



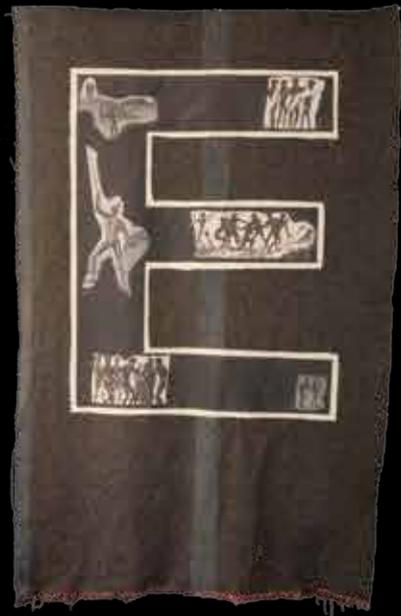
Peter Waples-Crowe
and Megan Evans

SQUATTERS AND SAVAGES

The Art Gallery of Ballarat acknowledges the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this exhibition is presented.

Readers should be aware that this catalogue includes images and names of deceased people which may cause sadness or distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.







left:
Peter Waples-Crowe
Euro Trash
2016-17
mixed media on
canvas board

page 8-9:
Megan Evans
Hunting Party 1
(detail) 2017
antique chair,
embroidery thread,
glass beads

Director's Foreword

Three years ago, the Art Gallery of Ballarat hosted the Victorian Indigenous Art Awards, and through that exhibition I met Peter Waples-Crowe and encountered his work for the first time. Some of that work explored LGBTI issues within an Indigenous context, with many of the images being collages derived from nineteenth-century European depictions of Aboriginal Australians. The work was charged with an iconoclastic sense of humour, but it wasn't just irreverent: these images were incisive and insightful. I was very impressed.

The Gallery has an extraordinary holding of nineteenth-century images of Indigenous Australians. These works first came into the collection through the gift, in 1949, of the library of Sir Alan Currie, a member of a prominent Western District pastoralist family who had a passion for collecting books that documented the European 'discovery' and settlement of this continent. The holding has grown very considerably since then, but while many of these images are beautiful and historically significant, they are difficult to exhibit in ways without seeming to be white man's trophies or 'exotic' curiosities.

After meeting with Peter and seeing his work, it occurred to me that one way of 'using' these images would be to make them all accessible to an Indigenous artist as a visual

resource. I had a powerful feeling that if anyone could 'reclaim' these images, it would be him, and I think the body of work he has produced for this exhibition shows how true that presentiment was. The originals, products of European minds and attitudes, have been transmogrified, and the transformations are fascinating as well as challenging.

The original informal 'brief' was that if the artist produced work that he was happy with, the Gallery would present it as an exhibition. About one third of the way along, Peter approached me with the idea that his work would have greater nuance and effect if presented alongside that of Megan Evans. Megan was already well known to this Gallery, having presented work here in 2004, and I think that Peter was inspired in his choice of collaborator. The project grew organically from this point and has become a remarkable dialogue about settlement and invasion, of cataclysm and survival. It includes some of the most impressive contemporary work presented in this venerable art gallery.

Gordon Morrison
Director
Art Gallery of Ballarat





left:
Jacques Arago (France, b.1790, d.1855) artist
Dupare (France) engraver
Nouvelle Hollande: Baie des Chiens-Marins, presqu'île Peron: Entrevue avec les sauvages
(detail) 1818 engraving on paper, hand coloured. Purchased, 1978

Imagining the frontier

invader	coloniser
native	savage
newcomer	squatter
usurper	owner
victor	victim
frontier	war
resistance	accommodation
Aborigines	Europeans
black	white
dispossession	settlement

US and THEM

How we describe the past matters. Our terminology shapes the way we imagine our history. Colonisers are preferable to invaders, natives to savages and of course settlement sounds so much better than dispossession. Yet each of these pairs of terms, each oppositional binary, presumes and assumes that there are discrete and separate categories.

Let me explain a little. If we see the world in binary pairs/ oppositional constructs, we are forced to choose one over

the other. In order to belong, we need to choose a 'side'. In reality, we do not choose where we belong: this is chosen for us. And importantly, many of us do not fit easily into only one category. Artists Peter Waples-Crowe (Ngarigo) and Megan Evans (Scottish, Irish, Welsh) have played with the categories, challenging us to see with clear vision the impact of colonialism on both the colonised and the coloniser.

In *Squatters and Savages*, Waples-Crowe and Evans have each, from their unique perspectives, responded to the Art Gallery of Ballarat's extensive collection of colonial prints. These works draw us back to the contact period, when Europeans arrived, dispossessed, replaced and recorded Aboriginal people. If we imagine the contact period, as the newcomers arrived and began to interact with the local groups, we might see violence or negotiation, we almost certainly see two separate and unconnected groups, but as their work shows us, we must struggle and not fossilise these moments, and remember that interaction between them changed them both.

It is a commonplace in Aboriginal society to properly introduce yourself. I have a heritage that goes back to both sides of the frontier, to the native and the newcomer. Some of my European ancestors had no choice in coming to Australia. My great-great-great grandfather Thomas Kent, a mere eighteen years old in 1816, was transported to Australia for seven years. His crime was to steal a leg of mutton from a home on Sunday 25 August 1815. Like most convicts lacking the resources to return 'home', he stayed on after his sentence and made a life for himself and his family: a life that included dispossessing Aboriginal people as he 'took up' land and 'settled'. On the other side of my family, my Aboriginal great grandmother was born in the western region of the colony of Victoria in the 1880s; her white father had managed to keep his family from the Aborigines Protection Act which had controlled Aboriginal lives since the 1870s. They had flown under the radar as best they could during the previous decades.

