtle, dugong, shark and others, built their shelters there with Thuwathu's big place in the centre. The rock-cod woman and her willy-wagtail daughter had no shelter. One evening a great storm broke over Jalga-Gindidbu and, as the rain became heavier, Bulthugu feared that her baby would become cold and fall ill. She called to Thuwathu, her brother, asleep in his snug shelter, to find room for the little willy-wagtail. Thuwathu was tired and grumbled at his sister, telling her that there was no room - she should go away and not disturb him. As soon as the mother spied a place to tuck her daughter in the safety of his shelter, Thuwathu moved some part of his great body into that nook and told her to go away. Bulthugu stoked her fire and wrapped her baby in bark beside it, watching the child and pleading with her brother by turns. Soon, after Thuwathu had shifted himself about, taking up this corner with his huge knees, that with his great horns and the other with his long penis, the baby began to shiver and become ill. The mother began to cry for her child and, when the little willy-wagtail died, she cut her head and arms in her grief.

'Bulthugu's anger at her brother was very great. She tied and lit a bark torch and set fire with it all around Thuwathu's shelter. He cried out in pain, cursing his sister, and rolled out of the flames, burning and suffering. Crawling away with his colours all burnt, he sang a terrible song, his great jaws ploughing up the earth as he went. The water followed Thuwathu as he gouged out the earth in his path, and his burning body fired the country all about. The sea came in to put out the fire, leaving that place of the willy-wagtail, Jalga-Gindidbu, underneath it to this day. He travelled on, suffering and ill, making the great river in his wake, singing and

vomiting up new life to fill the country. Trevally and mud crabs, sugar-bag bees, swamp turtle and water-lilies, goanna, wallaby and bloodwood trees were left in their places. Ribs fell from his burnt and blistering body and, where they fell, the gidyea boomerang trees grew. Where his blood spread over the salt-pan red ochre is now found. Thuwathu's own people, the rainbows, sang in sorrow when he came to them so thin and ill, and cut themselves with sharp stones as they mourned. The old man died at Bugargun on his way back to his country, fretting over his sister and her child. A great spring came up there and Thuwathu went down into its water, but his spirit lives still in every well and waterhole, and his eye follows the world in each shooting star. Until this day, the young men see the dances and hear the songs of Thuwathu's story at their initiation as they learn the laws of their people. Especially they learn the importance of their responsibility for their sisters' children' (Godden and Malnic 1982).

## Australian Mythical Creatures

The Hairy Wild Man From Botany Bay originated in England, the exotic nature of Australia being so extreme to the average Briton that a new terrifying creature was invented to accompany this exoticism.

Similarly, the bunyip came to represent the unknown of the Australian bush for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.
See page 127

### Indigenous Mapping

Indigenous nations map aspects of the countryside. Eg. Arrernte people map it on the surface of some tjurungas. This action made it easier to comprehend the landscape - something which is understood is less feared.
See page 44

### Indigenous Dreaming Stories

Dreaming stories provide the narrative of creation for significant land formations. By attributing the creation of features of terrain to cultural ancestors, Indigenous people provide explanations for the existence of these significant geographies. This action made it easier to comprehend the landscape - something which is understood is less feared.
See page 121

### Indigenous Land Management

Many Indigenous nations used/use fire to control vegetation, regulating the development of areas of bush, grass and scrub. Indigenous Australians have taken control of the natural environment, creating a balanced ecosystem in order to provide for their continued survival. When a vast landscape is controlled, it is less fear-inspiring.
See page 116 and 120

### Creature Stories

Creature stories, including that of the yowie and bunyip, tell the tale of fearful creatures that live in the deepest chasms of the Australian bush, often lurking in the depths of waterholes and swampy lagoons. These fears could not be understood, tamed or controlled, and as such, the fear of these monsters lives on in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian culture.
See page 129

### Picturesque Painters

The Picturesque painters working in the early colony used their controlled European style to transform wild and un-manicured Australian subject matter into ordered versions of reality. Picturesque painters overcame this fear by intervening on these people and places in order to bring them under control.
See page 48

### Inability to Capture Australian Landscape

Picturesque and Impressionist painters were not able to accurately capture the unrefined nature of Australian landscapes using a system developed to depict the ordered rural scenes of France and Britain.
See page 48 and 50

### Bush Legend

The bush legend speaks about frontier Australians as being rough individuals who lived in harsh, impermanent circumstances as they roamed the frontier in search for work.
See page 109

