

The Aboriginal Child Artists of Carrolup

David Clark

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that my article contains images and 'voices' of people who have passed away.

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Wadjak Boodja (Perth land), on which this article was written, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The colonisation of Australia by Europeans had a massive negative impact on a peoples and culture that had existed for more than 60,000 years. Aboriginal people suffered disease, violence, starvation and exploitation, and had their land taken. The 1905 *Aborigines Act* of Western Australia subjected Aboriginal people to tyrannical control and gave a white Chief Protector legal guardianship over all Aboriginal children and adults.

Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and sent to government-run native settlements where they were to be educated and trained for largely unskilled occupations. The Chief Protector, AO Neville, intended to 'breed out' Aboriginality through inter-marriage within the white community. A cornerstone of these policies was the belief that Aboriginal people were intellectually inferior to white people. Many of the latter feared that people of mixed race would eventually become the predominant population.

The child removal policy, enacted throughout much of Australia, also played a major role in the development of intergenerational trauma amongst Aboriginal people, a trauma which was unwittingly passed down the generations. Consequences of this trauma include addiction, mental health problems and suicide.

The Story

Carrolup Native Settlement, located 40 kilometres from the South-West Western Australian town of Katanning, was established in 1915. Aboriginal children led an institutionalised life on the settlement, whilst other Aboriginal people – mostly the elderly requiring rations – had to camp on the other side of the river. The settlement was closed in 1922, but re-opened in 1940.

Revel Cooper, a Noongar Aboriginal boy, was made a ward of the State and sent to Carrolup at the age of six after his mother died in 1940. In a letter written in 1960 about life on the settlement, he presented a vivid picture of Aboriginal children running wild in squalid conditions and receiving minimal care for most of the war years.¹ The children received no education for the two years before teacher Olive Elliot arrived at Carrolup in 1945. She described the children as being emotionally reactive and self-centred. ‘They are intensely jealous of each other.’² Today we know these behaviours are signs of trauma.

Mrs Elliot came to believe that the children needed the firm hand of a male teacher. She convinced teacher Noel White, who had a strong reputation for teaching Aboriginal children, to take over her position.

Mr White uprooted his young family from their established life in Narngulu, Geraldton, and made the 680-kilometre journey to Carrolup in May 1946. On arrival, the White family discovered there was no house available for them, contrary to what they had been promised. They moved into the former morgue. Conditions were primitive – there was a shortage of water, and no electricity, on the settlement.

Mr White soon discovered that he was unable to communicate with the Aboriginal children he was to teach. They sat sullenly and silently at their desks. Revel Cooper later said:

The first week at school with our new teacher we were all scared stiff. I think if it wasn't for the ever-present smile of Mr Whites we would have all stormed out of the school and ran for our lives.³

After discussions with School Inspector Charles ‘Sammy’ Crabbe, Mr White introduced a unique programme of education and personal development that helped transform the children. Drawing, singing, dancing, drama and storytelling were key to facilitating connection and communication, as was Noel’s empathy and compassion. The children gradually lost their fear and gained confidence, whilst their reading, writing and arithmetic improved greatly over time. Their drawings, done in crayons or chalk, kept improving as a result of regular rambles in the bush, hard work, and Mr White’s inspiration and feedback.

However, he was not permitted to interfere with the children’s living conditions. These were controlled by settlement staff who worked for the Department of Native Affairs. Noel, and later his wife Lily, worked for the Department of Education and were told they must only teach! The children continued to live in squalor. Lice from their hair fell regularly onto their schoolbooks. However, Lily White was given permission to purchase clothing material, and she and the older Carrolup girls made each child two sets of clothes.

The Whites introduced evening classes for the children, involving various activities including drawing, all in the light of Noel's lantern. These were a huge success. Sammy Crabbe told Noel that something remarkable was happening with the children's art. The teacher, who did not draw or paint himself, had not realised the art was of such a high quality. The children developed as a group, through a process of mutual interest, discussion, criticism and support.

