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*“Australian ‘Un-identity’
and the Significance of
Professional Sport on
Local Community”*

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Foreword

This paper addresses the thematic cornerstone of my art making practice of the last three years: Australian identity. ‘Un-identity’ is a term I invented relatively recently to accommodate for Australia’s identity crisis in an age where how one is publically perceived is a topic of daily conversation. Its origins stem from a personal inability to locate a valid perception of myself that was neither insensitive and egregiously nationalistic, nor dismissive of my luck to live in Australia. Previous works: *Kingsford Smith Airport Runways into Botany Bay* and *309, 310, M20 Bus Routes from Botany to Redfern* (see Figure 1), considered my identity as existing in an ‘in-between’ state; my awareness of being a non-Indigenous resident is juxtaposed with my corporeal engagement with the Sydney landscape. I intend for the ‘un-identity’ to encapsulate this state of ‘in-between-ness’.

Whilst the ‘un-identity’ is a term specific to my contemporary circumstances, broadly it also provokes the question: have things really changed in Australia since the invasion of the British?

Two-hundred and fifty years on and the nation is still unsure whether we belong best to the British Commonwealth or to our Asian neighbours. For this reason, my decision to use texts written half a century ago (namely Robin Boyd’s *The Australian Ugliness* and Donald Horne’s *The Lucky Country*) is intentional. Together they form the foundation upon which I draw out the nation’s cultural uncertainty from the common Australian experience, and reimagine it for a more coherent future. I consider the texts as important, though limited, accounts of the post-invasion Australia, and thus a confirmation of the concerns I have chosen to research.

*Editorial assistance during the writing of the paper was received from Dr Stuart Bailey (Honours supervisor), and Dr Gregory Clarke (father). Assistance in both cases involved the clarification of expression, correction of grammar errors, and advice on appropriate research paper formatting.

Figure 1:



Left:
Edward Clarke
*Kingsford Smith Airport
Runways into Botany Bay*
(installation view)
2016
Polyester, acetate, poly/rayon blend trim,
nylon sister clips
100 x 200 CM

Right:
Edward Clarke
*309, 310, M20 Bus Routes
from Botany to Redfern*
(installation view)
2016
Polyester, poly/rayon blend trim, nylon
sister clips
100 x 200 CM

Image source: courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2:



Edward Clarke
Botany Banksia Rugby League
Club 4 (#4 of 13)
2017
Unidentified jersey fabric, cotton, polyester-
spandex, polyester, embroidered patches,
vinyl
56.5 x 125.5 CM

Image source: courtesy of the artist.

I. Introduction

Australia's affinity with sport is a well-recognised cultural phenomenon. Donald Horne writes emphatically, but with a tongue in his cheek, "To play sport, or watch others play, and to read and talk about it was to uphold the nation and build its character"¹. But this national love affair with organised play reveals the cultural alienation of a proportion of its people. We are led to believe that association with either sport or the arts is to dismiss the cultural legitimacy of the other. Does this cultural division ring true in Australia? Or can the embodiment of the zealotry of professional sport be directly addressed within the arts? The coalescence of sport and art thus calls for a reconfiguration of Australian identity.

In a nation strung between newfangled cultural confusion and responsibility to Indigenous peoples, whose history predates European invasion by eighty thousand years, how can a resolute national character come to fruition? The temptation to synthesise distinct nationalistic 'Australian' qualities into a digestible morsel of laconic witticisms, yields profoundly dispiriting feedback that is either clichéd, facile, or grossly untrue. If we refine our search geographically, however, and consider the protracted history of the continent, a more complete example of the Australian experience becomes apparent.

I hypothesise that the Australian individual's identity (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) is not formed nationally, but locally. As Robin Boyd in his seminal book *The Australian Ugliness* brashly states, "There can be few other nations which are less certain than Australia as to what they are and where they are"². Nationally, the Australian identity is indeterminable, but on a local scale the nation is intuitively aware of its immediate surroundings.

As a resident of Botany, my relationship with the area has prompted a fondness for the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club. This location upon which my identity is established is materialised by the presence of the rugby league club, and moreover the jersey that communicates visually to others a specific form of self-identification. The existence of the South Sydney Rabbitohs and other adjacent clubs and codes, delimit the Australian geography into the 'supporter zones' upon which people form their connection to place. The fervent admiration for professional sport teams by local communities, particularly rugby league teams (at least in New South Wales and Queensland; and Australian Rules teams

¹ Horne, Donald. *The Lucky Country*. 6th ed. (Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 2005), 10.

² Boyd, Robin. *The Australian Ugliness*. 6th ed. (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010), 71.

elsewhere), would suggest Australians are familiar with who and where they are. It has been staring the nation in the face this entire time.

Positioned south of Sydney city, the suburb of Botany has inflected my approach to an Australian art practice as a result of its central role within the blemished history of invaded Australia. I have chosen to confer this relationship with my local geography, along with my affection for the community aspect of rugby league, on to the construction of thirteen rugby league jerseys: *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* (see Figure 2). Apart from my lived experience of the Botany landscape, I recognise my position as a non-Indigenous Australian citizen and consider the area with an awareness that it continues to hold salient cultural and spiritual value to its original inhabitants. My appreciation of Botany is a second-hand reading of an environment forcibly removed from its rightful occupants.

By taking into consideration the importance of local identity, as markedly expressed within the Botany area and the culture of the South Sydney Rabbitohs, I hope to offer a constructive prognosis of Australia's future cultural climate. And by applying interpretations of the aforesaid notion, through artistic conventions, and onto established rugby league templates, my *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys should reveal the validity of a marriage between sport and art.

II. Art versus sport

The belief that sport bears little 'legitimate' cultural influence in Australia is magnified by a factious entanglement between it and art³. McAuliffe notes: "the cultivated Australian sees sport suffering none of the attacks that it does and, worse, usurping art's role as the definer of national character"⁴. Sport and visual art are in competition. But what benefit does the existence of this contention have given the similarities of these areas of interest in our contemporary setting?

