

CHRISTIAN THOMPSON

WE BURY OUR OWN

FREE Admission

Opening hours

10–16.30 Tuesday to Sunday
and bank holiday Mondays

12–16.30 Monday



Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP

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entrance through the *Oxford University Museum of Natural History*, Parks Road, Oxford

Exhibition curated by **Christopher Morton**

Exhibition print design by **Alan Cooke**



26 June 2012 — 6 January 2013

Long Gallery, Pitt Rivers Museum

www.prm.ox.ac.uk



I conceived the *We Bury Our Own* series in 2010 after curator Christopher Morton invited me to develop a body of work that would be inspired by and in dialogue with the Australian photographic collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum.



Invaded Dreams

As an inaugural Charlie Perkins Scholar, and one of the first Aboriginal Australians to be accepted into Oxford University, I knew that this project would be a fantastic platform and unique opportunity to engage with the collection and to make a vital contribution to the cultural fabric of Oxford University, to create a new gateway to consider such material.

The archival images have permeated my work over the last year. They have remained at the forefront of every artistic

experiment and pushed me into new territory; they have travelled with me to residencies at the Fonderie Darling in Montreal and Greene Street Studio, New York. I was drawn to elements of opulence, ritual, homage, fragility, melancholy, strength and even a sense of play operating in the photographs. The simplicity of a monochrome and sepia palette, the frayed delicate edges and the cracks on the surface like a dry desert floor that reminded me of the salt plains of my own traditional lands.

I wanted to generate an aura around this series, a meditative space that was focused on freeing oneself of hurt, employing crystals and other votive objects that emit frequencies that can heal, ward off negative energies, psychic attack, geopathic stress and electro magnetic fields, and, importantly, transmit ideas.

I lamented the passing of the flowers at the meadow, I lit candles and offered blood to the ancestral beings, looked into the black sparkling sea, donned the Oxford garb, visited the water by fire light and bowed at the knees of the old father ghost gum. I asked the photographs in the Pitt Rivers Museum to be catalysts and waited patiently to see what ideas and images would surface in the work, I think with surprising results. Perhaps this is what art is able to

do, perform a 'spiritual repatriation' rather than a physical one, fragment the historical narrative and traverse time and place to establish a new realm in the cosmos, set something free, allow it to embody the past and be intrinsically connected to the present?

I heard a story many years ago from some old men, they told me about a ceremony where young warriors would make incisions through the flesh exposing the joints, they would insert gems between the bones to emulate the creator spirits, often enduring infection and agonizing pain or resulting in death. The story has stuck with me for many years, one that suggests immense pain fused with intoxicating beauty. The idea of aspiring to embody the creators, to transgress the physical body by offering to our gods our



Down Under World

spiritual heart, freeing ourselves of suffering by inducing a kind of excruciating decadent torture. This was something that played on my mind during the production of this series of photos and video work. The deliverance of the spirit back to land – the notion that art could be the vehicle for such a passage, the aspiration to occupy a space that belongs to something higher than one's physical self.

Christian Thompson

Christian Thompson is one of Australia's leading contemporary Aboriginal Artists. He was born in Gawler, South Australia, and is of Bidjara (indigenous people of southwest Queensland) and British heritage. The video work presented in this exhibition – titled *Dhagunyilangu* (Brother) – is a song written by the artist, and is sung in Bidjara. Christian Thompson has shown his work internationally for a number of years. His work *Gamu Mambu*, shown at the 17th Sydney Biennale in 2010, was included in a major exhibition of Korean and Australian art at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia. In 2011 he undertook a residency at the Australia Council for the Arts Greene Street Studio, New York, and the Fonderie Darling Studio, Montreal.