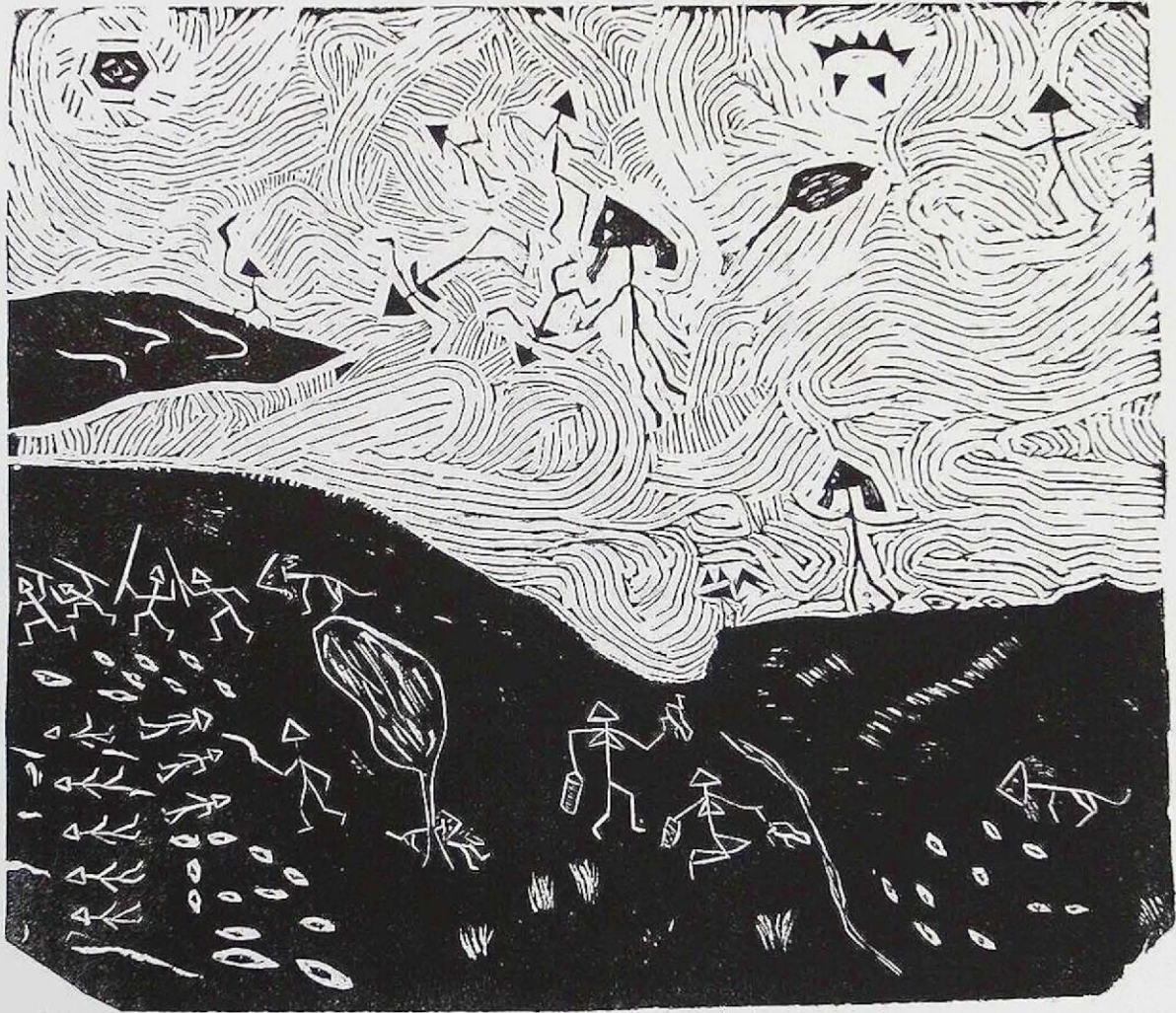


RACE MEMORIES



43/50

MASSACRE MOUNTAIN

Kevin Gilbert '65
(printed 1992)

