

**Not Niwe  
Not Nieuw  
Not Neu**



**Centre for  
Contemporary  
Asian Art**

## Nondum Cognita (not yet known)

There is no mystery as to why Captain Cook gave Botany Bay its name. The explorer was so impressed by the volume of flora and fauna collected by botanist Sir Joseph Banks and his team that Cook decided to commemorate the inlet after the science 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<sup>1</sup>. Their findings were immense: approximately 30,000 specimens were collected from Australia and New Zealand alone, representing over 3,000 species, of which 1,400 were wholly new to science.<sup>2</sup>

The scale of this taxonomy—the science of naming and defining plant and animal life—was without precedent. In many cases, Cook and Banks created new systems of vocabulary, hierarchies and methods to describe this new world.<sup>3</sup> Many plants collected were cast under the genus of ‘Banks’ in reference to his contribution, and the east coast was described as a ‘new’ offshoot of Europe, as in the case of New South Wales. Cook also named the ‘Kangaroo’ phonetically after *gangurru*, the term used by Aboriginal people on the North-East coast for local, large, grey marsupials.<sup>4</sup> 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 grafted, hybridised and transplanted colonial prejudices across the bastions of the imperial project. The artists included in *Not Niwe, Not Nieuw, Not Neu* disturb this past by revisiting the tales of these European ‘new discoveries’, providing new strategies to re-interpret and evaluate this traumatic history. The etymology of the English word ‘new’ can be traced to Old English, Dutch and German origins. The concept of ‘new’ in this exhibition provides a departure point to explore the mutability 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 are a lyrical study of how language, culture and ideas circulate. Homonyms, homophones, anagrams, alliteration and palindromes are rendered in neon in his enormously enjoyable *Circles in the Round* series. Framed by a series of concentric circles that act as flashing targets, Harry asks his audience to solve these 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 place its readers as outsiders, able to only grasp at part of the story. Read within the context of the artist’s nuanced practice—speaking to the colonial legacy on language, culture, politics and economics throughout the outposts of Vanuatu, India, Northeast Asia, Australia and his ancestral hometown, Capetown, South Africa—the works portray a darker undertone, highlighting the interplay between language, power and knowledge.

Michael Parekowhai entertains the idea of ‘otherness’ through the use of taxidermy in his sculptural practice. Within the *Beverly Hills Gun* series, common sparrows are perched upon meticulously finished green steel branches. Introduced to New Zealand by British colonialists, sparrows were intended to establish a partnership with native birds, forming an ecology more familiar to European settlers. However, more often than not, introduced species created havoc within the local

ecology—endangering local species and turning into pests. Parekowhai co-opts this history to illustrate the duopoly of the colonised and coloniser in New Zealand. Furthering this is the fact that each of the birds is named after people and situations related to American handguns, alluding to the danger of these invasive colonial ‘weapons’.

However, Parekowhai’s work operates at multiple registers, presenting perspectives that conflict, collide and coalesce depending from where in the room one views his work. In telling the story of the colonised/coloniser, Parekowhai uses sparrows instead of the native tui or now extinct huia and imported lemon trees instead of the kowhai or totara. The omission of these traditional symbols, which are remembered and honoured through ancestral narratives, for introduced species like the sparrow or olive tree is a curious decision.

Taxidermy as presented in an art gallery setting recalls the pedagogical paradigm of the historical natural history museum, specifically the 19th century *wunderkammer*, where ‘exotic’ materials are displayed as educational dioramas. Operating with and against this history, Parekowhai introduces a parallel discussion of *what* belongs—contemporary culture, history, actual animals—*where* it belongs and *how* it belongs. Nothing is immediately answered in this cul-de-sac; rather a series of arguments, ideas and postulations are waiting for one’s own input. This is the delight of Parekowhai’s practice: a carefully balanced tightrope that asks for a deeper kind of perception that stretches the boundaries of art appreciation and meaning making.

Fellow New Zealander Fiona Pardington’s photographic practice delves into the world of public and private collections. Using the still life format, Pardington often presents *taonga*, objects sacred to Maori culture alongside a tableau of native flora, fauna, and found objects, creating unique portraits of historical and contemporary Maori, New Zealand and Pacific culture. For this presentation, Pardington highlights the role of human intervention—hunting and forestry—in the extinction of the sacred Huia bird. Native to New Zealand, only high-ranking Maori chiefs wore the Huia’s precious plumes as headdresses. The bird was also used in a number of ceremonial roles, reserved for important occasions such as war and death.<sup>5</sup> The black and white starkness of this image triggers a mediation on memory, speaking to how an ability to confront painful, past historical events leaves us poised to understand ourselves today and better prepared for tomorrow.