Both Australian sport and Australian visual art have the potential to cultivate a distinct sense of identity. Raquel Ormella's *Wealth for Toil I* (see Figure 3) achieves a distillation of the disillusioned national identity via her coalescence of sport and art. The embroidered capital lettering, 'GOLDEN PROMISES', amidst the tattered remains of a gold-

³ The Basil Sellers biannual art prize – 2008-2016 – sought to imbue sport with the cultural notability possessed by the visual arts. The prize's withdrawal as a contributor to the Australian art scene after only nine years was perhaps the outcome of the varying success of the exhibitions' creative output during that time. The inception of the prize, however, did accommodate for finalists like Tony Albert, Raquel Ormella, Tony Schwensen and Scott Redford, to come nearer a resolute convergence of sport and art.

⁴ McAuliffe, Christopher. "Fair Game: Art Versus Sport In 'The Lucky Country'". *Art and Australia* 47, no.4 (2010): 582.

coloured Australian national flag illustrates the transience of Olympic achievement, as well as alluding to the continent's mineral wealth⁵. Ormella's concept of the national self is unashamedly critical, and thus plays into the general sense of the Australian cultural confusion. Nonetheless, Ormella's distinct application of Olympic imagery (the green and gold; the national flag as if to be draped across an athlete's shoulders) imparts an artistic voice, a visual identity, to the typical patriotic supporter. Ormella's artwork extracts the disordered Australian identity from the contested cultural space as if to proclaim that our identity exists within this but beyond jingoism and the superficial merits of success⁶. When art and sport are placed side-by-side cultural chaos does not ensue, but rather one validates the other. A markedly specific expression of identity is manifested by both sport and art that is referential to peoples' lived Australian experience. Even whilst the output of sport is often observed as parochial in contrast to that of art, the impassioned manner by which people experience both are decidedly alike.

Sport and visual art offer their spectators a participatory experience outside of direct participation. The respective cultural event – a football match or gallery show opening, for instance – imparts an emotional experience that stimulates an awareness of self within the spectating individual.

Boyd offers one reading of the sport-admirer's experience, "Watching Australian football may have distinctive qualities as an experience: consuming two twenty-six-ounce cans of beer per hour while hemmed in to the bleachers by eighty thousand roaring rain-coated fans"⁷. Whilst Boyd inarguably lends a critical opinion here, his account of the jostle of enthusiastic individuals in close proximity to one another is emblematic of the notion of community that sport engenders. And further still, the drunken scrum of like-minded individuals extends to visual art: the Friday evening show openings of Melbourne's laneway galleries. The art-admirers go back-to-back to flex their visual art knowledge in the proximity of contemporary art pieces. The community experiences in both instances are equally valid in how an Australian identity comes to exist.

⁵ Wearne, Suzette. *Basil Sellers Art Prize 2014*. PDF. (Melbourne: Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, 2014), 88. <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/assets/files/Exh2014/BasilSellersArtPrize2014MediumRes.pdf>.

⁶ "Raquel Ormella". YouTube video, 2:20. Posted by Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2014.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSuNQzIHs_s.

⁷ Boyd. *The Australian Ugliness*, 36.

Figure 3:



Raquel Ormella

Wealth for toil I

2014

Synthetic polymer paint, hessian, cotton,
metallic thread, ribbon

220 x 270 CM

Image source: Milani Gallery, Brisbane;
<http://www.sellersartprize.com.au/artists-and-exhibition/2014/shortlisted-artists/raquel-ormella/>

The *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys represent the ‘experience’ via the displacement of their utility. Whilst they offer the potential to be applied on a rugby pitch they instead exist in a gallery. And yet the very fact they have a practical application contradicts the passive surveying nature of the gallery. The jerseys’ existence as material objects is then secondary to the notions of local (Botany) identity they evoke. Consideration of the material elements of the jerseys, as applied to established rugby league forms, all work towards a hope to marry sport and visual art with artistic sincerity.

Vincent Alessi conjectures: “Sport...is a powerful window through which we can view, assess and understand all societies; and in that context it is not far removed from that thing we call ‘high culture’: art”⁸. The popular notion of the disparity between art and sport bears little foundation. Both entities reveal Australia’s cultural nuances in the form of fruitful and close-knit communities. Alessi continues: “art is cultural and an expression of and response to the society in which it is made...[sport] is central to the cultural health and identity of communities”⁹. Sport and art resonate with their immediate environments; it is by both by which people develop an identity that corresponds to their local surroundings. An amalgamation of them only reinforces an already established sense of identity.

i. The masculine trope in Australian sport

The topic of masculinity presents itself as an underlying feature of the *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys. And given the hyper-awareness of issues surrounding gender in our contemporary circumstances, it is a relevant topic to address within the discussion of the work (albeit not the foremost matter in question). The subject possesses a certain cultural authority when considering the representation of identity through art, that I intend to address through my textile-based art practice and the topic of sport in Australia.

Plainly, the implementation of a textile-based practice intrinsically contradicts the common perception of the typical Australian ‘bloke’. The presumption exists that needlecraft is characteristically feminine. Horne generalises wittily, “At parties men stood at one end of the room and talked about sport, money, motor cars – and women. At the other end of the room women sat and talked about children, homes, undies – and men”¹⁰. The *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys thus call into question the legitimacy of reducing aspects of Australian culture to absolutes.

⁸ Alessi, Vincent. *Basil Sellers Art Prize 2014*. PDF. (Melbourne: Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne, 2014), 5. <http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au/assets/files/Exh2014/BasilSellersArtPrize2014MediumRes.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰ Horne. *The Lucky Country*, 77.

A gender equality issue exists within the current culture of rugby league that tends to apotheosise the male sex, although the awareness of the importance of female involvement both on and off the field is a gradually improving factor of the game. Unlike Australian Rules Football, however, the National Rugby League is yet to implement a women's competition. Even though the game proffers a male dominated on-field display, grassroots numbers are strong with boys and girls, and the passion both sexes exhibit for rugby league in the stands is a notable quality of its team-based communities.¹¹

III. Australian 'un-identity': the local

Australia's present sense of 'national self' is malformed. Boyd posits that Australians encounter an "uncertainty of the national psyche"¹². By way of illustration, and on the subject of sport regalia, as much can be said about the state of Australia's Olympic opening ceremony uniforms, that continually appear confused with each four-year turnover (see Figure 4). These uniforms exemplify and epitomise the Australian 'un-identity'. 'Un-identity' denotes the addled sense of national self; identity that is expressed as much by who one is, as who one is not. Obscurity enshrouds the national identity in an international context and thus fails to successfully translate into anything material. The particularity of the local, as opposed to the nebulosity of the national (the national being a collection of all local conditions), thus supports a more refined sense of the individual's identity. The green and gold – Australia's unclear attempt at nationalism – that emblazon the Olympic uniforms are the only recognisable indicator of nationhood.