Kevin Gilbert
from "Because a White Man'll Never Do It" (1973)

reflections on the repression of First Nations people, from
invasion and first colonisation to the Gurundji Campaign

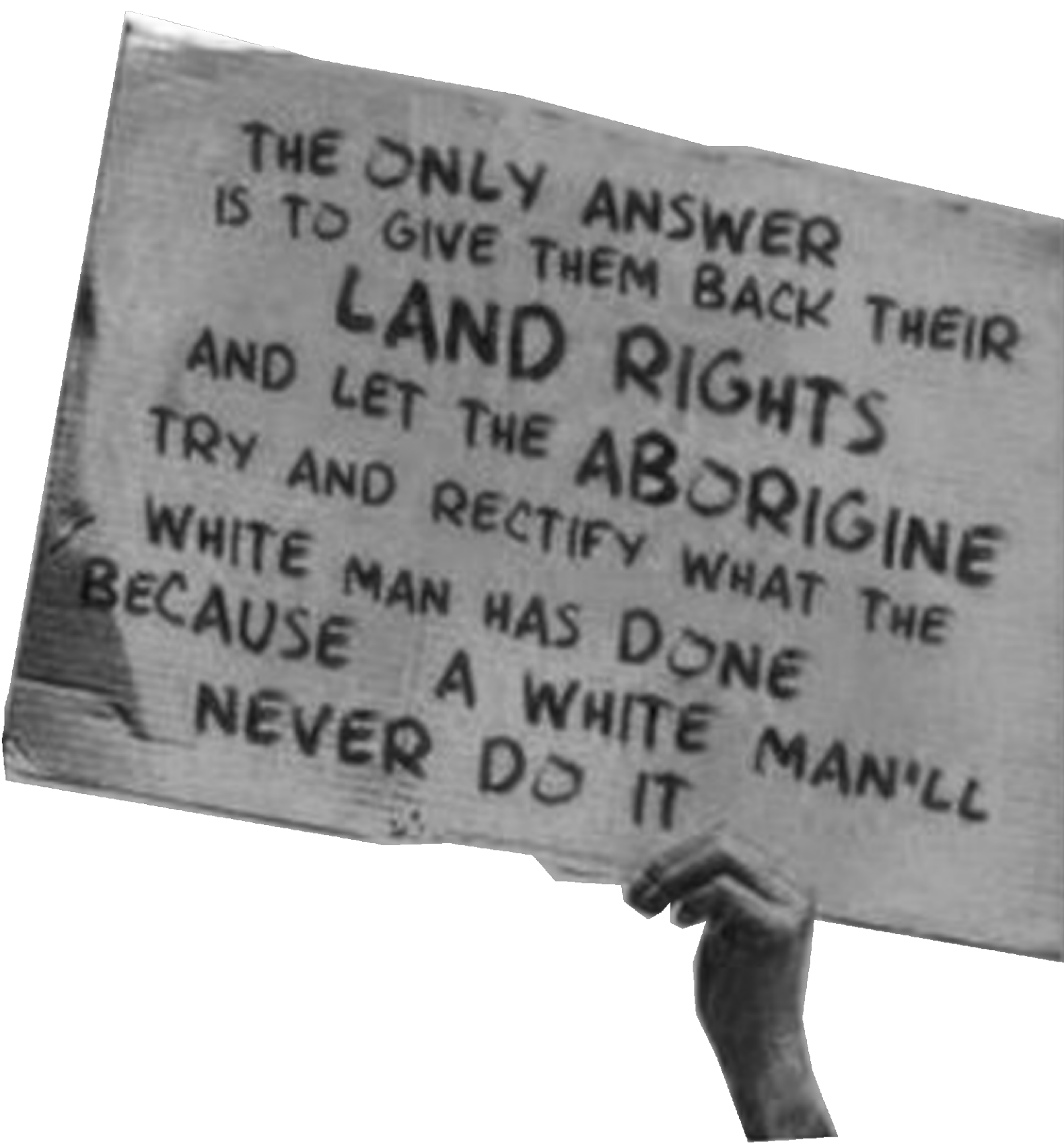
Cover art:

