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EXECUTED

*IN FRANKLIN STREET*

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CITY OF MELBOURNE

26 November 2015 –

1 February 2016

City Gallery

Melbourne Town Hall

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/  
citygallery](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery)

## **Executed in Franklin Street**

An exhibition honouring the lives of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, two Aboriginal Tasmanian men publicly hanged in Melbourne in 1842.

“What’s in our memorial landscape doesn’t reflect what happened in the past, it reflects what people want us to know about the past.”

**GENEVIEVE GRIEVES**

*Executed in Franklin Street* is centred on a story from the past, but it is really about being present and acknowledging our shared history, and a little known event to most.

Five young Tasmanian Aboriginal people found themselves a long way from home, on Kulin country, a journey that had fatal consequences. Traumatized by colonial warfare and violence, they resisted and fought back. Retaliation against Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner was public and final.

I invited a number of artists to respond to Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's story, and have included works created in response to the men's memorialisation. I felt it was vital to include Tasmanian Aboriginal artists, who make a significant contribution to art in Victoria; their works speak of Country, memory, trauma, connection and love for their people. These artists challenge the dominant colonial narrative – both historical and contemporary. They refute the myth that Truganini, a significant figure in this story, was the last of her people; that Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner were simply murderers; and that colonisation was a benign process that met no resistance.

Although Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner were treated and executed as criminals, they are remembered by many as freedom fighters. Aboriginal communities in Victoria and Tasmania have venerated the men, as have activists, artists, writers and playwrights over time. The story of their resistance and the events that led to their public execution and final resting place at the Victoria Market have been remembered, as has Truganini and her part in the story.

This exhibition comprises many expressions of Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner's story, as well as how they are remembered, how their lives impact the way in which we know ourselves in Victorian history, and who we choose to memorialise. By acknowledging the execution, we begin to shift the single story to multiple understandings, merging the personal, political and historical.

**Paola Balla**

Curator and Artist in Residence at Moondani Balluk  
Indigenous Academic Unit – Victoria University



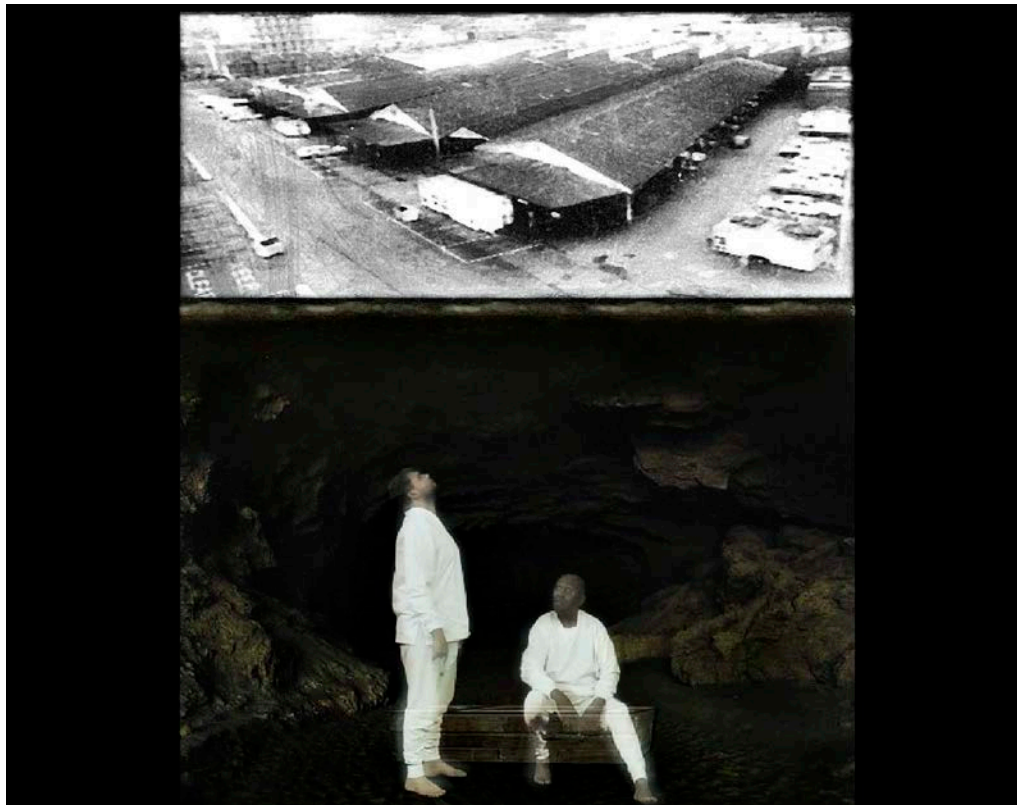


LEFT  
Aunty Marlene Gilson  
*Tunmerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner* (detail)  
2015  
Acrylic on linen  
142.5cm x 198.5cm

SECOND FROM LEFT  
Aunty Marlene Gilson  
*Tunmerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner*  
2015  
Acrylic on linen  
142.5cm x 198.5cm

RIGHT  
*Mourning Walk*  
Lonsdale, Swanston, Franklin and Bowen Streets, Melbourne  
Friday 30 October 2015

Performed by Tammy Anderson and Elliott Maynard  
Photographed by Paola Balla  
Digital print on hahnemuhle cotton rag  
32cm x 45cm



FAR LEFT  
Banner, Tunmerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner Commemoration Committee

On Loan from the Tunmerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner Commemoration Committee

SECOND FROM LEFT  
Ricky Maynard  
*Untitled (In Response to Place series)*, 2007  
Chromira Print  
102 x 76cm  
City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

THIRD FROM LEFT  
John Harding  
*Tunmerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner*, 2015  
Film still, DVD – 8.20mins  
City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

RIGHT  
Lisa Kennedy  
*Noila Canara, Beautiful Singer*, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas  
76 x 62 cm  
City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection



They have become aware of  
their fate. They have seldom  
spoken and frequently stand  
motionless for hours.

