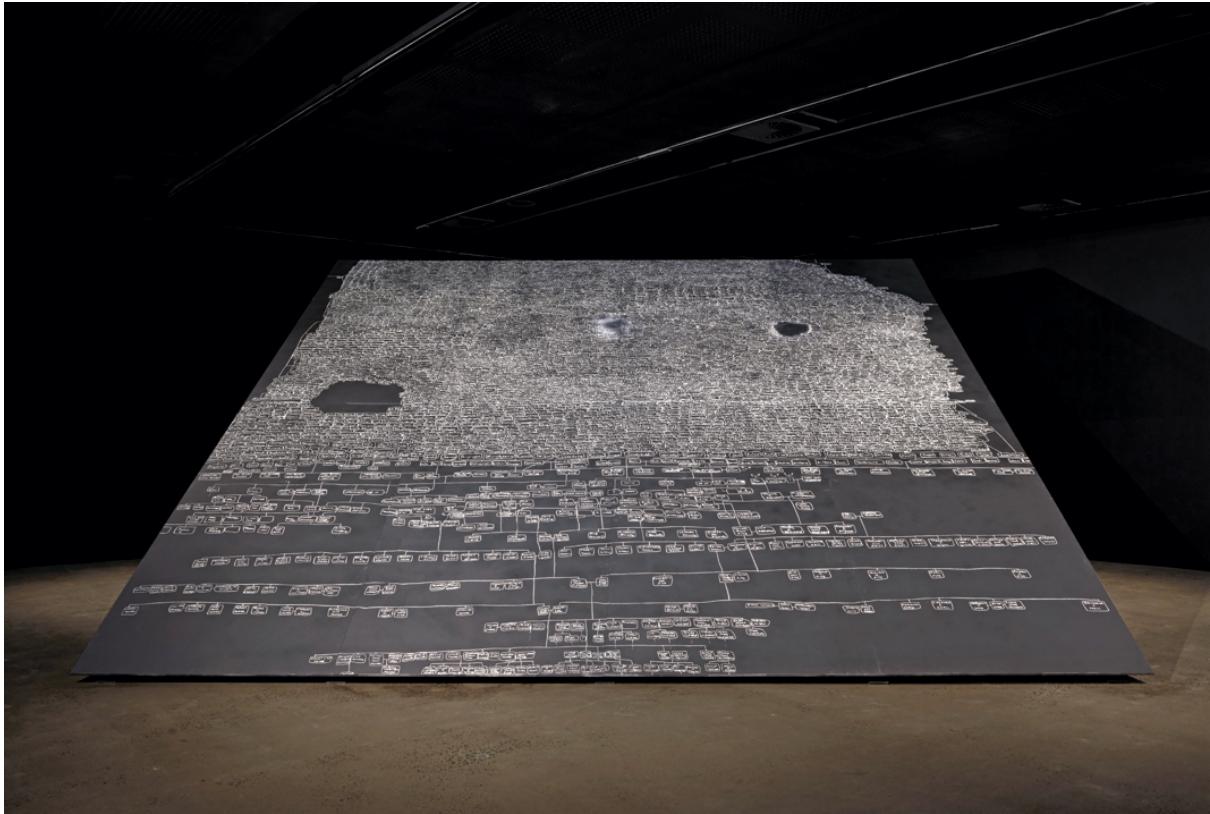


Archie Moore

UNSW GALLERIES



Archie Moore, *Family Tree*, 2021, conté crayon and blackboard paint on MDF. Installation view. Photo: Zan Wimberley.

The work of Archie Moore addresses the histories and politics of race. These themes are personal for the Brisbane-based artist, who was born in 1970—the son of an Aboriginal mother and a white father—and brought up in a small Queensland town where racism was a fact of life. The artist's recent show, "The Colour Line: Archie Moore & W. E. B. Du Bois" was made in response to curator José Da Silva's invitation to make a work in dialogue with the handmade data visualizations produced in the late 1890s under the guidance of African American writer, activist, and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois. These vividly colored, strikingly designed maps, charts, and graphs were originally part of "The American Negro," an exhibition organized by Du Bois for the American section of the 1900 Paris Exposition.

Moore's reply to Du Bois's project bore the dispiriting title *Graph of Perennial Disadvantage*, 2020, and took the form of a hanging banner installed alongside screens showing digital facsimiles of the Du Bois infographics. Here Moore conveyed the stark contrast between data evidencing some African American advances in the period before the full ascendancy of Jim Crow and the wretched circumstances of Aboriginal Australians in the same period. The banner's unusual medium—pulped pages of Australian parliament proceedings—invoked the 1901 Australian Constitution, a document decreeing that "Aboriginal natives shall not be counted" among the nation's people; the erasure was not repealed until 1967. The work contained other allusions to the dispossession of Australia's first peoples. One face of the banner was painted with a border of broad black, red, and yellow stripes that vaguely echoed

bar graphs among the data visualizations. But Moore told me the stripes also echo the designs on blankets handed out in colonial Queensland to Indigenous people on the queen's birthday from the early 1800s up to the early twentieth century. These paltry tokens of care for a people brutalized by colonization typically bore Queensland Government initials and the broad arrow symbolizing crown property; Moore likewise inscribed the reverse side of the banner with these emblems.

Du Bois mobilized empirical data to contest scientific racism, and Moore's *Blood Fraction*, 2015, reexhibited here, used ridicule to demolish racist pseudoscience. One hundred mug shot-style portraits of the artist formed a line around three walls of a room. The artist's skin was tinted a procession of colors, with each photo accompanied by a superimposed word or words—most existing, some invented—denoting ludicrously precise fractions of “blood quantum.” At one end, Moore's pitch-dark face was labeled full blood, and at the other end his light-skinned visage was classified hecteroon. In between, ninety-eight variations, including sexacontakihenaroon and octocontakaipentroon, amplified the absurdity of mathematical quantifications of race.

Moore's giant blackboard drawing *Family Tree*, 2021, completed the show. This inclined plane, a sixteen-foot-square board on a wooden frame, loomed inside a dimly lit room with black walls. With white conté crayon Moore had meticulously drawn thousands of rectangles linked by lines to create a genealogical maze purporting to be his family tree. In the top half, the boxes mass like honeycomb cells to convey a visual sense of Indigenous heritage stretching back hundreds of thousands of years. Filling the shapes are a multitude of traditional Aboriginal names interspersed with anglicized, derogatory, or anonymizing monikers assigned to Indigenous Australian people. Three noticeable voids in this section—looking like holes torn in the tree—may mark massacre events or the devastating impact of imported diseases such as smallpox. Or they may signal the limits of Moore's piecemeal knowledge of his Aboriginal heritage. In contrast, the more sparsely arranged lower portion records names and familial links about which Moore seems to have more certain knowledge. At once delicate and monumental, this work spoke movingly of ties of belonging both lost and gained.

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