### Untamable Australian Landscape

Squatters and selectors had great difficulty transforming the vast Australian bush into workable farmland.
See page 84

### Make Do

Frontier Australians did not have the tools or skills required to process timber for furniture making, so they made use of found branches, constructing functional objects from this rough and untreated material.
See page 84

### Emulation of Indigenous Art

Margaret Preston and Lin Onus took influenc from Indigenous painting. Preston was inspired by aesthetics alone, but Onus's work was shaped by a deeper connection to Indigenous Australian spirituality.
See page 52 and 55

### Unsuccessful Farming

Early attempts at farming in the colony were unsuccessful.
See page 116

### Untamed Materials

Materials such as bull kelp, tree branches and stones were used in their natural form, not refined in any way prior to use in production.
See pages 39, 43 and 85

### Sacrifice on the Frontier

On the frontier all comfort was sacrificed so that the available resources could be used to build a livelihood and future prosperity.
See page 84

### Male Convicts

In the convict legend men are described as being animalistic, beaten down, poor and wearing rags, and are always associated with working gangs, the ball and chainand merciless floggings by the red coats. Meanwhile woman are described as being sexually available, drunk and subject to violence.
See page 115

### Men at War

The Anzac Tradition is almost entirely focused on the men who sacrificed their lives at war.
See page 110

## Style

### Proliferation

If an Australian style represents the values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of the Australian community at large, that style should proliferate within the Australian community.
See page 31

## Materiality

### Australian Materials

Australian material culture should be made using Australian materials. The unique characteristics of an Australian material will contribute to a uniquely Australian aesthetic.

## Making Techniques

### Australian Making Techniques

A making technique that is geographically specific to Australia should be adopted in the making of Australian material culture.

---

*Condition*

A style that proliferates within a community can only be identified with the benefit of hindsight. As such the Australian style that will give shape to this new Australian material culture does not yet exist.

Globalisation has meant that virtually every making technique is now universally available to all makers in all parts of the world, but it is still possible, through research, to find some regionally specific crafting techniques.

---

### Verbal and Textual Accounts of Australian Identity

### Evolved Making Techique

*Resolution*

The verbal and textual accounts of Australian identity are a group of narratives and ideals identified as being core to Australian identity. If one or several of these ideas are used to inspire a style, that style may represent something of contemporary Australian identity.

It may be possible to invent new making techniques, or to evolve an existing technique into a new and unique method for making. This new technique will contribute to the distinctive nature of the resulting artefact and its uniquely Australian aesthetic.

---

### Fear of Open Country

The fear of and reverence for open country - unsettled places such as the desert and Australian bush - are common themes within the research.

### Australian Flora and Fauna

The close link between Australian native plants and animals and Australian identity.

### Impressionist Painters

Australian Impressionist painters were criticised for not venturing into Australia's open country at all. Impressionists were known to capture civilised Australian scenes, focusing on coastal areas and the depiction of more comfortable seascapes and pastoral vistas.
See page 50

### Indigenous Artefacts

The use of zoomorphic and phytomorphic designs on Indigenous artefacts.
See page 40

### Flora in Post Colonial Art

The depiction of native flora by Australian picturesque and Impressionist painters, as well as by Margaret Preston and Lin Onus.
See page 48, 50, 52 and 55

### Pankalangu

The camouflaged nature of the pankalangu has links to the way in which some Australian native animals hide in the landscape.
See page 131

### Untamable Roughness

The wild and resistant nature of the Australian landscape, plants, animals and people.

### Racial Exclusivity

Australian narratives and artefacts are designed either for Indigenous or non-Indigenous Australians, but rarely both.

### Australia's Pre-colonial Reputation in Britain

Prior to colonisation, Australia was seen as a rough and forbidding place. This is clear in the British myth - the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay.
See page 127

### Exclusive Myths

Myths such as the bush legend, Anzac tradition, colonial legend and Aboriginal myth are designed for non-Indigenous Australians, and Dreaming stories are designed for Indigenous Australians, but there are few Australian myths that are relevant to both groups.
See page 109, 110, 114, 117 and 121

### Impressionist Exclusivity

Australian Impressionist painters chose not to paint Indigenous subjects.
See page 50

### Exclusive Indigenous Artefacts

Indigenous artefacts such as Tasmanian Aboriginal kelp water-carrying vessels and Arrernte tjurungas were made for their respective Indigenous group, and not for non-Indigenous Australians. Often Indigenous artefacts carry narratives and are designed to keep these narratives secret from those who are nota part of that community.
See page 36 and 39

### Self-sacrifice

The self-sacrifice made by Australians for future benefit.