Massacre Mountain by Kevin Gilbert

1965/1990 26.5 x 31 cm POA

“... a part of the massacres in the time of early colonisation. We've got dingoman we've got eagleman flying and that was just a reflection of what I was feeling the continual destruction always, always the denial of the Peoples' right.” Kevin Gilbert

Made into a zine on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri people, in solidarity with First Nations struggle for liberation and justice everywhere in so-called australia.



1. RACE MEMORIES

EARTH

Of the earth am I
The breast that nurtured all the young
Of earth; with earth to earth again I fly
With every thought I thought and song I sung
Was earth and earth in all its bounty
Gave to me and mine a wise increase.

I am earth; and when the first ship came
They spat and cursed the earth as foul base
Most miserable of all the earth was I
Without the spice or wine of their much wiser race.

The learned came; and said Gods had I none
But totems and an animism dull
There was no high god somewhere in the sky
No higher metaphysics in my lower type of skull.

I am earth; missionaries looked askance
Upon my nature undisguised; my earthy lance
Was to them unclean; a blight to God
And such disgusting things hide from His sight.

Of the earth am I; benighted anthropologists
Wont to declare: The basest of the base and by
their skull
No glimmer of intelligence is there
They measured vacuity to fill their empty space.

I am earth; my God, my High God had I one
Ba'aime, though I did not know the high
And separate classes making God apart
From me and spirit beings who did his will.

Of the earth am I; the high God ne'er considered
That he was far too high to dwell with me
Together, as he breathed so breathed I
Together, to the hunt, was he and I
Together walked we two on earth
And sometimes in the sky.

The learned came; and said gods had I none
No politics nor sovereign embassy
Their learned ignorance served as a pass
For pioneers to kill the god in me.

Ever since the invasion of our country by English soldiers and then colonists in the late eighteenth century, Aborigines have endured a history of land theft, attempted racial extermination, oppression, denial of basic human rights, actual and de facto slavery, ridicule, denigration, inequality and paternalism. Concurrently, we suffered the destruction of our entire way of life—spiritual, emotional, social and economic. The result is the Aboriginal of twentieth century Australia—a man without hope or happiness, without a land, without an identity, a culture or a future.

While the wooden weapons of the Aboriginal tribes of Australia were no match against the musketry of the white invaders—whose invasion was, therefore, relatively easily accomplished—it is a point of pride to black Australians today that history documents the widespread resistance of the Aboriginal tribes against the squatters' inroads on their land. At best, black resistance kept whites out of certain areas for some years longer than would otherwise have been the case. These areas were, for a while longer at least, 'blackfeller country'. At worst, black resistance provoked the punitive raids, massacres and mass poisonings that remain branded in the race memory of every Aboriginal in Australia today.

Estimates suggest that in 1788 there were some 300,000 Aborigines who roamed their tribal areas in family groups, coming together periodically as tribes to carry out their increase ceremonies, initiation rituals and so forth. Some

tribes numbered several hundred while others had as many as a thousand or more. Anyone who trespassed onto another tribe's land except on recognized business was in danger of attack. The inheritance of land was a totally secure, never-ending state of possession that extended generation after generation to all those born within the material and spiritual boundaries of their tribal area. Each member of the tribe had his rights and responsibilities—the right to sustenance from the land and responsibility for its ritual upkeep. Food taboos ensured that no birds, plants or animals were too heavily hunted—a type of natural conservation that helped preserve the balance of nature. There were no fences or boundaries in the European sense, but each tribal area was clearly defined by land marks such as mountain ranges, rocks, trees and waterholes which all had a rich cultural and spiritual significance for the people. Within these land-marks dwelt the spirits and totem gods that nourished, protected and gave continuing life to the owners of that tribal area.

