



A small, rectangular, light-colored tag or piece of paper is attached to the trunk of the tree on the right side of the image.

JULIE GOUGH: HUNTING GROUND

# JULIE GOUGH'S FORENSIC ARCHAEOLOGY OF NATIONAL FORGETTING

*By Joseph Pugliese*

In the course of his essay, "What is a Nation," the nineteenth-century French historian Ernest Renan catalogues the acts of violence that are constitutive of the processes of nation building. He then pauses to reflect on the role of forgetting:

*Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, throws light on the violent acts that have taken place at the origin of every political formation, even those that have been most benevolent in their consequences. Unity is always brutally achieved.<sup>1</sup>*

Renan's insight into the constitutive roles that violence and forgetting play in the foundation of a nation powerfully resounds in the context of the Australian colonial state. From the moment that the Australian continent was invaded and colonized by the British in 1788, it witnessed both random and systematic campaigns of attempted Indigenous genocide. The collective acts of resistance deployed by Australia's Indigenous people in order to defend their unceded lands and to safeguard their very lives provoked settler campaigns of massacre in order to secure possession of the continent and its islands. This genocidal violence sits at the very heart of the history of the Australian nation-state. Yet, when cast in the context of Renan's astute observations, the violence of this history is precisely what had to be forgotten by non-Indigenous Australians in order to preserve the myth of the Australian nation as a state that has never experienced war on its own terrain.

Julie Gough's artwork is situated on the fraught ground of settler-colonial nation building. She embarks on a rigorous process of historical inquiry, unearthing texts documenting the massacres of Indigenous people that have attended the construction of the nation. She then transmutes these documentary texts into artworks that compel acts of remembering in the face of the national forgetting that insistently inscribes the dominant narratives of the settler nation. In her video installation, *Hunting Ground (Haunted), Van Diemen's Land* (2016 - 2017), she speaks back to settler acts of forgetting. Van Diemen's Land was the name used by Europeans for the island of Tasmania; the name of the island was changed to Tasmania in 1855. Returning to the multiple sites of the massacre

of Tasmanian Aboriginal people, Gough films serene rural scenes that, on the surface, appear to be utterly remote from genocidal practices. Gough literally re-inscribes in these sites the effaced histories of massacres that continue to haunt the settler hunting grounds that witnessed the murder of her people.

In her film, Gough examines landscapes of bucolic fields, rivers and valleys (Figure 1, cover). She then brings into acute focus excerpts from historical massacre texts that she has affixed, in the form of simulated parchment, to the trees and rocks of these pastoral settings (Figure 2). The historical texts re-signify these sites as places of atrocity.