The Australian confusion appears rooted in the fundamental disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous (British/European) cultures¹³. Indigenous culture *is* Australian culture, and yet the invading British system throws any sense of contemporary nationhood into disarray. The Australian 'un-identity' is expressed with the rhetoric of a Kantian conviction: "If someone cannot prove that a thing is, he may try to prove that it is not"¹⁴. The individual (Indigenous or *non*-Indigenous – the semantics exist here as well) carries an identity situated between two definite positions of self – definitely Australian and

¹¹ Perry, Jodan. "Jillaroos and rugby league hopefuls dreaming of inaugural Women's NRL competition". *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News*. Last modified August 24, 2017. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-24/women-rugby-league-nrl-jillaroos-hopeful/8839862>.

¹² Boyd. *The Australian Ugliness*, 73.

¹³ "In their differences, Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific ones are considered so disparate as to be "incommensurable" or "irreconcilable" on cosmological, epistemological and ontological grounds". (Nakata, Martin. "The Cultural Interface". *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36, Supplement (2007): 8.)

¹⁴ Guyer, Paul. *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 431.

Figure 4:



Matt King, *Australian athletes model 2016 Olympics uniform*, 2016. Digital photograph found online.
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-30/australian-athletes-model-2016-olympics-uniform/7283668>

definitely not. Australian national identity hence unfolds into a pessimistic game of ‘I-am-not’s’.

One must look locally for an authentic Australian identity. The Australian continent, prior to British invasion, did not operate on a holistic, national level but consisted of over two hundred and fifty distinct Indigenous language groups and nations. The European notion of a national totality does not appear congruent with the inconceivable vastness of the Australian landscape. The watercolours of Albert Namatjira express a profound sense of Australian (and Indigenous) self through his articulation of his immediate *Arrente* surroundings. The towering rock formation of *Kwariitnama (Organ Pipes)* – see Figure 5 – reveals a reverence for his local environment. Compositionally, Namatjira is looking up towards the outcrop as if subservient to its natural majesty. Rex Batterbee suggests that Namatjira’s work “may be nearer a real Australian art than anyone has ever been”¹⁵. Batterbee indirectly recognises that the Australian artist finds success, and an authenticity, when working locally. An impression of the immediate environment is heightened by a local affiliation (and affection) for it; the individual’s identity is best informed by what is immediately present.

The local environment is materialised by the existence of a professional sport club. In New South Wales, and greater Sydney in particular, the geography is often defined by the boundaries that demarcate where the rugby league teams cultivate their respective fan bases and junior teams. These rugby league organisations help in establishing these individuals’ sense of Australian identity, through locale-specific community culture. Horne recognises the cultural significance of sport on the outward expression of one’s identity and experience of the ‘Australian way of life’. “The elements of loyalty, fanaticism, pleasure-seeking, competitiveness, ambition, and struggle that are not allowed precise expression in non-sporting life (although they exist in disguise) are stated precisely in sport”¹⁶. Sport on its local level achieves these aforesaid qualities in an immensely acute way that reveals a more authentic Australian character than the general national identity ever could.

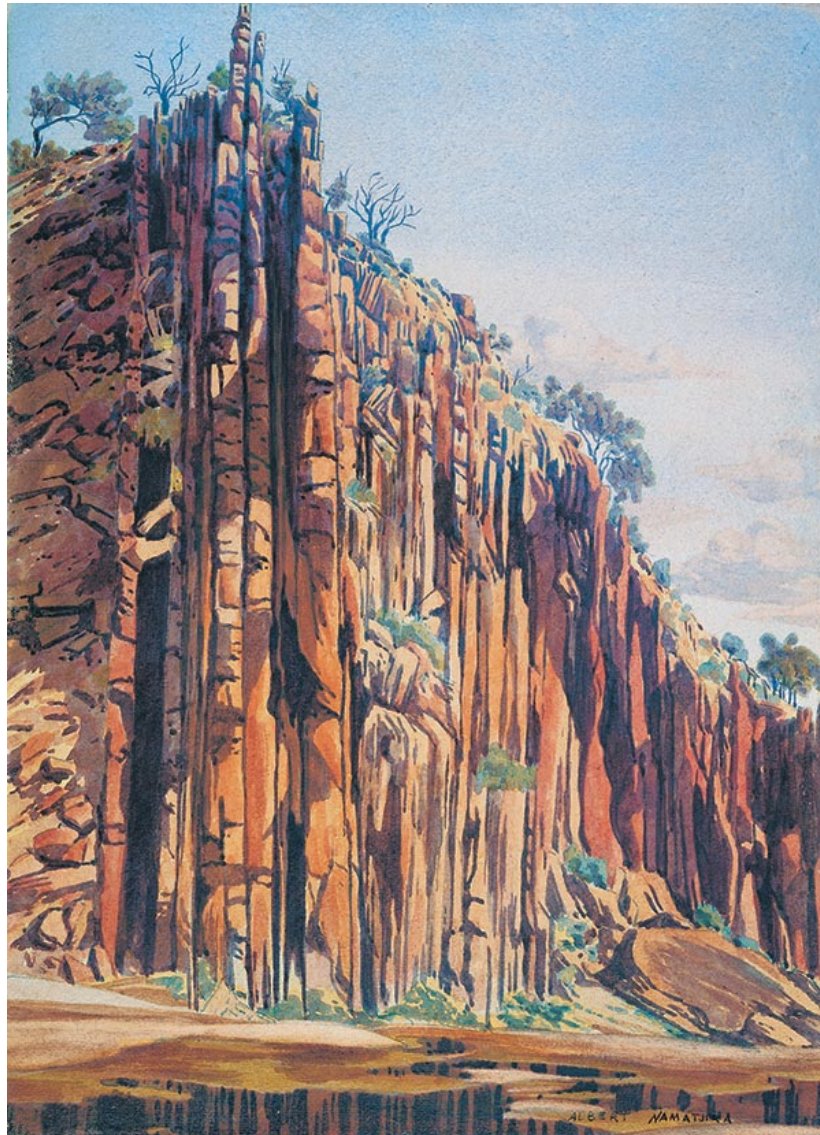
i. Botany

The city of Botany holds a crucial position within the understanding of the Australian identity. Whilst its immediate appearance is comparatively mundane compared to Sydney’s more iconic regions, it bears a history of social, commercial, and cultural flux that instantiates

