2004

Fabrics of Change: Trading Identities

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Research Contribution
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**Research Contribution**
The exhibition was innovative because it revealed artefacts from Australian museum collections formerly hidden from view in juxtaposition with contemporary works. Contemporary textile artists (Osmond Kantilla, Kay Lawrence, Nadia Myre and John Pule from Australia, Canada and the Pacific) created new works which drew on that resource, adapting hybrid images and materials from very individual postcolonial histories of loss and change.

**Research Significance**
The research was completed with Discovery Grant ‘Fabric(ations) of the Postcolonial’ 2001-2004, with CIs Sharrad, Collett and Jones from the University of Wollongong. The exhibition was shown in the Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery UOW, and the Flinders University City Gallery, Adelaide in 2004. The artefacts were borrowed from major museums and galleries, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; The Australian Museum, Sydney; The Macleay Museum, Sydney; the South Australian Museum; and the National Museum, Canberra. The Australia Council contributed $30,000 towards the exhibition, in partnership with the Australian Research Council. Described as a ‘challenging’ exhibition by The Adelaide Review, the book of 72 pages and more than 10,000 words is still in demand nationally and internationally in 2009.

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Fabrics of Change
TRADING IDENTITIES

NARELLE JUBELIN | OSMOND KANTILLA | KAY LAWRENCE | NADIA MYRE | JOHN PULE
Fabrics of Change
TRADING IDENTITIES

An exhibition with artists Narelle Jubelin, Otsond Kamilla, Kay Lawrence, Nadia Myce, John Pole

Based on research by Diana Wood Conroy, Paul Sharrad, Anne Collett, Dorothy Jones

Curated by Diana Wood Conroy and Emma Rutherford

Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong

25 April — 7 May 2004
Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery
University of Wollongong, NSW

18 June — 3 August 2004
Flinders University City Gallery
North Terrace, Adelaide, SA
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Introduction

DIANA WOOD CONROY

Fabrics of Change: Trading Identities explores textiles and their intrinsic relationships to texts of law and literature across an historical and contemporary span of British colonisation. Works by contemporary artists Narelle Jubelin, Osmond Kantilla, Kay Lawrence, Nadia Myre and John Pule are placed beside rare museum artefacts, showing that a metamorphosis has taken place mirroring yet transforming the turbulence and trauma of colonial settlement.

The research for the exhibition is part of an Australian Research Council project called ‘Fabric(ations) of the Postcolonial’ that brings together the vivid metaphors of ‘english’ writing with intricately structured textiles, and materials such as calico and wool, beads and buttons that were traded across countries of the former British Empire. Trade was both the impetus for and an outcome of colonial expansion. In this monograph, academics from the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, Paul Sharrad, Anne Collett, Dorothy Jones and Diana Wood Conroy, interrogate crucial objects of the colonial era. The excitement and power of objects from the museum archive underpins their discussion of colonial and postcolonial art in India, the Pacific Islands, Canada and Australia.

Literary scholarship and art practice, text and textiles came together in the collaboration between English Studies and Visual Arts. The idea of ‘postcolonialism’ is centred on studying the use of the language of the colonial powers, including visual and textile ‘languages’, to express local and specific experience in Australia, India, Canada, and the Pacific. These societies inherited not only the classical European heritage (so clearly seen in the etymology of the English language) but systems of government, law and culture which overlaid and interacted with the culture of the original inhabitants. (‘Colony’ derives from the Latin ‘colonia’, farm, settlement, ‘colonus’ tiler, settler, and ‘celere’, to cultivate).
A core concern for Australian contemporary art has been a questioning of often violent histories and the understanding of land and language through looking again at the visual and textual records of the colonial era.

A compelling example of such a record is the remarkable dress made from bark cloth (tapa) from nineteenth-century Samoa now in the Macleay Museum, University of Sydney (Fig. 1). Evoking a strange and haunting richness of imagery, the maker has blended the language of tapa with Western influences. The magnificent costume with its 'leg-of-mutton' sleeves and gathered waist was a local take-over of Victorian fashion. Without any historical details, it can be read as either a special assertion of traditional culture finding a place in a modern colonial world, or the dress of a possibly lower-class woman without disposable cash emulating 'trade-store' fashion with materials to hand. Possibly a wedding dress through its vivid and lavish design, the dress may have been intended for 'Sunday' best, a concept quickly adopted in Samoa, not just for reasons of piety and modesty but also for quite traditional motivations of competitive ostentation. French-born J. A. G. D'Alpuget settled in Sydney in the late nineteenth century and voyaged around the Pacific, trading for several companies. He was a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson and supported the Marist Catholic missions in Tonga and Samoa, bringing back this dress as a souvenir around 1890.1

Paul Sharrad has tracked how the tenacious tapa tradition continues a hundred years later in the Pacific Islands artist John Pule's work on canvas and paper (Fig. 4). His art expresses the dilemmas of postcolonial Pacific life in a vital written line and inventive motifs linking the dynamic vocabulary of tapa cloth to a contemporary idiom of art and literature.2

Dorothy Jones' expertise lies in the subtle literary exploration of image and plot in the Parliament House Embroidery in Canberra, designed by Kay Lawrence in 1984, and embroidered by four hundred and fifty women from Embroidery Guilds in each state until its completion in 1988.3 Colonial images in the sixteen-metre stretch of the Embroidery included homesick letters such as the one from Mary Thomas (Fig. 2). The embroidered narrative questioned the purely celebratory language of the 1988 Australian Bicentennial of British settlement that had overlooked Aboriginal and environmental concerns. The delicacy of stitch and colour has its own language in the fragmentary samplers lent by the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. The national vision of settlement of the Parliament House Embroidery in Canberra may be juxtaposed beside Nadia Myre's Indian Art, a communal artwork (Fig. 3). This First Nations artist from Canada has articulated the powerful relationship between text and textile with succint clarity by replacing each letter of the problematic Canadian legal statute by a bead.4 The rhythms of the original sonorous legal language can still be discerned, but the meaning has changed.

Anne Collett develops ideas of cultural poetics in exploring the nuances of costume of
the Canadian Mohawk writer-performer Miss E. Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake who was born in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Pauline Johnson’s ardent poetry, as well as her presentation of herself, was poised between an eloquent Iroquois and a patriotic British Canadian heritage, translating and adapting aspects of both in order to create an edge and heart-rending new identity. Her costumes and her writing mix to show the long lineage of syncretic cultural exchange linked to colonial trade and settlement [Fig. 37]. Anne Collett’s research uncovered very intriguing examples closer at hand: First Nations moccasins and a ceremonial robe (‘button blanket’) from the Kuerluhk’uk (Kwaaglit) nation, in the Australian Museum, Sydney, of the same late nineteenth century period [Figs 34 and 43], sold by a nineteenth-century dance troupe to buy their passage home.

India is at the heart of British colonisation in the complexity and wealth of its civilisations and trading history. Its example set a pattern of experimentation with cotton and indigo in almost every new British landing across the Pacific, leading ultimately to a vision of Australia as ‘the future cotton field of Great Britain’. Samples sent to Lancashire in 1852 for assay produced the curious mix of ‘muslin from Australian cotton, spun in Manchester, woven in Dacca’ [Fig. 5]. This, or one of its set, was displayed alongside a golden nugget at the Paris Exhibition as evidence of colonial prosperity and eventually passed into the hands of the Macarthur family who donated it to the Macleay Museum. Paul Sharrad has delved into the complex story of superb Indian shawls, specifically the Kashmiri Georgette shawl now in the National Gallery of Australia [Fig. 17]. Indian textiles were imitated by British artisans and manufacturers in the nineteenth century in the renowned Paisley shawls. Narelle Jubelin, an international artist born in Australia and now living in Spain, has re-presented colonial textiles through exquisite petit-point embroidery. Her two pieces in Fabrics of Change (now in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney) refer not only to the wider trade spectrum but also to the individual biographies of specific cloths such as a Paisley shawl or a tablecloth hemmed by Tiwi women as the fulcrum for sweeping change [Figs 6 and 17].

The innovative work of the contemporary textile screen printer Osmond Kantilla, working on Bathurst Island, in the Northern Territory of Australia, pin-points the continuing role of Tiwi pattern with zest and intricacy, printing traditional symbols on to brocade and twill European fabric [Fig. 7]. My research has focused on the historical trajectory of Tiwi textiles and ornaments of bark and fibre. The changing language of Tiwi abstract motifs has been an integral form of expression from pre-contact to postcolonial times. The workshop ‘Tiwi Designs’ where I worked in 1974, formed the starting-point of my investigation. The richness of the Tiwi heritage in the South Australian Museum is a great treasure. With the permission of the Tiwi Land Council, selected items, rare costumes, ornaments and message
stics collected in 1905 and 1949 form part of the Fabrics of Change exhibition in the Flinders University City Gallery in Adelaide. From the earliest contact with trade items such as glass beads, buttons, wool and calico, Tiwi artists incorporated the new materials with enthusiasm into the ceremonial repertoire (Figs 22, 23, 33).