In the English tradition, land titles were originally granted by the crown, after which they became transferable. The Aboriginal title was in perpetuity and was inalienably held by a group of people. As land was not merely a source of sustenance but also a living spiritual entity, an inextricable part of the life of the tribe, the question of transfer or barter could never arise, for this would have implied the bartering of the very soul sustenance, the Dreaming, which would have been tantamount to suicide for the tribe. Not only did the land belong to them, but they belonged to it—now and for ever. They had belonged to it in the past, the now and in the future when they would die and return again in spirit and in substance to their Dreaming-place. That is why it was impossible for white squatters to 'buy' or 'take' the land, although they could, with the sanction of the tribe, use it, share in its bounty and become part of the pattern of life.

The tribes had led a nomadic life through necessity because there were not plants or animals suitable for domestication. To maintain a balanced diet the people had to keep on the move, seeking the quondong here, the kangaroo there, emus, wild ducks, honey, fish, nardoo in other places. Within a

generation of their arrival in New South Wales, the invaders had made such an impact upon the ecology of the land that Charles Darwin, reporting on what he saw in 1836 in *The Voyage of the Beagle* wrote:

A few years since this country abounded with wild animals; but now the emu is banished to a long distance and the kangaroo has become scarce; to both the English greyhound has been highly destructive. The numbers of Aborigines is rapidly decreasing. This decrease, no doubt must be partly owing to the introduction of spirits, to European diseases, even the milder ones of which, such as measles, prove very destructive, and to the gradual extinction of the wild animals. It is said that numbers of their children invariably perish in very early infancy from the effects of their wandering life, and, as the difficulty of procuring food increases, so must their wandering habits increase, and hence the population is repressed without any apparent deaths from famine The offal, when a beast is killed, and some milk from the cows are the peace offerings of the settlers.

When resistance to the white invaders proved fruitless against the continuing usurpation of Aboriginal territory, many tribes tried to withdraw to the furthest points of their land. But they found that the natural economy could not sustain their inroads on the more restricted area. As a result, hunger forced them back into the white settled areas to spear sheep and cattle and to pilfer from the shepherds' huts. Then settlers began to leave them poisoned flour in the huts—flour laced with strychnine—in an attempt to wipe out the black 'nuisance'. Aboriginal leaders tried to organize their spears against the muskets of the settlers. Where they met with some success, history records the 'atrocities of the blacks'. There are numerous testimonies to the white man's retaliatory and punitive sabre charges against the tribesmen, women and children. 'Boong fires' destroyed the bodies of the trouble-makers. Individual Aboriginal men were killed and their women and children raped, then shot. Young children, considered 'safe' venereal disease risks, were raped. Consider

events such as the Namoi River massacre. The Coniston killings. The Murrumbidgee River wipeout. The black extermination drives of the Hawkesbury and Manning Rivers. The genocide of the Tasmanian blacks. These and many, many more were the links in the chain of white inhumanity that lives on in the memories of the southern part-bloods today.

Aborigines became, officially, a dying race. The tribes were divided from each other as individuals were forcibly transported to strange areas where they had no tribal affiliations or spiritual landmarks. Others died in police lock-ups. Some cried for Christ, and, by submitting to the directions of their Christian 'brothers', received some sort of welcome—not, in view of the extreme racist prejudices of the day, in terms of human equality, but, well, they were allowed to live. Once the niceties of civilized behaviour were established it was but a short step to introduce habit-forming substances such as tobacco, alcohol and a taste for sugar and tea which quickly brought about an almost total dependence on whites for hand-outs. To sustain the goodwill that kept the handouts coming, blacks found that they had to work—as prostitutes without fee, as stockmen without pay—a virtual slavery. Concurrently, the white race found it necessary also to demean and ridicule the tribal identity of Aborigines. They said that blacks were ignorant, heathen, savages without a technology, a government or an organization. The transfer of their attitudes and values to their black servants led to intense feelings of shame on the part of the blacks. Much of this shame survives today. It can be seen in the poetry of Kath Walker who, though feeling that her ancestors were inferior to the clever white man, nevertheless struggles to identify herself with the underdog.

