

Basic Detail Report



00054538

Title

Study for First Voyage to Possession Island

Date

2012

Primary Maker

Arone Raymond John Meeks

Medium

Synthetic Polymer paint on unframed stretched canvas

Dimensions

Display dimensions: 400 × 800 × 20 mm Overall: 405 × 800 × 20 mm

Name

Painting

History

Possession Island, also known as Bedanug Island, is an island in the Torres Strait Islands group off the coast of far north coast of Queensland. The island was a landing site for Captain James Cook when on the 22 August 1770 he recorded: "I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty King George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast...by the name New South Wales, together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast." As part of the East Coast Encounters initiative, artists involved travelled to Possession Island to experience the location of such a divisive moment in history. Meeks created this work following a trip to Possession Island. He sees this site as both a physical marker of first contact and symbolic divider between our post and pre-settlement histories. He was struck by the beauty of the whole area as a living entity and connected this with his personal knowledge of the island and its many traditional uses. He produced this work as a symbolic reclamation of Possession Island. The luminous canoe represents a vehicle for travelling back to the Dreamtime. "In Australian indigenous culture, the more you talk or paint about your story or country, the stronger this connection becomes. Through this work, I realised visually all the most important aspects of who I am and the images of great significance to me. Contained at the left, within the canoe, is the 'guiding light'. This figure represents my elders, teachers and people who have guided me. His head is illuminated and decorated with cockatoo feathers and a glowing light that leads the way. He also carries a sacred dillybag. The second figure in the canoe is my childhood. The dillybags are symbolic of the womb and used in ceremony for young boys to become men. The third figure is the personification of 'singing up country'. The words he sings create rivers, mountains, landmarks, rainforests and life itself. Traditionally a work of art was not alive until it had been sung and danced into existence. Above the vessel a gumtree

supports an egg, a symbol of life, which contains the rainforest. Beside this is a Frigate seabird. Towards the rear of the canoe is a red circle, representing Saltwater, with a Torres Strait Island pigeon. The figure below is my mother, who is having dialogue with a Quinkin style figure from my country, Laura. Contained within the larger canoe are many smaller boats, representing the life journeys within a life. In the saltwater below the boat are irukandji jellyfish. They are also markers of the wet season and the tropics and only appear after the big wet has washed them from the safety of the creeks onto the coastline. I use the boat image as a symbol of our times both past and present to represent those who have arrived by sea and made a mark on country, for the better or worse." - Arone Meeks