The Duplicity of Emus and Kangaroos: Coats of arms from the Australian frontier

Abstract

In December 2018 the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) rehung its collection to include an Australian faux coat of arms assembled from three different historic carvings. An emu and kangaroo sat on either side of a spectacular Adnyamathanha shield, in a combination of settler Australian and Aboriginal Australian art. The carved emu is dated to c1930, and probably comes from Port Augusta, Ooldea, or another stop along the transcontinental railway line where Indigenous artists began making animals for its passengers during the 1920s. The carved kangaroo is attributed to a settler, South Australian artist and is dated to c1845, pre-dating the animal carving movement. The shield is a striking, brilliant example of Adnyamathanha pyrography, dated to c1930, with emus, kangaroos and horses walking from one side to another in banded rows, and an emu sitting atop a nest of eggs on its bottom. This essay interprets this faux coat of arts to be part of a longer history in which the Australian coat of arms has influenced Aboriginal carvers and weavers. It constructs a cross-cultural history around the coat of arms through representations of the animal and emu in carvings from the railway sidings, missions and communities of remote Australia.

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Essay

In December 2018 the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) rehung its collection to include an Australian faux coat of arms assembled from three different historic carvings. An emu and kangaroo sat on either side of a spectacular Adnyamathanha shield, in a combination of settler Australian and Aboriginal Australian art. The carved emu is dated to c1930, and probably comes from Port Augusta, Ooldea, or another stop along the transcontinental railway line where Indigenous artists began making animals for its passengers during the 1920s. The carved kangaroo is attributed to a settler, South Australian artist and is dated to c1845, pre-dating the animal carving movement. The shield is a striking, brilliant example of Adnyamathanha pyrography, dated to c1930, with emus, kangaroos and horses walking from one side to another in banded rows, and an emu sitting atop a nest of eggs on its bottom. It is all too easy to accuse the AGSA of neo-colonialism here, as the shield is incorporated into a symbol of nationhood that was first conceived by excluding Aboriginal people.[i] This concept of recolonising overlooks, however, the way in which Aboriginal artists have themselves appropriated the coat of arms to decorate clubs, shields, walking sticks and more recently to make *tjanpi*, soft sculpture that includes native grasses. It also overlooks a long history of animal carving in which emus and kangaroos play a duplicitous role. While these antipodean animals symbolise nationhood in the Australian coat of arms, in the carving and *tjanpi* movements they represent a politics of Aboriginality amidst cultural and material exhange. The installation creates a continuity between carvings made by settler and Aboriginal artists bridging two histories that are typically kept apart in both the writing of Australian art history and in the exhibition practices of Australian galleries. This faux coat of arms is not the only curatorial conceit in the AGSA's rehang, that combines Australian, Indigenous, Oceanic and European arts in different ways. This essay is interested in the way that this installation of animal carvings allows us to rethink the way artists working on the frontiers of Australian society have worked creatively with symbols of nationhood.

The Elder Wing

To think through the significance of this faux-coat of arms and its cross-cultural significance, it is worth briefly surveying the history of innovations at the AGSA in which Aboriginal, settler, Oceanic and European art have been hung in different combinations. These exhibitions form part of an attitude fostered at the gallery by Nick Mitzevich who became the AGSA's Director in 2010. Mitzevich sought to improve attendances with provocative purchases and displays.[ii] Take, for example, the 2018 installation of Auguste Rodin's sculpture *Flying Figure* (1891-2) alongside Tom Roberts's painting of a shepherd, *A Break Away* (1891). The poses of the figures in both are near identical. In reaching across the wall, Rodin's sculpted torso mimics Roberts's shepherd who leans out of the saddle. AGSA curator Tracey Lock argues that Roberts and Rodin were both fascinated by the new technology of photography and its affect on movement, and that that this interest brought about this new, dynamic pose in art of the 1890s.[iii] Such insights are typical of good curating, in which artworks illustrate not only the historical experience of artists but new ways of seeing the world. This kind of gambit becomes risky, however, when curating work from Aboriginal Australia. The historical experience of Aboriginal Australians has been substantially different from that of Europeans and the settler population of the country, making Aboriginal art a politically sensitive area to be working in. Exhibitions that suggests there are motifs shared by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art risks the censure of an audience educated in the terms of these debates. So that when the AGSA combined Aboriginal Australian art with European, Oceanic and settler Australian art in its new hang, it attracted criticism from Ali Hayat who accuses the AGSA of recolonising its collection.[iv]