Price of survival. Bewildered by the strange new conditions of life, the Aborigine bowed to his forced removal from his tribal area even though he knew that if he were to die in a strange area his spirit would be lost forever. He bowed to the ward system by which the various authorities could split families and assign him, his wife or his children to separate areas as servant-slaves to white squatters. He bowed to the apartheid-style policies that kept him apart on reserves. He bowed to the nightly curfews that kept him out of towns. He

bowed to segregation rules of hospitals that ensured that his kind would not receive proper medical attention or humane care. He bowed to the power exercised by squatters on the stations over every facet of his life, diet and actions. He bowed to the demands of stockmen and squatters for 'black velvet'. He bowed to the fact of his women having to prostitute themselves for the food that would allow the children to survive, or for the alcohol that would yield the oblivion that was so much more desirable than daily reality. In the end, shamefully, he bowed to the fact that his children were doomed to die in anguish from the starvation that his women could no longer avert, or the diseases which the white man had introduced and now did nothing to check. For a long time it was indeed believed that his race was doomed. Extermination campaigns, detribalization, denigration, exploitation; many, many factors pointed to the impending death of a people. And as a pure race, southern blacks did die. But the half-castes increased, thanks to the propensity of the master race, Australia's proud pioneering stock, to lie with the despised blacks. Thanks to the urge to visit the black's camps by night, seeking the titivation and human warmth denied them between the cold starched sheets at home.

Came the government reserves and the mission settlements where the white manager was placed over the blacks as virtual dictator. Where, if it pleased him, he supplied them with government rations. Such was the power of the manager's rule, backed as he was by police power, that he indeed had blacks eating out of his hands. All these factors combined to leave the Aboriginal psyche shattered, ripped, tattered. A black man became a thing to joke about. No longer a mighty hunter, his personality had become so crippled that he could no longer either fight for his human entitlements or work for them. So he became a stockman without pay or a mission black on government rations or a cringing shadow on the street that cadged off whites for a feed and a bottle of plonk.

Not only did the Aborigine lose his pride, his place and his identity but group distinctions began to intrude to complicate the situation yet further. The mission blacks were taught by missionaries to deny their 'animal nature'. Fundamentalist

rectitude locked young blacks, male and female, in separate dormitories to save them from themselves. There they stayed, in these prison-like dormitories, at all times except in class hours or prayer meetings, until the youngsters were well past marriageable age and had been so indoctrinated against their 'unclothed heathen' brothers that they accepted their new lot in return, perhaps, for eventual salvation. On the other hand the tribally identified remnants sneered at these imitation blacks who bashed the bible to please the white fornicator who 'controlled their animal nature' but rarely his own.

The half-caste suffered on all fronts. In some places he was forcibly removed from his tribal parents by white authority. He was victimized by the churches who saw in him living proof, often, of the lust and hypocrisy of their members. The full-bloods disowned him because he was a 'yellah feller' tainted with the white, murderous blood. So the distinctions increased—the distinctions between government reserve blacks, church blacks, fringe-dwelling blacks and part-assimilated town blacks who looked down on what they regarded as their more backward brothers.

Even today the northern full-bloods do not consider that the southern blacks are Aborigines, although a Pan-Aboriginal feeling is on the move. The one fact on which all blacks—full-blood and part-blood, tribal and detribalized—meet, is the shared fact of persecution by whites. All share the hatred and the overwhelming realization of the enormity of white racial injustice; this is the cement that binds all blacks in unity. Read the testimony of Pincher Numiari, a Gurindji elder telling the story of the arrival of the white man to his land. Then read the testimony of a southern part-Aboriginal woman, tape-recorded last year. Their experience is very different and yet very similar. Their burden is the same—the white man.