### Indigenous Australian Culture

The oldest of Australian identities are those associated with the roughly 270 Indigenous Australian communities that have occupied the Australian continent for approximately 60,000 years.

### Anzac Sacrifice

The self-sacrifice made by Anzac soldiers, granting future generations of Australians freedom and privilege.
See page 110

### Dreaming Stories

The creation stories that explain the very existence of Indigenous Australian life and culture are a foundation for Indigenous Australian identity.
See page 121

### Australian Landscape, Flora and Fauna

The spiritual importance placed upon totemic animals, landforms and plants makes these natural elements a crucial component of Indigenous Australian identity.
See page 44 and 116

### Indigenous Artefacts

Artefacts made by Indigenous Australians were designed to facilitate the specific practical needs of that community, or to be a talisman in a spiritual ritual, or both. As such these objects are closely linked to the identity of specific Indigenous communities.
See page 36 and 39

### Lin Onus

Lin Onus's work was strongly influenced by both his Yorta Yorta heritage, as well as the Yolngu culture to which he was introduced later in his life.
See page 55

### Men

The masculine focus of many narratives linked with Australian identity.

### Cultural Hybridity

The complication of Australian culture, post colonisation.

### Frontier Men

The bush legend is almost entirely focused on the lifestyles of the men who wandered the countryside looking for work on farms and cattle stations.
See page 109

### Complications of Migration

Post colonisation, people from all corners of the globe migrated and continue to migrate to Australia, bringing with them their own cultural practices and adding components of these disparate cultures to a continually evolving Australian culture.
See page 35

### Bunyip

The cross-cultural origins of the word bunyip, and the subsequent confluence that emerged from this shared fear.
See page 130

### Margaret Preston

Margaret Preston attempted to merge her European painting style with that of Indigenous artists, in order to create a new style that would exhibit the characteristcs of both cultural styles.
See page 52

### Lin Onus

Lin Onus's father was Yorta Yorta, and his mother was Scottish, making him a person of mixed cultural heritage. Onus's work also made use of the style, materiality and techniques of Indigenous and Western art -making practices.
See page 55

## iv – Additional Practice-Based Outcomes

This thesis examines several bodies of work (see Chapter Four), among a greater body of work generated as a result of this and peripheral research into Australian identity and mythology. Other collections in the greater body of work are listed below.

## Tidal – Australian Beach Myth

The *Tidal Collection* for Tait references Australian beachside and surf culture. The three chairs in the collection are designed according to the stages of wave formation and the four tables are designed to reference the less common occurrence of waterspouts, which sometimes touch down on the ocean during a storm.



iii.01 - *Tidal Sun Lounge and Side Table* – Trent Jansen, stainless steel wire, 188 x 74 x 83cm, 2016.

iii.o2 - *Tidal Table and Chair* – Trent Jansen, stainless steel wire, 90 x 73cm, 2015.

## Solstice Collection – Testing Australian Material Culture Theory

The *Solstice Collection* aims to test the importance of geographically specific natural influences in shaping the Australian-ness of Colonial Australian bush furniture (see page 82). This collection adopts an ubiquitous/internationalist/modernist aesthetic in the design of an object that responds to the specific movement of the sun on the Australian continent.

Slices were cut into the seat at an angle of 34 degrees, which is the angle of the sun around Wollongong, New South Wales on the day of the winter solstice. These slices allow the sun to pass directly through, creating a striped shadow pattern on the ground. Holes were cut into the seat at 79 degrees, the angle of the sun around Wollongong on the day of the summer solstice. These holes allow the sun to pass directly through, creating a polka-dot shadow pattern on the ground. This object responds to the influence of the sun in this specific place in the Australian landscape, but does this geographic specificity result in an Australian object?



iii.03 - *Solstice Bench* – Trent Jansen, aluminium, 188 x 45 x 50cm, 2016.

iii.04 - *Solstice Bench* – Trent Jansen, aluminium, 188 x 45 x 50cm, 2016.

### Jugaad with Pottery and Jugaad with Car Parts – Testing Make Do

In Chapters Two and Four (see pages 82, 109 and 156) this thesis investigates and takes influence from the Australian ideal of *make do*. However, in different time periods and nations, other people have also made simple solutions to problems using the limited resources in their immediate vicinity. How does the Australian make do differ from resourceful making in other parts of the world?