Barry Loo, one of the most talented of the Carrolup child artists, later said:

How we, us boys came to do such beautiful art work of scenic and bush scenes is that we spent all our precious hours at school and weekends doing this work and three years of this took our art work to where it is today, and I say all honours are on Mr White who gave us that opportunity to improve our work.⁴

Whilst very few of the girls drew landscapes, they created beautiful geometric designs, as well as embroidery. The children's schoolbooks were something to behold.

In 1946/7, the children's drawings attracted attention locally in Katanning and then further afield. Three children, Reynold Hart, Dulcie Penny, and Vera Wallam, had their articles accepted in the *Lord Forrest Centenary Booklet*, in competition against other children from all over the State, whilst Parnell Dempster had a drawing accepted.⁵ Only one school in the State, Perth Modern, had more submissions to the booklet accepted. Vera and Parnell won two of the ten one-guinea prizes that were offered.

Exhibition of
Carrolup art at Boans
department store,
West Australian, 23
October 1947.

The boys from left
to right are Claude
Kelly, Barry Loo,
Reynold Hart and
Parnell Dempster.
(Noel & Lily White
Collection.)



After opening the exhibition of crayon drawings by pupils of the Carrolup Native Settlement school, the Lieutenant-Governor (Sir James Mitchell) talks with four of the young artists brought to Perth for the occasion. They are (left to right): Claude Kelly, Barry Loo (who seemed rather overcome), Reynold Hart and Parnell Dempster. Behind are some of their drawings.

The children's drawings shown in the Lord Forrest Centennial exhibition were seen by thousands and attracted the attention of the press. Reporter Max Praed acclaimed the art and the Whites' education programme in a *Sunday Times* newspaper article.⁶

In an exhibition of 450 Carrolup drawings at Boans, Perth's largest department store, in October 1947, four of the boys, aged between ten and twelve years, showed their skills twice daily, and more than £120 (\$8,000 in today's money) was raised from sales of their art and donations.

At a Teachers' Convention held in Albany in June 1948, organised by School Inspector Sammy Crabbe, members of Noel White's audience claimed that the children's art he shows was 'too good to be true'. Mr White returned



A pastel drawing on paper (26.5cm x 37cm) by an unidentified Carrolup child artist, which was found in a rubbish bin in the schoolroom in Albany, where the Carrolup art was exhibited at a Teachers' Convention in June 1948. Private Collection.



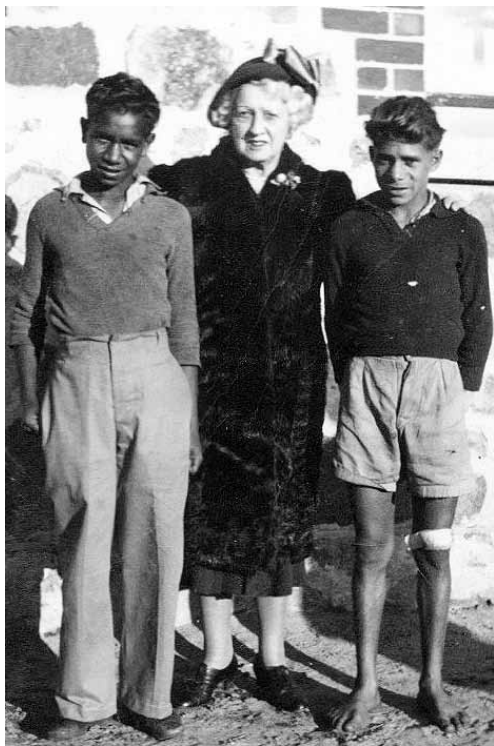
The children of Carrolup in their schoolroom with the White family and visitors from Katanning. Photographer: Noelene White, late 1948 or early 1949. (Noel & Lily White Collection.)

to Carrolup to fetch Parnell Dempster, Reynold Hart and Barry Loo, and they gave a stunning demonstration of their drawing to an amazed audience. Soon afterwards, the general public viewed the display, and all 96 drawings were sold. Sammy Crabbe taught the children to use water colours in July 1948.