The Australian provocations have taken place in the Elder Wing of the gallery. It once welcomed visitors with the busts of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dignitaries on either side of its entrance, the Tasmanians Trucaninny and her husband Woureddy on one side, with the heads of explorers Charles Sturt and George McLeay on the other. The pairing sums up something of the ambition of the AGSA's new curatorial gambits to trouble Australian art history. The beginnings of these gambits may well lie in the 2012 show by Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones. He arranged the colonial paintings of the Murray-Darling river system by their Indigenous names as a part of the Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art. This show also featured an display by settler Australian artist Tom Nicholson of thirty-eight painted copies of H.J. Johnstone's *Evening Shadows* (1880) on a wall, this being one of the most reproduced paintings in Australian art history. Together, these exhibitions created a troubled relationship between colonial representations and the Indigenous history of the country, as well as between high Australian art and kitsch.[v]

In 2018 the Elder Wing featured the Arrernte artist Erliklyika Jim Kite's kaolin smoking pipes amidst Indian colonnades and wallpaper inspired by William Morris. This partition of the Elder Wing suggests an 'Orientalist' history behind Erliklyika's pipes, that are shaped to feature hands, faces and more abstract designs holding tobacco bowls. There is no direct evidence that the styles of Persia or India influenced Erliklyika, since clay figurative pipes are part of European and particularly English culture. Here, however, there is a suggestion that he may have been inspired by the Afghan cameleers who once travelled the deserts carrying goods for early miners, pastoralists and telegraph station operators. He may also have been inspired by Chinese miners, gardeners and cooks who also populated the desert at this time. The effect is to open up these pipes to visual interpretation, to de-Aboriginalise the pipes, and make them a part of a cross-cultural history of the continent. As Lock makes clear, the new Elder Hang wing wants to capture 'artists working in an international experience but in human contexts.'[vi]

Another display in the AGSA gallery is modelled on the famous salon display of European, African and Oceanic art on the walls of Andre Breton's apartment. The new, AGSA hang puts mid-century, settler Australian paintings and Oceanic shields alongside Arnhem Land and Kimberley bark paintings in an eclectic display of surrealist ethnography. This part of the Elder Wing lends itself more than any other to postcolonial critique, since it gambles on an unreconstructed display of what has long been critiqued as a kind of primitivism. Suzanne Close writes that the 'sensibilities of individual works are lost in the aesthetically jarring display, dominated by the curatorial agenda.'[vii] She is particularly critical of an installation of Kunwinjku paintings that sit on either side of an animated Len Lye film from 1929. The film, called *Tusalava*, was inspired by the story of the Udnirringita, of the totemic witchety grub group of Central Australian Arrente people.[viii] The story is documented in Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen's *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), but the film is named for a Samoan word and shows the influence of Pacific carving.[ix] Lye was taking his inspiration from what he thought of as an 'old brain' that could be seen in Aboriginal and Pacific material culture. In other works he was inspired by Indigenous materials, scratching his film *Free Radicals* (1958) with American Indian arrowheads. *The Peanut Vendor* (1936) is more problematic, as Lye animates the image of a monkey dancing the Rumba. The AGSA curators are true to Lye's roaming primitivism in juxtaposing *Tusalva* with two paintings of the rainbow serpent, one by Billy Yirawala and the other by Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek. Nadjamerrek's painting is called *Rainbow Serpent* (1972), and the Yirawala painting is *Katjailen (the serpent)* (c1969). Arguably, however, these paintings are of very different Dreamings, and on different country, to the Udnirringita. They are aesthetically striking, but with very different Indigenous subjects. AGSA Assistant Director Lisa Slade defends this reinvention of surrealism, however, by arguing that that placing such a *wunderkammer* in the southern hemisphere displaces the centrality of European and settler Australian art. Rather than the surrealist works it is the bark paintings that are here the focus for an antipodean viewer. This reorientation of place displaces the 'northern' style works, in a decolonising perversion of surrealist ethnography.[x]

The Coat of Arms

These debates over the new Elder Wing hang are pertinent to the faux coat of arms that sits on a wall especially placed to partition it from the international part of the gallery. It introduces the Australian section of the gallery as Trucaninny and Woureddy, Sturt and McLeay once did. The carved kangaroo is perhaps the most unique carving in this three part installation, featuring the kangaroo, a shield and an emu. This is because of its age and its origins. It is dated to c1845, and is attributed to a migrant, possibly a refugee from religious persecution, living in the first wave of settler communities in the Adelaide Hills. While the shield and kangaroo are part of an Aboriginal art history of figurative carving and pyrography, this kangaroo troubles this history with an earlier example of animal carving that was not made by Indigenous hands. While the emu and shield look like they are made of mulga, a common carving wood in the dry regions where Aboriginal settlements were situated, the emu is made of casuarina, and incorporates iron and plaster, and peers out of glass eyes. Casuarina's distribution in the nineteenth century in more coastal regions, where the new settler populations were based. The incorporation of glass, iron and plaster materials in this early year of colonisation also suggests its settler origins. The kangaroo is from the collection of Robert Lyons, who comes from a Germanic South Australian family, and amassed a collection of folk art from the state. It may have been made by one the many Germanic migrants who fled Prussia to South Australia during the mid to late nineteenth

century. They brought their skills in felling, turning and carving wood to new settlements in the hills just north of Adelaide. The origins of the kangaroo may always be uncertain, however. In 2019 the curators changed the didactic panel that accompanied the kangaroo. The first panel attributed it to the Adelaide Hills, while a second, later panel broadened this to the more general region of South Australia. The change is symptomatic of the uncertainty surrounding historic carvings, that often arrive in collections with minimal information about their makers.

