



gallery **barry keldoulis**
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Outside: "white lines" 2005, fluorescent tubes and fittings, installation view, gbk
Inside: (top left, right) "untitled (graphite a)" 2005, "untitled (graphite g)" 2005
(bottom left, right) "untitled (graphite e)" 2005, "untitled (graphite c)" 2005,
all charcoal and graphite on paper, 110 x 164cm photography, Scott Strothers

Jonathan Jones

Jonathan Jones

white lines

Jonathan Jones has looked deeply into the work of his Indigenous predecessors, particularly artists working in the nineteenth century, primarily in New South Wales. These artists used the most straightforward of mediums. Tommy McRae drew with metal-knibbed pen and ink on sketchbook pages; Mickey of Ulladulla, pencil and watercolour. With such simple mediums these contemporaries, whose lives spanned the latter three quarters of the century, produced bodies of work rich in personal history and cultural allusion. Their drawings illustrate the present and bring it into an engagement with the remembered fabric of Indigenous society. Looking at a drawing of a ceremony by McRae, the viewer has the impression of being inside the composition. The artist is not a detached observer but a participant.

Jonathan Jones's materials are similarly simple in substance and equally complex in meaning. On one side of his installation in the gallery space a work is constructed from bars of light – domestic white fluorescent tubes. These are arranged into a geometric pattern derived from the decoration of weaponry, carved trees, and the designs on the insides of possum-skin coats. Taken to the scale of an entire wall and constructed of light, the pattern takes on an intense animation. As a viewer it is impossible not to experience one's own inclusion in the piece. One's own skin and clothing are bathed in its light. The patterns begin to resemble figures, limbs. You are surrounded by people.

The effect is like looking at a body of drawings by Tommy McRae in which the rhythms of dance are repeated and re-iterated. In McRae's drawings of dance ceremonies each participant is painted with designs that are individual in character; the knowledge embodied in McRae's observation is central to the way in which memory is conveyed in his art. Jonathan Jones shares McRae's clear interest in the precise and meaningful details of the designs carried on the bodies of the dancers.

As a piece constructed of light, the wall installation not only envelops but spills out into the surrounds.

The light ricochets around, causing reflections and chance effects that engage the work with the natural world; the floor repeats the patterns down into the ground, the gallery skylight takes the work up and inscribes it onto the sky.

On the opposite side of the gallery space, in a loose but not essential connection with the light piece, are a series of drawings, black graphite on white paper. These drawings are activated by the light emanating from the opposite wall – so we see immediately how important is light to these works. The surfaces that at first appear flat have been meticulously built up of densely packed areas of line. The surfaces take on the crystalline structure of graphite in its raw form – they glow and sparkle, like skin.

Jonathan Jones talks of the quality of the carving of wooden objects made in the nineteenth century which he has studied closely. He admires the precision and the meticulous working of hard wood and the beauty of their surfaces, their sheen and patina. The forms of his drawings recognise such sources. The drawings are made in such a way that the lines within them appear incised into the surface. The lines are the negative white of the paper, an effect drawn into focus by the artist's decision to leave a border of paper around the elaborated area. The drawings are not so much drawn onto surfaces, but are sculpted objects – built up and carved into.

Jonathan Jones's work appears monochromatic, based around alternations of black and white, dark and light, elaborated and negative spaces. But to spend some time with the work is to recognise it is much more inflected, complex and subtle. Each of the motifs he uses has its own meaning and is place specific; each has a long lineage. He has taken these motifs and given them a new context. Like the nineteenth-century artists, he has acted as someone who transmits culture, reiterating and re-forming its patterns and meanings in the present.

Andrew Sayers June 2005