What seemed 'natural' to British settlers was often incomprehensible to Aboriginal cultures where communication was informed by different priorities of kinship and country. Kay Lawrence's button blankets of 2003 allude to the wide arc of European art history and trade in Australia (Figs 44, 45, 46). The export of pearl shell from north-west Australia was a vital element in the British textile industry from 1876 to 1943, and it was also fundamental to Aboriginal trade across Australia from Broome to western New South Wales. Blankets were given to Aboriginal people in exchange for labour from the beginning of British settlement. The skull motif in Lawrence's blankets is taken from an eleventh-century mosaic of the Last Judgement in Torcello, Italy, precisely translating the image from tessera to button. The potent image of the skull reverberates with the decimation of Aboriginal societies and the terrible 'trade' in skulls for the advancement of science. Lawrence's use of the pearl button highlights its ubiquity across indigenous and non-indigenous postcolonial societies, linking wide geographies of cloth. The shadow of the past may often be a melancholy one.

Underpinning the connections between the objects in Fabrics of Change are ideas of quiet resistance to colonial power, often combining a critical intent with a pleasure in new materials and possibilities. Similarities exist between First Nations and Aboriginal societies in relation to colonisation. Materials cross between cultures, their meanings shifting in new contexts and their forms taking on hybrid qualities, stretching the imagination to include like and unlike, and initiating further change. The objects in this exhibition show that the artistic response to the material dominance of Western culture is not passive but actively shapes and transforms identity through translation and adaptation of form.

The research project and exhibition Fabrics of Change: Trading Identities reflects not only the legacies and cultural structures of imperialism but also intensely individual ways of melding and adapting hybrid images and materials. The archives of our public museums in Australia are an immense resource, like a teeming unconscious just below the surface of contemporary art. Diving into the depths of these archives allows the passions of the past to inform the present.

Fig 7
Oxendine Kerfita, Bothum/Melville Island, Australia (detail) Blanket, c. 2000
(from pigment screenprinted on fabric, 99 x 148cm)
© Oxendine Kerfita. Courtesy of Tjul Designs, Nyirri

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Trade and Textiles in the Pacific and India

PAUL SHARRAD

Beaten bark formed the substance of one of the principal fabric arts of the Pacific before colonisation. Bark cloth, or 'tapa cloth' as it came to be known to the wider world, was a major item of ritual exchange and status demarcation in Oceania and one of the first goods to attract the attention of European voyagers. As a sign of civilisation, early collectors such as Sir Joseph Banks and Alexander Shaw even considered tapa as a new form of cloth for European markets. Since contact with the wandering peoples of 'the West' in the sixteenth century, the Pacific has been part of a global system of trade and trade-offs. The tapa cloth from the Macleay Museum [Fig. 8], like the dress from Samoa described in the Introduction [Fig. 1], is a beautiful example of the traditional Pacific cloth. Made from the beaten pulp of the paper mulberry bark, its vibrant and delicate patterning suggests the importance of vegetal motifs and intricate geometric repetition.

Such objects are often seen nowadays 'fixed' in museum cases or tourist pictures as images of 'native tradition', but tapa moved around the Pacific and its designs carry through to contemporary clothing and artwork. One of the propositions of Fabrics of Change: Trading Identities is the transformation of societies through exchange and trade, reflected in textiles that combine the culture of Oceania with elements of Western styles.

Trading in ideas and technology under colonialism was never completely confined to a one-way process of indigenous people 'accepting' superior goods from the West and thereby being inducted into foreign cultures of modernity. People everywhere have traded for their own purposes and adapted new materials to better maintain local practices. Even where this has resulted in a shift to 'Western' fashions and behaviours, the processes have been complex. Missions in Tahiti, for example, tried to promote a local cotton industry to
protect Islanders from the immoral temptations of white traders, though the presence of missionaries also worked to make the islands safe for trading.¹

No better example of the confluence of cultures can be found, perhaps, than the waistcoat prepared for Captain Cook's expected return to court in England around 1780 [Fig. 9]. Reputedly worked by his wife, Elizabeth, from material obtained on Cook's first voyage in 1769, it is now held in the State Library of NSW.² The tapa cloth is embroidered with intertwining waves of ribbon, flowers and foliage in a pattern whose origins lie in Hellenistic art. Tahitian tapa of this fineness and yellowed tinge carried meanings of chiefly authority. The overlapping of two sign systems—that of Western embroidery and tapa—shows the material and 'sexual' negotiations between contact cultures. We could interpret this hybrid artefact as the authority of Empire 'writing over' the blank spaces and raw materials of the distant Pacific.

Changing customs can be readily seen in women's dress. Before Christian missions took hold in Samoa (from around 1840 after initial ventures a decade earlier), women were extremely proud of their bodies and showed no inclination to cover them. Clothing seems to have been adopted, not merely as subservience to an imposed ideology. This concept was quickly adopted in Samoa, not just for reasons of Christian piety but also as a part of a new apparatus in the traditional game of jostling for social status.³

The immediate impact of European ideas of dress was often mediated, not by Europeans, but by Pacific island pastors and their families. Tahiti's fine white tapa cloths for tupua ('poncho' coverings of the torso) was imported to Samoa as 'modest' mission wear. As woven cloth was added to existing production of mats and tapa, ranking women across Polynesia took control of sewing circles under church auspices, mixing traditional values, techniques and styles into the new textile technology and its ideological context. (The well-known muu muu or 'mother hubbard' and its Hawaiian variant the hula are end results of this adaptive process)⁴. As cotton cloth became the material of everyday clothing, Samoan chiefs, while also adopting elements of Western modernity, began to symbolise traditional authority by making over tapa cloth (tapa) into ceremonial dress. The gendering of tapa production also underwent change as 'men' used introduced metal tools to carve wooden printing boards (patu) once made by women from sweet plant fibres.⁵

Christianity and clothing were part of the 'civilising mission' of Europe in 'enlightened' parts of the globe, which included Aboriginal Australia and Canada. Missions were implicated in the regional dynamic of trade and power negotiation. Islanders took on missionary functions from Europeans in the pure enthusiasm of conversion, but also in assertions of collective self-determination and strategies of personal self-advancement.
Pastors and their families assumed chiefly roles when they went off to ‘less progressive’ parts of the Pacific to exercise authority over new converts. As part of this chain of expansion, they took their culture and its appurtenances. The now outmoded tiputa or ‘poncho’ cloths, were re-exported to the island of Niue by Samoans and tapa-making (hispa) was promoted there from around 1850. Niueans in turn adapted Samoan style to local myths and tastes in design.

Years later, in the late twentieth century, communities of working-class Islanders filled the factory floors of New Zealand in pursuit of cash incomes not available at home. Young artists such as John Pule (born Niue) began exploring their cultural heritage and translating it into forms compatible with modern pan-Pacific and international art. Pule incorporates creation myth, mission history and naturalistic depiction of migrant life into his poetry and fiction, but he also moved into painting and printmaking (Fig 11). In the 1999 print on paper E Fena e Ke Haau (This journey is for you), he uses the rectangular grid design of Samoan/Niuean tapa painting with some of the traditional star and flower patterns. To these he adds the specifically Niuean emphasis on circles and plants, the creation/trickster figure of the lizard celebrated in most Polynesian art, and narrative elements commenting on the disruptive legacies of colonialism, Christianity, contemporary migrations and global conflicts. The vitality and power of the imagery relates directly to traditional valuing of dreams and prophecy.

John Pule is an outstanding example of the creative translation of an older material cultural tradition that has continued in many contemporary Pacific Island communities. In cultures where ritual usage has remained strong, as in the monarchical Tonga, traditional production and exchange of great lengths of tapa (gata) continues. In the past details of design were accommodated to take in new developments. The royal acquisition of a phonograph and the treaty between Tonga, Britain and the US in World War Two were represented in tapa cloth. Some production has been turned over to making cash sales of table mats, fans and souvenir wall hangings.

Some people have worked to recreate lost traditions (Puman Ari and Rong in Hawai‘i), for example, and others moving to cities in New Zealand, Australia and the USA have continued to maintain and reinterpret culture through textiles. Merita Johnston in Auckland keeps the Fijian tapa tradition alive by making wonderful mat wedding dresses; younger artists produce other ‘texts’ of identity in T-shirt designs and ‘funk’ clothing. In Hawai‘i, Tahiti and the Cook Islands, sewing circles, with examples of western patchwork, also ‘translated’ old tapa bed coverings into a particular Island style of quilting using appliqué leaf designs. These quilts serve as personal ‘poems’, decorative wall hangings and items of ritual exchange, sometimes documenting family histories of migration. The
Cook Islands tisuta held in the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, include this vivid piece by Teata Rapana, now living in Sydney, its traditional vegetation motif of the taro leaf combining with the brilliant colours of modern dyes and ‘Island’ style [Fig 15].

