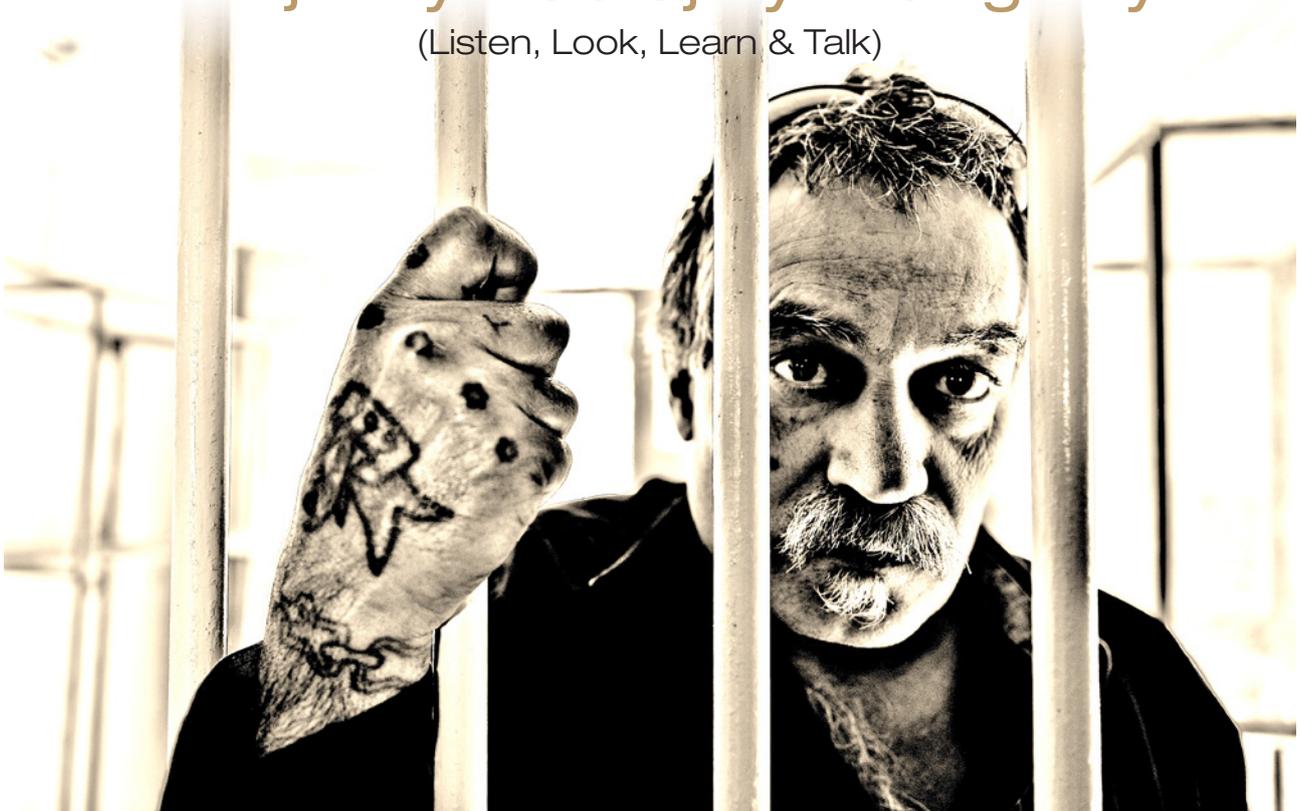


HUMANINSIDE 13 October to 2 December | FREMANTLE PRISON

Ni Djiny Kadidjiny Wangkiny

(Listen, Look, Learn & Talk)



Who are the real criminals?

Tonight one in every 14 adult Aboriginal men in this State will spend the night in prison and those taken away from their families as children, (those part of the Stolen Generations) are twice as likely to be arrested than their peers. "There's no doubt that prison has a ripple effect on every family, especially if the member in prison was supporting the family" said Justice Valerie French, Chairman of the Prisoners Review Board.

