

Artist Statement:

Julie Gough, *Bad Language 2*, 2007
Series of 10 screen prints, each 594 x 420mm
Edition of 10 Printer: James Bryans, Perth WA

This work is based on and inspired by the date: 25 May 2007 when the Day Bill (advertising poster) for The Australian newspaper that was plastered across Melbourne (where I was then staying) announced: **“Aborigines must speak English”**.

I found this Day Bill extremely disturbing and responded with mixed emotions – firstly, anger and indignation that the media was suggesting as ‘normal’ that an invaded country and its overcome people must, by government enforcement, speak the language of the invaders, even and perhaps especially after more than 200 years since the invasion.

Secondly, and in awkward contrast, the next emotion that the Day Bill gave rise to was wry humour. This came from recall of accounts of Tasmanian Aboriginal people calling out/speaking back and swearing at non Aboriginal people in English, not in 2007, but through the 1820s in VDL (Van Diemen’s Land).

Upon arriving into Perth in July 2007 I decided to make this series about how English HAS been successfully spoken - even better still purposefully deployed – by Aboriginal people in the distant past time to communicate to outsiders with clarity.

In part this early Tasmanian Aboriginal decision to speak out in English is because of the shameful lack of non Aboriginal people who could speak any Aboriginal languages. In order to be understood to be angry at invasion Tasmanian Aborigines became vocal in English, and therefore, an unintended but useful adjunct was that this sentiment was then publishable and became part of western recorded history.

In the Hobart Town Courier (newspaper) the following was printed on Saturday 23 December 1830:

On Wednesday, one of the most numerous meetings which has yet been held in the colony was assembled in the court of requests room. Mr Hackett regretted that so few efforts had been made by the whites to learn the language of the blacks... he did not think there were five persons in the island who could converse with them or make themselves understood by them....Had Van Diemens Land been colonized by the French the case would have been very different.

This outcome is positive, because it provides, for those embedded in western frameworks of understanding, a written record - required by non Indigenous historians as the key ‘evidence’ for anything especially in the ‘recent’ past. So, our Tasmanian Aboriginal ancestors - NOT happily invaded, responded in English language and this testimony is ironically not discountable according to western terms of engagement.

In these silk screened renditions of these encounters, verbal and physical, the geographic locations are provided in red ink, while the archival and newspaper references are at the bottom of each poster – citing cross cultural engagements that raise more questions than answers:

13 April 1825 **ELIZABETH RIVER, VDL** “I’ll give you paper” Refs: PDA 13/4/1825, HTG 29/4/1825

November 1826 **POOLES MARSH, VDL** “I will put you in the bloody river, ma-am” Refs: AOT CSO 762, HT Almanack

3 November 1826 **SHANNON RIVER, VDL** “Fire you white buggers - go away, go away” Refs: AOT CSO 759, CT 10/11/26

15 December 1826 **BROWN MOUNTAIN, VDL** “You white bugger, give me some more bread, and fry some mutton for us” Ref: CT 15/12/1826

28 August 1828 **CRESCENT LAKE, VDL** “We will settle you and all the white men” Refs: TAS 12/9/1828, 3/10/1828

21 February 1830 **CLYDE RIVER, VDL** “Parrawar, parrawar, go away you white buggers, what business have you here?” Refs: AOT CSO 430 (23/2/30), 434 (23/2/30), TAS 26/2/30, CT 26/2/30, HTC 27/2/1830

30 October 1830 **SOUTH ESK RIVER, VDL** “You white bugger, your piece no good” Refs: AOT CSO 712(30/10/30) 714 (1/11/30) HTC 13/11/30

2 November 1829 **COCKATOO VALLEY, VDL** "Oh you white bugger" Refs: AOT CSO 335, 338, 340, 244, 345, 346, 361, 363, 799, (10/1/31) CT 6/11/1829, 13/11/1829, HTC 7/11/1829

25 May 2007 **THE AUSTRALIAN** "ABORIGINES MUST LEARN ENGLISH"



This poster series artwork is titled *Bad Language 2* because it follows an artwork I created in 1994 called *Bad Language* (image below):



Bad Language, 1994, similarly focused on what mixed roles language might perform, especially cross culturally. The work addresses 'Blackness-as-sexual-proficiency' and the 'Plantation as a hot-bed of desire'. Two continuing myths where language and words are the spreaders of dis-ease. Fifty-six paperback books are about coloured women and men as objects of captive desire. The main impetus for this work was my numerous encounters with these books, over some years, on op-shop shelves; evidence of the fascination with the black body that I believe is a carefully hidden aspect of our society. The taboo nature of this desire has meant that the books are rarely seen displayed in anyone's home, and yet are deposited in copious amounts in an establishment where people anonymously leave anything from the home that they do not want. The resulting collection of detritus is a telling overview of Australian society. *Bad Language*, 1994 was acquired by the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1995.

Julie Gough Sept. 2007 Julie.gough@jcu.edu.au