Out of this personal context, and as an historian, the contact and colonial period has become one of my intellectual and personal foci. I never forget to remind

myself that even in the city, I walk on Aboriginal land: beneath metres of concrete, bitumen, the tangle of pipes, cables, and kilometres of sewers, we still stand on the same land that Aboriginal people walked over, hunted on, birthed and nurtured, built houses, celebrated with song and ceremony, practised their religion, died and were buried in for perhaps 3,000 generations. There is an unbroken link from Mother to Daughter, Mother to Son for over 50,000 years: an unimaginable time frame, even for an historian.

I often wonder, reflect on and read about what happened when the 'contact' period arrived: how did the world change when two cultures collided, danced, fought and merged? Of course, the arrival of Europeans had a dramatic impact on the lives of the traditional owners, but it was not the first significant change or challenge they had met. Over thousands of years, Aboriginal culture adapted to environmental and climate change and the movement of people. In western Victoria, the eruption of the volcano Mount Eccles, which the Gunditjmara knew as Budj Bim (High Head) at least 30,000 years ago, would have had a

significant impact on the lives of the Gunditjmara and their kin. As the last Ice Age ended and the sea levels rose, the very shape of their country was shifting and changing. These changes would have meant that clan territories had to be adjusted, other groups would need to accommodate these changes and societies would have needed to renegotiate their boundaries and limits.

The colonisation or invasion of these homelands by Europeans in the nineteenth century was cataclysmic. Access to traditional plant, animal and water resources, and visits to special sites for ceremonial purposes were restricted. New animals— sheep and cattle — replaced the kangaroos and wallabies, and fences were strung across land that had been theirs to traverse. In 1839, the squatter Niel Black, who went on to become a prominent Victorian Parliamentarian noted:

The best way [to procure land] is to go outside and take up a new run, provided the conscience of the party is sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives right and left.

It is universally and distinctly understood that the chances are very small indeed of a person taking up a new run being able to maintain possession of his place and property without having recourse to such means – sometimes by wholesale.¹

Massacres, disease, and death were common, and the guerrilla war known as the Eumeralla wars dominated the western regions. Here in Ballarat, the Wadawurrung fought to hold on to their land, their families and their culture. The discovery of gold in the region and the influx of thousands of diggers disrupted their way of life. Many took to the goldfields and worked in various capacities, others chose to continue as best they could on the fringes of the European settlement. Against this backdrop, the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Australia's oldest regional art gallery, collected colonial print works. Many of these relate to the killing times, the disruptive contact period and the colonial era.

Peter Waples-Crowe's powerful reinterpretation of some of these works takes contested images of the colonial/settlement period and energetically reimagines these from

an Aboriginal viewpoint. As he interrogates the central focus and readjusts the point of view, we are left asking 'who is the savage?' Bold painting and collage affectively tease the audience, and he forces the viewer to become the critic, as he opens up the narrowness of the Eurocentric view, and the cultural preconceptions of white society. In its place, he leaves us recognising the ignorance of the colonial artists and yearning to understand what the Indigenous responses to this invasion might have been. Moving from fixed imagery to animation, he reconsiders the much-celebrated and iconic gold-rush history. The heroic depictions of the hardship experienced by the miners shifts under his gaze, and in their place he highlights how the traditional owners of Ballarat were affected by the onslaught of 'newcomers.'

Megan Evans draws on her own settler/invasor heritage and the violence of those early encounters. Her works show us spilled blood, and savagery. While the blood shed was Aboriginal, it is clear that the savagery is European, and for her, the blood represents her own bloodlines and the violence of the era from which she descends. Using often

delicate beading and exquisite embroidery, she works herself into the art, as an inheritor of others' suffering. Evans has noted that as a descendant of European squatters and a beneficiary of the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, she feels compelled to explore the savagery of their conquest. Her aim is also to ensure that as a non-Indigenous person, she must speak the truth in her art but also ensure that the works do not re-traumatise or sensationalise that violence. This she does carefully, rejecting notions of guilt in favour of brutal honesty. Her work speaks to white Australians and challenges them to interrogate their duplicity.

As each artist works with the contested and challenging subject material, the effect is that together they have produced an eloquent contemplation of the colonial period, its legacies and ongoing impact. Their works, both separate and collaborative, are greater than the sum of the parts. Both have synthetically connected all sides of the frontier and cultural divide. They have shown us how we can move forward, recognize the pain, distrust and violence and interrogate it. These works push the audience beyond guilt, which is too often the default position of the

non-Indigenous. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, and for the descendants of the "newcomers", guilt can play a role. However, the works here in *Squatters and Savages* show that it is possible to move beyond that binary view and they challenge us to do just that. Their works remind us that we are all one, with multiple perspectives, that collaboration can lead to mutual understandings, and that we can flesh out the skeleton of the past and breathe new life into how we imagine it was.

Professor Lynette Russell

Director, Monash Indigenous Studies Centre
Monash University

1. Cited in Clark, Ian D. (1995). *Scars on the Landscape. A Register of Massacre sites in Western Victoria 1803-1859*. Aboriginal Studies Press, p1.





PETER

Megan, I'm having a bit of a crisis around your art. I'm finding the relentless violence hard to take as I feel a lot of the 'blood' in your art is Aboriginal blood. Is your work just white guilt?

MEGAN

Peter, the short answer is NO, it's not white guilt. But I realise this needs an explanation as it could be seen as such.

White guilt is oppressive to Aboriginal people and other people of colour. I am not expressing guilt with my work or asking other white people to feel guilty, but I am asking myself and them to take responsibility.