This is particularly true of Aboriginal carvings, that were collected anonymously along the railway and telegraph lines, as well as on missions and stations. Emus and kangaroos were carved atop walking sticks and made as stand alone sculptures, and sold along the transcontinental railway line that ran between Adelaide and Perth. At Port Augusta, Ooldea and Yalata these animal carvings, as well as coolamons, spearthrowers and other classical wares were sold to passengers as they stopped. The train did not stay at the sidings long, and a photograph from 1940 suggests that passengers did not even leave the train to make such trades, as they leaned through the window to negotiate with Aboriginal men peering up at them.[xi] It was however enough time to enable a quick exchange of wooden animals and artefacts. Further north, Central Desert artists sold their wares to early bus tours moving between cattle stations and natural attractions. Missions and government settlements such as Nepabunna also facilitated the production and sale of classical Aboriginal artefacts, as well as European styles of plaque, bowls and spoons. On the Ngaanyatjarra settlement of Warburton in Western Australia, boxes of carvings were sent to Perth for sale, while at Hermannsburg north of the South Australian border, the mission used its sponsorship of artefact and souvenier production to stay financial.

Some genres of carving were more prolific, and presumably more in demand, than others. Boomerangs, as symbols of Aboriginal life, if not of Australia itself, were popular as were the tools of hunting, including spears and spearthrowers. These genres owed much to classical Western Desert designs, but other genres and styles of decoration were owed to European influence, including mulga plaques and walking sticks. The continuity of these genres across settlements testifies to the extensive traffic of carvers around the region, and the opportunities they found in selling their work to settlers travelling through regional and remote Australia by train, truck and car. It may be that the AGSA’s emu was carved by Moonee David, who is named in a newspaper article that pictures him with a kangaroo carving.[xii] In the absence of solid provenance, however, such attributions are often speculative, as buyers of these animals and other carvings spent little time with artists who today remain sadly anonymous.

It is, however, possible to make a more certain attribution to the shield in the middle of this faux coat of arms. The didactic attributes it to ‘Adnyamathanha people’, and it is likely the artist was Davy Ryan, one of the more prolific carvers of the Adnyamathanha School. Ryan is known for the quality of his work, and for his interest in animals. The intricate figures of kangaroos, fish, horses, and a seated camel on this shield betrays a skilled and experienced artist. The fauna represents a bounty of meat, from cattle and swans walking to two emus standing above a nest of eggs. The shield pictures a lively state of nature in an earlier era of Australian history, when animals crowded the landscape. Camels were once used extensively for transport through Adnyamathanha country and into the dry north, while the fish may have been from the Murray River system that was once a part of an old trading network to the east. The estimated date of the shield suggests that it was made at Nepabunna mission, where in the early 1930s the missionaries encouraged a culture of carving to support its endeavours, but paid its artists little.[xiii] The silhouette style, in which pyrographed animals are burned to

stand out from the wood, makes the Adnyamathanha School distinct amidst a carving movement that extended across South Australia and into Western Australia, as well as north into the Central Desert.[xiv]

The appeal of such carvings to a newly Federated settler population may well have been the relational authenticity that they hold with them, the souvenier of an encounter with an authentic Aboriginal person. The hand of the artist assured the buyer of the traditional quality of the item, its connection to a distinctly different culture and people. In a series of publications, Ian McLean has described Aboriginal art as a modern art movement because its work is syncretic, combining both Indigenous and non-Indigenous influences to create something new.[xv] McLean's argument extends not only to new genres such as emu and kangaroo carvings, but to more traditional forms of carving made for sale and trade across remote Australia. This is because they were not made for ceremonial or functional use, but were made to be a part of the modern economy. Coolamons and shields, boomerangs and spearthrowers, were made to simulate their classical contexts without being classical.
There are other animal carvings installed on this AGSA wall below the coat of arms. Two wooden kangaroos that face each other in a pose that mirrors the emu and kangaroo above. One of these kangaroos is also from the Robert Lyons collectio, and is dated to c1900. There are two wooden decoy ducks here too, swimming below left of the coat of arms. The ducks are dated at c1910 and are from the settlement of Blanche Town on the Murray River, and were likely used by hunters. While the practice of making and deploying decoy ducks is European in its origins, the carving of decoy ducks was also practiced by Aboriginal craftsmen.[xvi] These carvings of contribute to a cross-cultural interpretation of these carvings, in which arms above, in which animals are carved by both settler and Indigenous people who are invested in their symbolism.