However, the children's success, along with the trusting and loving relationship that had developed between them and the Whites, led to increased jealousy and conflicts amongst settlement staff, to government inquiries, and to violence towards the children. Noel White's concerns and complaints about the poor living conditions at Carrolup were not addressed.

The children's beautiful art soon covered the schoolroom walls. Their schoolwork and schoolbooks were also impressive, and Sammy Crabbe was brought to tears by their enchanting singing.

The Carrolup School football team thrashed local opposition. They were invited to Perth and soundly beat Thomas Street School of Perth in front of 2,000 spectators at Subiaco Oval. Although strengthened by the inclusion of a number of older Perth Modern School pupils, the Thomas Street team still lost a second game at Subiaco Oval. A tarpaulin muster of money given by a large audience raised more than £70 (\$4,000 in today's money) for the Carrolup School. Their team was 'never ever beaten', according to Revel Cooper.⁷ Was there ever a sporting team anywhere in the world that contained so many talented artists?



Mrs Rutter with Reynold Hart (Left) and Parnell Dempster (Right). Photographer: Noel White, 31st July, 1949. (Noel & Lily White Collection.)

In July 1949, a 71-year-old Englishwoman, Mrs Florence Rutter, who was visiting Australia to set up Soroptimist clubs for women, saw examples of the children's artworks in the *Milady* magazine. She was so impressed and intrigued that she visited Carrolup and purchased £5 worth of drawings and designs. Mrs Rutter exhibited the drawings and designs in eight cities around Australia and New Zealand, and received many orders for the children's artworks.

On her return to Perth, a roundtable was arranged, comprising Mrs Rutter and her close friend Mrs Vera Hack, Native Affairs Commissioner Stanley Middleton, the new Carrolup superintendent Vernon Sully, and Mr and Mrs White. It was agreed that Mrs Rutter would

exhibit and sell the children's art in Europe, with all funds going to the newly set up Florence Rutter Trust Fund. The money was to be used to support the art activities of the children.

At the end of 1949, Noel White made an official complaint about the conditions at Carrolup to the Department of Native Affairs which was not addressed. Soon after, the girls were moved to missions without warning,

Four Carrolup boys:
From left: Thomas Jackamarra, Cliff Ryder, unidentified, and Simpson Kelly, with their pastel drawing books. Photograph: Vera Hack, 1st February 1950. (Noel & Lily White Collection.)



causing yet more grief for Aboriginal families. Boys from Moore River Settlement, many of them traumatised, were transferred to Carrolup, increasing the pressure on the Whites.

Mrs Rutter and Mrs Hack visited Carrolup for three days at the end of January 1950, where they received a rousing welcome from the boys. Mrs Rutter was amazed by the strong positive values of the boys, their exemplary behaviour and their strong sense of community. She said, 'I hope that my own grandchildren will develop these traits as definitely as these little aboriginal boys'.⁸

However, Florence was deeply saddened by the disgraceful conditions in which the boys lived. She intended to do all in her power to make the children's work known throughout the world, whilst helping the boys help themselves by earning money from their art. Before leaving Carrolup armed with more artworks to sell, Mrs Rutter presented Parnell Dempster with a set of oil paints, and he created what is probably the first oil painting done by an Australian Aboriginal.