Said Pincher Numiari to a member of the Gurindji Campaign:

White European was coming in. He was first come from Sydney. He coming in through Queensland to Wave Hill Station. He went over here to Black Gin. He pick that place first when he first come but he change his mind and

he came right to Victoria River and he found a place over there. And he bring the horses, a few horses and he had a bullock wagon. The Aborigines, they been quiet. They [the whites] been found them Aborigines and shot him down here in Black Fellows Knob [pointing to a hill that can be seen from Wattie Creek]. I don't know how many men and women, kids got shot over there. I think we'll call that 'burial ground' bye and bye, because a lot of blokes got killed. They been shot by Europeans. They were just walking around hunting, you know. They been hunting for their own tucker, bush tucker.

Poor old buggers, we didn't do nothing.

When I been working around West Kimberleys, they been tell me same story, right back to Alice Springs, right back to Darwin, all those places, they tell the same story. They shot him down like a dog, same way like Gurindji. See that hill there, they been shot there. See that river, they been shot there They [the Aborigines] didn't know, poor buggers. They didn't know, because white Europeans never explained to them. Because when they found Aborigines they shot him like a dog straightaway. He didn't give him a fair go. Now this time we stand up and fight, we mob. We turn around and fight it out, see. We walk off that Wave Hill Station. They treat him like a dog. People was having a rough time. I don't know why that. When they first come, they been living cross-ways, and they been just walk over to married mens' camp and just take the girls away from Aborigines, and take her to Wave Hill Station, and they keep him [her] in bed. Tomorrow morning they let him [her] back to camp for their right husband, see. This what they been do when they first come. The white European been start it first, not Aborigine.

(by courtesy of The Gurindji Campaign)

Said Alice Briggs, half a continent away from the Gurindji camp and several generations ahead of Pincher Numiari in experience of the effects of colonization:

The tribal people . . . they were strict in their ways. Not like a white man's law; it stinks, it does. And they've built these houses [at Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve near Taree, New South Wales], they put 'em here . . . instead of putting them here; why didn't they mind their own business and let Aborigines cater for themselves? That's how it should have been done. But they've ruined them and the neglect is not on the part of the Aborigine because it's a white man that's put it on 'em. He's made our men lazy, he's made our women what they are and everything that goes with it—and it's all come from a white man.

The only answer is to give them back their land rights and let the Aborigine try and rectify what the white man has done, because a white man'll *never* do it. While ever he tries to tell an Aborigine what to do you're going to have the same thing all the way through life. And I for one don't want to see my kids grow up in the conditions that I've grown up in. And if the children of tomorrow are going to have a chance, it's not going to come from education. Certainly not. It's got to be handed back to our people to educate their kids in their *own* way—and educate themselves. And make a life for themselves—but not to be hounded by a white man and be told to do it, because he *won't* do it.

It's this . . . now they've come out here, they've taken Australia and it's more or less as though they've taken us! That's where it is! Now look, everybody owns a piece of Australia. Now look at the miles and miles of land that's not being used. Why can't we have that? Why does the government own it? What did they do to own it? They came out here and they landed in one spot and they took the whole of Australia. Where does that leave us? We're just campin' on a white feller's reserve—that's all we're doing! And that's it. I don't really hate white people. I think all people should be equal. But not a white man to think he's God, or somebody, and you're the devil himself . . . because that's how they think of us, most white people do . . .

