

## **Campbelltown Arts Centre testimony**

### **Partnership between First Nation curators and artists in Australia and Canada**

The 2017 ICOM Award for a discreet project recognises an innovative exhibition *With Secrecy and Despatch* at Campbelltown Arts Centre based on international collaboration between First Nation curators and artists in Australia and Canada.

April 17, 2016 marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Appin Massacre. To commemorate this significant event Campbelltown Arts Centre partnered with the Canada Council for the Arts, the Dharawal community and First Nation curators Tess Allas (Australia) and David Garneau (Canada) to produce the exhibition *With Secrecy and Despatch*.

*With Secrecy and Despatch* traces the parallel colonial histories of Australia and Canada. The artists featured in the project explored themes that dealt directly with the Appin Massacre or with colonial brutality and themes of culture, identity, conflict, dispossession and community memory.

The title of the exhibition directly references the orders that Governor Macquarie gave to his military commanders and their troops to undertake the massacre of Indigenous people “with secrecy and despatch” in the Nepean region.

Campbelltown Arts Centre is located in the heart of Campbelltown in Sydney's South West and just a few kilometres from the massacre site. *With Secrecy and Despatch* demonstrates the important contribution regional museums make with projects generated from their local histories. By locating these histories in a global context the exhibition makes a unique and important contribution to international relations.

#### **International exchange**

Six Aboriginal Australian artists – Tony Albert, Vernon Ah Kee, Julie Gough, Genevieve Grieves, Dale Harding and Frances Belle Parker and four First Nations Canadian artists – Jordan Bennett, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Marianne Nicolson and Adrian Stimson were invited to produce new work. Historic works from Aboriginal Australian artists complemented these new commissions.

A number of residencies were facilitated for the curators and artists allowing these international practitioners the opportunity to spend time in the local region, exchange stories and ideas. The exhibition was both deeply connected to South West Sydney and international in its reach.

International exchange of this nature is significant in fostering dialogue between First Peoples and exploring the shared darkness of colonial histories that inform

Indigenous experience around the world. International collaboration between the partnering organisations, curators and artists ensured an exchange of information and culture.

Forging ongoing international partnerships was a key aim of *With Secrecy and Despatch*. The partnership initiated with the Canada Council for the Arts represents a key international relationship for Campbelltown Arts Centre the way for future collaboration and exchange.

**Innovative project: local history/international context**

By drawing parallels between two such distant frontiers of colonial violence the exhibition provided a unique perspective on local events. For participating artists and curators, the exhibition provided the opportunity to collaborate with other First Nations practitioners creating new relationships and generating dialogue globally.

Cross-cultural collaboration was at the heart of *With Secrecy and Despatch* and was critical in evoking a depth of public response. For the community the exhibition situated a very specific local history in a global context, providing pathways for reconciliation not only locally but also for other communities still feeling the effects of their colonial pasts.

Visitors acknowledged the powerful impact of the exhibition with responses of shock, anger, remorse and grief as well as hope and healing. Feelings of reconciliation from visitors pointed to the power of contemporary art to address issues of national significance such as frontier violence against Indigenous people. For many visitors it was their first knowledge of the Appin Massacre and for others a long overdue recognition of a violent past and an opportunity to reflect on how far the community has come and how to work towards further reconciliation. In this way the project contributed to well-informed, tolerant and more cohesive communities.

The 2017 ICOM Australia Award for *With Secrecy and Despatch* at Campbelltown Arts Centre acknowledges a unique and innovative project that resonated from the local level to the global level and is an important statement for museums 'describing connections beyond borders'.