The multiplication of wooden animals here suggests the reproduced quality not only of the craft of animal carving and pyrography but the reproduction of the coat of arms itself. Outlined on the back of pound and shilling coins that were in circulation in the early twentieth century, emus and kangaroos were a highly visible part of the iconography of early Australia. The new currency was significant not only for its place in a fledgling country, but more simply as a means to buy food and other essentials. The currency was sought after by carvers across South Australia and the Northern Territory, but was also a means by which Aboriginal people were kept in poverty. Carvers called tourists who bought artefacts from remote Aboriginal craftsmen in Central Australia 'two bob' after the price that they called out in attempting to secure a bargain boomerang when touring remote Australia.[xvii] 'Two bob' was little money in those days, and would be the offer whatever the quality of the carving. The cultural and material exchanges that took place on the frontiers of settler society played upon the unequal kinship of black and white Australia. The provocation of the faux coat of arms in AGSA, however, subverts the racially white origins of the currency, becoming a symbol of the cross-cultural traffic in carved animals, and the multivalence of the symbolism of native animals in Australia.

Today Aboriginal artists are in a very different historical situation to the one that they were in during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Australian political situation has today made these artists visible to the Australian public, amidst an appetite for exhibitions and conversations around Aboriginality that is reflected by an ongoing debate over their place in national society. In the early twentieth century Aboriginal people were much less visible amidst a new consciousness of Australia as a nation. The shift to nationhood had brought about the wholesale institutionalisation of Aboriginal people into missions, reserves, schools

and pastoral stations.[xviii] Aboriginal families had also been decimated by disease, and were expected as late as the 1930s and 1940s to be a dying race, or at least one that would be assimilated into the greater Australian population. Amidst the horror of children being removed from their parents, poverty and disempowerment, the making and trade of artefacts offered a rare opportunity for Aboriginal people to create economic opportunities for themselves, and to represent a nascent, pan-continental Aboriginal identity to white Australians. In their turn, white Australians were enthusiastic about collecting Aboriginalia, that represented both a dying race and expressed an authentic Australian iconography. Boomerangs, coolamons, kangaroos, snakes, spears and spearthrowers were traded across the deserts of Australia, and on missions and government settlements. Institutions including Bungarun in the Kimberley, Cherbourg in Queensland, La Perouse in Sydney and Nepabunna in the Flinders Ranges became factories for the manufacture of inscribed boomerangs. At Cherbourg thousands of blanks were carved from imported wood before being inscribed with designs of animals, hunting and station work scenes. At La Perouse, a stand of boomerangs welcomed visitors who were able to take away pictures of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on their boomerangs, souveniers of the part of the country that had been subject to the longest colonial occupation.

It is with this in mind that it is interesting to find, amidst the many subjects of carving, that the Australian coat of arms was both reproduced on shields and clubs and influenced their designs. Gallipoli veteran Douglas Scott collected a rudely etched copy of the symbol on a toy spearthrower when he went to Central Australia to work after returning from World War One.[xix] An earlier version of the coat of arms was also collected from an inscribed *lil lil*, a type of club made in south-eastern Australia, at the beginning of the twentieth century.[xx] This is no toy, measuring half a meter and being made of hardwood. The ‘Advance Australia’ coat of arms, in use from 1908 to 1912, had the emu and kangaroo motifs, but used a differently designed shield in between them. A commonwealth style star was placed above this shield with ‘Advance Australia’ written onto a scroll beneath. The appearance of coats of arms on carvings at this time suggests some symbiosis of Aboriginal and Australian symbolism. Through these works, the artists suggest to a newly nationalistic settler population the presence of Indigenous people as a part of Australia.

Since the 1980s, the appropriation of Aboriginal motifs has been of ethical and intellectual interest among Australian art historians and critics.[xxi] The debate over appropriation and the representation of Aboriginality has a long history to draw upon, from the collecting of Aboriginalia to attempts by artists including Margaret Preston to use desert and saltwater iconography to create a distinctly Australian art.[xxii] There has been relatively little discourse, however, around reverse appropriation, the way in which Aboriginal artists used the motifs of the invaders in strategies of creativity and survival.[xxiii] It is possible to interpret the use of the coat of arms on carved artefacts as one such reverse appropriation, as a motif consciously lifted from settler culture to be traded back with this culture in an exchange.

