

[ ROOM 1 ]

Large  
print  
captions

contested  
legacies

eight days IN  
**Kahawai**

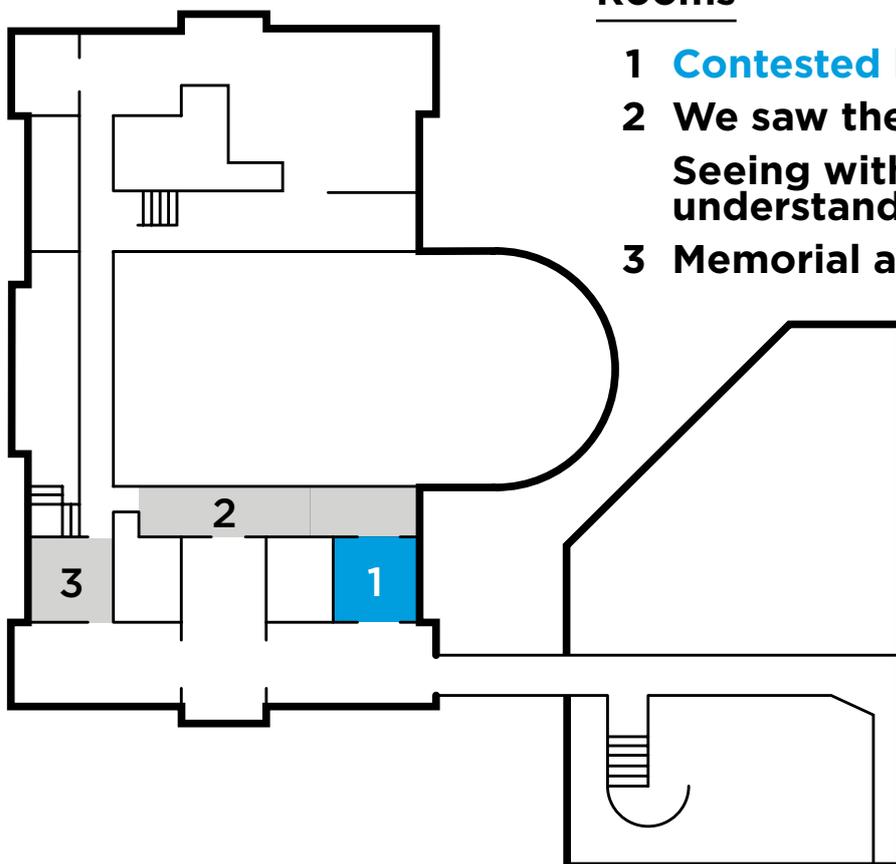
# Sensitivity notice

This exhibition explores the topic of first contact and features the names, images and voices of people who are now deceased. It refers to historical events and violence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors may find distressing, and includes historical documents that contain words and descriptions which are now considered offensive.

The State Library of NSW respectfully acknowledges the trauma of this history and its ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

## Eight Days in Kamay Rooms

- 1 **Contested legacies**
- 2 **We saw them coming  
Seeing without understanding**
- 3 **Memorial and resistance**





# eight days in Kamay

In April 1770 strangers appeared off the shore of Kamay (Botany Bay). The eight days these strangers spent on Gweagal lands and waters pulsed with curiosity and unease on both sides.

For the Gweagal people, the arrival of visitors was a serious occasion, but their attempts to be understood and respected by crew of the *Endeavour* were misunderstood or ignored.

This fraught encounter escalated when the ship's captain, Lieutenant James Cook, and his landing party shot an Elder on the shore, and with this act of violence the opportunity to learn from the Gweagal people was lost.

This exhibition has been made possible through the support of many people and groups, and we thank them all for their contributions. In particular, we thank the Aboriginal communities of the Kamay area, and especially Dr Shayne Williams and the Simms, Timbery, Moffitt and Beller families for so generously sharing their history and experiences; the Gamay rangers Robert Cooley, Robert Russell, Bryce Liddell and Harley Lester for assisting with the location photography; and the Gujaga Foundation and the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Due to COVID-19, the loan of original drawings from the *Endeavour* voyage from the British Library and Natural History Museum in London has no longer been possible. Special thanks to these institutions for their support through this challenging time, and for their assistance with the reproductions that are now on display.

**Access full transcripts of the audios and videos at  
[www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-audio](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-audio)**

**Access label text and transcripts of the *Endeavour* journals at  
[www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-text](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay-text)**

# Contested legacies

## Pirate? Hero? Both? Neither?

The way Cook is remembered in Australia remains deeply contested. Surrounding the eight days the *Endeavour* spent in Kamay are countless myths and exaggerations which have been compounded by an unwillingness to confront the violence Cook inflicted on many different First Nations people around the world. These myths have been further reinforced by the want of colonising powers to reinforce their power. The shining image of Cook as an explorer and skilled navigator has long been a seductive one, but for many he symbolises the darkest and most brutal parts of Australia's history.