The movement of designs and skills across geographical and generic boundaries is a witness to trade and changes in cultural practice. Shifts in textile arts in the Pacific began and continued in tandem with shifts from oral to written technologies. The initial contact between print and bark cloth (early printers in Tahitian were printed on tapa; Bibles were covered in it) is maintained in the translocation of tapa patterns to artworks and book covers [Figs 12, 13, 14]. Samoan artist Fatu Feu’u in New Zealand covers an anthology of Pacific literature in his adaptations of siofo patterns. Tahitian poet, Flora Devatine, uses the image of pounding bark into bipo as a metaphor for converting oral culture into writing. Mana, the magazine from the University of the South Pacific launching Pacific writing in English in the 1970s, anchored its new cultural production on the rock of traditional Fijian tapa designs. 25

It is beyond doubt that outside technology and culture has had an enormous impact on the Pacific, and this has in many places been destructive of resources, skills and the memory needed to transmit traditions across generations. It is also true that in subtle (and sometimes spectacular) ways, colonised peoples in the Pacific Islands have actively engaged in the ideas and objects of trade to modify and perpetuate their own expressions of what it means to be human in their particular circumstances and world view.
Very old patterns of Indian trade with Europe and Asia led to the trade in, and production and imitation of the famous Kashmir shawls, which became indispensable to fashion in Victorian England. The richly detailed Godfrey Shawl from the National Gallery of Australia [Fig. 16] is one of only four ‘map shawls’ representing this textile ‘genre’ in its form as court display and official gift item. Its inappropriate name, that conceals its Indian fabrication, comes from its purchase by the British Major Stuart Godfrey who had been a political officer in Kashmir (the Assistant Resident) and had bought the shawl as an investment from the State Treasury in 1896. Two others are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the fourth is in the Sri Pratap Singh Museum in Srinagar.

This extraordinarily fine textile was commissioned for the court of Maharaja Ranbir Singh around 1870, and was produced from the workshop of Sayyid Hussain Shah and Sayyid Muhammad Mir. It is known to have been exhibited at the Delhi Durbar 1902-3 and at the Crystal Palace Exhibition of Empire in 1911. The shawl became a family heirloom, moving from India to England and then to Australia and was donated to the National Gallery of Australia in 1992. George Watt at the Delhi Exhibition of 1902 wrote:

Major Stuart H. Godfrey has sent to the Exhibition a shawl that has excited the greatest possible interest. The remarkable feature about this shawl, however, is the fact that it is a panoramic map of Srinagar. In amongst the gold thread and the Gardens of Shalimar, we can see details of everyday life: the soldiers drilling and the workmen carrying the bolts of cloth through the streets.

The Godfrey shawl is a combination of exquisitely fine woven pashmina or cashmere wool, and embroidery. The shawl’s intricate detail represents a map of Srinagar, the major city of Kashmir, depicting the city with its palaces, people, mountains, lakes, rivers and even avenues of trees with the names of major features stitched beneath each. So much fine detail may have taken thirty weavers and embroiderers a year to complete. If we start our reading of the shawl-text from the ‘reception’ end of imperial history, we track a complex of changes in meaning and function. Ranbir Singh commissioned the shawls as a display of his suzerainty to local Kashmiris. At one point this one was to be given to the visiting Prince of Wales as a token of fealty to the British Raj for establishing his dynasty. As the fortunes of Ranbir Singh change, the shawl shifts from symbolic object of ceremonial status to cash commodity. On public show later, it could be read as a sign of Eastern opulence and imperial conquest. Later it moves from private family treasure to public work admired for its technical virtuosity. Such a textile text also contains hidden
stories: we will probably never know who the people were on the shop floor of Sayyid Hussain Shah and Sayyid Muhammad Mir’s workshop, but we may think about their traces in the fabric.

Bringing postcolonial writing to bear on our readings of fabric art can re-historicise and re-politicise isolated art objects. Equally, an awareness of textiles can produce new insights when reading postcolonial texts. The novels Shame and Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie pinpoint Kashmir within a deconstructive fantasy of national histories and employ textile motifs (the Kashmir shawl being a major image) as a central means of figuring both country and narrative construction.¹⁴

In the international trading of shawls between nineteenth-century Europe and India it is interesting to note how the particular figurative style such as seen on the ‘Godfrey’ shawl, was ‘edited out’ in favour of neutral patterns such as the famous ‘paisley’. This motif is characterised by a pear-shaped ovoid form (butsa), looped over at the narrower end, and filled with tiny vegetal details. A traditional border pattern for pashmina garments (mainly for men in India), this ‘paisley’ motif took over the whole shawl cloth, especially in the more elaborate French adaptations of the design for women’s fashion.

As early as 1784 Warren Hastings was commissioning Kashmiri shawls for his wife. The fashion for shawls had been led by the Empress Josephine of France, following the ‘discovery’ of such things during the French Egyptian campaign of 1798-1802. European weavers determined to copy the marvellous fabrics. They were unable to domesticate wool-producing goats, so a combination of sheep wool and silk was adopted as a substitute where trade could not supply the genuine ‘cashmere’ goat fibre.

The town of Paisley in Scotland assumed the lead in European production with the development of a capacity to coordinate the weft of five different shuttles in 1812. France developed the Jacquard loom from 1818 and the British adopted it in the 1830s. Indian weavers soon followed suit and worked with French pattern books at their side by the 1840s. So we see a fascinating two-way series of changes in fabric, in design, and in the social functions of the articles produced. As the Western European market became flooded with variations of the ‘Kashmir’ shawl, high fashion surrendered it to general popularity, and it became de rigueur for a working-class woman to have one as a sign of respectability.¹⁵

Many of these women migrated to colonies abroad, where the shawl then became also a symbol of the ‘civilised comforts of home’. The Paisley shawl (Fig. 17) exhibited in Fabrics of Change belonged to Jessie Inglis Wylie Mackie, wife of a milliner in Kilmarnock, Scotland, and great grandmother of the present owner, Diana Wood Conroy. The shawl may have been a wedding present, and found its way, through Jessie’s Mackie’s daughter Ida, to Australia.
The strategic and highly conceptual works of Australian artist Narelle Jubelin allude to the web of interchanges between Scotland and Australia, and their close association with unvoiced peoples of the British Empire. Her petit point rendition of a detail of the Paisley shawl, presented in an ornate Japanese frame, highlights the reverberations that the immense journeys of empire had on private lives and intimate objects (Fig. 18). The focused intensity of the embroidery process mirrors her close scrutiny of the systems of trade and its hierarchies.

The two pieces now in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, were exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow in an installation called Dead Slow, and in the Sydney Biennale of 1992/93. The title Dead Slow comes from traffic notices around ports and is the last category before Stop on the steering wheels of P & O liners. Contacts and journeys between such distant countries - Australia, Japan, India, Scotland - are slow, reflected in the processes of the hand which are immensely time bound and deliberate.

Her embroideries are conceived as components of installations combined with precisely considered found objects. For example, Dead Slow displayed copies of Thérèse de Dillmont's Encyclopédie of Needlework, which appeared in English, French, Italian, Spanish and German around 1900, and was used by women across the British Empire. Major themes of Jubelin's work since 1988 have involved trade and exchange and a postcolonial rethinking of the relationship to the 'primitive'.

The uses of tapa and ideas of costume in the Pacific were intimately linked with the history of conversion to Christianity. The second petit point embroidery of Narelle Jubelin (Fig. 20) is a rendition of the hemmed linen edge of an Irish linen tablecloth. Made by Miriam Babui and Antoinette Pilanei, Tiwi Designs, Bathurst Island Sacred Heart Mission, Northern Territory, in 1974, this cloth shows a similar pattern of missionary activity in the history of Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia. At Nguiu, Bathurst Island, the Catholic nuns trained Tiwi women in the home making skills of mending and sewing (Fig. 19).

Across the continents of imperial trade, from the sub-continent, to the Pacific Islands and Australia it is clear from all the examples illustrated that the meanings of fabrics may be slippery, changing according to the historical circumstances, geographical context and even an individual genealogy. As Australia broke free of the British motherland it has developed new relationships to museum holdings of South-east Asian, Pacific and Aboriginal textiles. A fresh understanding of the layers of fabrics at the crossing-points of history may reposition the Australian consciousness to a different understanding of a shared colonial past.
Fabricating Change: Bathurst and Melville Islands, Northern Territory

DIANA WOOD CONROY

In the rich storehouses of the South Australian Museum at Netley Park in Adelaide I found an old card listing Articles of Native Workmanship in which Materials of Civilization have been Used from a museum case of about 1900. Remote Aboriginal communities from Central and Northern Australia, including the Tiwi Islands, had incorporated European beads, cotton cloth, pearl buttons, wool and string, even laundry blue, with zest and style in the making of traditional objects.

The Tiwi people, with their highly distinctive ceremonies and art, had had sporadic contacts with Indonesia, and with Europeans since 1636. The Tiwi islands north west of Darwin in the Northern Territory came to the notice of the British Government as a possible major trading centre which might establish British control over competing Dutch and French interests. Without making any treaty or settlement with the Tiwi, the British constructed Fort Dundas in the Apsley Straits in 1834. The Tiwi were hostile to the isolated convict settlement and the British, almost starving and depleted in numbers, departed in 1829. No Europeans lived on the Tiwi islands until the 1890s, when the buffalo hunter Joe Cooper managed to come to an agreement with the Tiwi.