The Aboriginal imprisonment rate in Western Australia is 3,991 per 100,000, which is almost double the national rate. The next highest rate is in the Northern Territory, which is much lower at 2,645 per 100,000. So we have the highest rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people in the country and it is increasing – without any accountability let alone culpability being assumed by those in either politics or in authority in the criminal justice and correctional services system.

Consider the implications this rate would have on our political and state public service systems if it were mirrored across our broader non-Aboriginal population. At lower rates in other states it is considered an incentive for change - "You have government departments who say, 'just lock them up, that will solve the problem' " (Joan Baptie, Magistrate and Convenor of the Youth Drug and Alcohol Court of New South Wales).

However here, did the recent remarks of Wayne Martin AC Chief Justice of Western Australia rate a mention in the press?

"... I have said many times since my appointment to the bench, the over-representation of Aboriginal

people in the criminal justice system of Western Australia and Australia is almost certainly the biggest single issue facing those systems. Tragically, the phenomenon of over-representation is getting worse, rather than better, despite the objectives of government and the application of substantial public resources in an effort to reduce over-representation".

This is demonstrably not a new trend. Over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system of this country became a national issue as long ago as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which reported more than 20 years ago. Since that time, pretty well all governments at State and Federal level have made a commitment to address the problem, and have directed huge resources to that end. Despite these efforts, the situation is getting much, much worse - not steadily but rapidly and the worst example is right here in our backyard.

"Aboriginal people in Australia have now been exposed not to 3 but to 7 generations of compounding bad laws, a racially prejudiced federal constitution and institutional and social racism in all facets of their lives. This has deeply reinforced a lack of faith in working with Government and government services and hope for the future. It is simplistic for our colonisers to assume that these generations of profound damage to Aboriginality can be fixed in anything less than the time it took to inflict it. It permeates into everything we do, every day", said Jim Morrison in the Indigenous Keynote Address at the 2011 Commonwealth Peoples Forum.

Throw-away comments about billions of dollars already being spent on locking up Aboriginal men, women and children ignores the fact that these vast sums are wasted on programs we already know from their pitiful results were designed for failure and in almost every way possible. The learnings from this are surely in working far more closely with Aboriginal communities, sharing successes and investigating programs delivering positive outcomes here and overseas. Invest in actions well outside of the entrenched political and bureaucratic thinking that is so woefully failing to produce results. What do we have to lose in investing some of the resources spent on detention centres in community-based initiatives well BEFORE Aboriginal people start to offend?

A good start would be genuine collaboration with Aboriginal people. We might not tell you what you think you want to hear and we will not speak with one voice because that is not our way - but we can help others identify what needs to be done to empower Aboriginal people to take the steps necessary to reverse the tragically increasing trend of over-representation within the criminal justice system.

**Jim Morrison, Aboriginal Co-Convenor
The National Stolen Generations Alliance**

Who am I? What is it, this humanity? This human I am inside?

Lily Hibberd, 2012

Humaninside is the first exhibition in Western Australia to relate the experiences of aboriginal inmates of Fremantle Prison. The project was instigated when Noongar Elder Albert Corunna stood in the Quod Project gaol cell and said that it was not only good to look at the past but also to photograph contemporary aboriginal people in that colonial cell and listen to how their lives are affected now.

The photographs, documents and films in this exhibition offer a powerful account because the former prisoner and their immediate families are witness to their own history. The Prison Gallery walls feature a photographic portrait series in which the faces of survivors of the system stand side by side with their children, parents and aboriginal advocates of human rights, some with a sequence of astonishing projection overlays, produced in collaboration between James Kerr and Tania Ferrier. Other portraits show the witness standing in a reconstructed gaol cell, a precise recreation of the harsh colonial architecture that remained in use right up to Fremantle Prison's last day of operation in 1991. Among these potent works, a video montage provides graphic interviews with a number of men who passed through the same spaces or members of their families. A small book rests on a bench replete with quotations from former inmates and advocates, while mocked up newspapers displayed on an adjacent table, document a twelve-month period of leading media reporting of aboriginal people in Western Australia. Alluding to the furniture in institutional visiting rooms, blank notebooks are set on another long table with bench seating, available for comments. Finally, the foyer gallery features projected productions stills from Glen Stasiuk's film, *Wadjemup: Black Prison, White Playground*, some taken on site at the Prison yards, along with a video documentary that includes interviews with two of Glen's uncles, both of whom were incarcerated for many years in the Prison.