I see this as a different thing from guilt. Guilt allows you to avoid action. It is also a position that pretends to absolve you of responsibility. If I feel guilty, then I am implying that I am really a good person — only a good person would be guilty — and the amount of guilt I feel is equivalent to my goodness. This is the violence of guilt. There is no responsibility in guilt.

left:
Megan Evans
Shield
2017
antique hall chair with
shield-back, glass beads

The artists speak

On the other hand, responsibility says 'Yes, this happened, and I was a part of it' — or in my case, my ancestors were a part of it. You can't have a real apology until you actually say 'Yes, we did that', and while that may have happened symbolically at a national level what seems to me to be missing is some kind of personal reckoning. Genevieve Grieves uses the term 'violence of denial' — this is what I think my work is about.

To be clear about my process, I don't think about the history of our country and then work out how to best represent the violence of it. It happens the other way around.

I have been witness to the impact of that violence, and I have been affected by these things too in a secondary way. My husband, who was taken away from his mother at age two and grew up in institutions, took his own life at age thirty-six. Our life together and then my life after his death was directly impacted by the trajectory of colonial era violence. I have been to so many funerals, have seen so many people struggle to deal with racism and witnessed unusual amounts of pain amongst people I loved — it has had an impact on me.

Then meeting you and going on that first journey with you to Ngarigo land, watching you tentatively step up to the door of your Uncle you had never met and the relief and joy on your face when he welcomed you with a traditional Ngarigo ritual welcome, also had an impact on me. Sitting with you both and listening to him talk about the actual massacres of Ngarigo people, the way the local authorities ignored the skeletal remains found when they were building a road and so poured concrete over them. The story of the local council worker who, when alerted

to Ngarigo rock art, went there with a wire brush and scrubbed it off. Then the story from someone else about the bones of a woman named Black Mag found in the well of a tree, wrapped in a Victorian-era black silk dress. All of these things impacted on me and have come out in my work. The aesthetic of the Victorian era can never be the same for me — it will always be encumbered by these stories and life experiences.

But I want to get back to the part of your question about Aboriginal blood.

Am I just representing the suffering of 'the other'? While I think it is very important to question myself about this, I don't think I am. I have used red ribbons in my work for twenty-nine years. I first found myself painting them in a self portrait that turned out to be about my brother's early death of a drug overdose. I then went on to use them more metaphorically over the following years — they became a kind of signature of my work.

I have always seen the red ribbons, which I used in work, even very recently, as being about my blood lines, a connection to the past and to my own past in particular. When I started to use beads, it seemed to be the natural corollary to the ribbons. Beads and beading were a part of the lavish decoration on much Victorian clothing. The whole aesthetic of Victoriana is full of detailed decoration that was created by women. I imagined women, my female ancestors, sitting and sewing while their husbands, fathers and brothers were at war with the people whose land they had stolen.

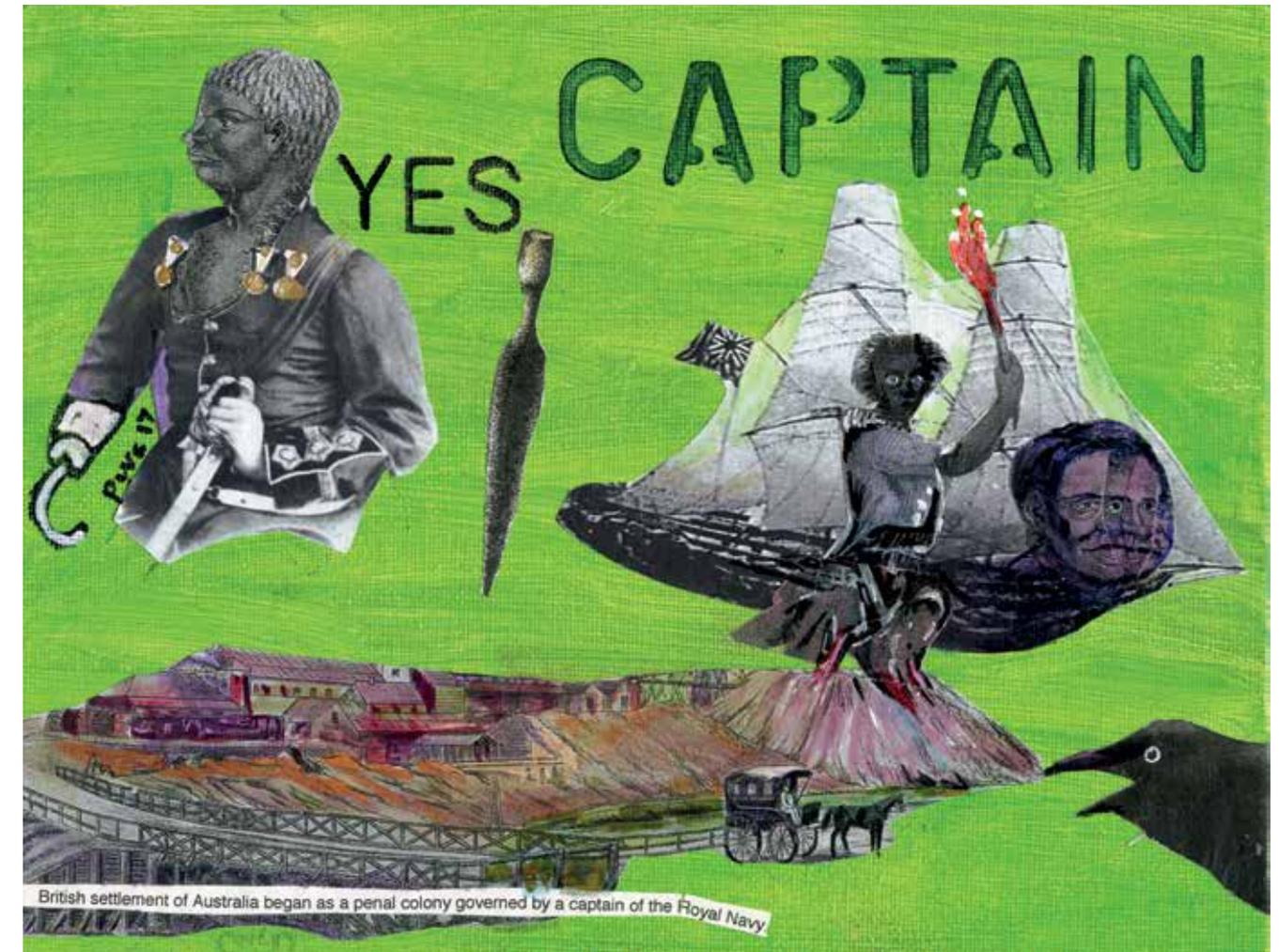
I don't know if my ancestors were directly responsible for the violence of the time, but I take the position that they were there and this alone makes them complicit. Am I representing their blood? I think it is more layered and complicated than that. I think my work is a metaphor for the violence that underpins the so-called 'civilised' way of life that is colonisation.

