

Archie Moore

Daze of our lives

You grew up in a dry, flat and hot land way out West. It seemed to you the furthest out West you could get but this place is only 297 kilometres west of Brisbane. The earliest memory you can recall is of a kindergarten friend relinquishing their golden glitter-encrusted, cardboard crown in an exchange for your broken one and quite possibly to stop you embarrassing yourself—AND EVERYONE ELSE!—who just wanted to get on with the Christmas play. You didn't know something so banal could be so seductive, or that another's kind gesture could placate you so instantly. The memory of this incident may be vivid because it is steeped in frequent viewings of faded and stained images from the family album, for there are very few other memories over the next decade. So, you think now, maybe you are remembering the remembering of an image that has replaced the event. Instead of recalling that day with eyes closed, it is the photograph that has overwritten your memory.

Forty-something years later you are still interested in the self inside time and space, and a history of place. In particular your self, an Aboriginal self, but not in an ancient spiritual sense, more like your self based upon how you think others perceive you. So most of the time with your art you are attempting to place the viewer in your shoes, to experience your experiences, to remember your memories. More precisely, to explore that impossibility of knowing that one has a shared experience with you. And this condition, being a metaphor for the failure of reconciliation, supports your view that maybe black and white Australians will never know or understand one another.

One work that you did for the Biennale of Sydney was a 1:1 scale replica of Bennelong's Hut built within the grounds of the Royal Botanical Gardens, close to where the original was said to have been. The idea was for the viewer to sit inside this building, representing the first ever residential building built by a white person for a black person, and stare out to where the middens used to be, now harbouring ten gigantic shells made from concrete and Swedish tiles. The interior of the hut was clad with rusty old corrugated iron, from the ceiling struts down



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Archie Moore *A Home Away From Home*
(*Bennelong/Vera's Hut*), 2016, mixed media.
Created for the 20th Biennale of Sydney,
supported by Neil Hobbs and Karina Harris,
and Kevin O'Brien. Courtesy the artist and
The Commercial, Sydney





to the dirt floor. You are in your grandmother Vera's hut now—she had the same floor as Bennelong's hut, but hers was much further from the sea and white people had long ceased providing equal, adequate housing for Aboriginal people. Then you think: Aboriginal peoples' homes weren't a fixed, permanent structure on the land anyway; it WAS the land. Back to Bennelong.

The brick and tiles used on the outside of this hut were brand new, just as they would've been in 1790, a pristine building for a black diplomat who failed to get Governor Phillip to understand where he was coming from. Most would expect an historic building to look old and a new house to look new but you wanted this incongruity. Although your grandmother's hut appeared old it was a newly-built structure made from discarded, used materials. This building at Bennelong Point, you wanted viewers to understand, went 1,457% over budget and was about wealth distribution, considering the circumstances that led to your grandparents living in corrugated iron huts when everyone else in that town had houses.

You don't really remember these huts in Glenmorgan but you do remember the oppressive feelings of being there with your relatives and even though no one said much and everyone saw each other out of the corner of their eyes, you knew there was some kind of invisible, heavy weight pressing down on their shoulders and necks, forcing them to stare down at the flea-ridden ground. Sometimes grandma would snap out of this

sullenness and slap you, pull your hair, call you names and say the death-bird would get you. Either that or someone would "take you away to the mission."

Last year you filled a ten metre by five metre gallery space with corrugated iron and over a tonne of red soil. This time you also had it filled with fog, with only the sun outside lighting the room through the door threshold. Four speakers in each ceiling corner with four different tracks looped loud sounds of rain on a tin roof, trickling water and drops dripping slowly. The fog from the haze machine leeches in from behind the corrugated iron wherever it found an edge, a nail hole or a rusted-thin area on the surface. Then floated above viewer's heads and with the deadening loam, this thin fog created a quiet stillness until the onerous sounds of hard rain broke through again. You noticed that you felt cold standing inside that space. This, you thought, was a psychological effect as you remember feeling the same sensation just by watching the "10 Hours Of Rain On A Tin Roof" videos online (a resource for the work). The video is a looped image of bright, green grass wet with raindrops, repeated at short intervals but the sound seemed to be one ten-hour take. This image and the sound together changed the temperature of the room and produced a faint petrichor smell. You have always loved the rain and it is when you feel most alive.

The infrigating result of the rain, the smell, the obscuring of vision, the cloud cover reducing the glare and burn of the sun all point to the fact that everything looks more pleasant when wet, impelling you to be inside the earth. *Whipsaw* (2017) at Fontanelle Gallery, hinted at this very comfort but also the unease of being trapped in a space that inadequately protects you from an excess of rain. This is also an attempt to represent the deficient lengths one can go to dam all the unpleasantness in life, and how quickly enjoyment can turn to discomfort and then danger.

This psychological space—one of post-traumatic stress from traumas generations ago, that have been passed down and contributing to the conditions now—is reconfigured in your latest exhibition at the GUAM, your first solo exhibition at a major institution. Here, the work

Archie Moore *Whipsaw*, 2017, mixed media, installation view, Fontanelle, TARNANTHI: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art. Photo: Tony Kearney. Courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney



is split into two rooms: one created from corrugated iron, dirt, a shearer's bed, a twig broom, a 44-gallon drum, a multi-coloured strip curtain and a kerosene lantern; and the other painted in volcanic ash tones with low lighting, fog and a droning, ominous soundtrack. They are two of seven rooms, a wall drawing in the foyer and an outside line drawing of your childhood home in which the smells, light and sound from other rooms trespass and, just like memories, are under reconstruction all the time. Time, place and events aren't fixed, and how you remember these experiences is influenced by your beliefs, perceptions, expectations, mental health etc.

You think about the Aboriginal oral traditions of songlines, dance and art to preserve histories and to pass it onto another generation and how none of this was passed

down to you. That had been stymied by the disaster of colonisation and now only bad histories are passed down or nothing at all; the things that can't be talked about. You don't remember much, or if what you do remember is correct, and if anything is worth remembering at all. You wonder who you are and if it is you speaking or someone else. This is the daze of our lives.

Archie Moore is of Kamilaroi, German and English descent.

An artist monograph in association with the exhibition Archie Moore: 1970–2018 (8 March – 21 April 2018) was published by the Griffith University Art Museum.