There is some evidence for this in rare cases in which artists from the early to mid twentieth century have used the kangaroo and emu atop shields and walking sticks, and whose intentions are remembered by their descendants. Warraumungu artist Nat Warano, better remembered as Tracker Nat, made watercolour paintings of a kangaroo and emu with a laurel design below them atop shields and spearthrowers dating to between the 1930s and 1950s. The side by side placement of emu and kangaroo, and the decorative laurel, on suggests their inspiration in the coat of arms. Rather than running, bounding or feeding, as with other representations on carvings of the twentieth century, the emu and kangaroo here stand facing

each other as they do in Australian coats of arms. Nat sold his artefacts to settlers making their way through Phillip Creek Mission, Tennant Creek and the government settlement of Warrabri in northern Central Australia. He didn't only make artefacts for commercial reasons, however. He also gifted artefacts to politicans, teachers and other important figures who were in some way serving the Warramungu community. Contemporary artist and Nat's grandson Joseph 'Yugi' Williams describes Nat's generosity with these artfefacts in terms of *ngijinkirri*, a Warramungu mutual gifting that implicates the giver and receiver into a relationship of obligation.[xxiv] Nat's art created relationships with those outside the small society of Aboriginal people living in this region to further the political interests of the Warramungu people. The use of the emu and kangaroo on his artefacts can be interpreted as a way of reaching common symbolic ground with the settlers he aimed to impress. Through his carvings, Nat was a visual and material diplomat.

The motifs of emu and kangaroo facing each other is also found on walking sticks made by Ted Coulthard with Winne Ryan and their five daughters on the Nepabunna settlement in Andymathanha country, South Australia during and after the 1930s. This kangaroo and emu are shaking a paw and claw, the figures resembling the 'Advance Australia' coat of arms. Contemporary Andymathanha carver and Ted's great grandson Kristian Coulthard explains that this emu and kangaroo symbolises agreements between people, particularly gentleman's agreements and friendships.[xxv] Such agreements have been a part of doing business for the Coulthard family for generations. When Ted and his brothers started a carting business, Kristian and his father Vincent Coulthard tell me, they struck up an agreement with Balcanoona Station. They said to the bosses at Balcanoona that if they carted wool and stores from the station to the railhead and back again with their donkey teams, could they give the Adnyamathanha a place to live. This the kind of handshake agreement is represented by the kangaroo and emu on these old walking sticks. They symbolise mateship and friendship and agreements, that even different animals can coexist, and we can get along even when opposite, *udnyu* and *yura*. Usually, Kristian says, when he pyrographs this symbol they are the first carvings to sell, in a testament to the way in which carving itself stands for an agreement between the artist and his customer, in a kind of bridge between peoples.

It is possible to return to the *lil lil* from c1910, and to the carved and pyrographed animals from the transcontinental railway line, with this visual diplomacy in mind. Could these animal carvings represent an attempt to broach the cultural and racial divide with figures commonly recognised by both Aboriginal and settler Australia? Could the appropriation of the coat of arms on the *lil lil* be part of a diplomatic strategy on the part of an unknown artist at the dawn of the twentieth century? These questions are for a large part unanswerable but only in the sense that so many questions around art from the past remains enigmatic, marooned in the historical multiplicities that produced it. It is, however, surely too simple to dismiss the carving movement as commercial opportunism and as not truly representative of Aboriginal art as the anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt did in their later years.[xxvi] Nor would it be accurate to romanticise the diplomatic function it was performing, or to dismiss it as a symptom of the assimimation and protectionist policies that these artists were then suffering at the hands of Australian governments. In his 2006 book *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, McLean argues for a transcultural thinking around the history of Aboriginal art. Extending his argument for Aboriginal art as a modern, syncretic movement, he turns to the concept of the transcultural to describe that which appropriates the cultural forms of Indigenous and Western for to create art that exceeds both.[xxvii] The term supplements the anthropological emphasis on the cross-cultural, in which Aboriginal and Western societies come to art from distinct ontological and historical experiences of

colonisation.[xxviii] To a degree the transcultural and cross-cultural are interchangable terms, since both describe difference and collusion in the collision of societies Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The transcultural emphasises the performative dimension of the encounter, in which difference is part of a deliberate play with identities and their politics. The cross-cultural is instead interested in the continuity of the cultures that it describes. The transcultural is defined by reinvention rather than the recurrence. It lends itself to the apporpriation of the emu and kangaroo from the coat of arms, an appropriation of animals that have themselves been appropriated from their Indigenous contexts.

Tracker Nat's painted shields can be interpreted as transcultural as they simulate classical designs while also adapting Western styles of figurative representations. Classical Warramungu shields were certainly not painted with hunters, plants and animals as they are in Nat's hand. And yet these shields also play a part in conflict with people outside the Warramungu community. Given to outsiders, they are part of a diplomatic strategy Nat used throughout his leadership of this community. He may not have painted the shield in the centre of his version of the coat of arms because a Warramungu shield was already there, as the surface of the painting. Nat employed these shields as means to further his negotiations with white authorities around the movement of the Warramungu people from township to mission to reserve to government settlement, amidst the arrival of cattle and gold prospectors on their country.[xxix] Similarly, the painting of the Australian coat of arms on a hardwood *lil lil* club, one of the most formidable and rarest of artefacts from south-eastern Australia, signifies an ongoing incommensurability between Australia and its original occupants. The two central motifs of the Australian coat of arms, the native animal and the shield, lent themselves to the reverse appropriation of Aboriginal artists. In the hands of carvers on the frontiers of settler society, animals and shields become duplicitous signs of an ongoing cultural and political collision, in the aftermath of an invasion that had left Aboriginal people impoverished and disempowered.