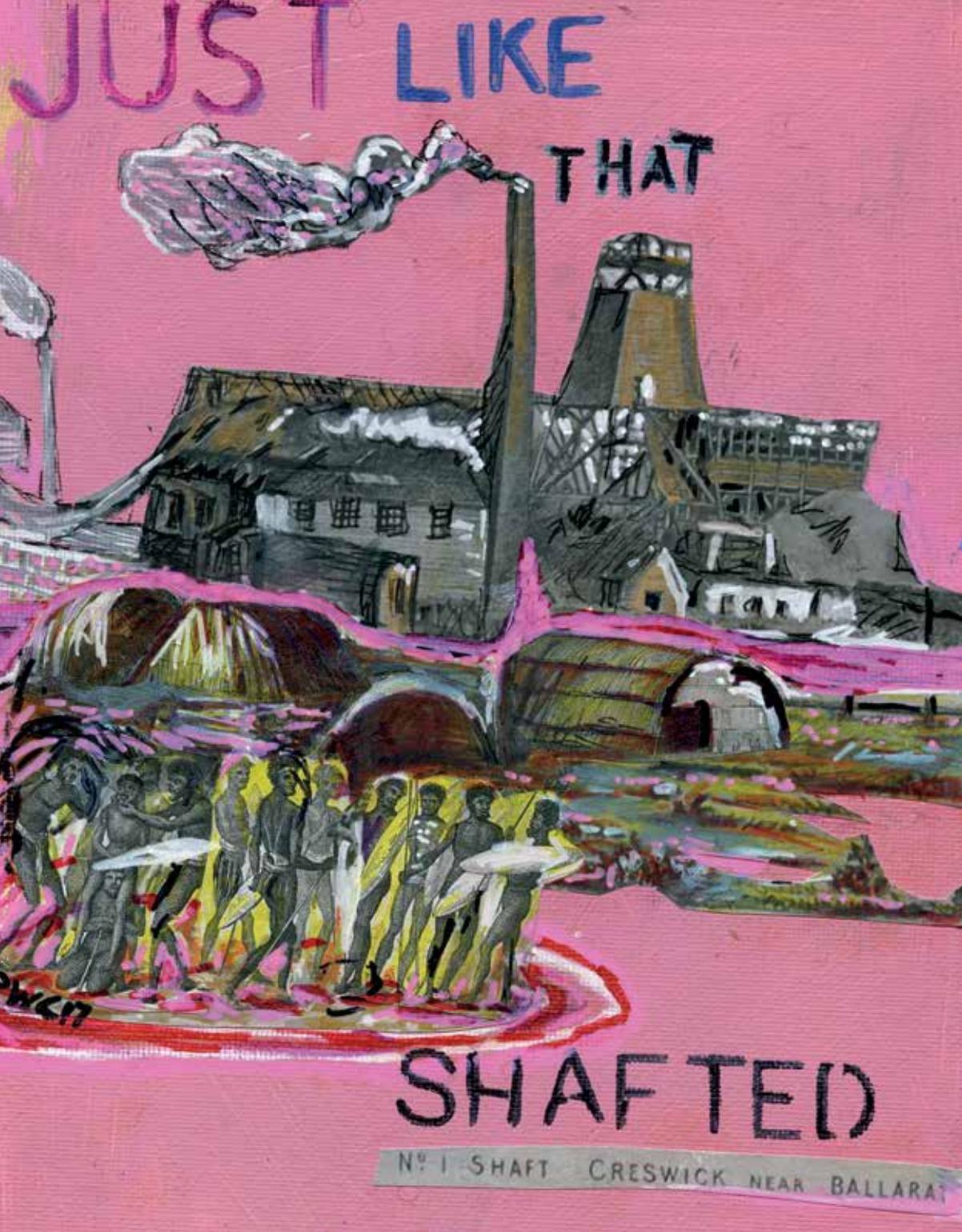
The blood stains I am representing are the stain left on the people who conducted such violence. It is this stain that I think is still present in the conscience of white Australia. It infects our identity and I believe it is at the root of the extreme racism prevalent in our society. These drops of blood are left to mark the remnants of that era on the furniture that may have been sat on by those people.

PETER

Thanks Megan, I can get what you're saying and I appreciate your honesty. It's good we can both be honest and upfront. You were with me when my Uncle John told me about my Ngarigo ancestors being massacred in Tumberumba. I'm not sure how to process such horror really, and I think the violence of your furniture just started to get to me. I thought of the slaughter of my ancestors and felt really upset about it.