¹⁵ McLean, Ian. *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: An Anthology of Writing on Aboriginal Art 1980-2006*. (Sydney: Power Publications, 2011), 25.

¹⁶ Horne. *The Lucky Country*, 77.

Figure 5:



Albert Namatjira
Kwariitnama (Organ Pipes)
c. 1945-53
Media and dimensions unknown

Image source: Ngurratjuta/Pmara Ntjarra
Aboriginal Corporation;
<https://nga.gov.au/namatjira/transformations.cfm>

the Australian experience of the last two hundred years. Botany's history hence belongs to the *Kameygal* people of the *Eora* nation.

For the Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre's 2008 exhibition *Lines in the Sand*, Ace Bourke writes of Botany Bay: "[it] has been a beautiful, bland, blank canvas for the superimposition of expectations and aspirations, dreams and nightmares, disappointments, fears, and for some, redemptive possibilities"¹⁷. Whilst the suburb of Botany is only one of many that meet the shoreline of Botany Bay, Bourke's words are undoubtedly applicable. And his dichotomous language reveals the Indigenous-European cultural division through a local lens.

The disjunction of Indigenous-European Australia is brought to light with the dissection of Imants Tillers'¹⁸ and Archie Moore's respective works *Nature speaks: AT* (see Figure 6) and *United Neytions* (see Figure 7). Both artworks invariably consider the Australian landscape at its local level.

Tillers' *Nature speaks: AT* expresses his relationship to the Cooma region of southern New South Wales. As the child of Latvian immigrants, the landscape comes to represent new opportunities, and yet the relationship to his familiar geography is far removed from the Indigenous kinship. Deborah Hart notes that "the shift in subject matter towards locality was inseparable from the move Tillers made...to Cooma"¹⁹. Tillers lists the names of the surrounding areas to his Cooma locality in *Nature speaks: AT* with candour, pride. The ochre red and yellow, and the white tonalities summon Indigenous imagery, and the place names lay on the image plane distinct from the earthen background much like the quality of a map. Tillers' act of mapping connotes an admiration for his local landscape, yet conversely suggests the cartographical intentions of Britain's early invaders. Tillers' characteristic use of panels creates lines of latitude and longitude that aggressively divide the land into neat portions. His 'birds-eye' perspective thus mimics the traditional Indigenous depiction of the landscape – "You know in Aboriginal art there is no horizon"²⁰ – and yet the sans serif text scattered over the painting's surface gives the impression of distance: a non-Indigenous indifference.

¹⁷ *Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770*, curated by Ace Bourke. (Sydney: Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2008), 25. Exhibition catalogue.

¹⁸ Imants Tillers considers the position of art produced by Indigenous Australians heavily within his own Australian practice. Tillers' work *The nine shots* (1985) is infamous for its illegitimate use of culturally sensitive signs and symbols as borrowed from a Michael Nelson Tjakamarra painting. Tjakamarra is of *Warlpiri* parentage and formed his knowledge of paint in *Papunya*.

¹⁹ Hart, Deborah. *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions*. (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006), 59.

²⁰ Michael Eather, interviewed by Deborah Hart, 15 February 2006. Found in: Hart. *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions*, 73.

The complication for the non-Indigenous Australian artist, knowing that Indigenous art *is* Australian art, is how to incorporate this notion sensitively within their practice. And therein lies a concern of my own art making. I aim to approach Indigeneity in *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* without overstepping the boundaries of what is relevant to my lived experience as a non-Indigenous Australian citizen. I acknowledge that my understanding of the Botany landscape is only a secondary interpretation of its features and history to that of its original inhabitants.

Comparably, geographic uncertainty enshrouds the thematic basis of Archie Moore's *United Neytions*. The artwork consists of twenty-eight 'national' flags that correspond to R. H. Matthews' (inaccurate) 1900 anthropological map of the Australian continent's twenty-eight Indigenous nations. Moore's interpretation of Matthews' "imagined nations"²¹ are predicated by the uncertainty that surrounds his own paternal *Kamilaroi* lineage. *United Neytion's* representation of the errors in cross-cultural knowledge that mar Australia's post-invasion history further demonstrate Australia's national confusion, and the importance of the local. Moore exploits the structural formalities of the flag – as an object that defines the subjugation of land – to critically reanalyse the way by which the topography is allocated in Australia. Whilst Moore consulted the topographic features of the various 'nations' to form the content of the flags, the fact they exist out of his own devising is symbolic of the misinformed European interpretations of Indigenous land. A truer Australian culture exists within its diverse localities.

The way by which Tillers and Moore approach locality in a culturally antagonistic society, strongly informs my intended relationship to, and interpretation of, the Botany landscape. The acknowledgement of this push-and-pull between the disparate Indigenous and European cultures is the fundamental starting-point upon which a new Australian identity will begin to manifest.

The *banksia serrata* motif that functions as the 'corporate' emblem of the *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys (visible in the work as the embroidered patch that features on the left of the chest) – see Figure 2 – toys with the notion of a dichotomous Australia. The banksia flower is synonymous with the Botany location, as seen in the Botany Public School crest and the logo for the former City of Botany Bay. Whilst the banksia is a native member of Australia's flora, it presently carries the name of Joseph Banks, the botanist aboard James Cook's *Endeavour*. The banksia, with this in mind, represents the confluence of

²¹ "Curator Nina Miall on Archie Moore 'United Neytions'". Online recording, 1:55. Posted by The National: New Australian Art, 2017. <https://soundcloud.com/thenationalau/archie-moore>.

