

**OPENING OF THE 'COLONIAL AFTERLIVES' EXHIBITION BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
SALAMANCA ARTS CENTRE, THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2015**

Thank you for that introduction and for inviting me to open this 'Colonial Afterlives' exhibition that is being presented by the Salamanca Arts Centre as part of this year's Tasmanian International Arts Festival.

I must confess that I approached this opening with a degree of trepidation. I am not an artist – not even an amateur – and have no skill at all in creating visual works such as those you see around you, nor in interpreting and understanding them. But I have been privileged to have had a preview of the exhibition and personal explanations from some of the artists and I have also been able to read the catalogue.

'Colonial Afterlives' is an exhibition of works that have been produced by descendants of those directly affected by British Colonialism. The 14 Australian and international artists represented have drawn from their disparate backgrounds, but it is interesting to note the commonality of themes and responses.

That should probably not be surprising. As Greg Lehman expounds in his catalogue essay, the experience of colonialism has had a profound effect on Indigenous Australians. He argues that identity as an Aboriginal person is shaped by ongoing reactions and responses to colonialism; that there are 'generations of Aboriginal people whose identity has been shaped almost entirely within an oppositional consciousness'¹ that unnecessarily constrains some members of the community.

As a criminologist many of these works spoke to me personally. Yvonne Rees-Pagh's work 'Thug' evoked memories of the Cronulla riots, as did Fiona Foley's

¹ Colonial Afterlives catalogue, p9.

three works and the implications of that violence for our mixed multi-cultural and sadly racist nation.

Daniel Boyd's, 'We Call them Pirates out there' is a reworking of Emanuel Philip Fox's 'Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay' as an invasion, a great colonial land grab,² rather than a settlement; and Geoff Parr's staged photograph image from 'Place', is based on Benjamin Duterreau's 1840 painting 'The Conciliation', an idealised depiction of George Robertson as saviour of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Boyd's and Parr's works challenge the romanticised view of Australian history which ignores the enormity of dispossession. Julie Gough's 'Hunting Ground' also challenges us to appreciate the enormity of dispossession.

As a criminologist, I am acutely aware of the legacy of colonialism. A consequence of dispossession is the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people in the criminal justice system in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians. And in our child protection and welfare systems their children are also over-represented. There are 5 in every 1000 non-Aboriginal children in out of home care in Australia whereas the rate for Aboriginal children is 55 in every 1000 children.³ This is a situation which is shared of course by other First Nations, particularly Canada.

A legacy of colonialism was transportation and the creation of a penal colony in Australia and slavery in America. It transpires that transportation was a successful experiment in re-integration — Australian convicts and their children in general turned away from crime. The majority story is one of reintegration into respectable society of the reformed criminal.⁴ This is not to say that transportation was a good thing. Many convicts were treated appallingly harshly, many died before they even arrived in Australia. And 'the more fundamental evil', of which this exhibition reminds us, was that 'the crimes of the convicted were expiated through the theft of an entire continent

² Catalogue, p 17.

³ Heather Sculthorpe, *Keeping our children with us, Report to the Government and the Aboriginal Community about changes needed to the child protection system in Tasmania*, 13.

⁴ John Braithwaite, 'Crime in a Convict Republic' (2001) 64 *Modern Law Review* 11 at 18.

from its rightful owners, mass murder of Aboriginal people, destruction and partial decimation of a splendid tapestry of cultures'.⁵

This exhibition challenges all who view the works to confront the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing effect on our societies. I was struck by how some of the works respond differently to the colonial museum collections, such as ours in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. I have already referred to Geoff Parr's response to Duterreau's 'Conciliation'. James Newitt's installation with digital video responds to the collection in a way that questions our collection and display of artefacts (or those not displayed but stored away and forgotten), while Maree Clark's works, also inspired by objects in museum collections, reclaim and take ownership of them in a respectful way. All of this should help us all to be 'wary of viewing colonial history through the lens of the coloniser'⁶ and to focus on the legacy that we want our society to leave for those to come.

I congratulate the curator Sarah Thomas, the artists and all involved with bringing the exhibition to Tasmania as part of the Tasmanian International Arts Festival. It is my great pleasure now to declare the 'Colonial Afterlives' exhibition officially open.

⁵ Braithwaite, n 4, 19.

⁶ Thomas, Colonial Afterlives catalogue, p4