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ARCHIE MOORE

Family Tree

2021

Archie Moore is a Kamilaroi/Bigambul man and contemporary Australian artist whose conceptually-based practice encompasses a range of disciplines, from painting and photography to video, performance, sculpture and installation. His quiet, evocative pieces invariably begin in the realm of the personal, probing themes close to the artist's heart that are often informed by his own experiences and memory. His work resonates profoundly with issues pertaining to identity, racism and how institutions, systems, history and education inform – and misinform – the status quo.

Family Tree was first presented in 2018 as an 11 metre wall drawing that greeted visitors to Griffith University Art Museum in Brisbane, on the occasion of the artist's first major solo exhibition, *Archie Moore: 1970 – 2018*.

A more recent version was commissioned for *The Colour Line: Archie Moore & W.E.B Du Bois*, an exhibition curated by **José Da Silva** for the University of New South Wales Galleries and a highlight of 2021 Sydney Festival visual art program.

In the years between these two iterations, the artist actively explored his family's history, undertaking extensive archival research as well as tracing personal connections. He's met people with knowledge and links to his family, and clarified aspects pertaining to his paternity and Kamilaroi heritage. This new information enabled him to populate *Family Tree* with greater accuracy and many more names.

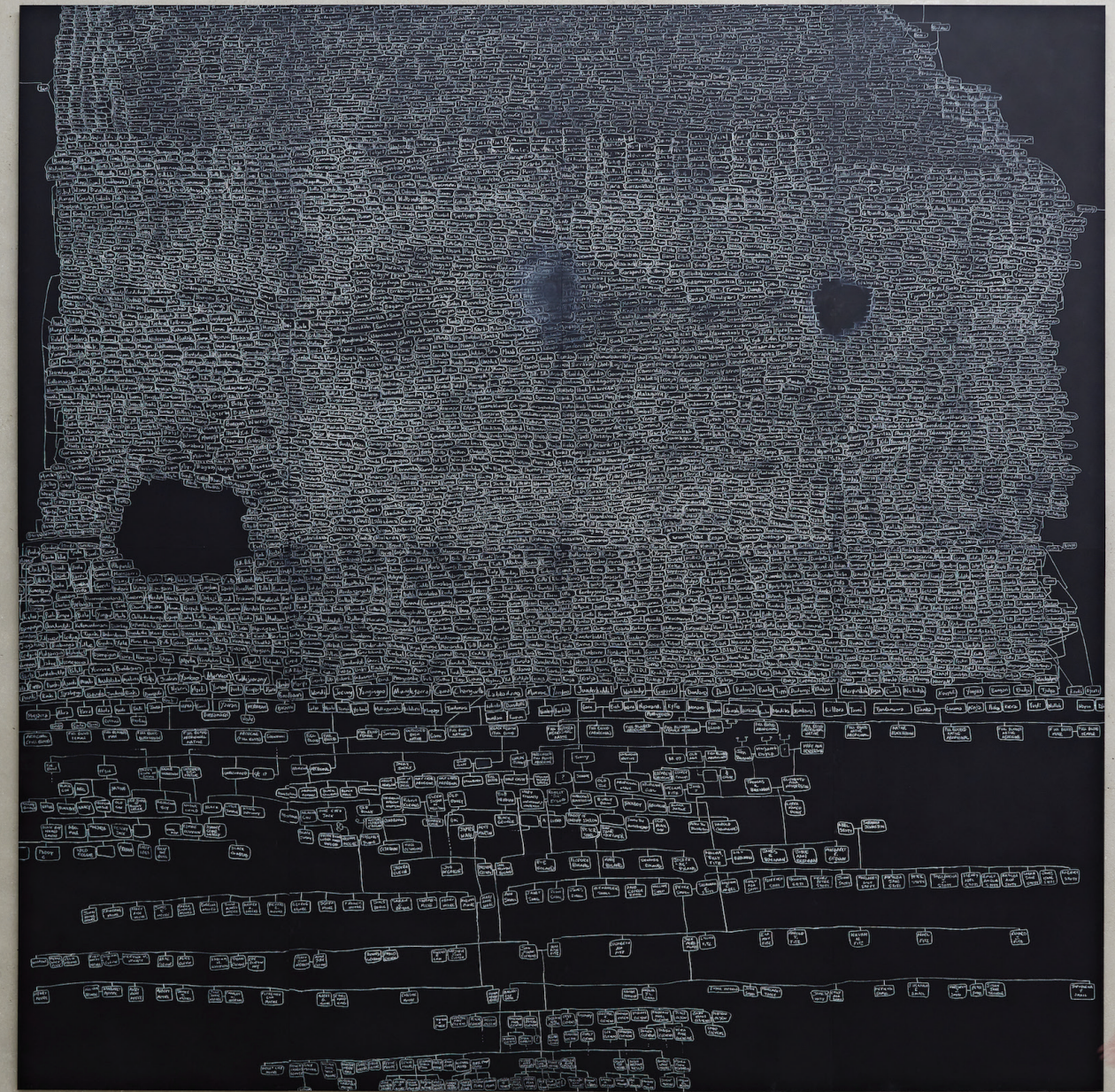
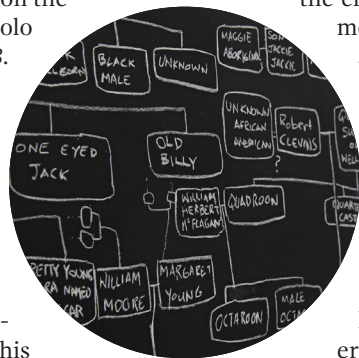
Moore's *Family Tree*, 2021 is a sprawling, chalkboard-style web of tightly-knit rows and boxes – meticulously drawn free hand in white Conté crayon on blackboard. Presenting long lines with large and numerous families, it attests the family's vitality and commitment to procreation, but there's also a precariousness, an uncertainty as the ancestral lines reach back in time. The current generation