Figure 7:



Archie Moore
United Neytions (installation
view)

2014-17

Polyester, nylon, zinc-plated alloy

Image source: Sofia Freeman/The
Commercial Gallery, Sydney;
https://thecommercialgallery.com/artist/archie-moore/exhibition/812/archie-moore-united-neytions/installation_view/13113

Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, and the etymological disconnection from the local environment and its systems. Although the jerseys are indelibly a landscape artwork, their relation to the Botany landscape is finite as evinced by my non-Indigenous identity. This absence of a profound attachment to the banksia, except through the reinterpreted use of the English language, is the result of a fragmentary understanding of Australia's natural order. To appreciate this notion, as a non-Indigenous Australian, is to appreciate the indefinable contemporary national identity (the 'un-identity').

Following British invasion, and right through to present day, Botany operates as Sydney's primary location for the comings-and-goings of airplanes and freight vessels, considering the suburb's proximity to Kingsford Smith Airport and the Port Botany seaport respectively. Historically and on an everyday basis, Botany exists in a state of continuous change and movement.

It is this 'back-and-forth' quality of the Botany landscape upon which the content behind the development of my art practice and my Australian identity are established. The non-Indigenous Australian identity does not exist in a fixed state, as it is constantly reshaped by the rippling waves of globalisation, and the history of the antipathetic regimes of colonial settlement in Australia. (Indigenous Australians have, of course, been affected the most severely by the processes of colonisation, and yet in the face of adversity their connection to *country*²² is an omnipresent reality.) The effects of colonisation, on a more superficial level, permeate the constructed forms of the 'North-South' and 'Third' runways of Kingsford Smith Airport, that extend into Botany Bay. With their distinct shapes from above – an augmentation of the continent's natural coastline – they feature in my research as a symbolic reference to how I perceive my own identity as a non-Indigenous Australian (its outline conveyed in the embroidered patch affixed to the right sleeve of each *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jersey) – see Figure 8. Whilst the runways now occur as permanent structures of the Sydney topography, it is unfitting to consider them as anything other than a transformation of the pre-existing landmass. Generally-speaking, this modification of the Botany terrain is illustrative of the post-invasion Australian condition; the Australian environment's natural order has been unapologetically repurposed to fit the European model of living. It appears to make sense, however historically tragic, that the site

²² Deborah Rose expresses the Indigenous perception of 'country' as: "People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person... country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life". The landscape exists beyond just its physical form; it is awarded an emotional humanity. (Rose, Deborah. *Nourishing Terrains*. (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 7.)

Figure 8:



Edward Clarke
Botany Banksia Rugby League
Club 4 detail (#4 of 13)

Image source: courtesy of the artist.

of first British contact (Botany Bay) continues actively to demonstrate the repercussions of colonisation.

Botany's intermittent landscape shifted considerably following the forced local council amalgamations imposed by the New South Wales Liberal government in 2016²³. The boundaries of the former City of Botany Bay council doubled in size to share local responsibility with the former City of Rockdale council, under the new guise of Bayside Council. The amalgamation of the City of Botany Bay and the City of Rockdale has been the subject of much scrutiny from the former in particular. From the civil unease, however, transpired the profound affinity City of Botany Bay residents held for their local area (see the campaigns: 'Hands Off Botany Bay'²⁴, 'Bring Back Botany Bay'²⁵). The reconstructive act of the council amalgamation instantiated the removal of a distinct Australian culture upon which people's identity was grounded. The irony of these circumstances is that they mirror the forced reconfiguration of the Australian continent some two hundred years prior. The 'DE-AMALGAMATE' lettering emblazoned across the front of the *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys (see Figure 2), as well as alluding to the commercial aesthetic of yesteryear, comes to suggest a similar political motive as if it were to read 'DE-COLONISE'. Hence, these turns of events become a notable feature of my work due to their impact on how the Australian landscape is perceived.

Blue and orange, the colours of the former City of Botany Bay, constitute the key aesthetic component of the *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys. By adopting colours that have more-or-less been discontinued in any official form in Botany, I interpret this to suggest an acknowledgement of all former inhabitants and manifestations of the Botany region. And considering the use of the orange and blue in the context of sport uniforms, the colours advertise qualities of the Botany community beyond simply the visual distinction between two participating sporting teams on a playing field. Bill Dunn notes that early on in the professionalism of football (referring to soccer) that "colours were usually those of the academic body or club with which their players were linked"²⁶. Sporting team

²³ Franks, Rebecca. "Botany Bay Council and Rockdale Are Merged Together, Local Government Minister Announces". *Southern Courier*. Last modified September 9, 2016. <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/southern-courier/botany-bay-council-and-rockdale-are-merged-together-local-government-minister-announces/news-story/898a975e86fa09cdcc473a09597b73c0>.

²⁴ Taylor, James. "Botany Bay Hits Out at Fit for the Future Fear Mongering". *Southern Courier*. Last modified May 28, 2015. <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/city-east/botany-bay-hits-out-at-fit-for-the-future-fear-mongering/news-story/70d5e0c715717bac93c7f57946ebdbd9>.

²⁵ Franks, Rebecca. "Botany Bay Residents Petition New Premier to Allow a Demerger from Bayside Council". *Southern Courier*. Last modified February 2, 2017. <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/southern-courier/botany-bay-residents-petition-new-premier-to-allow-a-demerger-from-bayside-council/news-story/46b7090800135a636a5d5760c221a4d3>.

²⁶ Dunn, Bill. *Uniforms*. (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2009), 192.

colours disclose the practical application of basic semiotics: the representation of the ethos of a particular group of people through instantly recognisable colour combinations. By incorporating orange and blue, with respect to the amalgamation debacle, it reveals that a distinct set of Botany/Botany Bay community characteristics does exist, separate from Sydney's other regions. The colours reflect a healthy working class and a growing middle class, a positive multicultural engagement within the community, and historically strong support for the old (union-oriented) values of the Australian Labor Party. And with rugby league commonly perceived in Australia as the game of the working classes, its appropriateness to the suburb of Botany is unmistakable.