I think we, Aboriginal mob get very suspicious about non-Aboriginal people entering into the historic colonial art space. It's usually us telling our hidden truths — it's just very new to have whitefellas owning up to the past and confronting it, because it's usually denied or buried in the





left:
Peter Waples-Crowe
Just like that
2016-17
mixed media on
canvas board

page 24–25:
**Megan Evans and
Peter Waples-Crowe**
*SQUATTERS AND
SAVAGES*
2017
still from HD video
6 minutes
Edition of 5

past. It makes me so mad. I guess in the end I use humour and colour to disarm my viewers, but your work is just very confronting and hardcore. It can be upsetting and probably will upset people.

MEGAN

I understand why the Aboriginal mob are suspicious of whitefellas, full stop — given the ignorance of the majority of the white population it is wise for you to be suspicious. I imagine it's a protective mechanism to guard against hurtful things being said and done, sometimes out of ignorance and sometimes from a more brutal racism. I am constantly learning about my own embedded racism, having grown up in a country with a White Australia Policy until I was sixteen — I was ten before Aboriginal people were considered in the national census — I was educated within a status quo that held these attitudes.

I take the position that of course I must have unconscious thought patterns that were shaped by this, so I am always looking for the ways in which those embedded perceptions emerge, to catch myself being blind to my white privilege.

One of the most moving things for me about our journey has been watching you come home to yourself. This seems to me to be a result of dealing with the reality of your people, which includes both the knowledge of your culture, being connected to your belongings, but also confronting the pain of what happened to your people in the past. I remember sitting on the floor at your Uncle's place and all of us in tears as he spoke about some of the atrocities. And

yet you are stronger for it all, I think.

As a non-Aboriginal artist, my reaction to the imagery which we have been asked to respond to has been brutal...

I understand that my work is upsetting for you. In one whole way, it's not for you, it's for people like me who have a history going back to the days of the invasion and for all immigrants, to enable us to understand the harsh reality of this country's history and the legacy that lives on today.

These things have affected you and I can understand that my work is hard to witness, as it echoes in your real life.

Do you think this is why you use humour in your work?

PETER

My humour is ironic. The Ballarat Gallery's collection of colonial prints is fascinating and very confronting — this is how the 'squatters', the white colonists, saw us. I feel removed from them as a contemporary Ngarigo person and I want to use them to show our history, some of the history of Ballarat and contemporary issues we face. My work is deadly serious.

We sure have had some adventures on the journey to this show. My spirit is much more settled than ever before, and you're right, I am stronger. There was that first big adventure to see the exhibition *Encounters* at the National Museum in Canberra and then we had our own encounters with Ngarigo cultural belongings and knowledge. The next time



I DIDNT GET THE MEMO

we went back to Country, we nearly had an encounter with death trying to return from a sacred site. You have been my witness and you helped me film my Uncle John, tell our Ngarigo story, which was giving back. This project has had it all.

MEGAN

Yes we sure have. That near death experience was one to remember! And meeting your mum was special to me. I have grown to really trust you to have this conversation with. You are special — a talented and courageous person who has contributed a lot to me. I remember when you came to me after seeing my last solo exhibition called UNsettled in 2015 and you said 'I think I need a white fella to do this project with' and I said, 'Well that's good because I think I am at a place with my project where I need to work with a blackfella'. I had been working on this project in isolation and wanted the balance of the other side of the frontier.

PETER

I'm glad we have had this conversation and you're right, I did ask you to be part of this exhibition. I think our art is very different in approach, but that difference makes the whole show even stronger. I was struck by your exhibition in Footscray — the sheer power of the imagery, and the craftsmanship.

Also, I was reading about some research the Australia Council had produced on attracting an audience to Indigenous art shows. I want non-Indigenous people to

see my art. I do it for everyone and it comments on many things that are important to me. It comments on the history of this country. My thinking was that showing with a whitefella would bring a wider audience, maybe even people who think Aboriginal issues aren't important, or they are just in the past. It's an honest look at two sides of the frontier, and it will be confronting for people.

MEGAN

It is a new kind of collaboration, one that suggests a way forward. It's a collaboration that shows two perspectives equally, built on an open and honest relationship between the two of us. We didn't take the easy path.