I initiated a research project entitled *Porosity Kabari* that took place in Mumbai's *Chor Bazaar* (Thieves' Market) in February 2016, asking four designers (myself included) to design and make an exhibition of work in just three weeks, using only materials and labour sourced from this small neighbourhood. Given India's relative poverty, this is a nation that makes the most of every resource, where ad-hoc solutions to simple problems are a necessary part of everyday survival. Areas like the Chor Bazaar can be found in many Indian cities, where businesses are born in order to recycle, repurpose and repair non-functioning objects. This is one common Indian site where resourcefulness is transformed into vibrant industry.

Through cultural immersion, this project was designed to identify some points of confluence and disparity between Australian *make do* and the general resourcefulness found in other contemporary cultures. The attitudes associated with the Hindi word *jugaad* were most closely aligned with Australian make do. Jugaad is the process of *doing as little as possible to arrive at an outcome* or *improvising a solution*. This idea has obvious commonalities with Australian make do; however, there is one key difference – make do does not specify that one should do *as little as possible*, it only specifies that one should *use what little they have*. In reality, some make-do solutions combine limited resources with an unnecessarily elaborate design, in order to create results of a reasonably high quality, for example *Chair* (Figure 2.23) uses steel rods to over engineer the back of the chair, making for a very durable design.

iii.05 - *Jugaad with Car Parts* – Trent Jansen, copper and used car panel, 45 x 37cm, 2016.

From this initial evaluation of the disparities between jugaad and make do, as with all examples of material culture, it can be concluded that disparate cultures with divergent values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions will generate unique artefacts, even when the circumstances of their production exhibit points of commonality. In this case, Indians and Australians living with access to limited resources and skills have made artefacts according to different inheritances, and those artefacts are significantly distinct.
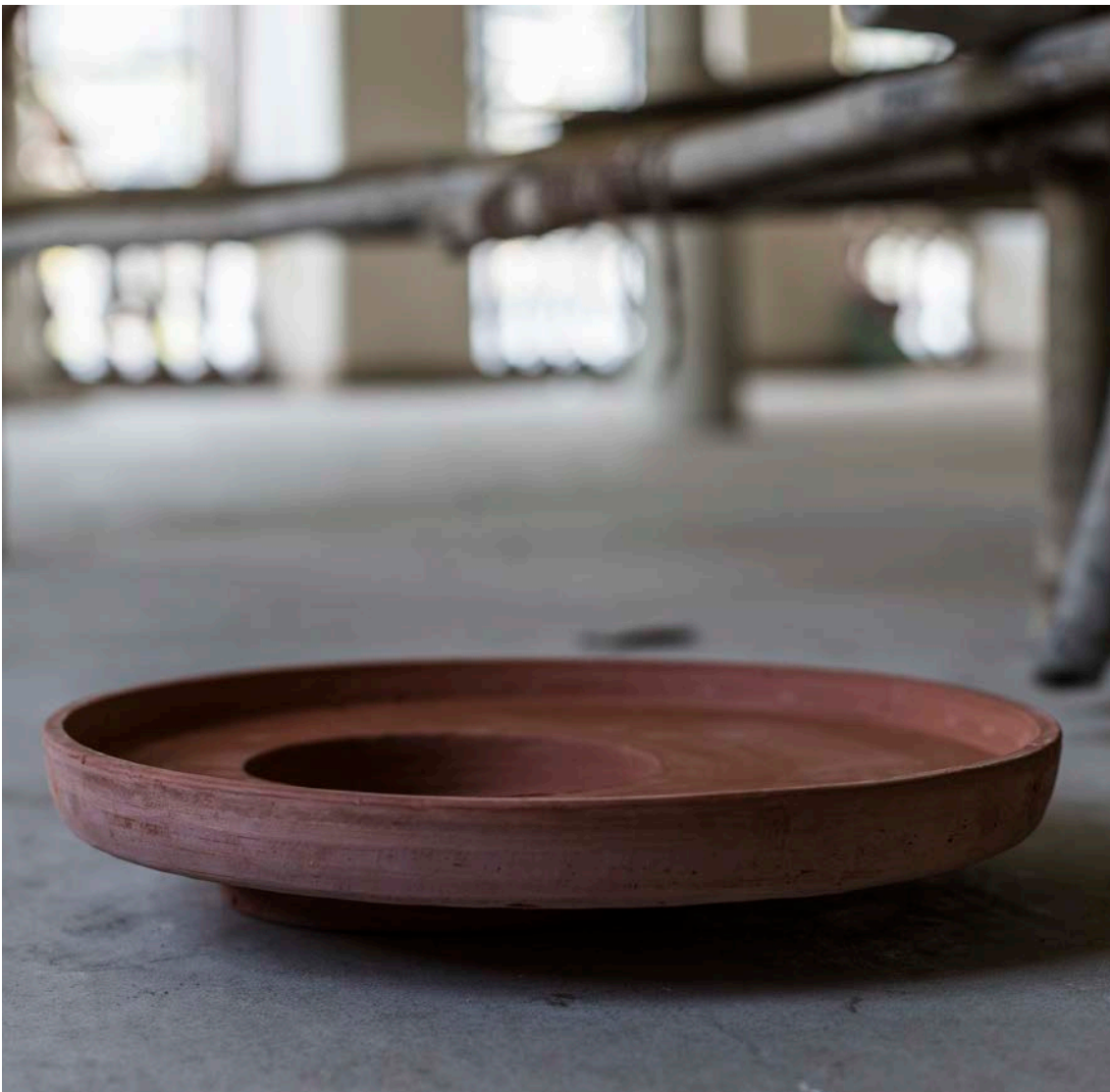