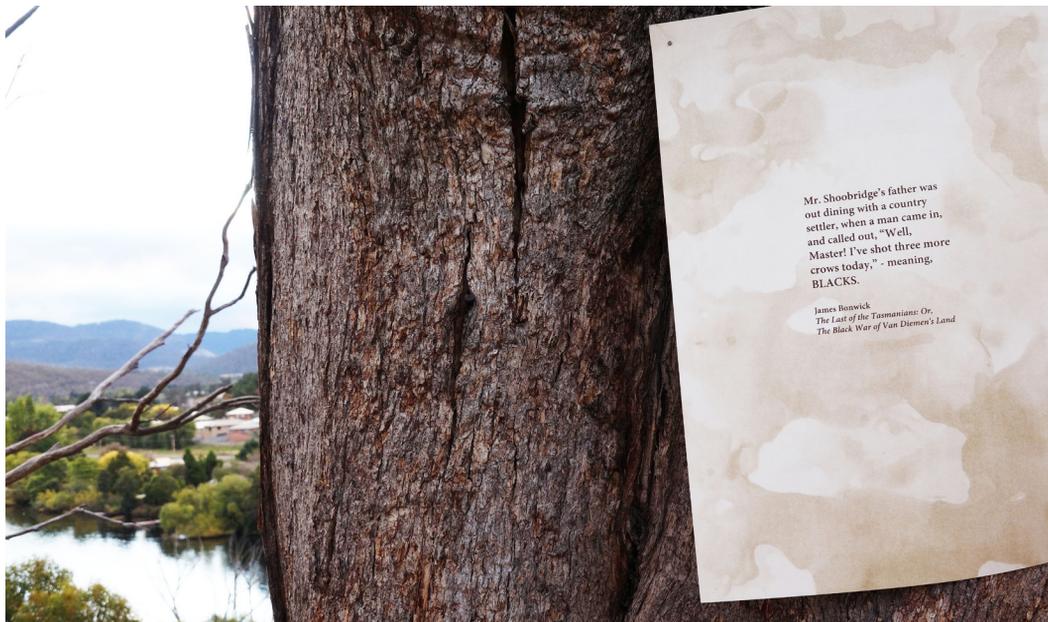


Figure 2. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground: (Haunted)*, Van Diemen's Land, 2016 - 2017.

"The resulting film," she writes in her artist statement, "is an articulation of otherwise usually hidden histories; a demonstration of our island as a crime scene; and a record of my reconnection with these places, establishing there, onsite, that we continue, were not entirely annihilated, and that we remember."<sup>2</sup>

The massacre locations of *Hunting Ground (Haunted)* resonate with a type of double visibility and double consciousness. On the one hand, the scenes of rural tranquility are riven by the re-inscribed

histories of violence that haunt these sites, but that have otherwise been erased and forgotten. On the other hand, Gough documents how this doubleness was already active in the historical practices of the settlers. She cites, for example, on the ground marked by the sign “Remains of Restdown c. 1833,” a letter by a J. Mountgarret that documents the number of natives killed by settlers. Mountgarret then casually remarks on the fact that he is still in possession of an Indigenous body, and he concludes his letter by stating that the prospective dissection of this Indigenous body is something that could be discussed over the hospitable ceremony of dinner. Here the double consciousness of the settler is materialized: the civil practices of colonial society are foundationally underpinned and enabled by matter-of-fact campaigns of genocidal violence.

In *Hunting Ground (Haunted)*, Gough invests the natural elements in the landscape with charged meanings that contribute to the haunting effects of this artwork: ringbarked trees dying their own slow death, the felled and contorted bodies of trees splayed across the landscape, or the decaying corpse of a kangaroo being inexorably reabsorbed into the earth. In Gough’s hands, nature becomes coextensive with the Indigenous victims of settler violence. Trees, for example, offer more-than-human testimony to the atrocities that transpired in a particular site from whence all signs of massacre have seemingly been lost. An historical excerpt affixed to the bleached trunk of a dead tree reads: “Mr. Glover said that some men were passing his farm one day when one said: ‘I shot a black at this place and buried him in the hollow of that tree.’” Trees, crows, rivers and rocks embody the Indigenous dead in Gough’s landscapes; they animate the landscape with the revenant presence of the deceased who have been physically disappeared, but not entirely annihilated. The viewer is compelled to bear witness to sites of erased massacres and to engage in acts of remembering. In *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)* (2017), Gough produces a pendant to *Hunting Ground (Haunted)*. In this work, she turns her attention to the acts of forgetting that, in Renan’s terms, are crucial to obliterating the violent origins of a nation. If, in her artist statement, Gough articulates her interest in investigating the forgotten “crime scenes” of the settler nation, then in *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)* she truly comes into her own as a forensic artist. The work opens with a shot of the nineteenth-century print titled *Risdon, Tasmania. The Residence of T. Gregson, Esq.* The viewer gazes upon an Arcadian landscape reminiscent of Claude Lorrain’s pictures (Figure 3).

The settler figures in the landscape are situated in the central axis of the print, gazing over the expansive prospect of their estate. The stillness of this idyllic landscape is, however, disrupted by a flight of blood-red arrows that scars the print. A number of red crosses are then inscribed upon the settler homestead and the surrounding grounds (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, *Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