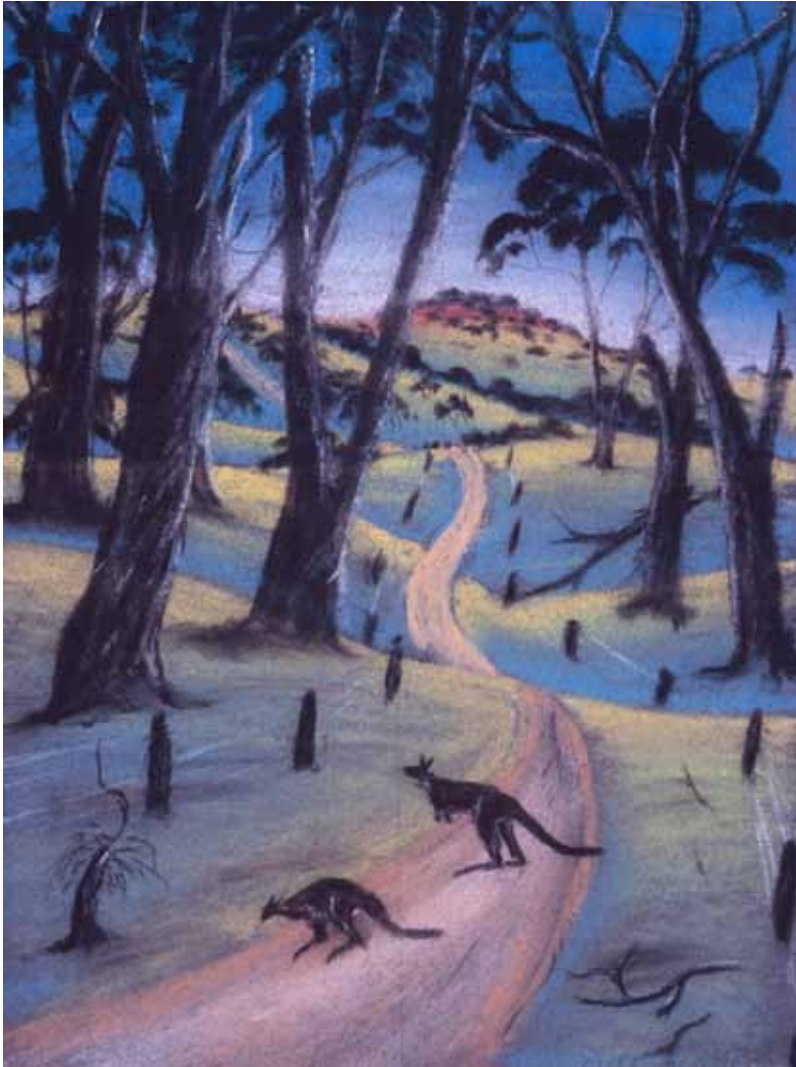
The children wrote to Florence Rutter after she returned to England. Mr White read Florence's letters to the class, prompting Parnell Dempster to write to Mrs Rutter, 'We are very proud of you and what you are doing for us in other parts of the world'.⁹



Golden sunset.

By Cliff Ryder, pastel on paper, 18 x 25cm, 1950. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Melvie, Stan and Gael Phillips, Berndt Museum of Anthropology, The University of Western Australia [1992/0088]. © Family of the artist.

The first exhibition of Carrolup art in Europe was held in Appeldoorn, the Netherlands, when Florence visited her daughter Margaret Edenburg and family. Letters written by visitors to the exhibition were very complimentary and described how the art has changed people's perceptions of Aboriginal people. The Native Affairs Commissioner, Stanley Middleton, wrote enthusiastic letters to Florence.



Kangaroos on road by Cliff Ryder, pastel on paper, 25 x 18cm, 1950. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Melvie, Stan and Gael Phillips, Berndt Museum of Anthropology, The University of Western Australia [1992/0101]. © Family of the artist.

However, some things were not going well in Carrolup. When he arrived at the beginning of 1950, the new superintendent, Vernon Sully, was disgusted by the living conditions and set out to improve matters. However, he soon suffered a 'mental and physical collapse' which put him in bed for two weeks. (The Whites had now survived four years of adversity.) During this time, he received a memo from Noel White about children being late for school, to which he took great offence.

In response, Mr Sully started a diary which detailed the conflict that developed between teacher and superintendent.¹⁰ Mr White's School Journal showed the difficulties he faced, including dealing with the poor state of the large number of Moore River children who had been transferred to Carrolup. The children were filthy dirty and arrived at school late. Native Affairs staff caused trouble. The toilet was in a disgusting state and not fixed. Vernon Sully's diary and Noel White's School Journal reveal completely different interpretations of the same events.