Cook's legacy of his time in Kamay has been assisted over the years by the imagery which has accompanied it - usually constructed by the colonial powers in order to reinforce the image of a brave explorer leading Great Britain into the new world. Imagery is powerful and in this room we see artists use this power to question the mythology. Who was James Cook and are we, 250 years after his landing, better served if we examine this legacy truthfully and quizzically or if we maintain the myths? What sort of future can we look forward to thanks to the critical eye of the arts?

The label texts by Arrernte writer and blogger Celeste Liddle guide you through the works in this room.

[ ITEM LABEL ]

## Rum Runners

by Karla Dickens, 2018



Each of these bottles, dating from the early years of the colony and perhaps used to hold rum, has been meticulously repurposed to depict

a white 'founding figure'. Cook, for example, comes with a series of fish hooks, perhaps referencing the seafoods caught and taken at Kamay; Arthur Phillip, with a strand of barbed wire, most likely a reference to his role in setting up the British penal colony. A number of the bottles show human remains such as skulls and bones, highlighting their complicity in deaths, particularly of Aboriginal people.

In her accompanying poem, *Life-like Liquid*, Dickens delves deeper into these characters and the destruction they have caused to the lives of Aboriginal people. As she states, the epidemic of alcohol and its use by colonisers to rape, displace and kill Aboriginal people makes the delivery of these historical figures as booze bottles only too appropriate.

### mixed media

Lent by Karla Dickens and Andrew Baker Art Dealer

# Life-like liquid

by Karla Dickens

There was the odd ship spotted  
as a century passed  
little interaction and little loss  
awareness of ghostly strangers switched on

Verging on untold upheaval  
the First Australians watched closely  
like the world watches ISIS today  
with fear and uncertainty

Tall-ships rolled into Botany Bay  
settling in Sydney Cove  
man, woman and child watched from afar  
sending warnings—collected and shared

Oysters, mussels and axes were traded  
numbers of white faces multiplied  
while black heads rolled and hung  
floating belly-down in crystal clear waters

Ancient rock engraving and ceremony stood fast  
as new diseases swam through native blood  
unknown poisons unloaded to befriend or murder  
relationships as rocky as the seas travelled

To quieten hostile savages  
whiskey and rum—a fluid gold  
colonial currency killing and raping one's sacred duties  
a toxic tonic unable to still the pain

From coast to coast  
jail to jail, home to country  
from lore to law, the Devil's juice takes its place  
assimilation giving rise to new initiations

Taking possession of more than the land  
lost spirits walk lifeless paths  
in and out of courthouses, foster homes and cemeteries  
epidemic havoc for those still in the womb

The stereotypes don't belong to me today  
you can have your demons back and your bottles  
I have my culture, I own my art  
so go ahead, underestimate me

Flowing powers with strengths from initiation scars  
I find my place as a Waridjuri warrior  
in this new world with new fears  
new boat people

New strangers  
under the original stars  
on the same sacred ground  
guided by the old people here since time began

Boats come and boats sink  
pirates thief  
fools repeat themselves  
ships sail off in the distance

Tides rise  
tides fall  
sorrow knows its own beauty  
traditional healers prevail

Life is like liquid

# Captain James Cook (black light)

by Jason Wing, 2019–20



Jason Wing describes this work as an invitation — an invitation for audiences to take an active role in how they engage with the dual histories present in this country. ‘Australians today are still divided on issues surrounding our colonial past. Through this artwork I hope that audiences will begin to rethink the various narratives that exist within Australia’s history.’

At first glance, Wing’s Captain looks every bit the stately depiction we’re used to. But by activating the UV (black) light, we see Cook revealed wearing a balaclava: ‘When I attended high school I was taught that Australia was discovered by Captain James Cook ... [but] the truth is that Australia was stolen by armed robbery. History is often written and erased by the victors, so I decided to challenge the colonial history of Australia from an Aboriginal perspectives and simply tell the truth.’

**handpainted silkscreen print, UV light-sensitive ink, black light**

Lent by Jason Wing and Arterreal Gallery, Sydney  
Quotes from Jason Wing’s artist statement, 2020

**Wave your hand across the sensor to activate.**

This light contains ultraviolet rays, which can harm skin and eyes. Do not look directly at the lamp or place yourself in the light’s path.