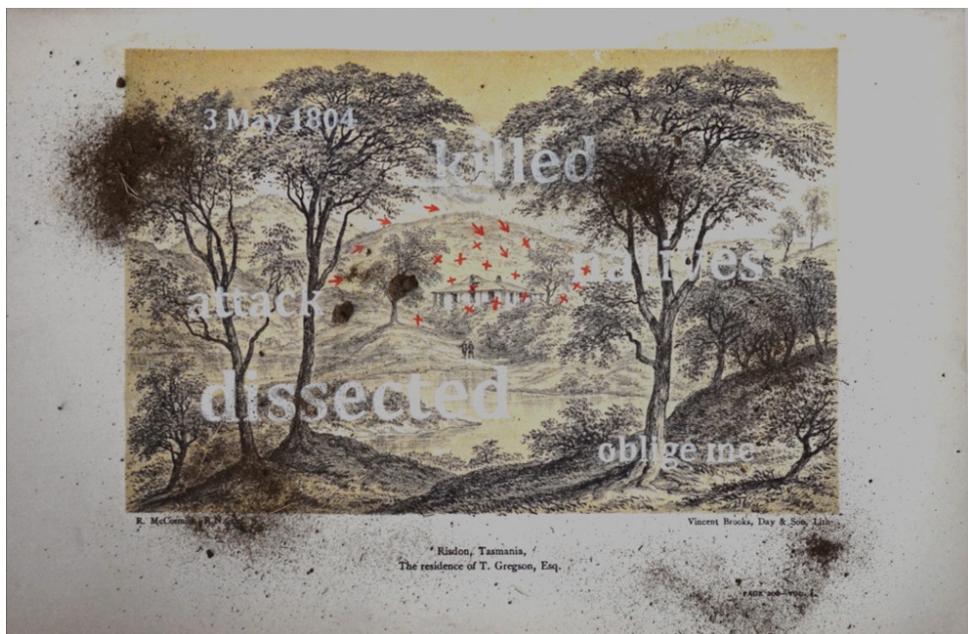


Figure 4. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, *Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

Apparently disconnected words slowly emerge from the depths of the picture: “3 May 1804, killed, natives, attack, dissected, oblige me.” This word cloud composes its own textual image that interrogates the pastoral vision that underpins it. The overlaying text entirely re-signifies the meaning of the print: text and image collide, opening a violent disjunction between the categories of pastoralism and atrocity. The textual inscription of the massacre that underpins Risdon exposes the pastoral estate as a massacre site of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. It is upon this forgotten massacre that the settler estate has been founded.

As the viewer gazes on this scene of a historical massacre, a slight shudder of the camera generates a momentary focal distortion, setting in train a haunting visual shift: splotches of soil begin to crowd the planar surface of the picture (Figure 5). This is soil that Gough has collected from the actual massacre sites.

Gough deploys time-lapse photography to film the accumulation of soil across the picture until its surface becomes entirely covered. This visual technique mimics the accretive process of historical erasure. Through this inspired move, Gough mobilizes both spatial and temporal dimensions as key agents in her work. The spatial extension of the landscape is inflected by the dynamic movement of



Figure 5. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral), Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

temporal unfolding. In documenting the cumulative extension of soil across the surface of the picture to the point of complete effacement, Gough brings into focus the literal process of the historical decomposition of a massacre site and the consequent burial and excision of the massacre from the annals of settler history. The viewer is thereby compelled to rethink the significance of the very ground under their feet. The seemingly neutral earth upon which the viewer stands now signifies otherwise and it proceeds to provoke a series of troubling questions: What bloody secrets underlie Australia's civil culture? What violence underpins the foundation of the nation? What collective acts of forgetting have been mobilized to erase this foundational violence? Across the surface of a site of atrocity, the amnesic soil of national forgetting continues to accumulate. Its accretive layers conceal the hundreds of massacre sites that scar the Australian landscape, even as they serve to supply the very foundation of the nation and of all its prestigious civil institutions – of law, government, church and culture.

Gough's crossing of the genre of the Arcadian landscape with the history of settler massacres is nowhere more clearly marked than in her use of the work of the colonial Tasmanian painter John Glover (1767-1849), renowned for his pastoral visions of the Tasmanian landscape. Gough inserts Glover's oil painting, *Launceston and the river Tamar* (c. 1832), in *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)* (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, *Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

This canvas exemplifies Glover's painting of the "colonial future" devoid of its Indigenous inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> Through the exterminatory "Black hunts" and massacres, Aboriginal Tasmanians no longer figure on the very ground of their country. Glover here fulfills the colonial vision of Aboriginal people as a 'vanishing race' that is doomed to extinction. As the viewer gazes upon Glover's idyllic scene, a series of red targets rupture the tranquillity of the landscape and another word cloud of massacre overlays the scene: "Launceston, pursuit, 12 miles, the blacks, four men, one woman, and a child, killed." The red-circled hollow of a tree standing in the dead center of Glover's painting now references the practice historically evidenced in *Hunting Ground (Haunted)* of unceremoniously secreting the bodies of murdered Tasmanian Aboriginal people into tree hollows (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, *Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