PORT PHILLIP PATRIOT *January 1842*

*Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* are  
with us: Mourning, memory and presence

TONY BIRCH



On 20 January 1842 two Aboriginal men, *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner*, both originally from their own Country in what we know today as Tasmania, were executed by public hanging in Melbourne. The men, along with three Aboriginal women, *Truganini*, *Planobeena* and *Pyterrunner*, had been tried for the murder of two whale-hunters in the Western Port district. The men were found guilty and sentenced to death. On the day of their execution the men were paraded through the city and then hung in the street, in what was reported to be a crude manner, before a crowd of thousands of people. The public spectacle was a deliberate act of violent theatre, choreographed by colonial society in order to, as the sentencing judge, John Walpole Willis explained at the time, inspire 'terror' in the Aboriginal population, and 'to deter similar transgressions' in the future.

The men were the first of only six people to be sentenced to death and face public execution in the early years of a settlement that would later make claims as the premier city of the southern colonies of the British Empire. While the brutal story of the execution was not completely erased from the collective consciousness of Melbourne, it was a story largely forgotten until recent decades when the lives of *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* were remembered and their deaths mourned through an annual ceremony on the site of the execution, near the corner of Bowen and Franklin Street.

The artworks created and gathered for this exhibition are central to the process of remembering, not only of *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* themselves and the wider history they represent, but also to re-place the men within the consciousness of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society. In one of the new works commissioned for the exhibition, Auntie Marlene Gilson, has chosen to represent the men, not as the shackled prisoners of colonial society about to have their lives stolen from them, but, in her own words, as cultural men, and men of dignity.

Through both her art and words, Auntie Marlene has produced a powerful record of the history of an Aboriginal resistance to colonial invasion and violence of the nineteenth century. The work is also a powerful reflection of the contemporary cultural vitality of Aboriginal people in both Victoria and Tasmania, where the presence of *Tunmerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* has become a lived reality in the face of all attempts to obliterate the men from our collective psyche.

The story of the first public hanging in the Port Phillip district is not only an Aboriginal story. It is a shared story that non-Aboriginal people must also take ownership of, in the hope that with ownership comes a sense of responsibility, reflection, and where necessary, a commitment to reciprocity. The artist, Pamela Horsley, has accepted this challenge with a dynamic sense of creative and intellectual work. Her painting, 'Evasion', which documents the resistance of the five Aboriginal people from Tasmania while 'on the run' in the colony of Victoria, brings *Truganini*, *Planobeena* and *Pyterrunner* out of the shadow of history. Horsley's work reminds us of the courage of the women, and their centrality in the wider story of colonial occupation and Aboriginal resistance, which is a story of the autonomy and bravery of all Aboriginal women as much as it is a story of men.

The exhibition also includes a reproduction of a painting created earlier by a direct forbear of Horsley, 'The First Execution', by Wilbraham Liardit, produced thirty-three years after the hanging itself. The painting is a remarkable historical document. Intentionally or not, it reflects the fiction that would come to dominate the version of colonial myth-making that passed for history in late nineteenth and twentieth century Australia. The image is one of militaristic order. It is *unproblematic*, absent of the brutality and chaos evident on the day of the execution. It also denies any sense of agency, and again, presence in relationship to the condemned men. They are rendered passive, inert, absent in the face of their impending deaths.

Other images in the exhibition, including a photograph from a series of contemporary Melbourne by Ricky Maynard, create voices that *speak truth to power*. These examples of 'speaking back' are no more potently present than in the work created by Tammy Anderson and Elliott Maynard, and documented by Paola Balla. The artists recover the journey undertaken by *Tunmerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* through the streets of the city on the day of their execution, enacted in an attempt to humiliate and terrorise other Aboriginal people, as well as the men themselves. Anderson and Maynard, dressed in white, map contemporary Melbourne in a

manner that both commemorates the men and returns their spirits to Country.

Do not be mistaken, *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* are not ghosts. To think of them as such would be a simplistic and Eurocentric reading of the work. As Anderson and Maynard walk the streets, their bare feet retracing the footsteps of a pair of resistance fighters, they create an additional story, carving a new narrative into Country that penetrates the bitumen and concrete, glass and steel, the sounds and smells of a twenty-first century metropolis. The walk both reaches back in time, to the day when two Aboriginal men were murdered in the name of Empire, and into the future, to where and when we will meet *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* again.

Art becomes a powerful force when it provokes us to think anew, to challenge our stubbornness and ignorance. A prime minister of recent times once commented that the role of Australian history was to help us to feel *relaxed and comfortable*. This mantra should never be given credibility in a country that is yet to deal with its past. This exhibition will provoke unease and *discomfort* in some. In doing so we will not only pay legacy to the deaths of two important Aboriginal men. Hopefully we will be nudged to think more productively about contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia.

**Tony Birch** is the Dr Bruce MacGuinness Research Fellow in the Moondani Balluk Academic Centre at Victoria University. He is the author of the books *Shadowboxing* (2006), *Father's Day* (2009), *Blood* (2011), shortlisted for the Miles Franklin literary award, and *The Promise* (2014).



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