In 1905 DM Sayers, an Adelaide merchant, had collected the rare textiles of bark and fibre now in the collection of the South Australian Museum, presumably from Cooper. These artefacts were essential to the burial and initiation ceremonies of Bathurst and Melville Islands. Even at this time, in 1905, before the permanent presence of white people on the islands, the unnamed makers of the ceremonial art used the new trade materials of cloth and beads.

As I handled and scrutinised the objects in the South Australian Museum I felt there had been a creative pleasure in the new textures which closely corresponded to the primary
characteristics of local materials. For example, the brilliant red ‘‘jiquity’’ seeds in the compelling ornament held in the hand or around the neck while dancing (Fig. 21) are from *Abras sp.* A native plant of many tropical regions. Its brilliant red and black seeds were also called ‘‘crab’s eyes’’ and are reminiscent of beads. The ‘‘biting bag’’ (Fig. 23) mirrors the ceremonial goose feather ball (pakunanus and tikwantu) held in the mouth and around the neck during funerary ceremonies. Here the ‘‘biting bag’’, twined with fine thread and decorated with a pearl button combines tradition with the materials of European trade without changing the overall significance of the object. (It is important to remember that the European pearl shell industry, fundamental to the British textile industry from the 1870s, was stimulated through shell traded by Aboriginal people to the exploring party of A.C. Gregory, near Nicol Bay in Western Australia.) The armband or pammajii (Fig. 22) shows how the red ochre fibre may be duplicated by red wool, calico, or glass beads without losing its intrinsic resonance.

The synthesis of new materials with old followed the patterns of language. Charles Osborne, a linguistic anthropologist of the Tiwi language, wrote that it took him ‘‘years to unravel its intricacies’’. He described the structures of Tiwi language as a ‘‘polysynthetic mainly agglutinative language’’ where all the elements of a sentence may be combined in a single highly complex morphological structure. As phrases can be added to the Tiwi language to express the needs of the present moment, so could new materials be an exciting variant without in any way undermining longstanding traditions.

Bathurst and Melville Islands have a haunting colonial history; an episode of British failure. Thirty years or so after the settlement of Sydney in the 1790s, the British decided to occupy Melville Island with a fortified settlement. Fort Dundas was founded in 1824 in order to maintain British dominance over Europe’s trade with Asia, particularly the rapidly increasing markets for textiles and ironware. The British thought that the Dutch and French might occupy northern Australia in competition for the same trade. Strategically, Melville and Bathurst Islands were placed between the Australian mainland and Timor, a major sea route, it was thought, to Sydney.

Sir Gordon Bremer in 1824 made a fascinating report of material culture, including baskets:

The tomb of a native being raised around with trees seven or eight feet high, some of which were carved with stone or shell, and further ornamented by rings of wood, also carved. On the tops of these poles were placed the waddies of the deceased. ...Around the grave were several little baskets made of fan leaf palm, which from their small size we thought had been placed there by the children of the departed.
Major Campbell recorded figures painted on walls of bark shelters in 1826 on Melville Island:

‘But one in particular being neatly and regularly done all over, resembled the cross bars of a cell.’

This first description of Tiwi art by Europeans concern objects made of bark and palm leaf fibre. How telling that the walls of the bark shelter were ‘neatly and regularly done all over’, showing characteristics of Tiwi painting that have continued to develop.

Paperbark comes off the tree almost in the form of readymade soft cloth, and easily bent into a multitude of forms. Fibre in many guises foreshadowed the interest in trade materials shown by the Tiwi, long before Europeans were established on the islands. Some of the oldest Tiwi items in the South Australian Museum, collected by Sayers in 1905, are paperbark skirts or aprons worn by Tiwi women.

White visitors such as Baldwin Spencer in 1912 observed that these skirts were held in place while dancing in ceremonies [Fig. 25]. The pubic belt of threads spun of human hair rubbed with red ochre and heavy with wax is a compelling costume, one of the extraordinary ceremonial ornaments specific to the Tiwi Islands [Fig. 24].

In 1996 the Tiwi Literature Production Centre with Donald Kantilla and Fiona Kerinna produced a bi-lingual text of a ‘Young Tiwi Women’s ceremony’, showing how fibre artefacts are essential to the ceremony. The old customs were re-formulated in the new written Tiwi, and in English translation:

‘In the morning they paint her body and the father of the girl goes and puts a feather head-dress (pirmimit) on her head, and a goose feather ball (palparyamunu) around her neck. Her aunts put an arm band (pamijeni) and hair belt (sautirima) on her. Then the grandmother will go and put bark around her. They smash the red ochre, white ochre. They get a stick and paint her up all over her body with a lot of care. They put a necklace around her and dress her up.’

Textile artefacts in this account represent transformative moments, such as puberty when a girl becomes a woman, or death, when the spirit passes to the other world. Painting the
human skin with signs and patterns, ornamenting the body with woven armbands and head-dresses, highlights and separates the ceremonial moment from the everyday.

Objects and images in Aboriginal societies may be closely linked to chants or speech. In the actual process of making the relevant art may sing the relevant story, so that the myth or song is indissolubly tied to the purely visual aspects of the object. 

The four wooden ‘message sticks’ or parasita from the South Australian Museum of Melbourne Island were collected and described by the anthropologist Charles Mountford in the course of the American Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948. He tells how the inscribed patterns communicated requests for supplies and invitations to participate in ceremonies.

The ovoid message stick (Fig. 26) was sent to Melville Island. The central line is the Tjipiru River, with the feathered lines indicating the palms from which baskets are made while the dark ochre blocks are reefs of black and yellow rocks on the bank of the river.

The messenger who brought the sticks to a particular group also communicated by voice. Two senior men, Tjamalampua and Malulemunita, commented on the message stick (Fig. 27). They told Mountford that its bands of diagonal cross hatching indicated it was sent to members of the ironwood totemic group on Buchanan Island near Nguiu to tell them of an impending funerary ceremony. The inscribed lines stood for living and dead paperbark trees, yams with jungle trees and roots.

The distinctive modelled stick (Fig. 28), wrote Mountford, has designs 'that were thought out by the artist as he walked along the sandy beach near our camp'. The lines represented 'waves breaking on the beach' and patterns of shallow gutters formed by fresh water seeping from a lagoon'.

The message stick carved with a waist (Fig. 27) was sent to people on the Coburg Peninsula on the mainland, inviting them to a ceremony. The patterns stand for various men and women involved in the ceremonies, and for the shores of the Coburg peninsula.

Subtle variations in the organisation of lines had specific meaning in these accounts, differing from a proto-written language in the linking of marks to an abstract idea of country and kin within a span of time. Both paperbark and the palms used for making baskets are referred to as significant features in the message sticks. The protein abstract patterns of contemporary Tiwi Design fabric designs seen in the blanket piece by Osmond Kantilla (Fig. 30) demonstrate the continuing vitality of the totemic ‘writing’ of significant features of country. Such patterns can also be painted on the body, making familiar personalities almost unrecognisable in ceremonies. Osmond Kantilla, like Bede Tungatulam (a senior artist in Tiwi Design in 2003) employs the silk-screen technique to great effect in representing patterns that would have been recognisable to the early British observers in the 1820s.
Fig. 32 [left]
Artist Unknown, Bathurst/Melville Island, Australia
Message stick
Carved and burnt wood c. 20cm
© South Australian Museum, AG535
Permission: Tiwi Land Council

Fig. 33 [right]
Oxenard Karmilla, Bathurst/Melville Island, Australia
Blanket, c. 2001
Linen pigment screenprinted on fabric 229cm x 356cm
© Oxenard Karmilla. Courtesy of Tiwi Orangmi, Ngiru

34 FABRICS OF CHANGE — TRADING IDENTITIES
The articulation between tradition and contemporary non-Indigenous society continued in the late 1990s. Tiwi artists Maryanne Mungapatj and Pedro Wonesamirri visited Adelaide to draw the Charles Mountford collection of Tiwi art in the South Australian Museum in 2005. This major collection was inaccessible and unknown to contemporary Tiwi. The artists made drawings and subsequently prints of bakam (funerary) and ililama (initiation) ceremony objects with the Australian Print Workshop in Melbourne (Fig. 31). The artists sought not only to record the older forms, but also to reclaim and revision the past.14 The print represents many ceremonial armbands and ornaments, a hair skirt, a bark basket and a message stick. Their response to the collection was in a very different mode to my precise drawings and descriptions of the 1905 artefacts made in the tradition of documenting material culture through the conventions of archaeological drawing (Fig. 32).

A pervasive influence on the immediate Tiwi past, on textiles and the wider culture had been the establishment of the Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island in 1911. The Mission was set up 'for the moral and social betterment of Aborigines', and 'to preserve Tiwi customs and culture', at a site at the head of the Apsley Strait that was chosen by Father (later Bishop) Gsell. He worked with the South Australian Government, with the support of Baldwin Spencer and others, to have most of Bathurst Island declared an Aboriginal Reserve.15 ‘Social betterment’ included learning the processes of civilised domesticity for Aboriginal women, as shown in the illustration of Tiwi women hemming Irish cloths printed with Tiwi designs (Fig. 21). Mission education tried to counter the pull of nomadic traditions and endeavoured to offer the Tiwi settled routines of domesticity and work at the same time as Christian conversion.

