

## Travelling Light

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Travelling light phenomenon are known in specific places all over the world. Canada has its Northern Lights and Australia has Min Min Lights in the east. These nocturnal lights can and do react to the presence and movement of people. Min Min Lights are known to appear above settler shooters and drovers, and as one recounts, "The light appeared above us as we were shooting at kangaroos. We became scared and shot at it. This had no effect, so we jumped into the car. The light chased us for about 20 minutes, we were screaming and crying."<sup>1</sup>

The lights exhibit a form of intelligence and another worldliness.

Our wandering eye is also often taken by the moving images of our people: a product of our times. The short screen-based works presented in the 'Travelling Light' exhibition are bursts of light between 2 and 5mins with powerful messages. Here the work of 2 Female Australian Aboriginal Artists are featured alongside 2 Male Canadian Aboriginal Artists under the curatorial axis of memory and idea. The exhibition title also references the idea of nomadism and other more current irregular migratory movements and is presented in small, portable DVD format: what we can take with us.

Traditionally Australian Aboriginal people always travelled and treaded lightly as outlined by the following address of Aboriginal man Yagan to the Advocate General of Victoria in 1843. "Why do you white people come in ships to our country and shoot down poor black fellows who do not understand you - You listen to me! The wild blackfellows do not understand your laws, every living animal that roams the country, and every edible root that grows in the ground are common property. A black man claims nothing as his own but his cloak, his weapons, and his name... He does not understand that animals or plants can belong to one person more than to another."<sup>2</sup> Canadian Aboriginal people also maintained a similar lifestyle, following the seasons and the migration of the animals important to them.

Through viewing the experimental film by Shanouk Newwashish we get an idea of an insiders perspective in a remote Aboriginal French Canadian Community where we see local youth running throughout by streetlight. We might wonder why they are running? 'Coureurs de Nuit' (Night Hunters) also hints at a fugitive territory that comes with a sedentary lifestyle. Are these young people the hunters or the hunted? Are they running from the Police or has their running simply made the Police nervous enough to harass them?

My own work 'the Great Australian Dream-ing' highlights the inequity and irony of suburban affluence versus the denial of basic housing needs in Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Strange Nation, Min Min Lights of the Outback, 2000 <http://www.strangenation.com.au>

<sup>2</sup> Brough Smith's Aborigines of Victoria, Vol II, 1848, p228

communities. Reflecting the current Australian governments focus on aspiring to 1950's white societal values, the short video is set to an Everly Brothers hit song, 'All I have to do is Dream':

"I can make you mine, taste your lips of wine  
Anytime night or day  
Only trouble is, gee whiz  
I'm dreamin' my life away"...

Reminding of us of the contradictions of aspiring to ideals of whiteness, by being subject to denial and exclusion, these night scenes of domesticity also feature the night skies and ground designs of an ancient and persisting spiritual presence. However, there is an absence – the people. Those with busy lives, yet empty lifestyles.

'Wagon Burner' is the title of Terrance Houles work, and is a reference to a derogatory name for "Indians" used back in the day. In a 4-minute act of defiance, a boy burns a wagon and then stamps it out in a ritualistic dance to music by Isho Bailey, putting out the flames. The performance is as mesmerizing as the flames themselves. The hues in the film are paled down with bright white light, but the non-conformist message shines through.

'Starr' is set in 1930's New York and is told through the life of Starr herself, a young socialite whose spirit is slowly drowned by the memories of her past. She had made it into the limelight but in the eyes of many she was just a tramp and a gold digger and her own childhood issues of sexual abuse caught up with her for a tragic end. Michelle Blakeney has remade this story from the USA, but interestingly has used Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander actors of all shades, blanketed under the veil of nightfall.

To see the light is to wake up in remembrance and resistance of the contradictions that face us: inclusion vs exclusion, interior vs exterior, homely vs sterile, family vs individuality, sharing vs ownership, ancient vs modern. To travel with it is to follow our own dreams and destiny in trust.