Tjanpi

A more recent example of a remote Australian artist remaking the national coat of arms carries on this politicisation of its symbolism. Ninginka Lewis's *We Were There and We Are Here* (2018) is a version of the coat of arms made from spinifex grasses, raffia and wool. The striking difference of Lewis's coat of arms to the carvings discussed previously lies in the unity of its parts. While the kangaroo, emu and shield appear as distinct entities on the *lil lil*, and as part of the AGSA's carved coat of arms, here the woven form necessitates the joining of the parts into a whole. Also striking and in contrast to these earlier versions is an emphasis on vegetation. The official, national coat of arms features branches, leaves and flowers of the golden wattle that are not featured on either the *lil lil* or the AGSA assemblage. Here Lewis has placed leaves and colourful fruit to approximate this wreathing of the coat of arms, their bright colours and friendly shapes lending this coat of arms something of its loose, tactile character. It is, in Pitjantjatjara, *tjula* which 'means it is pliable and flexible.'[xxx] There is friendliness to this coat of arms, a warmth of colour and design. Fibre artist Nalda Searles describes the way works like this are made as 'cobbling', in which different materials are tied and stitched to make all kinds of sculptural forms.[xxxi]

There is a material continuity between this kind of 'cobbled' work and carving. Before working with grass, Lewis was part of the revivial of carving practices that took place across the southern desert region of Australia during the 1980s as Maruku Arts began its operations there. Although carving has long been practiced and sold by Pitjantjatjara artists in this part

of the desert, Maruku mobilised it as part of a commercial operation, selling *punu* to tourists at Uluru and further afield. Carving was of particular interest to Pitjantjatjara artists who had chosen not to make paintings like the Papunya artists to the north. The move has been interpreted as a conservativism on the part of Pitjantjatjara elders, who were among those who protested when paintings from Papunya were first exhibited with restricted ceremonial scenes.[xxxii] The arrival of the *punu* man in communities across the desert, ready to pay artists for carvings that would then be onsold, was a precedent for the *tjanpi* coiling and weaving that began during the 1990s. A series of workshops run by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytatjara Women's Council introduced carvers to this new practice that combined native grasses with imported materials such as wool and raffia, to make baskets and animals. Many of the women had already been carving coolamons, lizards and sometimes snakes as a part of their carving practice, as well as classically designed clubs and hunting sticks, when these women's workshops diversified their art practice.[xxxiii] Maruku Arts became the biggest buyer and seller of *tjanpi* as they used their existing network of galleries and shops.[xxxiv] From her earliest work, Lewis used raffia as well as desert grasses, string and wool.[xxxv] Wool, Lewis says, 'is good for the colour on top,' and in this coat of arms the wool certainly brightens the sculpture.[xxxvi]

The continuity between carving and *tjanpi* lies not only in the transcultural combination of tools and materials from local and settler material cultures. It also lies in an emphasis upon making animals. Kanytjupayi Benson was the first to turn to animals as a subject, making an emu and then a dog. Taking up animal sculpture was not, however, a merely secular or commercial choice. When Benson began weaving dogs, Elaine Wanatjura Lane was not sure that it was the right thing to do, because dogs are 'our sacred animal.'[xxxvii] The significance of the emu and kangaroo, too, hold meanings on the Pitjantjatjara Lands, where the *kaḻaya* (emu) and *maḻu* (kangaroo) Dreamings cross the country. This significance, in which animals symbolise long connections between Aboriginal people and the land, is one that Lewis wants to emphasise in speaking about her coat of arms sculpture:

> This work represents Tjukurpa (the foundation of Aṉangu life and society) and Nguraritja (sovereignty and traditional ownership), strengthof culture, and the abundance of landscape which has nurtured and sustained us since ancient times. It also reflects on Anangu youth experiencing jail brutality, and demands that we, the original people of this land, be treated with respect.[xxxviii]

The *tjanpi* sculpture combines this sense of continuity with the classical past, with the *tjukurrpa* (Dreaming) and country. This is placed within a contemporary context, in which Aboriginal people continue to face the consequences of invasion and colonisation. The coat of arms is an act of diplomacy, a means to marking the difference of Aboriginal points of view through a national iconography.