iii.06 - *Jugaad with Pottery Low Tray* – Trent Jansen, terracotta, 6 x 40cm, 2016.

iii.07 - *Jugaad with Pottery Stool* – Trent Jansen, terracotta, 52 x 56 x 49cm, 2016.

iii.08 - *Jugaad with Pottery Vessel* – Trent Jansen, terracotta, 29 x 22cm, 2016.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABS (2010). "About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics." Retrieved 01.12.15, from http://www.abs.gov.au.

Agricultural Research Service, U. S. D. o. A. (1974). Plant morphogenesis as the basis for scientific management of range resources, Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

Aldersey-Williams, H. (2000). "Bauhaus: design or dogma?" New Statesman: 41 - 43.

Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1991). Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London ; New York, Verso.

Attwood, B. (2005). Telling the truth about Aboriginal history. Crows Nest, N. S. W., Allen & Unwin.

Australian Government (2013). "Australia's federation." Retrieved 04.12.13, 2013, from http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-government/australias-federation.

Balint, R. (2013). Quiet Continent, Timeless Land. Australian Legends, University of New South Wales.

Barnouw, A. J. (1948). The Making of Modern Holland, Allen and Unwin.

Barrett, C. (1946). The bunyip and other mythical monsters and legends. Melbourne, Reed & Harris.

Barwick, G. (1975). Australia From the Bench. U. o. Newcastle. Newcastle.

Begg, C. A. a. B., Neil Colquhoun (1979). The World of John Boultbee, Including

an Account of Sealing in Australia and New Zealand. Whitcoulls, Whitcoulls Publishers.

Betsky, A. and A. Eeuwens (2004). False flat : why Dutch design is so good. London, Phaidon.

Bey, J. (2014). "Studio Makkink Bey." Retrieved 02.09.14, 2014, from http://www.studiomakkinkbey.nl/list/products/4011_kokon_furniture/1979.

Birrell, R. (1995). A Nation of Our Own. Melbourne, Longman.

Boyce, J. (2008). Van Diemen's Land. Melbourne, Black Inc.

Brawley, S. (2013). The Anzac Legend. Australian Legends, University of New South Wales.

Bryman, A. (2004). Social Research Methods. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Butel, E. (2003). Art and Australia : selected writings 1920-1950. North Sydney, Richmond Ventures.

Butel, E. and Art Gallery of New South Wales. (1986). Margaret Preston : the art of constant rearrangement. Ringwood, Vic., Penguin in association with the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Campbell, J. (2015). The Germen Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts, Princeton University Press.

Carter, D. J. (2006). Dispossession, dreams & diversity : issues in Australian studies.

Frenchs Forest, N.S.W., Pearson Education.

Cochrane, P. (2006). Colonial Ambition. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
Cornall, G., et al. (1990). Memories : a survey of early Australian furniture in the collection of the Lord McAlpine of West Green. Perth, W.A., Australian City Properties Ltd.