Mr Sully prevented the boys from working on their art in the evenings and weekends, which meant that Mr White could not provide new artworks for Mrs Rutter to exhibit and sell. She asked Mr Middleton to sort the matter out. Reynold Hart wrote an apologetic letter to Mrs Rutter saying, 'Well Mrs Rutter we hope you won't be angry with us about the drawings. It's not our fault'.¹¹

On 28 July 1950, a two-week exhibition of the Carrolup children's art opened in Over-Seas House in London. An audience of 300 attended the opening reception, including reporters from fourteen publications. There was a strong positive response from the audience. Mrs Rutter told Mr Middleton that the response was so good that the boys would be able to make a good salary:

These boys, at least 50% of them will develop their technique and turn out pictures equal to that of Albert Namatjira & he can earn £1500 [per annum].¹²

The *Illustrated London News*, which appeared as the world's first weekly illustrated news magazine in 1849, published five illustrations of Carrolup drawings.¹³ The publication had a wide circulation, both nationally and internationally, ensuring that many people around the world heard about the child artists of Carrolup. The *Daily Graphic* newspaper published part of the letter that Reynold Hart had earlier written to Mrs Rutter about the evening art sessions being stopped.¹⁴ Mrs Rutter sent the newspaper clipping to Mr Middleton.

In the meantime, Mr Sully had filed an official complaint to the Department of Native Affairs, about Mr White, stating that there could only be one superintendent at Carrolup. Mr Sully also sent in his diary. He commented about the publicity over the boys' art and football successes:

APRIL 12, 1950 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS 259

KANGAROOS



"KANGAROOS" BY SEVERAL BOYS, SHOWN AT THE RECENT EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS BY AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AT OVERSEA HOUSE, ST. JAMES'S.

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN ART: NOTABLE WORK BY CHILDREN.

MACPOSSUM



"MACPOSSUM" A SERIES OF LARVAL DRAWINGS BY SEVERAL BOYS, IN EXHIBITION AT A HOUSE OF OVERSEA HOUSE, ST. JAMES AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN.

LANDSCAPE—WARRING DANCING



"LANDSCAPE—WARRING DANCING" BY SEVERAL BOYS, THE FIGURES HEAD-DRESSED AND PAINTED SHOULDERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN EXHIBITED AT ST. JAMES'S.

LANDSCAPE WITH KANGAROOS



"LANDSCAPE WITH KANGAROOS" BY SEVERAL BOYS, THE FIGURES HEAD-DRESSED AND PAINTED SHOULDERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN EXHIBITED AT ST. JAMES'S.

FOREST SCENE



"FOREST SCENE" BY SEVERAL BOYS, ONE OF THE INTERESTING COLLECTIONS OF DRAWINGS BY AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN.

The remarkable drawings which we illustrate on this page were made by Australian Aboriginal children who, it is stated, had had no previous instruction in art, and had not seen any European paintings or water-colour drawings. The young artists, whose work has the characteristic freshness and naive charm of Primitive paintings, have remarkable powers of observation and a great feeling for composition and atmosphere. Their talent was first discovered, four years ago, by Mr. and Mrs. Noel White, who had been appointed by the West Australian Educational authorities to take charge of the Carrolup Native Settlement. The 111 drawings which accompanied the exhibition at Oversea House, St. James's (which was due to close on August 31), were collected by Mrs. Florence Butler and were shown by her permission. They have previously been exhibited in Holland, Australia and New Zealand, but this is the first occasion on which they have been seen in this country. The drawings, by artists aged between five and fourteen years, include designs for paddocks, and fences, land-clearing, weapons and a series of sheets of animal drawings, surrounded by decorative borders composed of Australian Aboriginal weapons and other objects, with neatly written notes on the characteristics and habits of the animals illustrated. The selection which we reproduce on this page gives a good idea of the high standard achieved.

The prestigious *Illustrated London News* highlighted the Carrolup boys' achievements, August 1950. (Noel & Lily White Collection.)

Such publicity has been at the expense of the boys' general education and preparation for life. They now face such a false impression of the world they eventually have to face, that when they leave school and have to work for a living they will find that they are ill-equipped "niggers". How many people in our walk of life earn a living from art or playing football? How much less is the chance for these unfortunate people!¹⁵

Mrs Rutter was shocked when she received her next letter from Mr Middleton, who wrote:

... in the education of the boys in a way that will befit them to take their place on terms of reasonable equality with the whites, it was NOT in their best interests to put the emphasis on art which, at best, would never earn them a living and would, as at present, be treated only as an interesting curiosity.¹⁶

Mr Middleton said that there would be no more drawings produced for use outside the school, particularly for commercial purposes.