[ ITEM LABEL ]

## Undiscovered

by Michael Cook, 2010

The first thing that strikes you in this series is that the Captain Cook reimagined by artist Michael Cook is an Aboriginal man, appearing strong and stately.

In several of the images, he looks somewhat a

companion to a number of iconic Australian animals. In the first, he's approaching an emu with a rifle, though rather than hunting the emu he seems only to be entering its territory. In the third image, he looks every bit the heroic British explorer with his ship behind him. The black Cook appears in the wash of the ocean, possibly as if he's bringing in a new wash of his own.

Michael Cook's use of the Union Jack is also intriguing. In the third image, it flaps regally from the side of the vast sailing ship yet in the final image, it lies tattered on the sand as it's approached by a Tasmanian devil – an infamous eater of carrion, the decaying flesh of dead animals. Is the image of Cook's 'discovery' about to be devoured once and for all?





**inkjet print on paper, edition of 8, numbers 1, 3, 4, 8 & 10**

Lent by the National Library of Australia, Canberra; purchased 2018



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## Sir No Beard

by Daniel Boyd, 2007

It's hard to miss the eyepatch of Daniel Boyd's 'Sir'; infamous pirates such as Blackbeard immediately spring to mind. In a jar next to his feet is the head of an Aboriginal warrior probably on its way back to Britain to inform a series of eugenic studies, the likes of which would

eventually inform genocidal atrocities committed across the world. As well as the head, his loot includes traditional tools such as spears, headpieces and instruments.

This pirate-like figure is not James Cook, but the *Endeavour* botanist Joseph Banks. To see him shown by Boyd as a murderer and thief rather than as an important man of knowledge confronts many of the stories we've been told of 'discovery' and trade.

Boyd frequently depicts such celebrated explorers as having bare faces, highlighting the initial perception by Aboriginal people that they were women because they had no beards. Perhaps Banks' true status is what the head in the jar ponders as it looks up at him.

### oil on canvas

Lent by the Art Gallery of NSW; gift of Clinton Ng 2012, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 378.212



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## We Call Them Pirates Out Here

by Daniel Boyd, 2006

Daniel Boyd's alternate exploration of Cook's travels as a pirate mission rather than a noble discovery continue, this time featuring the captain

himself, complete with his own eyepatch and a Union Jack with skull and crossbones on it. The image is a recreation of Emanuel Phillips Fox's famous 1902 painting of Cook's landing at Kamay, but instead showing the landing as a pillaging and the crew as plunderers.

Boyd explains how he took the original piece of Australian federation propaganda and turned it back on itself.\* The original, Boyd says, had two Aboriginal men standing to warn the noble explorers away. Boyd has replaced these men with grass trees. In depicting Aboriginal men as flora, he highlights how our communities and place in society were seen by white statesmen at the time the Constitution was adopted.

### oil on canvas

Lent by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia; purchased with funds provided by the Coe and Mordant families 2006, 2006.25

\* Boyd interviewed 2007. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8Fb1Vfu\\_CU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8Fb1Vfu_CU)



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## Cook's Dinner Party

by Vincent Namatjira, 2014

In Cook's Dinner Party, Namatjira depicts quite the feast. He sits next to the captain as they enjoy a meal together. From fine

wine to shellfish, Cook willingly shares the delicacies collected from his travels across the world as he embraces the artist in a jovial manner.

Yet there is a slight sting in the tail of this friendly scene: the exchange of knowledge appears to be one way. While Cook has the bounty of his travels to share with his guest, he doesn't seem to understand that his guest may, in turn, have stories and knowledge to share with him. Desert foods, for example, are absent from the fine spread despite the fact that these foods had sustained Namatjira's ancestors for millennia. What might Cook have learnt from an Aboriginal man if he'd properly engaged?

**acrylic on canvas**

Lent by Artbank, A#14245



[ ITEM LABEL ]

## The Endeavour

by Vincent Namatjira, 2015

Despite its small scale, the first thing I notice in this piece by Namatjira is the vastness of the landscape. The vastness, and also the barrenness of the sand Cook stands on as he gazes towards his boat.

Yet the boat seems unimpressive compared to what's going on behind: a vision of what may be a Central Australian sunset. The Cook-like figure seems to be looking upon that scene in wonderment, as if for once he has discovered something so worthy that he's unsure where to go next.

In a number of interviews Namatjira highlights a childhood visit to a replica of the *Endeavour* as inspiring his fascination with Cook, thinking of him as an 'ocean ghost'. Certainly as he stares out to the peach-coloured horizon, Cook appears to be floating and unfocused. I'm left wondering where Namatjira may take Cook next.

**acrylic on canvas**

Private collection, courtesy THIS IS NO FANTASY + Dianne Tanzer Gallery