Botany is by no means defined by the sport of rugby league, but the connection between them is indelibly etched into Sydney's geography, via Botany Road. Winding along south-central Sydney's western-most boundary, the road links Botany directly to Redfern – the heart of the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club. Sung to John Denver's *Take Me Home, Country Road*, the Rabbitohs' steadfast supporters, the Burrow, chant in victory:

*Take me home, Botany Road
To the place, I belong!
Back to Redfern, South of Sydney
Take me home, Botany Road.*²⁷

These semantics that imply an intimate relationship to location – “home”, “I belong” – denote the notions of identity that are deeply embedded in the club. And when sung *en masse* the resulting chorus is the perfect resolution of the local Australian community. Traudi Allen writes: “Views from the window, the footpath and the traffic outside all contribute to [the home's] singular character and serve to reinforce attachment”²⁸. Home exists beyond the brick and mortar and encompasses the local community; identity, as according to place, is propagated from one's immediate surroundings. Affection for the Rabbitohs courses through the traffic of Botany Road and disseminates through the back streets of Botany.

ii. South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club²⁹

‘Pride of the League’ is the expression conferred on the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club by its supporters. The phrasing infers the club's history of strong community

²⁷ "The Burrow – Botany Road (Official Recording)". YouTube video, 1:30. Posted by StandSingSupport, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpWCb7Zuw6g&t=2s>

²⁸ Allen, Traudi. *Homesickness: Nationalism in Australian Visual Culture*. (South Yarra: Macmillan Art Publishing, 2008), 11.

²⁹ Also referred to as: South Sydney, the Rabbitohs, the Rabbits, the Bunnies, Souths.

support, their adoration for the game, and the team's dominant premiership record. There are two incidents in the club's more recent history that call particular attention to its community culture: first, South Sydney's exclusion from the national competition from 1999-2002; and second, the private acquisition of the club by Russell Crowe and Peter Holmes à Court in 2006. Both incidents revealed the extent to which peoples' identities depended on the vitality of the Rabbitohs and its adjacent fraternities of local citizens and/or rugby league enthusiasts.

As professional sport became increasingly commercialised in Australia, the 1990s were witness to a series of changes to the national rugby league competition that eventuated in the Rabbitohs' exclusion from competing altogether. The incident was widely chronicled as the result of insufficient funds generated by the organisation, and poor on-field performances in the years leading up to the ejection. With its roots established firmly within Sydney's working classes, the act of exclusion, off the back of the Kerry Packer-Rupert Murdoch revenue-fuelled television rights warfare, gave the sense of disinterest in the community culture that is a vital element of the game to so many of the South Sydney – and rugby league – supporters. The first of two immense public displays of support for the Rabbitohs occurred on October 10, 1999 – five days before the club's official exclusion from the competition. Tears, and chants, and a sea of myrtle green and cardinal red striped team jerseys characterised the protest march in what was a culmination of the community spirit of the club. James Connor quotes Michael Moller, "Being a fan entails a sense of duty and a responsibility to protect the community of which they are part. This passion is crucial to understanding Souths' struggle, because the... demands of supporters makes little sense without their emotional commitment"³⁰. The forty-thousand strong assembly demonstrated the reality of the significance of the local identity on Australia's citizens, as established via professional sporting communities.

On November 12, 2000, a second protest march was conducted following the rejection of an appeal to the Federal Court to re-enter the competition (see Figure 9). The demonstration possessed the same wealth of passion as the former but boasted an attendance of around eighty thousand. Whilst the zealous, assertive actions of the South Sydney fan base were an instrumental example of the team loyalty associated with local Australian identity, it was after a legal revelation that involved breaches of the 'Australian Trade Practices Act' by the game's officiators in 2001³¹ that the Federal Court overturned the original ruling that had excluded the Rabbitohs from the national competition.

³⁰ Connor, James. *The Sociology of Loyalty*. (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2007), 105.

³¹ Ibid.

Figure 9:



Craig Golding, *Fighting the good fight: George Piggins with fellow Rabbitohs legend John Sattler leading the 2000 protest march, 2000*. Digital photograph found online. <http://www.smh.com.au/rugby-league/south-sydney-rabbitohs/how-south-sydney-rabbitohs-former-leader-george-piggins-did-his-deal-with-news-corporation-20141001-10orfk.html>

South Sydney Rabbitohs' financial woes, however, continued to plague the club following its re-entry into the National Rugby League (NRL). Hollywood actor Russell Crowe, a long-term supporter and beneficiary of the club, along with Australian businessman Peter Holmes à Court, posited to the club a private acquisition proposal with the hope to rejuvenate South Sydney to its former glory. As aforementioned, professional sport in Australia (and globally) had grown increasingly more profit-oriented since the mid- to late 1980s. Crowe and Holmes à Court believed they could help guide the Rabbitohs to become a financially-stable, and competitive club and team once again in the twenty-first century. Unsurprisingly, though, the prospect of privatisation was received with trepidation by supporters that cherished the working-class, grass roots history of the club. Others questioned the longevity of the club without the incorporation of a contemporary business model. Whilst the ordeal effectively tore the club in two, it once again revealed the profound significance of this local organisation on the formation of a sincere Australian identity, regardless of where each supporter fell on the issue. "Ninety-eight years of history and tradition, that we have here in South Sydney, and that is valued at three million dollars? No way for mine!... "For those people that don't realise that this club's broke, where have ya [sic] been for the last twenty years?"³² The impassioned sentiments from either side of the privatisation debacle expose a reverence for South Sydney that is deeply embedded within the supporters' very existence. The resolution of the acquisition proposal was put to a vote amongst the club's members, where a seventy-five per cent return in favour of the Crowe and Holmes à Court accession established the next chapter in the history of the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club.

With regards to my *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys, the intention is to emulate this same emphatic affinity for the local, within an even more geographically-specific subsection of Australia. By constructing the sport regalia by hand, I firstly acknowledge the aesthetic of a bygone era, that in turn insinuates a cognisance of Botany's history. And secondly, but more notably, the methodical and tedious act of making resembles the tireless devotion individuals have for their local team. I use the vehicle of sport team loyalty and fandom to instantiate the historical significance of the Botany area; accepting the neighbourhood as the birthplace of contemporary Australia, but with the acute awareness that the land was, and still is, the rightful home of the *Kameygal* people.