These word clouds of massacre emerge as forms of physical graffiti that violate the civil protocols of settler culture by articulating what would otherwise remain unsaid. It is through these acts of physical graffiti that Gough unearths the bodies of the Indigenous dead and resituates them in the very sites from which they have been voided by acts of settler effacement and forgetting. In the context of a nation that has refused formally to acknowledge its violent settler history or to deliver justice to the Indigenous people that have survived attempted genocide, Gough's acts of physical

graffiti emerge as forms of street justice. Street justice refers to the tactical exercise of informal justice by the dispossessed and disenfranchised. Even as it lacks the legitimacy of institutionalized forms of law, street justice interrogates hegemonic law's very claim to being a just law. As such, Gough's aesthetic sabotage of Glover's painting with a word cloud of violence challenges the viewer to question what exactly constitutes a criminal act: a massacre? The erasure of a massacre? Or the physical defacing of an iconic settler painting in order to draw attention to a site of massacre occluded by the same painting?

The sequence of colonial pictures that Gough physically manipulates in the course of *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)* covers a wide range of places and landscapes, including rivers, fords, valleys and lakes. Colonial prints of the Macquarie River or of the lake at Oatland are inscribed with their own word clouds of massacre, and both the river and the lake become, through the technique of time-lapse photography, saturated with a blood-red color. The recursive structure of the work—pastoral print, the inscription of a massacre, and the sedimentary overlay and burial of the atrocity with the amnesic soil of settler history—reproduces in practice the settler state's serial rhythm of massacre and obliteration, as constitutive of the process of nation building.

Gough's use of time-lapse photography to document this serial and accretive process of effacement-through-burial metaphorizes the cumulative layers of historical denial necessary in order to effect the settler state's forgetting of its genocidal history. If, in her artist statement, Gough identifies herself as invested in uncovering the nation's "crime scenes," then in *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*

“The viewer is thereby compelled to rethink the significance of the very ground under their feet... What bloody secrets underlie Australia's civil culture? What violence underpins the foundation of the nation? What collective acts of forgetting have been mobilized to erase this foundational violence?”

she emerges as a type of forensic archaeologist committed to excavating the processes through which settler society has achieved its collective amnesia with regard to its genocidal past. As forensic archaeologist, she crosses aesthetics and criminalistics in order to expose a crime scene's *corpus delicti* or body of evidence: a blood-spattered tree trunk in a clearing or the scarlet-saturated banks of a river.

Gough's covering of Tasmania's massacre sites with soil operates in the ambiguous key of a double register. Her practice of uncovering and covering is perhaps best illuminated by this Nietzschean insight: "Whenever the truth is uncovered, the artist will always cling with rapt gaze to what still remains covered even after such uncovering."<sup>4</sup> After Gough has uncovered the site of a massacre and has then proceeded to cover it up with the amnesic soil of national forgetting, she has the camera linger with rapt gaze over the surface of dirt. The use of time-lapse photography compels the viewer to watch how the smooth surface of the burial site is slowly inflected by the passing of time. The

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mutating surface of the soil that unfolds under the rapt gaze of time-lapse photography appears to respire; its animated surface becomes visually redolent of the texture of skin, with its pores and pockmarks, scars and corrugations. What the viewer imagined was mere dirt now emerges as coextensive with the residual remains of the Aboriginal dead: the body that had been dispatched to the dust heap of history returns in the very medium that had been mobilized to erase it (Figure 8).

Situated in this context, the final image of *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, with its surface of flesh-soil gathered from the actual massacre site, refuses the unilateral meaning of obliteration. The porosity of this flesh-soil, its corporeal texture

steeped in the blood of massacres, will ensure that the voices of the Indigenous dead and the disappeared will continue to leach upward and through to the very foundations of the settler nation, haunting the complacency of its collective forgetting.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882), Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Gough, 'Artist Statement,' in Tess Allas and David Garneau, *With Secrecy and Despatch*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, 2016, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Lawson, *The Last Man: A British Genocide in Tasmania*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2014, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, New York: Vintage, 1967, p. 94.