Costa, J. T. (2006). The Other Insect Societies. Harvard, Harvard University Press.

Cunningham, P. M. (1827). Two Years in New South Wales. New South Wales, H. Colburn.

Davison, G. and M. Brodie (2005). Struggle country : the rural ideal in twentieth century Australia. Clayton, Vic., Monash University ePress.

Dermody, K. and Australia. Parliament. Dept. of the Senate. (1997). A nation at last : the story of Federation. Canberra, Australian Govt. Pub. Service.

Dixon, R. (1986). The course of empire : neo-classical culture in New South Wales, 1788-1860. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, E. (1995). The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. New York, The Free Press.

Fahy, K. a. S., Andrew (1998). Australian Furniture. Woollahra, Casuarina Press.

Fermor, L. L. (1944). "Some South American Timbers." Nature 153: 564.

Field, B. (1825). Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales. London, John Murray.

Flannery, T. F. (1999). The Birth of Sydney. Melbourne, Text Publishing.

Flinders, M. (1814). A Voyage to Terra Australis. England, G and W Nicol.

Gammage, B. (2011). The biggest estate on earth : how Aborigines made Australia. Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen & Unwin.

Giddens, A. (1985). The Nation-State and Violence. California, University of California Press.

Glassie, H. (1978). "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies." Prospects 3: 1-49.

Glesne, C. a. P., Alan (1992). Becoming Qualitative Researchers : An Introduction. White Plains, Longman.

Godden, E. and J. Malnic (1982). Rock paintings of Aboriginal Australia. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W., Reed.

Goldman, A. J. (2009). Art & Design : Celebrating the Bauhaus at 90. The Wall Street Journal. New York, N.Y., Dow Jones & Company Inc.

Gough, J., et al. (2009). Tayenebe : Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work. Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Grant, K. and National Gallery of Victoria (2014). Mid-century modern : Australian furniture design.

Harrison, R. a. W., Christine (2004). After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the

Recent Indigenous Past in Australia, Rowman Altamira.

Hirst, J. B. (2010). Looking for Australia : historical essays. Melbourne, Vic., Black Inc.

Holden, R., et al. (2001). Bunyips : Australia's folklore of fear. Canberra, National Library of Australia.

Hooper, T. and J. Hooper (1988). Australian country furniture. Ringwood, Vic., Viking O'Neil.

Hunt, D. (2013). Girt : the unauthorised history of Australia volume I: From megafunna to Macquarie.

Jansen, T. (2014) I Merge Indigenous Stories With my Design- Maybe Others Should too. The Conversation

Johnson, M. (2014). Australia's Ancient Aboriginal Past. North Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd.

Karskens, G. (2009). The colony : a history of early Sydney. Crows Nest, N.S.W., Allen & Unwin.

Karskens, G. (2013). The Bush Legend. Australian Legends, University of New South Wales.

Karskens, G. (2013). The Fatal Shore? Legends and Legacies of the Convicts. Australian Legends, University of New South Wales.

Kingery, W. D. (1996). Learning from things : method and theory of material culture

studies. Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kovel, R. a. K., Terry (1965). American Country Furniture 1780 - 1875. New York, Crown Publishers.

Labilliere, F. P. (1878). Early History of the Colony of Victoria. Victoria, S.Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington.

Lake, M., et al. (2010). What's wrong with Anzac? : the militarisation of Australian history. Sydney, New South.

Leslie, D. (2008). Aboriginal Art : Creativity and Assimilation. Melbourne, MacMillan.

Macfarlane, I. H., Mark (2007). Transgressions : Critical Australian Indigenous Histories. Canberra, ANU E Press.

Maciuika, J. V. (2005). Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890-1920. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Macrobius (Unknown). http://www.e-manuscripta.ch/zuzneb/content/zoom/831411. 2016.

Maes-Jelinek, H. (1996). A Talent(ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford. Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi B.V.

McCarthy, F. D. and Australian Museum. Trust. (1976). Australian Aboriginal stone implements : including bone, shell and tooth implements. Sydney, The Australian Museum Trust.

McCubbin, F. a. M., James Stuart (1986). The Art of Frederick McCubbin, Boolarong Publications.

McLean, I. (1998). White Aborigines : identity politics in Australian art. Cambridge ; New York, NY, Cambridge University Press.

McPhee, J. (1982). Australian Decorative Arts. Canberra, Australian National Gallery.