Across its diverse forms, this material is plainly presented and thus remains open to interpretation. In this room, you are free to engage with what is present and to decide how you will look and if you will listen.

The writing you hold in your hand is not coming from an expert on the justice system or to evaluate the works in this exhibition, because you can meet with them yourself. Nor can I speak on behalf of the prisoners of this gaol, aboriginal or otherwise. All I can do is simply turn and ask myself as someone outside of this experience, who am I and how can I understand and be accountable for this society's practices and legacies? Together we can ask: What do we see when we look into the prisoner's soul? Do we see ourselves? Perhaps, when we look through the high prison walls, we see the *human inside*. It is then we can begin to comprehend who the prisoner really is: that, child, son or daughter, that father or brother. Once we open ourselves to them and their humanity it becomes possible to see the responsibility we have to care for others and comprehend their experience, as people not so different to you and I with whom we share this country.

Take a guided tour. Walk along the cold corridors, past the tiny cells and their soundless double walls



where the prisoners were once interred. See them up there, the watchtowers. The wardens see you. Look, there's a dead pigeon, bloodied on the asphalt.

Those high walls are the same boundaries we place around the men and women we've collectively decided to exclude. The walls equate to the way we've determined that we will live with each other. But the prisoner is not alone, he or she is part of a lineage of exiles, which began with the transportation of convicts from Great Britain to the American and Australian colonies in the mid-to-late 1700s, primarily for the purpose of cheap labour. In Australia, the legacy of this system is more than 150 years old, and this is the foundation of the Commonwealth's legal and government policy, which remains in place to this day. All of us who live here collectively bear the burden of the ideologies that underpin that era and the psychological consequences of our origins in the penal system. Today, the families of the institutionalised, especially their children, live with the intergenerational burden of their parents' personal and social pain. Why? Because human lives carry on beyond walls.

This exhibition is not intended to incite debate about the merits or detractors of the prison. What is of importance is understanding where this idea came from and how it relates to the role of punishment in the justice system and penal reform today. Let's begin by examining the conception of the modern prison. The penitentiary model was founded in a social and architectural premise called the Solitary System (UK) or Separate System (USA), which dominated the penal system across the colonies from the mid-19th century into the 20th century. In Australia's early colonisation, the Model Prison came to our shores with the prisoner, and both Imperial and Colonial convicts constructed many of the institutions of incarceration in which they were confined. In Britain, the Solitary System was intended to reform the criminal through long-term isolation and rigorous labour. The primary impetus of solitary confinement at its conception was to prevent all possibility of moral and social contagion, with the highest aim of seclusion being religious reflection and penitence, hence the term 'penitentiary', which the alliteration of Melbourne's Pentridge Prison clearly echoes. The inevitable dark side of this enlightenment style philosophy of reform, more precisely called a penology, was the return of punishment in the Australian colonial prison system and the return to the disappearance of the undesirable bodies of criminality within the logic of mortification and symbolic social death. The sensory and social deprivation of solitary confinement hovers still today in the grey zone between care and cruelty, as it lies at the conceptual heart of the global proliferation of (privatised) Supermax prisons of recent decades.

While the latest Australian prisons are being designed with much more convenience and apparent cosiness, the authoritarian figure of the institution remains at large in Australian public perception. Why is this the case? Is it because we remain in pursuit of the idea that the role of 'justice' is primarily to punish? We have a concept of the prisoner that is based on a spectacle, on a need to define and publically contend with the threat of unfettered evil. It is well known that the costs of imprisonment far outweigh the benefits. Corrections, punishment, normalisation: it's obvious that institutions struggle to repair lives. So, who is this for and who is being corrected? At the core of punishment is the question of who we are as a nation, and in this regard there is no difference between the country and the self because as members of society we are implicated in our system of justice.