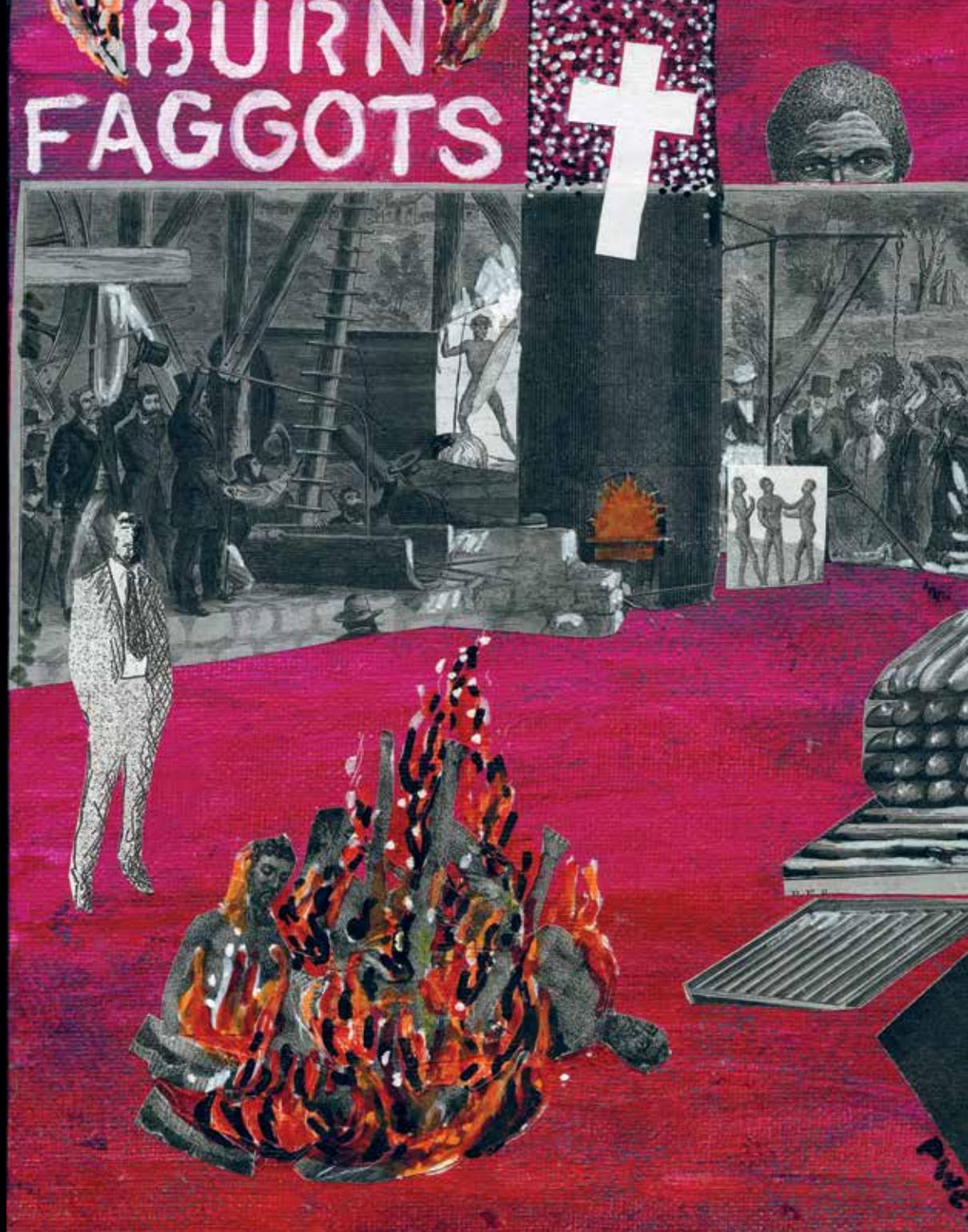
PETER

It's been a big journey for me on so many levels.

Peter Waples-Crowe
Megan Evans

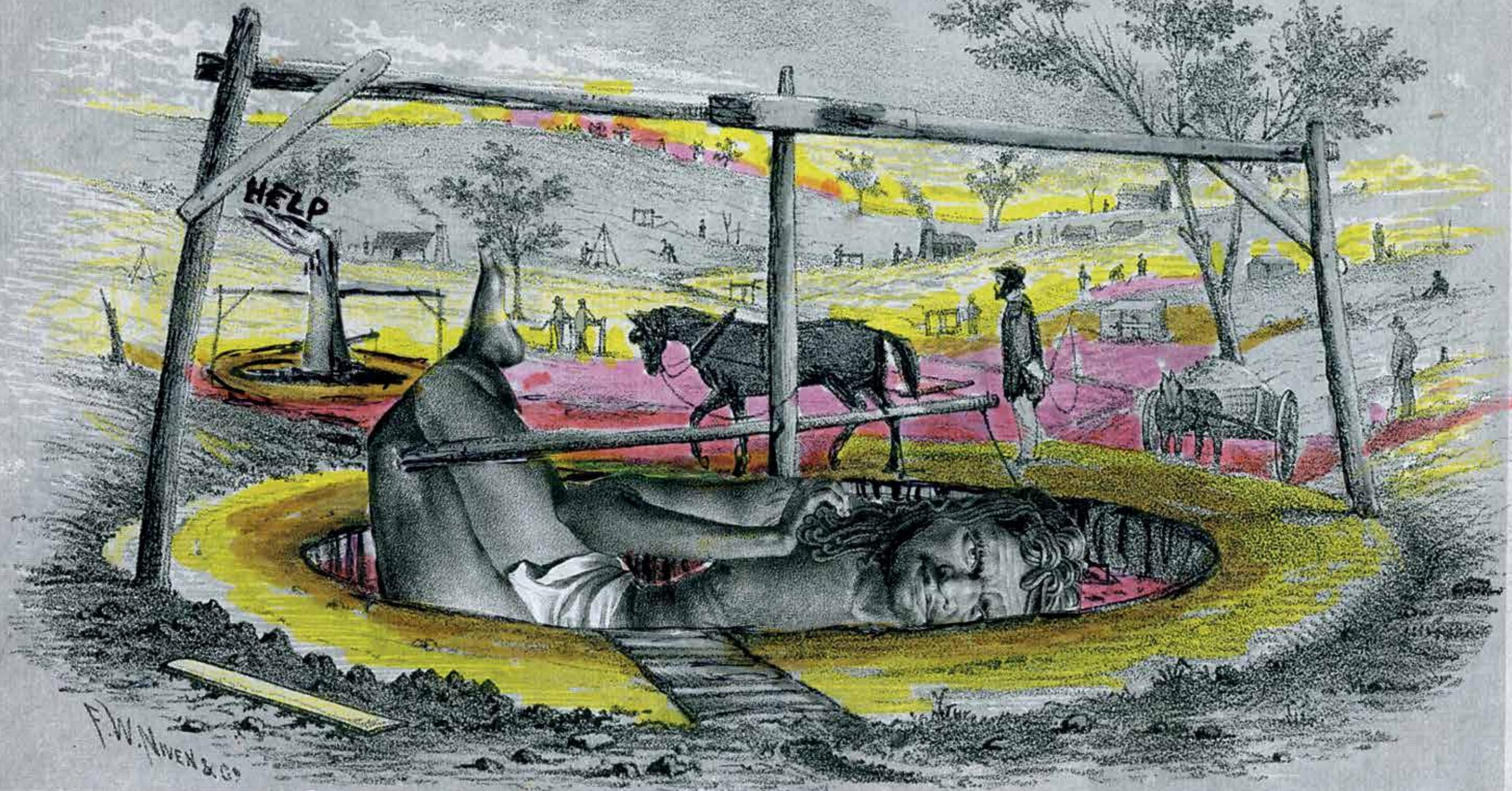
right:
Megan Evans
Bleeding Chandelier
left: detail
right: full image
2017
antique chandelier,
glass beads