³² "Pride of The League", *South Side Story*, directed by Macario De Souza (2007; Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007), Television series.

iii. Sport and Indigenous Australia

Sport holds an indispensable relationship to land. It is the land which is manipulated by various lines and structures to provide the surface upon which the game can be carried out. The Indigenous relationship and claim to land alters the prevailing Eurocentric perception of the social and cultural significance of professional sporting events, and even more so with the engagement of Indigenous players. The ‘dual-sanctity’ of the sporting arena (in Australia: Aboriginal *country* and the ennoblement of the pitch based on its former sporting history) is pivotal to understanding how the geography of sport contributes to the formation of a local Australian identity. The ground itself becomes a channel through which the player, and the supporter, actualises an attachment to a place of communal significance; an area of land set aside for gameplay that bears an adjacent (though not congruent) sacredness to the notion of *country*.

Indigenous involvement in organised play (post- British invasion in this instance) possesses a significance in the understanding of contemporary culture and place in Australia. Sport provides a crucial platform in which to exemplify the active, albeit disparate, entanglement of European and Indigenous cultures within the boundaries of the continent. Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd note that “historically, Australian sports have provided a rare and important social context in which Indigenous Australians could engage with and participate in non-Indigenous society”³³. Whilst Indigenous participation in rugby league has a long and on-going history (as an institution of Redfern, and with the club’s affiliation with the Redfern All Blacks³⁴, the South Sydney Rabbitohs has had continually strong Indigenous support), the game of Australian Rules Football carries with it particular importance in how sport contributes to Indigenous culture, on a localised level. From the game’s origins to its representation in contemporary Australian art, Australian Rules Football has latched on to the cultural identity of numerous Indigenous communities.

Tom Wills, an early descendent of British convicts, is regularly credited as the originator of Australian Rules Football in 1858; a fact that has been adamantly contested in more recent years based on the game’s functional similarity to the *Djab wurrung* (an

³³ Hallinan, Chris, and Barry Judd. *Indigenous People, Race Relations and Australian Sport*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 1. A reproduction of *Sport in Society*, vol.15, issue 7.

³⁴ The Redfern All Blacks (RABS) are noted as Australia’s oldest Indigenous rugby league organisation, established in 1944 (or by some accounts during the 1930s). Ken Brindle in *New Dawn* magazine writes: “Some people refer to the non-admittance of Europeans to club membership as a form of segregation... All Blacks players themselves see it as an expression of identity and visible proof that they can organize and manage their own affairs”. RABS represents an expression of Aboriginal self-determination through the medium of sport. (Brindle, Ken. "A Club to Be Proud Of...". *New Dawn* 1, no.3 (1970): 1. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/dawn-and-new-dawn/new-dawn-issues>.)

Indigenous language group located in the western district of Victoria) game of *marngrook*. New investigations into the roots of Australian Rules Football by Monash University historian, Professor Jenny Hocking, have yielded details that suggest Wills was well-acquainted with the Indigenous ball game from a young age. “[State Library of Victoria records of a transcription of an interview with [*Mukjarrawaint* man] Johnny Connolly] situates the game in its local version in the Grampians region at the same time as Tom Wills. There's now no doubt about that”³⁵. The Australian Football League (AFL) has continuously contested the evidence, or rather is yet to officially acknowledge that *marngrook* was a precursor to the modern game, and hence the debate raises the question: how does this disassociation, with relation to sport, affect a local community’s relationship to culture and place?

Recognising local sport fandom as the catalyst for the individual’s sense of Australian identity, the omission of *marngrook* from Australian Rules Football’s history is one example in an extensive list of examples of European suppression of Indigenous culture. By disenfranchising the Indigenous peoples of western Victoria of their culture it is to effectively displace them from their country. Since culture is a categorical component of location, extinguishing (or, disregarding) culture implies an uninhabited space. Affirmation of a community by relative outsiders thus consolidates its culture and location, as was evinced by the South Sydney Rabbitohs supporters’ demonstrations of club loyalty in 1999 and 2000. The omission of *marngrook*, however, is part of the ongoing blemished history of colonised Australia, a contributing factor to the confused sense of nationalism, and evidence of why sport, in its local format, is undeniably significant to the foundation of peoples’ identity.

Tiwi Islands artists, John Pilakui and Edward Yunupingu, imbue their traditional *pukumani*-style wood carvings with the distinctive love for Australian Rules Football that characterises their present-day Tiwi culture. As Yunupingu describes, “footy is in Tiwi blood”³⁶. Australian Rules Football has been passionately adopted by the people of the Tiwi Islands since the mid- twentieth century, insofar as to become a distinguishing factor in the expression of their local Australian identities (smaller communities make up the Tiwi Islands whole). Artmaking is approached as the ideal vehicle upon which to celebrate sport and

³⁵ Sutton, Malcom. "Indigenous Influence on AFL Creation Confirmed by Historical Transcripts, Historian Says". *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News*. Last modified April 13, 2017. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-13/historian-reveals-marngrook-influence-on-afl/8439748>.

³⁶ “Edward Yunupingu 'Tiwi Footyman' Sculpture”. YouTube video, 2:54. Posted by Australian Museum, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAhDeptycvk>.

Figure 10:



Figure 11:



Above:

John Pilakui

Tiwi Footyman

2010

Media and dimensions unknown

Image source: screenshot from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHQR1NXWShk>

Below:

Edward Yunupingu

Tiwi Footyman

2010

Media and dimensions unknown.