In 1969 Sede Tunggatalum and Eddie Punaratameei, with Giovanni Tipungwuti, started Tiwi Design, a silk-screen textile workshop. Madeleine Clear, a dedicated art teacher provided the organisational structure through the Catholic Mission on Nguiu, Bathurst Island. The textile workshop of the 1970s was set up to encourage a fresh approach to traditional patterns, allowing income into the island from the organised sale of artwork. At this time it was thought that Aboriginal arts were seriously threatened by contact with Europeans, and that the original purity of an unsullied tribal culture was being polluted by non-Aboriginal influences. Any mixtures of imagery were not ‘art’. This was about to change. The Papunya dot painting movement with Geoffrey Bardon was becoming prominent at the same time as the emergence of Tiwi Design.16

The influential anthropologist Jane Goodale investigated the cultural context of Tiwi creativity in 1973 with observations that have a bearing on the continued growth of Tiwi Design in 2004. She analysed the central position of art making for funerary ceremonies as a duty and obligation to kin, and an opportunity to achieve success and commendation.
from a wide audience. Artists were paid by the organisers of the ceremony during the last stages of the ritual. Such traditional models that emphasised the social integration of art and its exchange value, have allowed Tiwi Design to flourish. Jennifer Biddle has acutely observed that the rise of acrylic painting in Central Australia from 1972 turned traditional knowledge into the terms of trade, a positive basis for economic and social viability. 16

Tiwi Design in 2004 owns a commodious well-organised building, with more than fifteen artists working there in every medium, not only textiles. The piece by Osmond Kantilla (Fig. 30) from the Tiwi Design workshop shows a sophisticated and vibrant ‘body painting’ pattern overlaying twill and brocade fabric. The emblematic form of the blanket is repeated across Fabrics of Change, echoed in the Button blanket from North west Canada [Fig. 42], and in Kay Lawrence’s blankets entitled Folded [Fig. 44].

'The materials of civilization' documented in the South Australian Museum archive have become part of Tiwi culture. The armband with glass beads collected in 1905 (Fig. 33) exemplifies a fluid approach to the use of materials at the beginning of white settlement, an attitude still in place nearly a hundred years later. The persistent older forms of communicating pattern and form through myth and ceremony inform contemporary Tiwi art with a vibrant inventiveness.

Fig 33
Artist unknown, Bathurst Island, Australia
Ceremonial arm ornament
Four rows of bound cane with human hair, wax, ochre
3.5 cm wide, 13.5 cm diameter
String with 28 glass beads, 12.2 cm long
© South Australian Museum. 497033
Permission Tiwi Land Council
Stories in Bead and Buckskin, Button and Blanket

ANNE COLLETT

Hidden away in the recesses of basement archives in the Australian Museum in Sydney are intriguing textile examples of the permeability of borders between the imagined and the real that show how fact and fiction intersect and even merge to create the myths by which we come to understand ourselves and others. One of the most exciting discoveries amongst the First Nations' collection was a pair of delicately embroidered sheepskin moccasins described as Minnehaha's Moccasins (Fig. 34). For those, like myself, whose lives are fired by literary imagination, Minnehaha's Moccasins are a fascinating example of cultural negotiation and translation – both in terms of their materiality and the story that accompanies their long and unlikely journey from northern to southern hemispheres. Made by indigenous peoples in the New Brunswick area (M'kmaq and Mi'kmaq), the moccasins' material and design are indicative of cultural adaptation: made from sheepskin rather than deer or moose hide, embroidered in glass bead rather than shell bead or porcupine quill, featuring floral rather than traditional indigenous iconography. As material object, Minnehaha's Moccasins are a perfect example of the "fabrics of change"; the story attached to them in the form of museum correspondence and documentation is a wonderful example of "trading identities".

Minnehaha is the heroine of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha, published in the mid-nineteenth century. The poem was enormously popular as a recitation piece throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth; so popular in fact that its heroine's name, Minnehaha, entered the vernacular as a term for an Indian's wife. So Minnehaha's Moccasins are of course not the personal property of the fictional woman of Longfellow's poem, but are nevertheless associated with the fabled Minnehaha by language and myth – thus the worlds of fact and fiction are merged in the specification and
documentation of a material object that partakes of both indigenous and settler, traditional and modern cultures.

The hybridity of these souvenirs is echoed in the story of Hiawatha as told by Longfellow. His poem is based primarily upon legends and stories of the Ojibwa people, collected by Jane and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and published as *The Myth of Hiawatha* in 1856. Thus, in Longfellow’s poem, Hiawatha is a member of the Ojibwa nation. A mainstay hero in every sense of the term, he demonstrates physical and political prowess such that he becomes a leader of his people and a peacemaker among the warring Indian nations.

Moreover, enraptured by the lovely Minnehaha, daughter of the Dacotah people, he goes against the advice and wishes of his elders by marrying outside his tribe, thus further cementing peaceful relations between Indian nations:

> After many years of warfare,  
> Many years of strife and bloodshed,  
> There is peace between the Ojibways  
> And the tribe of the Dacotahs.  
> Thus continued Hiawatha,  
> And then added, speaking slowly,  
> That this peace may last forever,  
> And our hands be clasped more closely,  
> And our hearts be more united,  
> Give me as my wife this maiden,  
> Minnehaha, Laughing Water,  
> Loveliest of Dacotah women!  
> [Part X: Hiawatha’s Wooling]

Longfellow’s poem is romantic, heroic, exotic. Its portrayal of a tamed and benevolent Indian peoples who are called upon by Hiawatha to take up the new religion and the God of the Europeans offered the reassurance of Indian good-will to the white settler population.

Longfellow represents Hiawatha as the peacemaker between Red and White nations. He is like and not like the ‘real’ Hiawatha, who was born into the Onondaga nation in the mid-sixteenth century. This historical Hiawatha was instrumental in the complex and delicate negotiation of the Five Nations League of the Iroquois that became known as the Iroquois Confederacy. His heroic and indeed mythic status in *First Nations’* history is based upon his vision of peace that resulted, after much courageous and diplomatic negotiation, in the creation of constitutional diplomatic relationship between Indian nations – of which the wampum belt is emblematic. Hiawatha is the founder of a powerful wampum treaty, as documented in his name that translates as “he who seeks [or makes] the wampum belt”, and the many stories of his journey to negotiate a lasting peace.

One story tells of his long journey through the depths of a vast forest, out of which he emerges, weary but undaunted, to the vision of a great lake whose surface is covered with white ducks. Startled by his approach, the ducks take flight, thus revealing a multitude of beautiful pearly white shells that cover the lake bottom. These gather and threads on to lengths of string to present as gifts to the nations with whom he seeks to negotiate a peace. These same shells, known as wampum, will be woven into a belt of contract that symbolises the powerful union of the Five Nations. The ‘Hiawatha Belt’, given by the Onondaga Council chiefs in 1838 to the New York State Museum, and recently returned to the Council of the Six Nations in 1989, features a beaded design of white squares and a central pine tree that are set into a deep purple beaded background. Four Indian nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga and Seneca) represented by the squares, are joined by white wampum beads to the peace-making nation, the Onondaga – represented by the central Pine Tree under which the five nations’ hatchets of war were ceremonially buried. The league would later incorporate the southern Tuscarora people and became known from the beginning of the eighteenth century as the Six Nations Confederacy – a powerful indigenous political unit whose members’ capacity for skilful negotiation with the European traders and settlers became legendary and is recorded in many of the surviving documents from the period of ‘first contact’.

The Hiawatha Belt now held by the Council is not sixteenth century in origin, but this does not undermine its legal and political significance. Belts deteriorated and were reworked over time, their cultural significance retold and archived in the memory of the people. With each reworking of belt and story, text and textile, fact and fiction merged over time, much like the multiple versions of Hiawatha’s peace-making journey. Although of great symbolic importance to the Iroquois, Hiawatha’s mythic discovery of wampum shell has little archaeological or linguistic credibility. The term wampum or wampumeg comes from one of the Algonquin languages of New England and refers to beads carved from marine shells of whelk and quahog harvested from the coastal waters. The shells were shaped and drilled into white and purple beads respectively and either strung or woven into belts for ceremony and ritual purpose. Traded inland, to the Iroquois among others, the belts were both private and public property, owned and exchanged or traded by warriors and chiefs, by families and nations.

With European contact, negotiation between First Nations and the settler-invaders increasingly centred upon the exchange value of wampum. As early as 1643 Roger Williams recorded that six white or three purple beads were the equivalent of an English penny.6
Linked with the expansion in the fur trade, by the 1750s thousands of fathoms of wampum are recorded as having passed from the Dutch to the Iroquois and hundreds of wampum belts were made up and exchanged as contractual agreements. Although glass beads were introduced by the Europeans in the mid-seventeenth century, the Iroquois insisted on the use of ‘authentic’ wampum in the makeup of treaty belts, maintaining the value of the wampum both in terms of contract and currency. Wampum was legal tender – as bead-coin and as ‘word’. The belts took the form of a legal text, able to be read or interpreted like a written document. Wampum belts in the keeping of museums continue to have significant cultural value and political clout. As treaty agreements they carry the symbolic and historical weight of cultural continuity for peoples of the First Nations.