Something of ourselves is reiterated in the criminal justice system, something that mirrors our own psychological confinement, a state that exists without walls. Does our warped perspective reflect a progressive society? Or does it maintain an outdated colonial view of the captive as the public enemy and a powerful anti-social icon? The prison is more often a contradiction, and we must speak of its lawlessness, its paradoxes, at the same time as we uphold its reason: Model prison – Model prisoner – Model citizen? Once we have the institution, we are obliged to fill it with appropriate people, to find someone who can be defined as the prisoner. How many of us are wrongdoers? To what degree is the captive really a criminal? Should we blindly support every decision of government? It is of course possible that the law might betray its own people. Still, this is a matter of degree: what is more wrong: to ignore the lawlessness of the state or to refuse to subscribe to its edicts when it is harmful to the lives of others? Human rights are the rights of all humans, not to be meted out so that some people have more rights to rights than others. And yet, is it impossible to say what is totally right or wrong: there are no absolutes. It is too late to return to a world without captives. But how can we begin to see inside?

There's a difference between history and the past, which is hard to separate. One is held in the walls; Fremantle Prison is a time capsule, suspended in the moment of its final hours. According to its signage, the last prisoner left the prison on 8 November 1991 and 'nothing' has been altered. On the guided tour I imagine cells full of convicts. White men. The lash. Stone breaking. In truth, from 1931, when the Native Prison on Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) was closed, the prisoners in this jail were up to 40 per cent aboriginal, sometimes reaching 60 to 75 per cent indigenous representation.¹

A true story took place within these very cells, the story of a Western Australian family. It starts with a boy growing up on Fairbridge Farm, brought out from England, probably in the 1930s, under their child migrant scheme. An adult, this orphaned man meets a Noongar woman from Katanning. Several children are born. The father leaves his young family in 'search of work', as many men did in those times; the mother must fend for herself, and without work or family, the single mother doesn't cope. When welfare comes to her aid, she has little choice but to watch as her kids are taken into the 'care' of Sister Kate's Children's Home (a 'home' for aboriginal children and many of the Stolen Generations, also called The Children's Cottage), located at Queens Park, Perth. The eldest boy, Graeme, is five years old, his brothers are just toddlers. The boys are later moved into the Salvation Army Boys Home in Karrakatta. They run away numerous times, trying to get back home, and are severely punished. In the coming years the boys are continuously interned, shifting between one institution and another, including juvenile reformatories such as Longmore, Hillston Boys' Farm and the dreadful and greatly feared Riverbank (The Bank), and a period on an 'out camp' called Wooroloo Prison Farm in the

1. 'During February 1969 the majority (approximately 75%) of the prisoners were Aboriginal. In 1968 Aboriginal women comprised 81% of women prisoners in the state. There was a dramatic increase in the imprisonment of Aboriginal women in Fremantle Prison from 1952.' Research statistics provided by Curtin University of Technology, commissioned by the Building Management Authority, 1992. Fremantle Prison Records: WAA 220, Occurrence Books.

See also, 'Messages from the inside', ABC 720 Radio transcript, by Emma Wynne, 24 September, 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2012/09/24/3596618.htm?site=perth>, accessed 26/09/2012

Wheatbelt. Finally, following a series of court charges for absconding and small crime, Graeme is made a Ward of the State. At sixteen, he does his first stint in Fremantle Prison, Division One, where he'll spend most of the next nine years, and where he secretly begins to write in his cell.

Prison Graeme Dixon (extract)²

Endless days
Eternal nights
Thinking
Worrying
In a concrete box
The disease
It causes
In the head —
I'd rather
Have the pox

Because man
Is just
An animal
Who needs to see
The stars
Free as birds
In the sky
Not through
These iron bars

There must be another way
To punish
Penalise
Those of us
Who stray
And break
The rules
That protect
The taxpayers
From us
The reef
Of humanity's
Wrecks.