Mirriam-Webster, I. (2015). "Mirriam-Webster Dictionary." from http://www.merriam-webster.com.

Moore, W. (1934). The Story of Australian Art, from the Earliest Known Art of the Continent to the Art of To-day, Angus & Robertson Limited.

Mountford, C. P. (1943). "A Stone Tjurunga of Unusual Form from the Aranda Tribe of Central Australia." Mankind 3: 113-115.

Mundle, R. (2012). Flinders : The man who mapped Australia. United Kingdom, Hachette.

Neumann, G. (1984). Early American Antique Country Furnishings - Northeastern America, 1650 - 1800. United Stated of America, McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Onus, L., et al. (2000). Urban dingo : the art and life of Lin Onus, 1948-1996. South Brisbane, Craftsman House in association with the Queensland Art Gallery.

Osborne, C. and A. L. Lewis (2012). Australian modern : Australian mid 20th century design. Carina, Qld., Chris Osborne Publishing.

Parker, G. (2002). The Dutch Revolt. Netherlands, Penguin.

Parkes, H. (1851). Sydney Morning Herald.

Parliamentary Education Office. "Closer Look - Federation." Retrieved 20.06.16, 2016, from http://www.peo.gov.au.

Powerhouse Museum. and A. Watson (2002). Mod to Memphis : design in colour 1960s-80s. Haymarket, N.S.W., Powerhouse Publishing.

Oxford Press. u. (2015). "Oxford Dictionary." Retrieved 13.01.2015, 2015.

Prown, J. D. (2001). Art as evidence : writings on art and material culture. New Haven, Conn. ; London, Yale University Press.

Radok, S. (1997). "The sublime and the parochial: the foot of God." Artlink 17(3): 14-17.

Ramakers, R. (2002). Less + more : Droog Design in context. Rotterdam, 010 Publishers.

Ramakers, R. and G. Bakker (1998). Droog Design : spirit of the nineties. Rotterdam, 010 Publishers.

Reynolds, H. (1996). Aboriginal Sovereignty. St Leonards, Allen and Unwin.

Scott, S. E. (1933). Australia, Cambridge University Press.

Smith, B. (1975). Documents on art and taste in Australia : the colonial period, 1770-

1914. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Smith, B. (1985). European vision and the South Pacific. New Haven ; London, Yale University Press.

Spencer, B. and F. J. Gillen (1927). The Arunta : a study of a stone age people. London, Macmillan.

Spradley, J. P. a. M., David W. (1972). The Cultural Experience : Ethnography in Complex Society. Tennessee, USA, Kingsport Press.

Stanner, W. E. H. (1969). After the dreaming. Sydney,, Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Stanner, W. E. H. (2009). The Dreaming and Other Essays. Collingwood, Black Inc. Agenda.

Stasiuk, G. (2005). The Forgotten: A documentary chronicling the role of Indigenous Australian servicemen. Australian Broadcasting Corporation: 24 minutes.

Strauss, A. L. and J. M. Corbin (1998). Basics of qualitative research : techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Strehlow, T. G. H. (1947). Aranda traditions. Carlton, Vic., Melbourne University Press.

Tomita, J. a. T., Noriko (1982). Japanese Ikat Weaving. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Trainor, L. (1994). British imperialism and Australian nationalism : manipulation, conflict, and compromise in the late nineteenth century. Cambridge ; Melbourne, Cambridge University Press.

Unknown Author. (1842). "Superstitions of the Australian Aborigines: The Yahoo." Australian and New Zealand Monthly Magazine 1(2).

Unknown Author. (1853). Sydney Morning Herald. Sydney.

Unknown Author. (1883). Bulletin. Sydney.

Unknown Author. (1898). Bulletin. Sydney

Wanders, M. (2013). Wanders and Wassink: In Conversation on Design, Art and Industry. Eindhoven: 1:57:46.

Ward, R. (1962). The Australian legend. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Ward, R. (1978). The Australian legend. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Watson, A. (1989). Take a Seat : Chair Design in the 20th Century. P. Museum. Sydney, The Pot Still Press Pty Ltd.

Weis, L. (2012). "Broached Commissions." Retrieved 14.07.14, 2014, from http://www.broachedcommissions.com.

White, R. (1981). Inventing Australia : images and identity 1688-1980. Sydney, George Allen & Unwin.

Zijl, I. v., et al. (2000). Droog & Dutch design : from product to fashion : the collection of the Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Utrecht, Centraal Museum.