Wampum is in fact very sensitive material, both physically and politically. For this reason ‘traditional’ wampum is rarely loaned across political or environmental borders. The belt illustrated is from the Museum of Victoria, acquired in 1879, and thought to be Huron in origin. Although it is not a traditional belt, either in terms of material or design, it is a wonderful example of cultural adaptation (Fig. 35). Crafted in the style of a cowboy belt with metal buckle, it is a fashion item rather than an object of political significance. Yet the glass beadwork on leather aligns it with a history of cultural translation – the politics of which is never absent if unobtrusive.

The politics of cultural translation and adaptation are exemplified in the fascinating story of the performance poet, Miss E. Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake. Born in the latter half of the nineteenth century, she inherited the English/Iroquois alliance, symbolised by wampum belt and head. Her great-grandfather, Jacob, was baptised in the Christian faith and given the name ‘Johnson’ by Sir William Johnson (superintendent of Indian Affairs in the mid to late eighteenth century) who acted as his godfather. As a warrior of the War of 1812, her grandfather, John Smoke Johnson, was very proud of Mohawk fealty to the British. Fluent in his native tongue and English, he acted as an intermediary between Iroquois and English cultures. It is to her great-grandfather that Pauline owes the Mohawk name, Tekahionwake, which translates as ‘double wampum’.

The poet-performer who would become synonymous with the formative years of the Canadian nation and a distinctive Canadian literature, grew up on the Six Nations Reserve in Brantford, Ontario. Her grandfather possessed a vast repertoire of Mohawk song and legend, and a detailed knowledge of the ritual of wampum as gift and document. Pauline’s father, George Johnson, was a hereditary chief on the Six Nations Council and assistant to the Reserve’s Superintendent.

In the family tradition, Pauline Johnson was actively involved in the contentious but courageous work of cultural translation. As a woman of Red and White descent, the staged
performance of her poetry was both a personal and a political act of cultural mediation. In poetical, dramatic and comic form, she staged the history of relations between Red and White peoples to capacity crowds in small-town halls and the concert venues of the larger cities from New Brunswick to British Columbia. In 1894 her success allowed her to undertake a trip to London to enhance her stage and writing career. Here she spent much of her time on and off stage attempting to correct prejudiced, misguided or ill-informed opinions of the 'White man' on the savagery of the 'Red Indian'. Pointing out to her audience that Hiawatha was unfortunately not "the god that dear dead Longfellow painted him, but the greatest statesman Indian civilization ever produced"; she compared his political vision to that of Napoleon.

Pauline Johnson's story begins, at least in part, with a love of Longfellow's poetry and, like the famous Hiawatha, she was an astute politician who realised that ingrained attitudes and prejudices might best be attacked with the cunning of diplomacy, a persuasive oratory, and the civilised face and voice of 'culture'. Like Longfellow's poem, both the text and textile of her carefully constructed and performed persona, were a bricolage - a mix and a merging of cultures. Pauline Johnson modelled much of her poetry and her 'Indian' buckskin costume upon Longfellow's text and corresponding artistic representation of Minnehaha. As the daughter of a Mohawk father and English-Canadian mother, her theatrical Indian costume was a fabrication especially designed to stage a performance that was maidenly and erotic, traditional and modern, didactic and entertaining. The costume is an eclectic mix of buckskin fringing, bear claw necklace, scalp, silver brooches, rabbit pelts, red blanket, the occasional eagle feather, wampum belt and beaded moccasins. Each item has a story to tell, each piece of the costume being borrowed or given by friends, acquaintances and patrons from both Red and White cultures (Fig. 37).

Of particular significance to this story of cross cultural connection is the wearing of the wampum belt - identifiable as a 'league belt' by the pattern of purple diagonal stripes that represent the rafter of the Six Nations Council house. This wampum belt, similar to that held by the Onondaga Chief Joseph Snow, in Hale's photograph of 1871 (Fig. 36), is symbolic not only of Pauline's allegiance to her Iroquois heritage, but also of her desire to enter into peaceful treaty negotiation with her White audience. The publication of Pauline Johnson's poetry under the title of The White Wampum showed her desire to renegotiate a peaceful treaty between Red and White cultures. The title refers to one of the earliest treaty agreements between indigenous peoples and Europeans, the famous Five Peoples' wampum. Two straight rows of purple beads woven into a background of white shell beads symbolise the vessels of Red and White nations that will travel together but separately down a river of peaceful community. This wampum belt envisages a confederacy of nations similar to that entered into
by the Six Nations in the sixteenth century. It is a contract in which power sharing and an equality of relationship is established as a fundamental principle of 'settlement'. This contract was not honoured, and Pauline Johnson was one of the earliest First Nations' artist to make a claim for remembrance, restitution and renewal of contract and culture.

Working with wampum and modern materials, the contemporary First Nations artist, Nadia Myre crafts a political and aesthetic re-visions of 'Two Row' that recalls the name Tskhononvapit and 'double wampum'. Like Pauline Johnson, Nadia Myre is a woman of mixed descent – Algonkin and French Canadian – and her personal and political art re-visions the past and future of Red/White relationship. Two 'belts', originally mounted on opposite walls, are a woven sculpture of flexibility and solidity, of hope and loss, of tradition and modernity: they reflect upon and speak to each other. Monument to Two Row, Revised is a wampum belt, mounted on canvas art encased in a shiny silver aluminium frame (Figs 38 and 39).

In its beautiful solidity, the belt insists upon remembrance of contractual agreement between nations. It is the original belt given twenty-first century form; thus an historical continuum is created in which remembrance of the past does not infer consignment to the past.

Its companion, Portrait as a River, Divided, is a much darker piece. (Fig. 40) Fabricated from paint.
on canvas and imitation sinew, this belt is skeletal in appearance—it's two rows reminiscent of the human spine. This is the stilled moment of disjunction and rupture felt on 'contact'. It is a sculpted history of Red/White relations, a portrait of divided and damaged national community, and a poignant self-portrait of the suffering of the children of mixed descent.

Sometimes the creation of a communal work of art is an effective means of reducing the isolation that intensifies personal suffering; a public sharing of grief and anger in a creative act can have a rejuvenating effect on individuals and communities. The pages of Indian Act (Fig. 41) are a small part of fifty-six pages of a communal beading project. Like the belts, this work is of monumental size and is similarly charged with the dual purpose of remembrance and renewal. The (Canadian) Indian Act, created over the course of the nineteenth century, legally defines 'Indian' status, inclusive of land rights, political rights, educational rights, religious and cultural rights—many of which the Act denied. The Act was also used to forcibly remove First Nations children from their families in a manner similar to the terrible impact of white assimilation policy on what has become known as 'the stolen generation' of indigenous people in Australia. Reading the Act is an act of resistance and political solidarity that takes possession of the Act whilst simultaneously making mock of its status as a document of authority.

Refusing the shame of cultural denigration, this creative communal act, initiated and orchestrated by Nadia Myre and Rhonda Meier, is an act similar to that exemplified in the revival of the 'button blanket' and its associated ritual after the ban on the Potlatch ceremony (officially made law in 1884) was revoked in 1951. The Potlatch is a ceremonious gathering of indigenous communities (often taking the form of a feast) in which hereditary property (inclusive of naming rights) is transferred and communal status is conferred and re-affirmed in a ritualised manner. For many First Nations peoples of the upper west coast of North America, a decorative ceremonial robe, or 'button blanket', was integral to this occasion. The blankets began to make a re-appearance not long after the Potlatch ban was lifted so that by the 1970s the resurgence of interest in the 'button blanket' led to a revival of associated custom and ritual.¹⁰

The robe on display (Fig. 42) is the work of the Kwa'kwaka'wakw ( Kwak'waka'wakw) people of Cape Mudge, British Columbia. Created from a check wool blanket over which red felt and black corduroy have been sewn to maximise dramatic effect, the black panel is delineated with white glass buttons and decorated in a multi-coloured beaded floral pattern, whilst the buttons featured on the borders of the red section are mother-of-pearl. An eclectic mix of old and new, this robe is evidence of an innovative indigenous response to cultural and material trade, and like so many of the artefacts discovered in the archives of Australian museums it has a curious story to tell.
From the late eighteenth century, Hudson Bay blankets were traded for furs, that, over the course of the nineteenth century, gradually replaced the sea otter and cedar bark traditionally used to fashion ceremonial robes of the west-coast nations. Like wampum, the Hudson Bay blanket became a form of ‘Indian coin’; and, like the move from hand-carved wampum shell to the metal-drilled manufacture of wampum, manufactured pearl-buttons (from Japan, China and Russia) replaced the scarce abalone shell and the labour intensive process of collecting, cleaning and drilling dentalium shell. The robes that became known as ‘button blankets’ were typically made of a dark-blue wool blanket to which red-flannel appliqué was sewn and the design outlined or emphasized by pearl-white buttons.