The significance of the emu and kangaroo in Aboriginal versions of the coat of arms, and of animal carving and weaving more generally, can be interpreted after both Nat and Lewis in political terms. The making of native animals for sale to settlers was a reverse appropriation of the significance they had been ascribed within a newly founded nation. The faux-coat of arms assembled by the AGSA curators suggests both this reverse appropriation, as well as a continuity of art practice between settler and Indigenous animal carvers. The c1845 kangaroo carving, presumably by a new Prussian colonist of South Australia, is an early carved response to an encounter not only with a new kind of animal, but an early attempt to symbolise the experience of colonisation and settlement itself. The kangaroo becomes a

means by which to carve out a relationship with a strange country, an icon lending itself to appropriation. The upright stances of the kangaroo and emu, the power contained within these fast and powerful local fauna, lent themselves not only to animal sculptors and designers of the national coat of arms, but also to the Dreamings by which they carve out the ranges and rockholes of the desert itself. Although it was designed without consulting Indigenous people, the Australian coat of arms carries within itself the ancient signifance of these animals to the people who first symbolised them in ceremonies. Its appropriation by Aboriginal artists animates the symbolic power of these animals for both settler and Indigenous cultures.

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[i] For critiques of the AGSA rehang, although not of the faux coat of arms in particular, see Yusuf Ali Hayat, 'Domesticating Settler Colonization at the Art Gallery of South Australia', *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture* 4.2 (2019): 233-244; and Yusaf Hayat, 'Na(rra)tion', *Fine Print* 23 (June 2019). http://www.fineprintmagazine.com/previous#/narration. See also Suzanne Close, 'The Elephant in the Room at the Elder Wing', unpublished essay.

[ii] Caitlin Eyre, '"It's not art, it's a monstrosity": Reflections on Public Outrage at the Art Gallery of South Australia', *Fine Print Magazine* 10 (March 2017). http://www.fineprintmagazine.com/its-not-art.

[iii] Suzie Keen, 'Elder Wing's new hang takes a fresh look at Australian art,' *InDaily: Adelaide Independent News*, Wednesday 5 December 2018. https://indaily.com.au/inreview/2018/12/05/elder-wings-new-hang-takes-a-fresh-look-at-australian-art/

[iv] See Yusuf Ali Hayat, 'Domesticating Settler Colonization at the Art Gallery of South Australia', *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture* 4.2 (2019): 233-244; and Yusaf Hayat, 'Na(rra)tion', *Fine Print* 23 (June 2019). http://www.fineprintmagazine.com/previous#/narration; and Suzanne Close, 'The Elephant in the Room at the Elder Wing', unpublished essay.

[v] Another curatorial innovation within the field of Aboriginal art has been on display since 2017, in a juxtaposition of watercolour landscape pantings by Albert Namatjira with the dot and circle paintings of the early Papunya school, suggesting a continuity between the two. This built on recent rewritings of Western Desert art history by Vivien Johnson and John Kean, that revisit the significance of Namatjira to the emergence of the Papunya art movement. See Vivien Johnson, *Streets of Papunya: The re-invention of Papunya painting,* NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2015; John Kean was also talking the curators at the time about his thesis that was then in development. Kean, Dot, Circle and Frame: How Kaapa Tjampitjinpa, Tim Leura, Clifford Possum and Johnny Warangula created Papunya Tula Art,' PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2020.

[vi] Tracey Lock, 'Tuesday Talk: Tracey Lock takes a closer look at the Elder Wing of Australian Art', public talk, Art Gallery of South Australia, 7 May 2019, https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/elder-wing-australian-art/

[vii] Suzanne Close, 'The Elephant in the Room at the Elder Wing', unpublished essay.

[viii] Max Bannah, 'Crossing the dotted line: Animation and Aboriginal representation', in *Modern times: The Untold Story of Australian Modernism in Australia,* ed. Ann Stephen, Philip Goad and Andrew McNamara, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 62-69 at 64-65.

[ix] Baldwin Spencer and Frances Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), Dover Publications, 1968.

[x] Lisa Slade, 'Breton's compass and Marek's map: Seeing surrealism from the South,' *Historie de L'Art* 84-85 (2019): 49.

[xi] Frank Leyden, *Passengers on the Trans-Australia train leaning out of the train windows at a stop between South Australia and Western Australia*, ca. 1940. National Library of Australia object number 147017150. See also Tony Thomas, 'How the Truth went Begging,' *Quadrant* online, 10 January 2014, < https://quadrant.org.au/opinion/bennelong-papers/2014/01/truth-went-begging/>.

[xii] 'Moonee David', Adelaide Advertiser 8 July, 1938, p. 32.

[xiii] Adnyamathanha men Kristian Coulthard and Vincent Coulthard in conversation with the author at the Wadna Shop in Blinman, South Australia, 13 June, 2021.

[xiv] This concept of the silhouette style was coined by Anyamathanha woman Lily Neville in conversation with the author and Denise Champion and Cynthia Webster in Port Augusta on 26 May, 2021.