In 1989, Graeme Dixon won the inaugural Unaipon Award for his collection of poems, *Holocaust Island*. The follow up, *Holocaust Revisited: killing time*, 2003, is a vivid account of Graeme and his brothers' time in Sister Kate's Home. Graeme passed away in 2010, leaving the unpublished manuscript of his memoirs, *Vagabonds and Rogues*. This searing life story is an incredible account of the Australian child welfare system and its revolving-door relationship to the criminal justice system, and the shared history and recurrent intersection of Stolen Generations with Forgotten Australians. Graeme conveys his struggle and how his life was transformed by the system into something he could hardly recognise himself. It documents the power of his incredible love and tenacity, at the same time revealing the workings of Australian society, not only from an aboriginal perspective but throughout the decades of government interventions in family life, of which there are countless casualties of Australian institutional malpractice across child welfare, mental health and even education. Survivors have started to tell us about their experiences. The men, women and children who stand before you in this room are witness to the consequences of our system of

institutionalisation, and offer us an empathic link to the unseen captive and their families. Humaninside is a place to stand, a place from which aboriginal people can speak about their lives, without fear or censure.

Graeme is sitting staring a blank wall tonight, in Cell Block 18, Casurina Maximum Security Prison. He might get an hour out in the concrete yard tomorrow. There might be a cloud in the sky. He might not get to see it.

This is just one story of entwined colonial legacies, through which, if we are willing, we can see in this exhibition. Our meeting here with one prisoner allows us to better differentiate between the criminal and the power exercised over them. The faces of the people in the photographs speak for themselves and for us too. They witness the experience of their grandfathers, uncles, fathers and sons. They tell us, that regardless where you come from or what your culture might be, that not all justice is equal. How many others have passed through this system, staring incomprehensibly at the four walls of a cell? And who is it that disappears inside this system? It affects all of us. To ignore this truth is an act of prejudice. But how can we overcome our tendency to judge and our desire to cast out those that don't meet up with often arbitrary rules? How can we find empathy amid the fear? Humaninside witnesses these lives. All we have to do is look and listen, and be receptive to what we might have in common with these men, women and children.

Lily Hibberd is an artist and writer, currently working with a group of Forgotten Australians to represent their own history.

Thank yous:

Reverend Sealin Garlett , Albert Corunna , Jim Morrison, Lily Hibberd, **all the families and individuals who participated**, Sister Kates Healing Centre, Tjalaminu Mia, Curtis Taylor, Alan Thompson, Nathan Mewitt, Jindee Simmons, Dennis Simmons, Chris Dixon, Lindsay Dixon, Greg Dixon, Graeme Dixon (RIP), Harry Taylor, Carmelo Musca, Frank Rijavec, Fremantle Prison, Fremantle Art Centre AIR, Sandra Murray, Antony Webb, Philippe Signer, Elizabeth Murray, Jacksons, Kendalls, Earlywork, Fitzgeralds, Herbert Pinter, Mark Ralph, Andrew Daly, Gerry Gergatos, Jenny D'Anger, Ron Bradfield, Fredrick & Dorkus Pickett, Abe & Amelia Dunovits, Evi Ferrier, Sandra Albin, Tony Gajewski, Laure Benard, Xoe Baird, Jeff Asselin & JCCA students.

Forum discussion in the gallery on Saturday, 24 November from 2 to 5pm:

"Welcome to country" by Rev. Sealin Garlett followed by Jim Morrison/The Facts and the Future, Tjalaminu Mia/ Healing Programs, Gerry Gergatos/ National Indigenous Times, Glen Stasiuk & James Kerr/ Humaninside, Tania Ferrier/USA Statistics and political art. Open mike to audience. Tea and coffee provided.

To RSVP for forum write YES in comments book provided along with your comment. For information about artworks contact Tania Ferrier at ferriertania@yahoo.com.au

TANIA FERRIER/VISUAL ARTIST
JAMES KERR/ PHOTOGRAPHER
GLEN STASIUK/FILM MAKER

² Graeme Dixon, 'Prison,' *Holocaust Island*. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1990, pp. 3-4.