The robe on exhibit does not feature the usual family or personal crest but a floral pattern that may well have been specifically designed for non-ceremonial use. Originally part of the costume and regalia of a ‘Red Indian Performance Troupe’ advertised to appear in the Sydney Royal Easter Show of 1911, the robe was acquired by the Australian Museum in 1912 as part of a collection of ‘valuable Red-Indian curios’. Dubbed as ‘Genuine Red Indians’, the troupe was comprised of Kwakiutl’swallow men from Cape Mudge, Vancouver Island, who were solicited by American businessman, Colonel John Stacey to tour Australia under the brand of the ‘A.A. Amusement Company’. The venture appears to have failed for financial reasons after the Easter show, and it is unclear what happened to the troupe members. What remains is the museum record of correspondence between Sydney accountant Frank Wilkes, to whom Stacey sold the collection, and Robert Ethridge, the curator of the Australian Museum who purchased the collection of fifty-six Pacific Northwest Coast Indian artefacts (five items of which have recently been repatriated) as part of a brief to “create a representative collection of as many of the world’s ‘disappearing’ cultures as possible.”

The survival of the ‘button blanket’ in contemporary form attests to the strength of cultural traditions that refuse to disappear, but adapt and reinvent themselves through the determination and imagination of artists like Nadia Myre, Pauline Johnson and Kay Lawrence. Inspired by the common colonial currency of blanket and button shared by Canada and Australia, Australian textile artist, Kay Lawrence has created Folded: all I have is a voice to underrife the fold of the sky, a quote from poet W.H. Auden September 1, 1939. The image of a skull, derived from a medieval Italian mosaic, has been worked in black and white pearl buttons (Figs 43–44, 45). Like Nadia Myre’s work, these blankets are a memorial not only to melancholy histories, but also to a shared passion for the luminous pearl shell. Both European and Aboriginal people valued shell for its ornamental qualities in costume, and traded it widely. The pearling industry was built on the knowledge of Aboriginal divers from the 1850s, providing vast quantities of shell to the textile industry in Manchester.

Fig. 43
Artist: Unidentified. Kwakiutl’swallow (Haida), Cape Mudge, B.C., Canada Kangall Diikee Haidi, acquired 1912.
2 layered red dot and black conodynamic Blanket, glass bead embroidery, mother of pearl buttons. 1900s + 1920s
© Australian Museum, Nature focus. 515542

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For Aboriginal communities, as well as First Nations people, the blanket is emblematic. Blankets were allocated by European settlers, with flour, tea, sugar and tobacco, to people driven off the land and unable to sustain their traditional and independent livelihood. Kay Lawrence speaks of the folded blankets as 'a memorial and a sign of an unequal process of exchange'. Yet although emblematic of human and cultural loss, pearl buttons and blankets are also generative of light and warmth. They attest to the creative and regenerative possibility of material and aesthetic trade.

Artists like Nadia Myre and Pauline Johnson-Tekahionewake see that change is inevitable, but that culture does not have to disappear. The artistic act - ironic and innovative, reflective and responsive - works toward an historical continuity that documents past moments of rupture and disjunction whilst insisting upon imaginative projection into the future. In the hands of the artist, the fabrics of change are life-affirming.
Assembling the Fragments

DOROTHY JONES

As the Bayeux Tapestry commemorates significant historical events, so Australia’s Parliament House Embroidery records European settlement until 1900 along with a representation of the land itself. This is a work created almost entirely by women — members of Embroiderers’ Guilds nationwide—but two people played particularly significant roles. Dorothy Hyslop of the Australian Capital Territory Guild first suggested the project in 1980 as Australian embroiderers’ gift to the nation and her commitment, vision and energy were responsible both for its inception and for bringing it to fruition. South Australian artist, Kay Lawrence, was selected as designer in 1984 and the completed embroidery embodies her perception of the land and its transformation by Europeans.

In accordance with her design brief to ‘examine the concept of the Australian land and its impact upon the human values and lives of its inhabitants’, Lawrence’s notes list the work’s major topics: ‘The Land’ with both Aboriginal and European responses to it; ‘Imposing European sensibility’; ‘Exploiting natural resources’ and finally ‘Holding a balance between positive/negative effects’. Consequently the embroidery presents a double narrative. One is a familiar story of pioneers establishing themselves in the country, facing adversity and building a nation. The other recounts loss, with Aboriginal people’s dispossession of their land, native species being crowded out by European farming methods, and the harmful introduction of exotic plants and animals — subject matter some of the embroiderers found disconcerting. Celebration, therefore, mingles with sadness. Lawrence’s design also contains a strong literary component. Like the Latin commentary across the top of the eleventh century Bayeux Tapestry, a range of written texts appears, mostly at the base of the design, but the entire work demands to be read section by section and detail by detail. Sixteen metres long and located in a gallery only two meters wide (Fig. 47), the embroidery...
cannot be taken in at a single glance so visitors are obliged to view it at close quarters, reading its design as they walk along.

The work’s great length represents both the span of Australian history from pre-European times until 1900, as well as the wide expanse of the continent from west to east. An image of landscape resembling a headland facing left as if looking back into the past opens the design which also closes with a similar landscape image facing right, looking out into the future. Time flows both ways beyond the boundaries of the cloth. Human figures, mostly derived from drawings, paintings and early photographs, are also incorporated into the embroidery along with representations of the land. The overall design is organised in panels, each embroidered by Guild members from a different State or Territory. The opening panel shows a landscape infused with Aboriginal presence incorporating words from writer Sam Wookagoojah, a petroglyph of an emu claw and detail from a Papunya dot painting.

Subsequent panels show Europeans marking out territory, first through various forms of mapping, and then by establishing houses and farms. One panel reveals both the settlers’ ideal, in a version of John Glover’s famous painting of a substantial stone house with blossoming garden, alongside the more ragged reality where a settler cottage, erected with great labour, stands among felled tree trunks. Another panel representing the four seasons shows more tree stumps and a row of fence posts crossing the land to declare ownership. In a reversal of European expectations, winter appears a green, gentle season while a harsh summer ravages the land with bushfires. The following section portrays European farming successfully established with stalks of golden wheat sumptuously embroidered and sheep grazing in a pastoral landscape where golden hills melt into purple haze. But such rich abundance also involves loss. To the left are vanishing fields of native Mitchell grass which the wheat has supplanted and in the bottom right-hand corner is the image of a potoroos, so detailed it might illustrate a zoological textbook, with a cross stitched over it indicating its threatened extinction.

The next panel takes up this theme indicating how Europeans introduced plant and animal pests. Images of prickly pear and Patterson’s curse outlined in black resemble botanical drawings, and represented alongside is a Sam Byrne painting of 1890s bush houses and their inhabitants completely encircled by rabbits. The final two panels show the establishment of towns with the crafts and occupations which flourished in them. A mining settlement, indicating the growth of industry, surmounts a faded, unloved landscape stitched in beige and grey and scattered with black markings which suggest rubble and detritus. Fitted beside that scene so closely that both share the same horizon is a soft green landscape with trees and shrubs, a representation of the land’s ability to endure and retain its essential character.

Despite the unexpected medium, it is entirely appropriate to construct Australian history in cloth and thread since textiles and writing are intimately connected. Generations of little girls embroidered alphabets, names and improving maxims on samplers which they often dated, transforming those which survive into a form of historical documentation. Expressions like ‘spinning a yarn’ and ‘fabricating a story’ are still current and, for centuries, paper, the principal medium of written expression, was made from cloth rags. Lengths of cloth are themselves historical indicators of former trade links between nations, revealing changes in taste and fashion. But few visitors walking along the gallery of the Great Hall to view the Parliament House Embroidery will recognise the process involved in its creation with all the careful choices of cloth, thread and stitch. In situ, the embroidery is an impressive, monumental and unified work of art. It also makes a powerful political statement, perhaps the strongest of any artwork in Parliament House. Nevertheless, its unity has developed out of
multiple fragments and close examination of how the work reached its final state reveals a continuous creative tension existing between the whole and its many parts.

The embroidery was designed to be worked as eight separate panels by Embroiderers' Guild members in each State and Territory. All this disparate activity was held in place by designer Kay Lawrence and the coordinator Anne Richards who both criss-crossed the country to discuss the embroiderers' choice of stitch, texture and colour. Transforming into embroidery a design originally executed in pen and ink, pencil and gouache proved very exciting and visits from Lawrence and Richards were augmented by exchanges of letters and audio tapes generating a mass of documentation which forms one aggregation of fragments contributing and relating to the completed work.1 Samples worked by individual Guild members to judge how they might best interpret Lawrence's images were also discussed and debated with the designer. These fragments are now widely dispersed, with some held in the Australian National Museum, others in the Australian National Library and still others in archives of the various Embroiderers' Guilds whose members stitched them.

As anyone engaged in textile production understands, fragments are precious and important. Scraps of cloth are hoarded with ends of thread and wool for possible re-use in mending or damming and also to create new fabrics as in patchwork which, by using material from worn garments may also record the past.2 The Australian Capital Territory Guild members saw the historical value of tools and process leading to the Parliament House Embroidery. The Guild deposited not only samples, but also packets of thread and bundles of the different fabrics originally considered as ground for the embroidery in the National Museum of Australia. These samples, preparatory studies for the respective panels, are in themselves miniature works of art, revealing techniques and possibilities explored in realising the overall design. Australian Capital Territory and Tasmanian embroiderers worked the samples exhibited in Fabrics of Change from the collections of the National Museum of Australia (Figs 46, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55).