Figure 8. Julie Gough, *Hunting Ground (Pastoral)*, *Van Diemen's Land*, 2016 - 2017.

# LIST OF ARTWORKS

*In the exhibition*

*Hunting Ground (Haunted) Van Diemen's Land* 2016-17

HDMI video projection, MP4, 16:9, color, sound, 12:26 min

Edited by Angus Ashton

*Hunting Ground (Haunted) Van Diemen's Land* 2016

10 prints (silkscreen and etching) on BFK Rives paper

Printed by Cicada Press

*Hunting Ground (Pastoral) Van Diemen's Land* 2016-17

HDMI video projection, 4:3, color, silent, 12:26 min

Edited by Angus Ashton

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Kluge-Ruhe Collection would like to thank Bett Gallery and UVA Library's AV Architect for their assistance in making this exhibition possible.

# CHRONOLOGY OF ARTWORKS

*As re-presented in* Hunting Ground (Pastoral), Van Diemen's Land

R. McCormick, R.N. (1800 - unknown)

*Risdon, Tasmania - The residence of T. Gregson, Esq.*

c. 1840

Lithograph

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

John Orde Ommanney (1810 - 1846)

*New Norfolk from the Governor's House* date unknown

Lithograph, London: Smith & Elder

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

John Glover (1767 - 1849)

*Launceston and the River Tamar* 1833

Oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

W C Piquenit (1836 - 1914)

*Butts of Ben Lomond* 1878

Oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Joseph Lycett (1774 - 1825)

*View on the Macquarie River, Van Diemen's Land, near the*

*Ford at Argyle Plains* date unknown

Aquatint, hand-colored

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

Louis Le Breton (1818 - 1866)

*Green-Pons - Ile Van-Diemen* c. 1825

Lithograph

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

Attributed to Francis Russell Nixon (1803 - 1879)

*Oatlands [from the N.E. end of Lake Dulverton showing the*

*Callington Mill]* c. 1850

Drawing, pencil on cartridge paper

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

Thomas Evans Chapman (1788 - 1864)

*Richmond, Van Dieman's Land* 1843

Watercolor on card

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

John Richardson Glover (1790 - 1868)

*On the slopes, Nile, Lilyburn* c. 1840

Grey wash and ink on paper

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart

John Glover (1767 - 1849)

*"Montacute" Bothwell* c. 1838

Oil on canvas

Private collection



## ABOUT *Julie Gough*

Julie Gough is a Trawlwoolway artist, freelance curator and writer who lives in Hobart. Gough's research and art practice often involve uncovering and re-presenting conflicting and subsumed histories, many referring to her maternal family's experiences as Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Traditionally from Tebrikunna in far northeast Tasmania, her family have lived in the Latrobe region of Tasmania since the 1840s. Gough's paternal heritage is Scottish and Irish. Her current work in installation, sound and video provides the means to explore ephemerality, absence and recurrence. Julie holds a Doctorate and a Bachelor's in Visual Arts from the University of Tasmania, a Masters degree from Goldsmiths College, University of London, a Bachelor's in Visual Arts from Curtin University and Bachelor's in Prehistory and English Literature from the University of Western Australia. Since 1994 Gough has exhibited in more than 130 exhibitions and her work is held in most Australian state and national gallery collections. She is represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart.



## ABOUT *Joseph Pugliese*

Professor Joseph Pugliese is Research Director of the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney. He has published widely on colonialism and decolonization, migration, refugees and asylum seekers, race, ethnicity and whiteness, cultural studies of law, state violence, and bodies and technologies. Selected publications include the edited collection *TransMediterranean: Diasporas, Histories, Geopolitical Spaces* (Peter Lang, 2010), the monograph *Biometrics: Bodies, Technologies, Biopolitics* (Routledge, 2010) and the monograph *State Violence and the Execution of Law: Biopolitical Caesurae of Torture, Black Sites, Drones* (Routledge, 2013), which have won or been nominated for numerous prizes. He is co-founder, with Professor Suvendrini Perera, of Researchers Against Pacific Black Sites.

# JULIE GOUGH: HUNTING GROUND

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