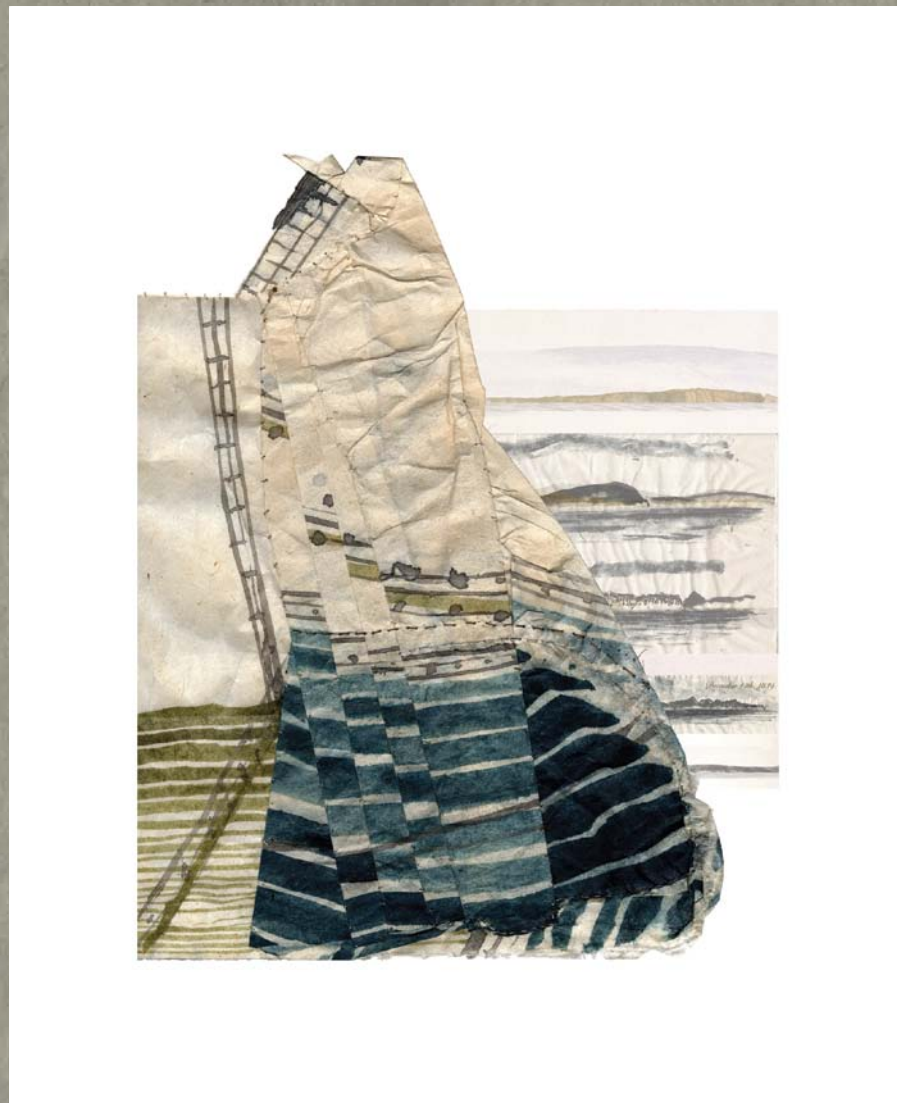




some women's apparel (from McMillan's inventory) 2011 digital print in edition of five 103 x 88 cm



one German frock (from McMillan's inventory) 2011 digital print in edition of five 108 x 88 cm



trace
jan davis

15 September – 29 October 2011



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two pea-jackets (from McMillan's inventory) 2011 digital print in edition of five 108 x 88 cm



McMillan's waistcoat 2011 digital print in edition of five 104 x 84 cm

trace: a vestige or mark left by some past event; a path or trail indicating the passage of a person or thing; to follow the tracks, the course, the history of something; to find out, to discover; to make one's way...

trace has its origins in a story which begins with an encounter between explorer Angus McMillan and a white woman in an Aboriginal camp in Gippsland in 1840. In the manner of making my own way across this historical landscape I have imagined particular events, artifacts and places from the narrative and bundled them together with my topographical knowledge of the region.

Whilst traveling southward from the Monaro Plains into Gippsland, McMillan and three companions came upon an Aboriginal camp of about twenty-five men, women and children near Flooding Creek (now Sale). The Aborigines fled on their approach and McMillan described how one of the women appeared to be 'looking back at them' as the Aboriginal men escorted her away. In the camp McMillan and his companions found over thirty European artifacts including bloodstained clothing and household items. They also discovered the body of a young child. The child, they determined, had been 'beyond doubt... of European parents'. McMillan concluded that the woman looking back as she was lead away was a European woman held captive¹.

The description by Angus McMillan of the first supposed sighting of the white woman became my focus and I imagined the inventory of objects which he offered as evidence of her existence; two pea-jackets, moleskin trousers, women's apparel and an animal skin bag among other artifacts. I took ink and brush and passed my hand back and forth across the surface of the paper. The action became like walking, my passage laying down trails of ink, blending the stories with the surface of the paper. I reflected on the scant evidence of the woman's existence, the ensuing fruitless searches to establish her identity or location, the sense of outrage the story encouraged in the settler community, the license it provided for terrible violence against Aboriginal people and the impetus it provided for white settlement of the far reaches of Gippsland.

The paper carrying the washes, stripes, grids and stories was then fashioned, folded, and secured with needle and thread, *becoming* the items of clothing listed in McMillan's inventory or *becoming* the terrain across which the search parties and the fugitives ranged. I pressed the folded and stitched objects through a scanner to create a type of print matrix from which I constructed these works. I offer them as contemporary vestiges of an unfinished story.

Jan Davis 2011

¹ J Carr, *The Captive White Woman of Gipps Land*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2001, pp. 4-6

Jan Davis is Adjunct Associate Professor at Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW
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cover image: *Southbound* 2011 digital print in edition of five 84 x 100 cm