[xv] See for example Ian McLean, 'Crossing Country: Tribal modernism and Kuninjku bark painting,' Third Text 20.5 (2006): 599-616; and Ian McLean, 'Modernism and the Art of Albert Namatjira,' in *Mapping Modernisms*, ed. Ruth B Phillips and Elizabeth Harney, Duke University Press, Durham, 2020, pp. 187-208.

[xvi] Jared Thomas, personal communication, 28 January, 2021.

[xvii] W.E. Harney, *To Ayers Rock and Beyond*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1969, pp. 100-101.

[xviii] See Tim Rowse, *Indigenous and Other Australians Since 1901*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2017.
[xix] pelargonium2, Aboriginal WOOMERA, small, hand-carved with coat of arms, resin work, 1920s, https://www.ebay.com.au/itm/Aboriginal-WOOMERA-small-hand-carved-with-coat-of-arms-resin-work-1920s/233566382697?hash=item3661a42a69:g:lHkAAOSwOmtentjz
[xx] Davidson Auctions Sale 143, Lot 40, Willem Kow Collection Tribal, Asian Arts, Weapons/Estate and Collector, 17 October, 2020. Sydney. See https://auctions.davidsonauctions.com.au/asp/fullCatalogue.asp?salelot=143+++++++40+&refno=10012724&saletype=.
[xxi] Rex Butler, "Introduction," in Rex Butler, ed., *What is Appropriation? An anthology of critical writings on Australian art in the '80s and '90s*, Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, Brisbane and Sydney, 1996, pp. 13-46.
[xxii] Elizabeth Butel, *Margaret Preston: The art of constant rearrangement*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 49-69.
[xxiii] An exception lies in the scholarship around Tommy McRae, including Carol Cooper and James Urry, 'Art, Aborigines and Chinese: A nineteenth century drawing by the Kwatkwat artist Tommy McRae', *Aboriginal History* 5.1 (1981): 80-88; Ian McLean, 'Mysterious Correspondences between Charles Baudelaire and Tommy McRae: Reimagining modernism in Australia as a contact zone', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art* 13 (2013): 70-89; and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2014, pp. 209-257.
[xxiv] Joseph Williams, Levi McLean and Darren Jorgensen, 'Tracker Nat's Art of *Ngijinkirri,* the Tennant Creek Brio, Masonic Hand Signs and Warramungu History,' unpublished paper.
[xxv] Private conversation with Kristian Coulthard and Vincent Coulthard in Blinman, South Australia, on 13 June, 2021.
[xxvi] Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt with John Stanton, *Aboriginal Australian Art*, New Holland, Sydney, 1998, pp. 136-141.
[xxvii] Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art*, Reaktion Books, London, 2016, p. 10.
[xxviii] Anthropologists Howard Morphy and Fred Myers have advocated cross-cultural readings of Aboriginal art. See for example Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories,* University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2007; Howard Morphy, 'Seeing Aboriginal Art in the Gallery', *Humanities Research* 8.1 (2001): 37-50; and Fred Myers, 'Unsettled Business: Acrylic painting, tradition, and Indigenous being', *Visual Anthropology* 17 (2004): 247-271.
[xxix] See David Nash, "The Warumungu's Reserves 1892-1962," *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1984): pp. 2-16.
[xxx] Ninginka Lewis, 'This is what we say when we make baskets', in *Tjanpi Desert Weavers,* ed. Penny Watson, Macmillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2012, p. 324.
[xxxi] Christiane Keller, 'From Baskets to Bodies: Innovation within Aboriginal fibre practice,' *Craft + Design Enquiry* 2 (2010): 9-36 at 27.
[xxxii] Judith Ryan, 'Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra Art of a New Millennium', *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 2010, p. 4.
[xxxiii] Kanytjupayu Benson, 'Beginnings and History of the Tjanpi Weaving Movement,' in *Tjanpi Desert Weavers,* ed. Penny Watson, MacMillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2012, p. 17.
[xxxiv] 'Timeline', in *Tjanpi Desert Weavers,* ed. Penny Watson, MacMillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2012, pp. 336-348 at 337.
[xxxv] Niningka Lewis, 'I thought I'd get some to experiment with,' in *Tjanpi Desert Weavers,* ed. Penny Watson, MacMillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2012, p. 70.
[xxxvi] Niningka Lewis, 'String, wool and raffia,' in *Tjanpi Desert Weavers,* ed. Penny Watson, MacMillan Art Publishing, Melbourne, 2012, p. 319.
[xxxvii] Cited in John Carty, '*Purnu, tjanpi,* canvas,' in *Ngaanyatjarra: Art of the lands*, ed. Tim Acker and John Carty, University of Western Australia Publishing, Perth, 2012, pp. 15-35 at 29.
[xxxviii] Rhett Hmmerton, 'Ninginka Lewis' Coat of Arms acquired by Australian Parliament House,' Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council News, February 5, 2019. < https://www.npywc.org.au/news/ninginka-lewis-coat-of-arms-acquired-by-australian-parliament-house/>