of family members have full names and surnames, yet further up, across five or six generations, people are identified by disparaging, settler-epoch nicknames such as **Jacky Jacky**, **Lolly Legs** or **Johnny Come Lately** or descriptors like Female Octaroon, Abo. male and Pretty young lubra named Vinegar. Beyond here, individual's names become even more remote: **Untouched Bush Native**, **Full Blood Native**, **Half Caste**, **Paddy King of Goomi** or **Queen Susan of Welltown** and further still, there are names we understand to be in language, such as **Munglegarra**, **Yangigoo** and **Yambo**.

At the UNSW Galleries *Family Tree* was installed in a darkened space, alone. Our attention is drawn to the crowded surface, names that represent mothers and fathers, aunts, uncles, sons and daughters are today as ethereal as white chalk on a blackboard. The artist includes a few black holes and blurred areas in this cosmos; they are empty spaces that he describes as "a disruption or disturbance to the structure of the tree, where the lineal descent is interrupted by a cataclysmic event, like smallpox or genocide, but also erasure or omission in record keeping, either accidental or deliberate."

We search for the artist himself, a small ME on a crowded line at the base of the work. His forebears have determined his destiny in many ways. *Family Tree* reads as an epic of mythic proportions with a cast of thousands, bloodlines spanning millennia, hosts of clans with the upper echelons dense and too distant to discern. The work acknowledges and articulates Aboriginal survival, yet it also reads as a portrait of changing racist attitudes and the contempt expressed toward Aboriginal people across generations. It is a reflection on the subjectivity and failures of history; its uncertainty, fragility and the inherent imperfections of interpretation.

Judith Blackall



THIS PAGE: Archie Moore, *Family Tree*, 2021. Conté crayon on blackboard paint on board, 488 x 488 x 1.2cm. Installation view at The Commercial, Sydney. Commissioned by UNSW Galleries with support of the 2020 Commissioner's Circle. OPPOSITE: Detail of Archie Moore's *Family Tree*, 2021. PHOTOS: NICK DE LORENZO. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND THE COMMERCIAL, SYDNEY.