The ACT Guild embroidered the opening panel with its image of tranquillity, undulating country in soft muted greens, with touches of russet, pink, brown and beige (Fig. 50). The samples show blends of colour ranging through green, pale pink, pale blue, lilac and even vivid apricot as individual embroiderers test the effect of one colour laid upon another and the way colour is modified by different stitches and textures (Figs 46, 48, 49). Here is a description of embroidering the Aboriginal petroglyph:

The section was worked entirely in wool, often two colours of thread in one needle. Some of the watercolour and crayon shadings were especially difficult to achieve. Shades of blue-grey ranging to pink, apricot and orange were worked in straight stitches to give the background the appearance of a rough, flaky rock surface. Cretan stitch was used to depict the embedded emu claw.4

Rich combinations of colour give these samples a jewelled look in comparison to the Tasmanian ones which are largely monochromatic, though every bit as intricate and delicate (Figs 51, 52).

In the completed embroidery, this panel with images of pioneer houses and their builders is about establishing home and, stylistically it evokes pen and ink sketches and photography (Fig. 53). John Glover's painting of house and garden is reduced to bare outlines representing the abstract idea of 'home' underlying it (Figs 54 and 55). Lawrence's substitution of a monochromatic garden for the vivid colours of the original caused some disquiet. 'Never before had the embroiderers worked charcoal foliage and beige-toned...
Likewise I want a root of rhubarb... You will think me very silly but I cannot help it, for I have such a desire for something English that nothing else gives me any pleasure.
Your loving sister
Mary Thomas

The embroiderers did have significant influence in the interpretation of the design. They applied to the South Australian State Library for a photocopy of the original and successfully requested to stitch Mary Thomas’ own handwriting, rather than a transcription in Lawrence’s handwriting.

Once again, a written text is incorporated into the textile which is not only the sum of innumerable material fragments of cloth and thread but is also, in its design, a compilation of ideas and images Lawrence gathered together. She read very widely while developing her design, being particularly influenced by Geoffrey Bolton’s Spoils and Spotters.

I was surprised to discover, through my reading, the extent to which the landscape we take for granted as “natural and untouched” has been altered by human intervention – European agriculture and buildings, displacement of indigenous plants and animals, tree-cutting and so on. I eventually decided to use such changes to the land in my design as a metaphor for the development of European settlement in Australia. Then changes in the appearance of the land would symbolise the settlers’ attempts to come to terms with their environment and to use the land properly.

She also drew on other work by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers including quotations from both in the embroidery. In addition she ranged through a great variety of visual images including early photographs and paintings and drawings by former Australian artists. Out of these disparate sources, in which past memories have been given material form, she distilled her vision of the land and its initial transformation by Europeans expressed in the design.

The fragmentary studies exhibited in Fabrics of Change, with their wonderfully skilful stitching and intricately blended colours, are anonymous. The individual guild members worked for a large collaborative vision, yet the ‘mark’ of the stitching, the placement of tones and colours has a vivid subjective aspect. They contain the poignancy and possibility of the incomplete, allowing imagination to envisage other narratives, a different emphasis in the story of Australian settlement.
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

NARELLE JUBELIN was born in Australia and lives and works in Madrid, Spain. She has represented Australia in major national and international exhibitions. Major themes of Jubelin’s work since 1986 have involved trade and exchange and a postcolonial rethinking of the relationship to the ‘primitive’.

OSMOND KANTILIA is a senior designer at Tiwi Designs on Bathurst Island in the Northern Territory. His work is exhibited in galleries around Australia, and was in the Telstra Award in Darwin in 2002. The abstract patterns of contemporary Tiwi Design fabrics demonstrate the continuing vitality of the totemic ‘writing’ traditionally painted on the body, now translated to silk-screen designs for fabric.

KAY LAWRENCE is a tapestry weaver and designer of major public artworks. Her work crosses between an intimate subjectivity and a concern for the wider issues of postcolonial society in Australia. She received the Order of Australia for her work in designing the Parliament House Embroidery in Canberra.

NADIA MYRE is a contemporary First Nations artist of Algonkin and French Canadian descent. Working in Montreal, Canada, Myre crafts a political aesthetic which has been widely recognized as a potent revisioning of the Red/White relationship.

JOHN PULE, born in Niue, now lives and works in New Zealand. His paintings, prints and drawings contain lyrical patterns as well as poetic linear narratives that show a sharp awareness of ambivalence and pain in relation to western colonisation. His work links the vocabulary of traditional tapa designs with contemporary art and literature. Pule is an accomplished writer. Pule’s cross-disciplinary art has been exhibited widely in the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and the UK.
Assembling the Fragments

Dorothy Enright


In the "Theatre" section of the exhibition, the embroidery is held in the Australian National Library, MA, in 1987. Kay Lawrence has also allowed generous access to her personal collection of papers associated with the project.

Partwork has been incorporated into the panels woven by members of the Victorian Embroiderers' Guild showing the growth of towns.

Fig. 7. Araminta Kentish, Ballarat Methodist Island, Australia. Risler. The pattern of the embroidery is held in the Australian National Library, MA, in 1987. Kay Lawrence has also allowed generous access to her personal collection of papers associated with the project.

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Fig. 7, 19, 20, 21, 22


12. Several examples include the two-cased and decorated house posts impressively referred to as "theatres" photos is in the museum correspondence, which have been returned to the Kangaroo Museum and Coloured Centre at Cape Mudge, and three marks, now held by the National Library of Australia, MA, in 1987. Kay Lawrence has also allowed generous access to her personal collection of papers associated with the project.

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OBJECTS EXHIBITED

Artists unknown, Samoa
Traditional tapa cloth (kapa), c. 1930
Hand printed, 198 cm x 140 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, A1593
John Pate, New Zealand
Flax kapea / flax kapea (this former is for poi, the latter for poi juice), 1976
Lithograph 53.8 x 37.8 cm
University of Wollongong Art Collection
Courtesy of Cow Langford Gallery
Narellefabri, Australia
Basket of flax cloth from Bula Island, date c. 1870 from Fiji, in exhibition: New South Wales, 1994
Pilkington on linen with 19th-century himself, canvas, cassia, and shoes, 52.5 cm x 97 cm
Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1993, 198, 75
Narellefabri, Australia
Peri Printed on linen with 19th-century himself, cassia, and shoes, 52.5 cm x 97 cm
Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1993, 198, 75
Artists unknown, Glasgow
Runa Avila, c. 1975
Silk warp, woven with silk and linen, 29.5 cm x 18 cm
Gallieria Italiano Woven Comany
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Commemorative sash c. 1995
Two hanks of white wool, mounted to "rugs" or brooms, with writing handle, 5.5 cm x 21 cm x 5.1 cm
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Wrapped armlet, circular armlet with two bound rows, white and black, 3 mm and 4.5 mm
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council
Océane Ferrari, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Elekta, c. 2001
Iron pigment on paper 37.5 x 30 cm
University of Wollongong Art Collection
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Hair dressing basin or skirt, string-dyed, regal "shoals" (wood) and "wood" sticks, sticks of human hair, 24.5 cm x 24 cm
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Dark skirt or armlet, paperbark and human hair, 30.5 cm x 30.5 cm
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Message stick c. 1995
Curved wood with ochre
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Message stick c. 1995
Curved wood
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Message stick c. 1995
Curved and burnt wood
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Message stick c. 1995
Curved and burnt wood
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Mary Mongeaux, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Objet et in cloth hair 570 x 370 x 370 cm
University of Wollongong Art Collection
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Bathurst Mobile Island, Australia
Commemorative sash ornament
Case with human hair, 6 cm x 6 cm, 5.5 cm wide, diameter c. 5 cm
South Australian Museum, 1995
Permission from the Land Council, Ngiri
Artists unknown, Whangai Mural, North America
Miscellaneous / Miscellaneous, 1970-1990
Shiny stick and bead embroidery.
Australian Museum, Arts 1886
E. Pauline Johnson, Canada
Publicity (Aniit), 16 x 16
Castles of Ontario Collection, Toronto, 1994
Public Library, Vancouver, B.C. 1994
M. Myers, Canada
(Marcel) Inuit Art, 18 and 17, 2001
Stained cloth, dyes, hat, beaded hat, wood frigate, 49 cm x 57 cm x 57 cm
Australian Museum, 15753
Artists unknown, Kwakwada's village (Kwakiutl), Cape Mudge, B.C., Canada
49 cm x 39 cm x 19 cm
2 flayed red fish and black abalone
Elephant, glass bead embroidery, mother of pearl buttons, 39 cm x 26 cm
Australian Museum, E15753
Kay Lawrence, Australia
Billet, 2003
Installation of found and altered objects: Table, Mugs, pearl and shell buttons, cotton wide cloth (burlap)
30 x 60 x 70 cm
Australian Museum, 2000
Embroidery designs, Canberra and Turkestan, Australia
Designed by Kay Lawrence
Wood thread on linen, various sizes
National Museum of Australia,