Image source: screenshot from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAhDeptycvk>

culture, as marked by the conjunction of the two on Grand Final day in mid- March each year. “Football is culture, and art is culture, too”³⁷. The *Tiwi Footyman* pukumani carvings of Pilakui (see Figure 10) and Yunupingu (see Figure 11), in their contemporary context, denote an omnipresent relationship to *country* and traditions; an intrinsic awareness of the significance of the local community. Direct from the trunks of local trees the forms allude to spiritual knowledge; the posture of the *moon-man*³⁸ resembling an Australian Rules player taking a ‘mark’. The natural ochre pigments also delineate area-specific body decoration for ceremony, and similarly the figure’s distinction as a player from a particular team³⁹. Materially and iconographically the artworks illustrate the authentic Australian experience through their embodiment of local culture. The presence of sport, with its cultivation of local communities and as an expression of them, reveals a culture’s nuances most readily. And accordingly, an Australian identity is expressed.

Anne McMaster notes: “You see the kids walking around the street kicking a footy and there’s a tribal link: who belongs to which community, island to island, team to team”⁴⁰. McMaster’s disagreeable use of the word ‘tribal’⁴¹ draws cogency away from what is an otherwise interesting observation. To paraphrase: a relationship exists between the Tiwi peoples and the game of Australian Rules Football that bears a resemblance to the traditional operations and interactions between the separate Tiwi communities. Even within the culturally distinct Tiwi Islands subsection of Australia, smaller divisions between the communities are present. And as McMaster was attempting to communicate, these individual peoples establish their identities via the expression of loyalty to their respective Australian Rules teams. The Tiwi Islands’ perception of sport and culture exemplifies the greater Australian experience; the expression of local identity is manifested by an acceptance into sport team communities.

³⁷ Australian Associated Press. “AFL And Art: The Tiwis' Twin Passions”. *Special Broadcasting Service News*. Last modified March 16, 2014. <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/03/16/afl-and-art-tiwis-twin-passions>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “John Pilakui Tiwi Footyman Sculpture”. YouTube video, 4:13. Posted by Australian Museum, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHQR1NXWShk>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The use of the term ‘tribal’ can possess certain negative connotations: “‘Tribe’ is a European word that tends to impart western preconceptions developed from colonial experiences in North America and Africa”. (*General Information Folio 5: Appropriate Terminology, Indigenous Australian Peoples*. PDF. (Sydney: School of Teacher Education, University of New South Wales in association with the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1996). http://www.ipswich.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/10043/appropriate_indigenous_terminology.pdf.) [sic]

IV. Concluding statements

Australia's confused sense of national identity looks to be embedded in the underlying disparity between the distinct Indigenous and European cultures that have shaped the nation as we know it. This is the Australian 'un-identity'. The Australian individuals' sense of self is best informed by their local geography, in much the same way the Australian continent was once a conglomerate of over two hundred and fifty diverse Indigenous language groups prior to invasion. The local landscape apprises a sense of Australian self with greater clarity than if one were to look nationally, as has been attested to by the research outlined above.

Our locality becomes material when the experience of it is shared amongst neighbouring individuals; an experience that is largely embedded in the communities that manifest from local sport teams. A specific geography, like the suburbs of Sydney that constitute the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League Club, validates one's perception of belonging to a system – a nation – that exists beyond just their lived experience. Any sense of nationhood only stems from each individuals' conversance with the local. Visually, this sense of belonging is represented by the jerseys and other regalia that bear the symbols of one's local team. The semiotics of the varying jerseys reveal instantly a relationship to the landscape of which they respectively represent.

In this way, my *Botany Banksia Rugby League Club (1-13)* jerseys encourage a mandate for a new perception of Australian identity. With a clear focus on the importance of the local experience, I intend for my work to encourage a dialogue pertaining to Australia's cultural future. I achieve this by drawing upon the significance of the rugby league jersey as a 'cultural artefact' within my artistic practice, as well as acknowledging the contentious cultural relationship between Indigenous and European Australia that characterises Botany's history of continuous social and geographical change.

The research I have undertaken indicates that a divergence between the culture of sport and the culture of art does not assist in the formulation of an Australian identity. Rather, it is a coalescence of the two that reveals a healthy environment within which peoples' diverse localities can be expressed and coexist to engender a new Australian character, as exemplified by the successful correspondence of them in the Tiwi Islands. As Christopher McAuliffe notes, the art-sport divide represents the idealism of a bygone Australian era: "The role of the cultural elite is to guide and lead and teach discrimination... [Robin Boyd] saw the bread and circuses of popular pursuits like football as a complete distraction from national

Figure 12:



Edward Clarke
*Botany Banksia Rugby League
Club (1-13) (work in progress)*
2017
Unidentified jersey fabric, cotton, polyester-
spandex, polyester, embroidered patches,
vinyl

Image source: courtesy of the artist.

aspiration”⁴². Enough time has elapsed since Boyd’s seminal words to claim that division hampers progress; the coalescence of sport and art is for the betterment of them both.

Upon revising *The Lucky Country* for its fifth edition, Donald Horne revisited what was originally meant by the phrase ‘the lucky country’: “Twisting it around over the years to mean the opposite of what was intended has silenced the three loud warnings sounded in the book about the future”⁴³. Whilst all three warnings reveal Horne’s keen perception of the nation’s cultural trajectory, his third warning remains unshakeably relevant fifty years on: “the need for a bold redefinition of what the whole place adds up to now”⁴⁴. Australia’s distorted sense of nationalism was not news to Horne, and hence his third warning is unquestionably important to the notion of considering Australia at its local level. The local dictates the individual’s perception of the nation, and therefore the perception of the self, more substantially than at any other level. And with a push to better educate Australia’s citizens about the country’s original inhabitants as the diverse peoples they are, with an emphasis on the local, we may in fact see a redefinition of the Australian character altogether.

⁴²“Why the Cultural Divide Between Sport and Art?”. Online recording, 8:22. Posted by Radio National: Books and Arts, 2014. http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2014/03/bay_20140321_1006.mp3.

⁴³ Horne. *The Lucky Country*, xvii.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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Appendix



Edward Clarke
*Botany Banksia Rugby League
Club (1-13) (installation view)*
2017

Unidentified jersey fabric, cotton, polyester-spandex, polyester, embroidered patches, vinyl

Image source: courtesy of the artist.



Edward Clarke
*Botany Banksia Rugby League
Club (1-13) (installation view)*

2017

Unidentified jersey fabric, cotton, polyester-
spandex, polyester, embroidered patches,
vinyl

Image source: courtesy of the artist.