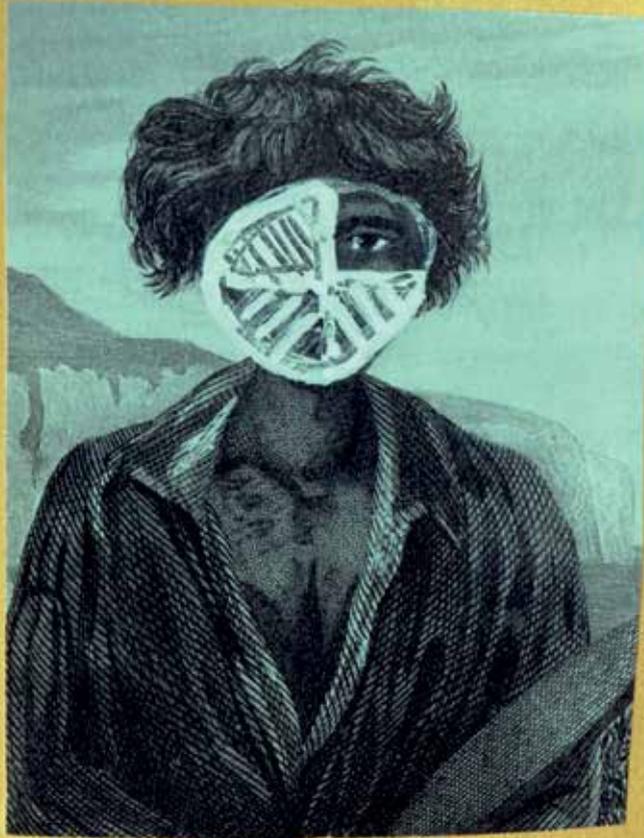


HELP

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QUADROON

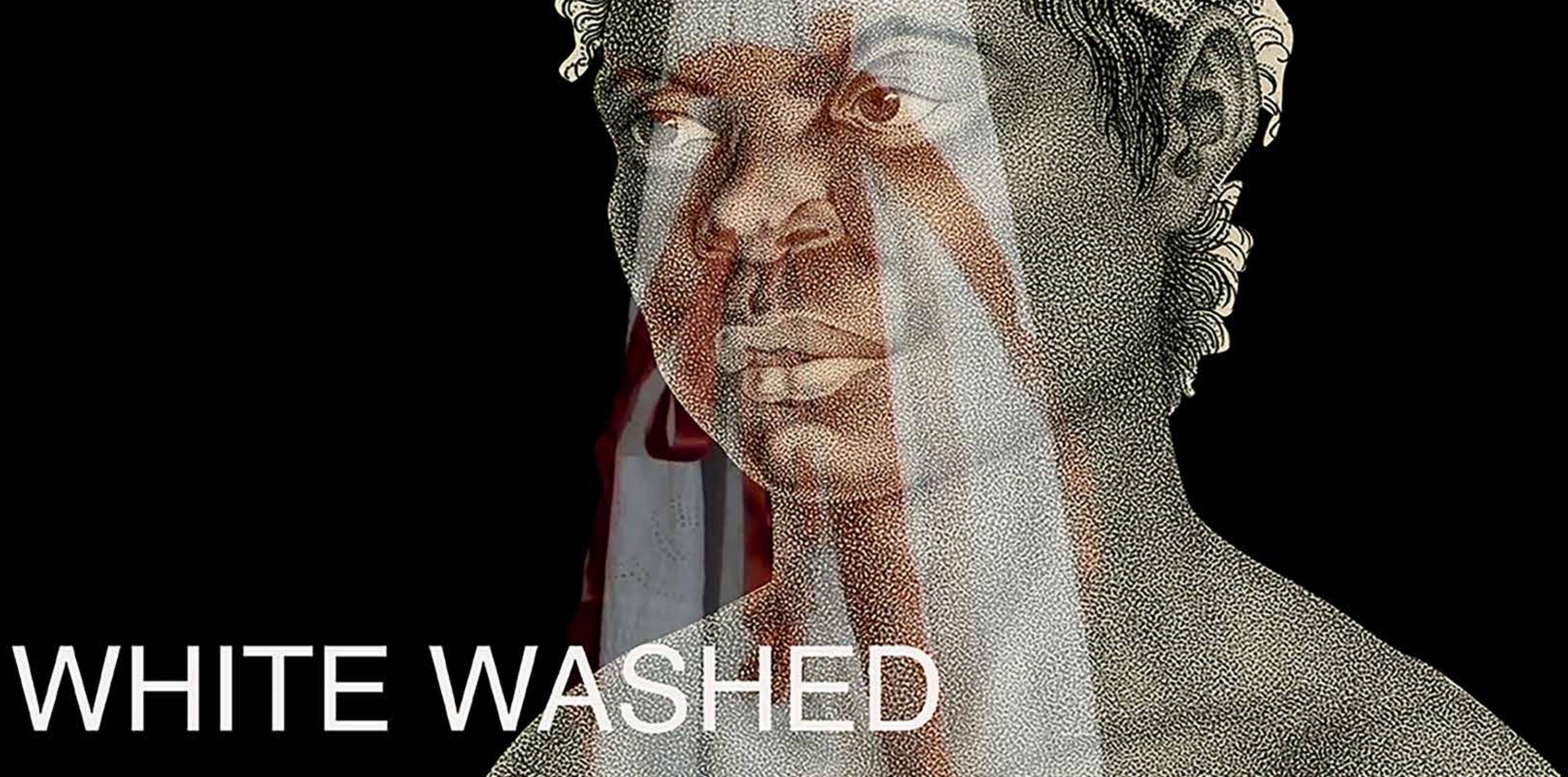


PWC17

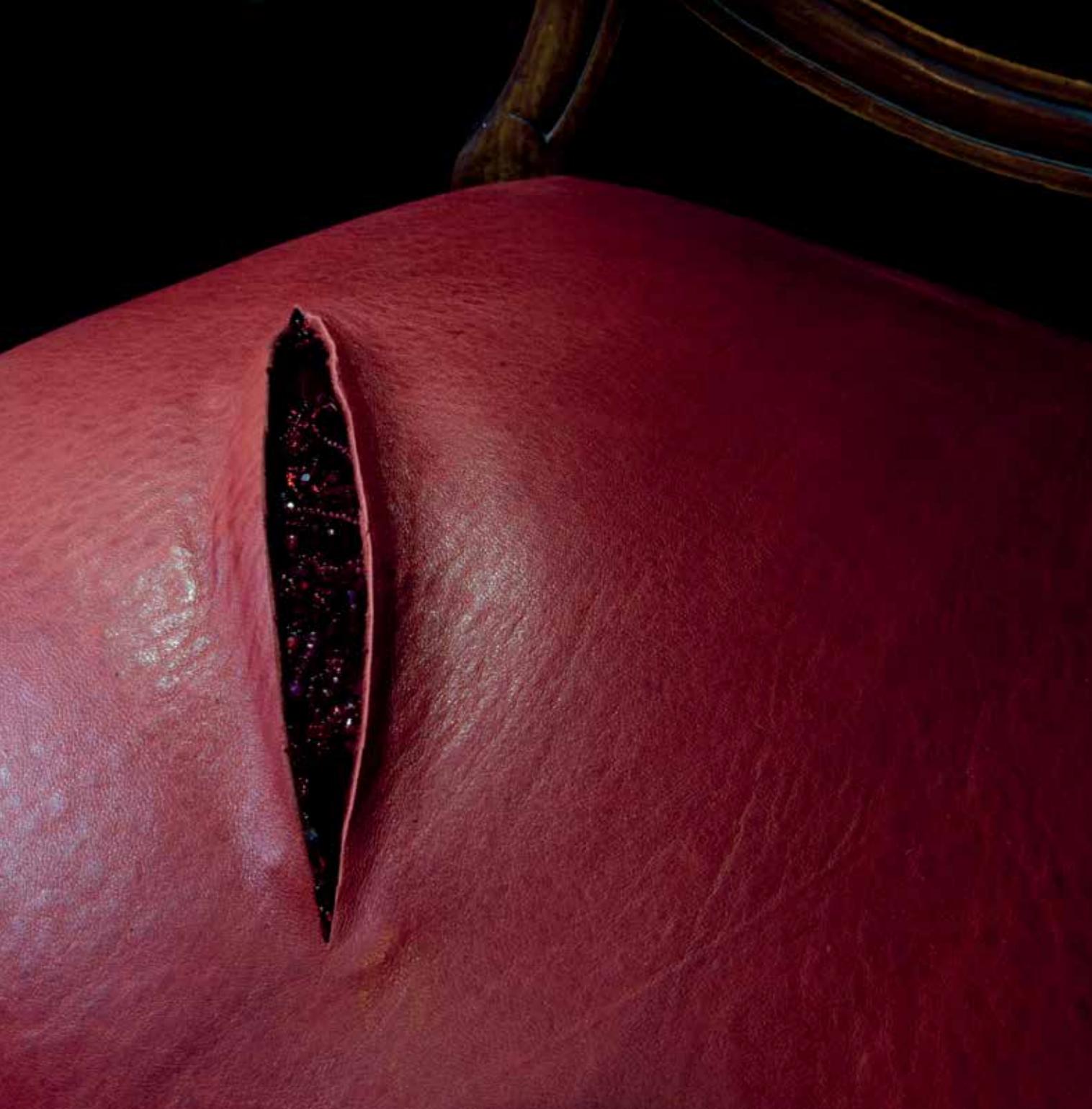
left:
Peter Waples-Crowe
Jus' Sayin' series
2013-17
mixed media on paper

right:
Megan Evans
Settle: Self
2016
Colonial chair, velvet,
glass beads, cotton





WHITE WASHED



left:
Megan Evans
Cut
(detail)
2016
Colonial balloon-back
chair, leather, glass
beads, cotton



right:
Peter Waples-Crowe
Colonised 3
2017
digital print
on canvas



front cover:
Peter Waples-Crowe
Colonised
2017
mixed media on paper

page 2–3:
Megan Evans
SQUATTERS letters
2017
Victorian table cloths,
embroidery thread, glass
beads

page 4–5:
Peter Waples-Crowe
SAVAGES letters
2017
digital prints on calico
with cotton on recycled
blankets

page 38–9:
Megan Evans
left:
Isabella Robertson
nee Kelly
2016
Colonial chair, velvet,
glass beads, cotton
right:
Patrick John Kelly
2016
Colonial chair, velvet,
glass beads, cotton

back cover:
Megan Evans
Sovereign
2017
Victorian era bedroom
chair, leather, carving
forks

Peter Waples-Crowe and Megan Evans
Squatters and Savages

An Art Gallery of Ballarat Exhibition
Saturday 27 May – Sunday 16 July 2017

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