Another of Pardington’s works, *Freud and Puriri* (2013) speaks directly to the *Endeavour* voyage, which travelled to New Zealand, but moored for only relatively short periods due to the hostile interactions with the Maori people.<sup>6</sup> Banks and Solander collected a number of specimens in New Zealand, one of which was like the Puriri pictured.<sup>7</sup> Her composition speaks to the work of the Old Masters. Bathed in light and shadow, the image manages to be both epic and intimate, locating allusions to grand subjects such as love, death, faith, amid the particulars of everyday life.

James Tylor interrogates the colonial project by co-opting the photographic medium used by the colonies to disseminate information about plants, animals and life in Australia and New Zealand. Daguerreotypes, introduced in 1839, render images using finely built-up texture on a mirror-like surface. Using this medium, Tylor’s plates reimagine the work of Banks and his team—hands fastidiously collect native plants, which are later dissected, manipulated and then photographed as specimens.

For Tylor, a Nunga (Kaurua) and Maori (Te Arawa) man with European heritage, this photographic series is particularly personal. Working with the historical trauma of the colonial project, Tylor uses metaphor to draw allusions to his ancestors who too were taken from their land, manipulated, controlled

and then photographed. The critical edge of these images lies between the push and pull of these references, alternately informative and illustrative yet never instructive.

Daniel Boyd’s personal heritage and artistic practice is also directly connected to the trauma of the colonial project. Born in Cairns, Queensland, his family is of mixed origin: part Pentecost Islander (now part of Vanuatu) and Kudjilla, Gangalu Aboriginal people from Clairemonth South to mid Queensland. Between 1863–1904, approximately 62,000 South Sea Islanders were ‘blackbirded’ (deceived into leaving their homes), recruited, or enslaved and forced to work on the sugar plantations in Queensland.<sup>8</sup> By 1901, many were repatriated to their homes, however a significant population of people remained in Australia, many having married into Aboriginal families.<sup>9</sup>

The weight of this familial history appears in Daniel Boyd’s history paintings that interrogate Eurocentric perspectives of Australian colonial history. In 2005, he presented a painting series that would dramatically alter the landscape of Australian art history and history painting broadly. Boyd recast Captain Cook and colonial explorers as pirates and murderers, complete with eye-patches and the occasional parrot. Inscribed beneath each portrait is the expression ‘no beard’, alluding to accounts that the Indigenous Australians first thought Captain Cook and his explorers were women as they had no facial hair.<sup>10</sup> The beard reference also ties Captain Cook to Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard, the notorious English pirate.

In this exhibition, the painted figure of King George III (reign 1760 – 1820), the monarch at the time who commissioned Cook to undertake their voyage and a portrait of an older Banks, are paired together. This recasting of these historical figures marks both the beginning of Boyd’s historical evaluative practice and the destination of this exhibition.

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 privilege 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 provocation and question, they provide us the tools to forge a new order from the precarious vestiges and remainders of the so-called colonial ‘new world’.

### ARTISTS:

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

Curator: Micheal Do

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

### Cover image:

Michael Parekowhai, *Robert Hayden*, 2004, sparrow, two pot paint and aluminium. Image courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland.

### Background image:

Newell Harry, *Circle/s in the Round: WHITE WHINE*, 2010, neon, 135 x 110 x 5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

This exhibition has been supported by 4A Patron, Marmont Capital.

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 collected plant life, he would leave notes for his illustrations to be finished later. The *Florilegium* project, containing Parkinson’s 743 illustrations were finally published in copperplate prints from 1980 – 1990. Two of these are included in the exhibition.

2 P. J. Hatfield, *The Material History of the Endeavour in Chambers*, N. (ed.), *Endeavouring Banks* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016).

3 W. T. Stearn, *A Royal Society appointment with Venus in 1769: The voyage of Cook and Banks in the Endeavour in 1768–71 and its botanical results*, in Ballantyne (ed.), *Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2004).

4 R. Cilento, *Sir Joseph Banks, F.R.S., and the Naming of the Kangaroo*, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 26, pp. 157–161.

5 M. Szabo, 1993, *Huia: The Sacred Bird*, *New Zealand Geographic*, 20.

6 J. Banks, *Journal of the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Banks Bart., K.B., P.R.S* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

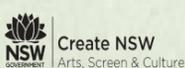
7 P. J. Brownsey, *The Banks and Solander Collections – a benchmark for understanding the New Zealand flora*, *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 42:2, pp. 131 – 137.

8 D. Mundine, 2017, *Daniel Boyd: Bittersweet* exhibition catalogue. 24 June – 10 September 2017.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

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