DOMINIK
MERSCH
GALLERY

PETA CLANCY

'The Colonial Scar and the Curative Cut'

24.10. – 14.11.2026

EXHIBITION ESSAY

Revisitation and return are at the core of Peta Clancy's artworks *'The Colonial Scar and the Curative Cut'*. The works examine the tensions and complexities that returning to Ancestral Country can evoke for Aboriginal peoples; deep yearning, fear, or grief caused by the environmental destruction of Country. The impulse to return, and the tension it elicits, is materialised through the making of multilayered photographs, night sky images, and video works created with Yorta Yorta Country.

The series' starting point was Clancy's encounter with historic photographs of Yorta Yorta Country held in the Museums Victoria Collection. These photographs were 'taken' along the Dungala (Murrary River), at places where her grandmother, great-grandfather, and great-great grandmother were born, lived, or yearned to return to throughout their lives. Clancy returned to the places depicted in these historic photographs, which were originally 'taken' in the service of colony expansion, a process contingent on the dispossession of Traditional Owners, including her own family.

Clancy's artworks respond to photographic histories of the land in Australia. In the nineteenth century, technological developments coinciding with colonisation, including the increasing portability of photographic equipment, enabled photographers to move beyond the studio and into the landscape. During this period, Nicholas Caire and A. J. Campbell travelled to photograph in and around Cummeragunja and Maloga missions on Yorta Yorta Country. Their photographs drew on colonial conventions of linear perspective to create the illusion of a window into the land. In contrast, Clancy's photographs draw attention to the surface of the image by bringing together two images of the same place, made at different times on Country. Working performatively and reciprocally with Country, she cuts into the prints, removes sections, and then rephotographs them.

A series of photographs of the night-sky were made using an 8x10-inch film camera, employing the tools of colonial photography through darkness, duration, and uncertainty. Clancy set up the camera in daylight before opening the shutter in darkness and exposing the sheet film for seven hours. She invited Country to determine what would be concealed or revealed on the film. The resulting series of three photographs feature Sky Country on Yorta Yorta Country.

Since colonisation, the stars have become less visible in many places due to light pollution from cities. Satellites further disrupt our view of the constellations in the night sky. These changes therefore have implications for the visibility and continuation of ancient Indigenous astronomical knowledges.

'Still Standing' re-stories A.J. Campbell's photograph *'Murray River Crossing, Barmah, New South Wales'* (1895) through Clancy's familial perspectives. When Clancy shared the photograph with a Yorta Yorta Elder, he recognised a tree in the photograph and said, "That tree still exists. I can take you there." A few days later, they stood at the place, looking across the river at the tree, which was still standing strong. Clancy wondered what the tree had witnessed and what it knew. She was reminded of a story her Aunty had told her about how her great-great-grandparents, James and Grace, fell in love across the river. The tree stood there then, and it still stands on the banks of the Dungala.

– *Peta Clancy, 2026*

Peta Clancy is the descendant of the Yorta Yorta people and has English, Irish and Indian heritage. She lives and works in Naarm.