

01 / TWO POSITIONS

Two positions, one conversation

How two artists can work around a shared history while speaking from different positions.

A shared project can hold different positions

Peter Waples-Crowe and Megan Evans developed *Squatters and Savages* in response to colonial history and the Art Gallery of Ballarat's collection of nineteenth-century images. They worked within the same exhibition, but they did not approach that history from the same place.

Waples-Crowe worked from a Ngarigo position, reworking colonial representations and questioning who has historically controlled images of Aboriginal people, Country and history. Evans worked from her own settler ancestry, using Victorian objects and domestic materials to examine the violence and responsibility carried through that history.

Working together does not require artists to speak from the same position.

The difference between their positions is part of what the project can communicate.

POSITION → RELATIONSHIP → RESPONSIBILITY → COLLABORATION

02 / ARTIST VOICE + POSITION

Who is speaking changes what the work can say

The artists bring different relationships to the history they are addressing. Listening to their own words helps us understand why their choices are different.

PETER WAPLES-CROWE

Waples-Crowe describes the colonial prints as confronting records of how white colonists saw Aboriginal people.

He reworks those images from the position of a contemporary Ngarigo artist and uses them to speak about history, Country and contemporary experience.

His use of humour can appear playful, but he describes the work itself as serious.

megan evans

evans approaches the project through her own settler ancestry.

Victorian furniture, embroidery and glass beads become ways of thinking about the histories carried by objects associated with colonial domestic life.

She repeatedly asks what it means to speak from that position and what responsibility follows from it.

LOOK AGAIN

- What does each artist have a direct relationship to?
- What knowledge comes from lived or cultural experience?
- What knowledge comes through research, conversation or another person?
- How does that position affect the choices each artist makes?

Position can shape what an artist chooses to work with, how they work, and what they understand themselves to be responsible for.

03 / POSITION + RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility changes the choices an artist makes

In the catalogue conversation, Evans distinguishes responsibility from guilt. She describes responsibility as requiring a person to acknowledge their relationship to a history rather than using guilt as an ending point.

She also questions how a non-Indigenous artist can address colonial violence without sensationalising it or speaking over Aboriginal experience. That question affects both the subject matter she takes on and the materials she chooses.

Waples-Crowe speaks from a different position. His relationship to Ngarigo history and Country gives the colonial images another point of view. Reworking those representations becomes a way of speaking back to images that were originally produced through a colonial gaze.

What does the artwork mean? Who is speaking, and what gives them a basis to speak?

KEEP TRACK

OBSERVATION

What can you point to directly in the artwork?

SOURCE

What has the artist or an authoritative source shared?

INTERPRETATION

What can you now reasonably say?

04 / COLLABORATION WITHOUT SAMENESS

Collaboration can keep difference visible

The artists describe their practices as very different. They understood that difference as part of the strength of the exhibition. Their collaboration involved shared research, travel, conversation and sustained negotiation.

Most of the artworks remained individually made. The relationship between the works was built through the larger inquiry and through the way the exhibition placed two positions beside one another. Collaboration can create a space in which different histories, responsibilities and ways of making remain visible.

DIFFERENT POSITIONS → SHARED INQUIRY → INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS → DIALOGUE

CONNECTION TO STUDIO GUIDE 07

Return to Colonised 3 and Bleeding Chandelier.

- What becomes clearer when you consider the position from which each artist is speaking?
- Where do the artists meet? Where do they remain different?
- What does the exhibition gain by keeping both positions visible?

SOURCE

Waples-Crowe, P., & Evans, M. (2017). Squatters and Savages. Art Gallery of Ballarat.

This Learning by Design extended reading summarises selected ideas from the exhibition catalogue for use alongside Studio Guide 07. No catalogue images are reproduced here. The original catalogue advises that it contains colonial imagery and images and names of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

READ / ORIGINAL EXHIBITION CATALOGUE ↗