

Moorina Bonini,  
'A Tribute to the  
Concrete Box (For  
Aunty Hyllus)'



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I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in which I work and live, the Wurundjeri people and the Boonwurrung. I pay my respect to all Elders past, present and emerging of the Kulin Nations. Always Was, Always Will Be Aboriginal Land. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

My Great Aunt, Hyllus Maris, wrote a metaphor entitled 'The Concrete Box'. This poetic text provides a new perspective of Aboriginal people within Australia and poses a question – when will the time come for all Kooris to have their freedom, peace of mind and their health? Three generations after and I continue to voice her question.

Aunty Hyllus is able allude to the history, the injustices and incarceration of Aboriginal people through her text, which is familiar and accessible to all. 'The Concrete Box' presents an example of colonial power structures, economic history and the disconnect from Country. Her writing asks for an action – from the reader themselves but also from the Australian society.

This new body of work is informed by Indigenous knowledge structures. Through the physical action of deconstruction, which occurs in the dismantling of a white cube, 'A Tribute to the Concrete Box (For Aunty Hyllus)' aims to begin the re-imagining of institutional space for Indigenous people.

Responding directly to the gallery space situated within the newly renovated Collingwood Yards, it is important to acknowledge the Indigenous histories of this place. I grew up being told stories from my mum about how Collingwood and Fitzroy were community hubs, which is evident in the number of Aboriginal Organizations located across these areas that are still present today. It is with this understanding, about the importance of this area and the stories that are embedded into this part of Melbourne by the local Indigenous community, that I have engaged a long term intervention with the gallery and the Collingwood Yards. When you open the right side windows in the gallery that face out onto Johnston Street, it is here you will find Victorian Aboriginal marking-making burnt into the raw wood.

Traditional tools will be used to break through the white walls of the white cube, in the aim to create an opportunity for the community to reclaim power and authority over their histories, their artworks and over the exhibition space itself. Speaking past structures that have historically erased Indigenous people, Moorina will instead highlight and re-centre Indigenous knowledge systems.

(Moorina Bonini, 2020)

## The Concrete Box

We're standing on this big heap of keys – a small mountain. And just over from it is this box. It's marked "Blacks". And I can hear them all moving around in this box saying it's dark and they're hungry. There's no food and a lot of them are sick. And they've got no clothes, no shoes. And a lot of children are dying.

And there's a little window in this box with bars over the top of it and they can put their hands out and sometimes they get food, sometimes they get clothes, but not enough for everybody, not enough food for everybody. Sometimes they get beer, wine.

But there's no light in there. And it's dark and they're stumbling around. And it's crowded, there's not enough beds – they lie anywhere, they and their children.

And over this pile of keys there's one that fits in the lock that'll give them their freedom, peace of mind, their health. And there's some Aborigines looking for the key and they're running over and trying all the keys in the lock and throwing them aside ...

When they first started off there used to be a lot of people but gradually they've dropped out. Now there's only a few that keep trying to unlock the box.

And on top of the box sits this white man and he knows where the key is because he's the one that put the people in the box and hid the key. Every now and then the white man changes masks. Sometimes it's benevolent and sometimes it's indignant. But always the persons underneath remain the same no matter how many times he changes his masks.

And he can hear the people move around, and hear them whispering because they're too afraid

to call out or to talk loud because the white man's been sitting on the box so long. And they're afraid he might hear them calling for help because everytime they do he uses some weapon against them.

His weapons he invents himself but usually they're in the shape of money. And there's a little hole in the top of the box where he drops in coins. And the money drops in the box and the people reach up to catch it. They can see the light coming in with the money. But every time they reach up it slips out of their grasp and it falls through some holes in the bottom of the box. The white man knows this - he's make the box so the money'll drop straight through and no one can catch it.

And sometimes the Kooris looking for the keys try to lever the lid up and put their hands in to help the people to come out. But the white man slams it shut and tries to chop off their fingers. And the people inside are afraid to take the hand in case their fingers get chopped off too.

Outside the other Kooris are still looking for the keys amongst all those thousands of keys. And the white man sitting on the box smiles because he knows where the key is.

But one day they're going to try all the keys and they're going to find the right one and unlock that box and the people will go free.

(Hyllus Maris)

Moorina Bonini is a proud Yorta Yorta and Woiwurrung woman. She is descended from the Dhulunyagen family clan of Ulupna people (Yorta Yorta) and is part of the Briggs/McCrae family. Moorina is an artist whose works are informed by her experiences as an Aboriginal and Italian woman. Within her practice, she creates artwork that examines contemporary Indigenous histories through the use of installation and video.

Moorina holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from RMIT University and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from VCA. Her work has been exhibited within group shows and at various galleries such as Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Sydney Festival, Blak Dot Gallery, c3 Contemporary Art Space, SEVENTH Gallery, Koorie Heritage Trust and Brunswick Street Gallery. Moorina has produced and co-curated art and cultural programs across RMIT University and the University of Melbourne. Moorina is currently working at Next Wave as a Producer-in-Residence. She is a board member of SEVENTH Gallery, where she is currently the First Nations Programming Coordinator.

Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

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31 JOHNSTON ST,  
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VIC 3066 AUST.

OPENING HOURS  
12-6PM TUE-FRI  
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