The people have nothing going for them here. The

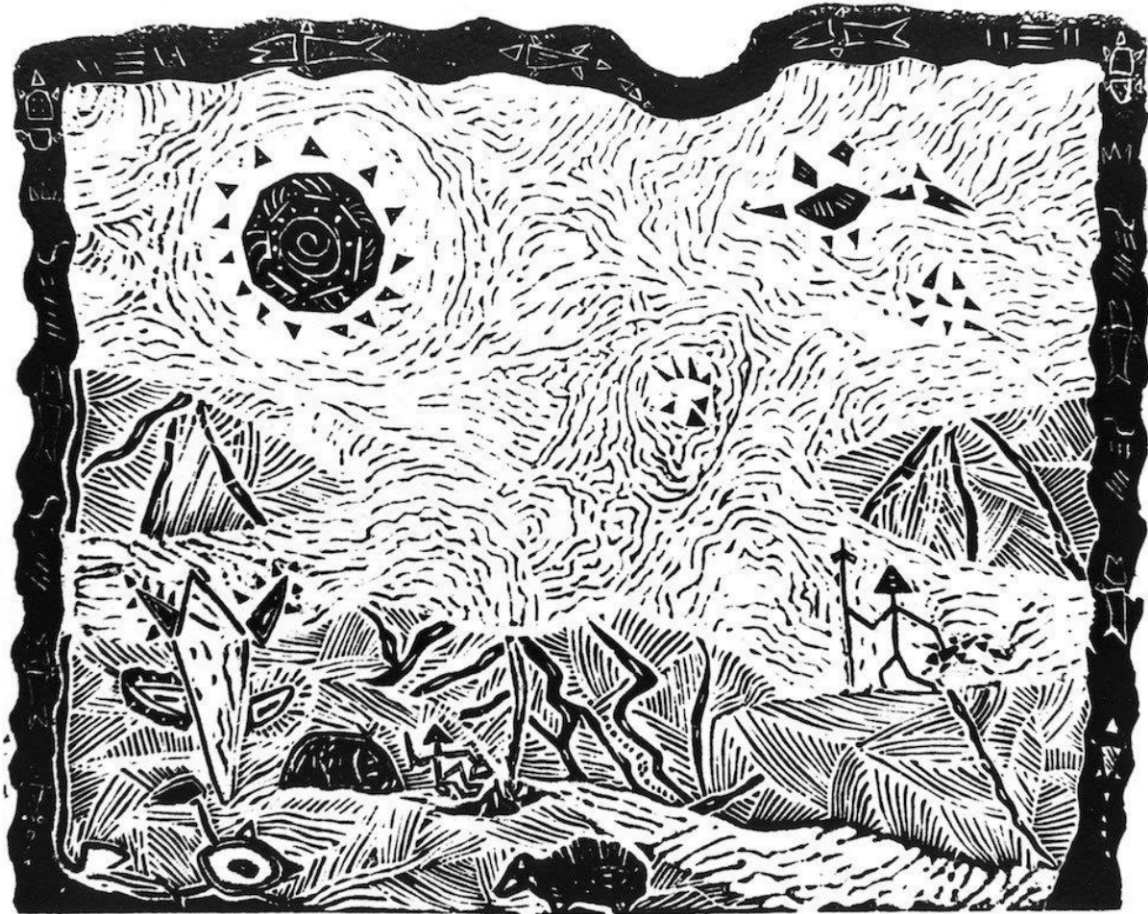
women have nothing. The kids have nothing. They go over town, they go pinching fruit and, believe me, they even as much as go and grub in the garbage cans—eating out of a garbage can! And the kids here, they really got nothing! Nothing for 'em and no one gives a damn and least of all the welfare officer that's supposed to be here helping the children! And little kids running over the street while their parents are in town.

