Not Niwe
Not Nieuw
Not Neu
There is no mystery as to why Captain Cook gave Endeavour its name. The early explorers were impressed by the volume of flora and fauna collected by botanist Sir Joseph Banks and his team that Cook deemed so significant that he commemorated the title after the name of plants. Throughout the Endeavour’s four-year voyage (1768–1771) across Tahiti, the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, and Indonesia, Banks and his assistant Daniel Solander collected a staggering quantity of plant life. Their findings were immense: around 3,000 plant specimens were collected from Australia and New Zealand alone, representing over 3,000 species, of which 1,400 were wholly new to science.1

The scale of this taxonomy—the science of naming and arranging animal and plant life—was without precedent. In many cases, Cook and Banks created new systems of vocabulary, hierarchies and names to classify the new world. Many plants were collected under the genus of ‘Banks’ in reference to his contribution, and the east coast was described as a ‘new’ offshoot of Europe, in the case of New South Wales. Cook also named the ‘Kangaroo’ phonetically after ganganguru, the term used by Aboriginal people on the North-East coast for large, grey marsupials.2 Had Cook realised the plurality of Aboriginal language and that this word was foreign to most Indigenous people in Australia, the outcome would have been very different.

Examples like this set the template for generations of legends and myths, illustrating how these 17th and 18th century European explorers gathered hybrid botanical, geographical and colonial knowledge across the bastions of the imperial project. The artists included in Not Niwe, Not Nieuw, Not Neu, New Noties Noes Notts of our time are among the most influential in the field of taxonomies. These European ‘new discoveries’, providing new strategies to re-inter and evaluate this traumatic history. The story of the English word ‘new’ can be traced to Old English, Dutch and German origins. The concept of ‘new’ in this exhibition provokes a re-presentation of plants and animals, and the instability and instability of the act of naming—who has the privilege of classifying something as new, why, and to whom?

Newell Harry draws upon this notion, presenting works that investigate the fluidity of how language, culture and ideas circulate. Homonyms, homophones, anagrams, alliteration and palindromes are rendered in neon in his enormous enjoyable Circles in the Round series. Framed by a series of concentric circles that act as flashing targets, Harry asks his audience to solve the entangled wordplays: ascribe meaning and rationale to what initially seems like, the meaningless.

This lack of immediate associations between the word constructions in Harry’s work places the audience as outsiders, able to only grasp at the word constructions in Harry’s work place. Using this medium, Tylor’s plates reimagine the work of Banks and his team—hands fastidiously collect and define plant and animal life—was without precedent. In many cases, Cook and Banks created new systems of vocabulary, hierarchies and names to classify the new world. The omission of these traditional symbols, instead of the native tui or now extinct huia and totara. The critical edge of these narratives is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander family is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander, part Chinese, part Cornish. Born in Cairns, Queensland, his personal heritage and artistic practice is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander, part Chinese, part Cornish. Daniel Boyd’s personal heritage and artistic practice is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander, part Chinese, part Cornish.

Daniel Boyd’s personal heritage and artistic practice is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander, part Chinese, part Cornish. The loose ends of this colonial history cannot be easily tidied up. Not Niwe, Not Nieuw, Not Neu addresses the colonial mythology of power and influence through the lens of botanical science. The British colonial project, whilst yielding incredible botanical discovery, left a legacy of social, economic, political and literal devastation of Aboriginal communities that continues today. Whilst not directly addressed in this exhibition, these considerations are present and inform these artists’ practices, galvanising their stories and observations. This is the strength of these artists. Through provocative and questioning, they issue to us the tools to forge a new order from the precarious vestiges and remains of the so-called colonial ‘new world’.

**ARTISTS:**

Joseph Banks, Daniel Boyd, Newell Harry, Fiona Pardington, Michael Parekowhai, James Tylor

**Curator:** Michele Do

To view a full list of works, artist biographies and public program details, please visit: 4a.com.au/not-niwe/


**Book cover:** Michael Parekowhai, Robert Hayden, 2004, spray, two photographic plates and aluminium, Image courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley Gallery. Sydney.


1. The collected plant life was recorded by illustrator Sydney Parkinson, also on board of the Endeavour. Unable to keep up with the quantity of specimens, Parkinson’s notes for the flora were finally published in correspondence prints from 1760 – 1950. These of the included in the exhibition.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.