

Immobilising viewers with sensory overwhelm and panic, Curtis Taylor's installation titled "*Boong*" harnesses the perceptual force of light and sound with a piercingly potent severity to create a simulation of racial violence which exposes audiences to the dehumanizing terror of being made victim to the discriminatory accosts of white settlers. Characterized by its gripping viscerality, the work lays bare the brutalistic racism inherent to settler colonialism in Australia with an unflinching veracity. The auditory environment which dominates the enclosed space of the gallery becomes physically anchored in the material presence of bull bars replete with flashing headlights placed on each wall of a dark room to suspend and enclose the audience in a disoriented state of vulnerability and isolation. The bull bars which customarily armor the hood of utility vehicles driven by farmers and property owners who occupy the unceded lands of First Nations people across Australia are decorated with bumper stickers that display the kitschy iconography of white settler identity. The inclusion of the Aboriginal flag in this assemblage of decals subliminally directs the audience to reexamine the procedural appropriation of emblems and symbolic acts by Australian institutions which emptily gesture towards an acknowledgment of First Nations sovereignty while accruing monetary gain and political influence through corporate dealings that actively disempower First Nations communities beneath the surface. The invocation of the utility vehicle made manifest through the punitive presence of the bull bars speaks to the latent dualisms of such a commonplace machine that are defined by the dichotomized realities of white settlers and First Nations communities which determine its simultaneous position as a tool of agency and mobility for one and a weapon of violence and degradation for the other. In the social context conveyed by "*Boong*" the utility vehicle represents the embodiment of white freedom and class power which serves as a crux of the economic advancement and territorial expansion of settler colonialism and doubles as an interface for establishing an asymmetrical hierarchy in interactions between white settlers and colonial subjects. By creating a barrier to interactions between white settlers and First Nations communities, the systemic inequalities of their relationship as oppressor and oppressed are reified by the dynamic of automotive driver and pedestrian created by access to the vehicle that is granted or denied along lines of racial privilege. Inside the vehicle, the settler is given unnatural capabilities of speed and force which protect and embolden their penchant for racist acts of violence and harassment and presents the inescapable threat of death to First Nations pedestrians targeted as victims to the driver's bigotry and prejudice.

The socio-cultural implications of *Boong* are multilayered and far reaching, touching on the enduring legacy of settler colonial violence and genocide in regards to how it inherently informs and is critically articulated within both the contemporary arts scene and the political

landscape of First Nations historical truth telling and Australian national identity. Though the content of the work is situated specifically in an Australian context, it traverses themes of colonial violence, racial harassment and vehicular murder that are highly relevant to western nations which share a history of genocidal colonialism and sustain global conditions of neoliberalism and imperialism more broadly. In its art historical context, *Boong* exists in dialogue with a rich continuum of works which address racism by unapologetically confronting the viewer with the relentless trauma of experiencing ceaseless forms and reformulations of racist aggression perpetuated by white supremacist society. By continuing to push the boundaries of what is considered an acceptable degree of discomfort and accountability for white audiences to digest within public arts institutions, such artworks often help shape the discourse surrounding racial violence and theory as the material and super structural limits of the gallery space to affect substantial social change are discursively redrawn. *Boong* presents a radical revitalization of anti racist artworks by creating an environment which approaches the phenomenologically impossible task of repositioning the white viewer to be the subject of racial violence rather than its offender or witness. Though any artwork can only offer a small glimpse into the lived reality of another's subjection to colonial violence, by giving primacy to fabricating the experiential rather than the representational qualities of racism in the gallery space, *Boong* displaces and prevents the realization of the viewer's expectation to passively consume and adjudicate the artwork. *Boong* effectively evades commodification by disallowing the viewer the privilege of being an observer removed from the content of the work, making the artwork an event of distress to be psychologically withstood rather than an object to be aesthetically evaluated.

In an article titled "*A response to echoes of the swan river colony*" by Robert Wood, the author reflects on postulations put forth by Karl Marx in Chapter 33 of *Capital I* which analyze the economic conditions and historical origins of the Swan River Colony. Wood agrees with Marx's conclusion that capital is a social relation dependent on how the means of production are used and questions how this sentiment might apply to efforts made towards respecting and furthering Noongar sovereignty in the material expressions unique to Boorloo and its historical connection to colonial states around the globe in the present day. Wood continues this query by contemplating the concept of the "Other" in post colonial theory and how it is complicated by the experiences of racialized immigrants who are 'other' to both settlers and Whadjuk people alike. Wood proposes that the individualization of othered communities that occurs through their reflection in exchange commodities and conceals their truth could be remedied through the collective solidarity to be found in their shared familial resemblance as 'others'. Wood suggests that matters of disclosing one's truth are at the core of concerns about the potential for art to be

the antithesis of the market commodity which obscures and hides the truth of social relations whereas art reveals and clarifies the truth of people in their familial resemblance and acts as a bridge between brothers, sisters and non binary siblings.

The ideas presented by Wood offer valuable contributions towards forming an analysis of the socio-political and art historical significance of *Boong* to local and global contexts of systemic racial violence and settler colonialism. The concepts put forth by Wood provide a useful language for describing the role of the utility vehicle as a weaponized commodity which reflects and constructs the identity of white settlers in Australia and colonial states abroad. By recognizing the utility vehicle as a market commodity which white settlers closely link to their identity and self conception, one can distinguish its ideological transition into capital serving to produce social relations of exploitation and subjection that occurs through its usage as a weapon of vigilante racial violence. The dual function of the utility vehicle as both a commodity and weapon thus grants white civilians the legal authority to arbitrate penal justice against First Nations communities with unchecked discretionary powers. As explained by Elsa Dorlin in "*Self Defense*" the systematic disarmament of First Nations and black peoples in colonial states has historically functioned in tandem with the emergence of racist vigilante terror groups to reproduce and maintain the inequality and oppression which the capitalist mode of production demands.

Boong embodies Wood's notion of art as the antithesis of the market commodity by speaking truth to the reality of racist violence which preserves the status quo of Australian colonial society. In so doing, Taylor forges a link of solidarity with communities facing colonial violence and racial oppression throughout Australia and around the globe, bringing to mind adjacent struggles for First Nations sovereignty and BIPOC liberation in Palestine, the United States, Canada and Mexico to name a few. Far from being unique to Australia, racially motivated vehicular violence is a common practice of vigilante terror which plagues contemporary societies and is especially rampant in the United States. During the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, 72 incidents of cars intentionally driving into protestors were recorded in the span of one month. Despite causing severe injury and hospitalization to their victims, the drivers responsible were not subjected to any legal consequences while the victims faced police charges and fines for damages to the vehicles. In the year following, five states enshrined protections around vehicular violence against demonstrators into law, granting legal immunity to drivers who harm or kill pedestrians exercising their civil right to protest.

By restaging the reality of racially motivated vehicular violence, Taylor's own experiences as a Martu artist are bridged with those shared by First Nations and BIPOC communities across

Australia and around the world, prompting an imminent call to action against this deadly and pervasive phenomenon. *Boong* resists potentials for commodification by subverting the creative confines which produce marketable art objects, using the gallery space to stage an act of protest which refuses to shield white audiences from the trauma of the acts of terror they commit, ignore and benefit from. The utility vehicle is no longer a neutral market commodity, but a colonial weapon that must be internationally disarmed.

References

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