There's your neglect, and there it is, brought on by a bloody white man—and that's right from the horse's mouth! And I'll tell even the Prime Minister of Australia the same thing. I've *seen* the little children for myself . . . and that's why it's got to come from us. We've got to help these kids out here ourselves . . . because as the magistrate said, the children out here are delinquents! Well, there it is, that's your problem. And it's not only *my* problem, it's everyone's around here, but the biggest majority around here haven't got the guts to stand up and say it! I'm a bundle of nerves, but by Jesus, I'll stand up for my kids and I think everybody else could do the same! . . . Because I've been mother and father to my kids. I've reared my three kids from babies and I've had a bloody hard battle to rear my family . . . and I'm not going to just sit back like some of 'em do and wonder how the kids are going to get through the next generation . . . whether they're going to go on as second-class human beings all their life!

Both speakers carry the burden of the white man. Both carry in their mind the memory and the experience of his immorality, killing, rape and land theft. As a child of fourteen, I remember how my guts twisted with bitterness as I dug the skeletons of black women and children out of the sands of the Murrumbidgee and examined the squashed and bullet-riddled skulls. Many black families have some story, some horror story of racial massacre in their district. It is not that long ago that the last 'shoot-ups' occurred in blacks' camps—the local whites having themselves some fun. It's not that long ago that Aborigines were roped off in picture houses from the rest of

the audience, that they couldn't get service in cafes etc. In some areas it still goes on. In more recent times, the figures on the number of black babies dying in the outback were ignored while this country gave generous millions to nations like Pakistan. Blacks know this. They know how little time has elapsed since they were not counted in the census. They lived through the shame of being 'second class' people in a country that denied them the right to social services, the right to walk into the country's lowest institutions, the pubs. Very few blacks have any land security as yet. Police victimization and disadvantages before the law are attested to by the enormous disproportion of blacks in jail.

White man, you may well speak to the Aborigine of your 'democracy' and 'justice' and 'Christianity'. But your reality is a little at variance with your theory. The Aborigine snarls his disbelief of your words as he slinks away unmanned. Often he holds silence, for such is the beggarly state that society and circumstance have reduced him to—and this includes the 'respectable' blacks who have been singled out for white favour—that he will fawn obsequiously at your lies and half-truths. Once his fathers were men. Now he hopes, by fawning, to remain reasonably agreeable in your sight so that he may beg from you, borrow, or if he is one of the favoured ones, be given a more lucrative sinecure tomorrow. Underneath it all there is frustration, obsequious resentment, divided loyalties, uncertain values. There is no real belonging, no real identification except to the memory of misery. It is true that the modern Aborigine is sick, very sick. But let no white person use this as an excuse to denigrate him even further. You cannot look down on black people while you understand the historical reasons that have reduced them to what they are—the reasons of which I have here sketched only a tiny, general, impressionistic fraction. Remember that the Aborigine's sickness has been forced upon him. Yours you not only tolerate, but structured into the very fibres of your society.



Totality

1965/1990 28 x 36 cm POA

"Totality to me is expressing what we are... We, Aboriginal People, are a total being...

We are total in that we cannot remove ourselves in identity from trees from land from the environment from the earth from the universe.

It's a print done more in asserting the totality of the human personality in proper development with the land, with the sky. I would like to try and represent myself or other human beings, especially Aboriginals, as being one very tiny part in the total universe and I'm trying to this in Totality.

I as a human being am no more important, possibly not as important, as a tree. I am possibly not as important as a rock. A rock, for instance, will gradually erode over the millennia and gradually release particles and minerals into the earth, before gradually merging with the earth. Other animals' life work in the totality of life can be extremely destructive. Human beings are extremely destructive, unless they understand the totality and how they are only as important as, equally important as, the rocks and trees. They can't really advance without that totality, without recognizing that totality. You can be a conservationist, or a greenie or a miner; each one of those stands is fairly irrelevant unless you take on the responsibility within the total aspect of all forms of life and creation." - Kevin Gilbert

“Consider events such as the Namoi River wipeout. The black extermination drives of the Hawkesbury and Manning Rivers. The genocide of the Tasmanian blacks. These and many, many more were the links in the chain of white inhumanity that lives on in the memories of [Aboriginal people] today.”