Noel White also faced a series of further shocks. Firstly, Lily gave birth to a son, little Noel, who died four days later. The following month, Parnell Dempster was moved, without warning, to a job in Perth, joining Reynold Hart and Barry Loo who had been previously sent there by the Department of Native Affairs. In December 1950, the Department closed down Carrolup school, with little warning to the Whites. Noel and Lily were devastated and took a very long time to recover from the 'loss' of the boys.

The children's dreams of a better future were shattered by the school closure and their later experiences in a white-dominated society which considered them inferior. Writing in 1960, Revel Cooper said the decision to close the school, 'closed the pathway to a better way of life for coloured people'.¹⁷

Florence Rutter published a sixteen-page booklet, *Little Black Fingers*, (the title refers to the residue left on the children's fingers from the crayons and chalk used in their drawings), which provided an outline of the children's story and her visit to Carrolup. The pamphlet served as a way of publicising the art. She continued to exhibit the Carrolup artworks in England and Scotland during 1951-52. Mary Durack Miller, author and historian, and Florence Rutter produced a book, *Child Artists of the Australian Bush*, in mid-1952.¹⁸

Florence wrote to Queen Mary, wife of the late George V, at Buckingham Palace about the Carrolup artists. She gave her one of the drawings and later sent a copy of the book. The Whites received a letter of thanks and a book from Queen Mary. Florence also sent a copy of *Child Artists of the Australian Bush* to Princess Wilhelmina in The Netherlands, who was most impressed by the art.

Revel's dreams of a better life became a nightmare after he left Carrolup. Aged only eighteen, he was accused of committing wilful murder just outside Narrogin. He faced a white judge and jury in the Supreme Court of Western

Australia in November 1952. The jury could not reach a decision, so he faced a second trial for wilful murder a week later. He was found guilty of manslaughter – the jury recommended mercy – and was sentenced to four years in prison. The judge recommended Revel be sent to a country prison farm where he could work on his art, but he was sent to the maximum-security Fremantle Prison instead.

Mary Durack Miller, who had befriended Florence Rutter during the latter's stay in Perth, wrote regularly to her, keeping her informed of developments in Western Australia.

Revel was joined in prison for a short time by Reynold Hart and Parnell Dempster, who had been beaten by the police into confessing to a crime they did not commit. On their release, Reynold and Parnell began living with Frank and Myrtle Amos, a white couple first involved with the children in 1947, who loved them like sons. They applied to adopt the boys but were refused because there was 'no precedent'.

Mary Durack Miller helped Reynold and Parnell find jobs, and the boys were soon successful in their work, football, and social activities. They began painting again and Mary organised a small exhibition of their work. However, their families in the South-West called them home and for a period they moved between city and country, caught between two cultures.

Revel Cooper was released from prison in March 1956, but arrested two days later for 'drunkness' when out celebrating. Unable to pay the fine, he served three days in jail. He then headed to the South-West, where he had considerable difficulty finding a job. He was arrested for vagrancy and spent a period of time in and out of prison, working and painting when he could. Many Aboriginal people in Western Australia were imprisoned for minor offences. The Carrolup artists Ross Jones, Claude Kelly and Barry Loo also spent time in prison.

In April 1957, fourteen pictures by Revel and work by other Carrolup artists, Parnell Dempster, Reynold Hart, Milton Jackson, and Barry Loo, were displayed in Boans Stores in an exhibition organised by the Western Australian Native Welfare Council. Nineteen pictures by Albert Namatjira were also on display. Revel Cooper moved to Melbourne in 1958. He had been struggling with his drinking, and he and his close friends believed he should start a new life in Melbourne.

In the UK, Mrs Rutter was swindled out of her savings by a conman and in 1958 she had to sell her Carrolup artworks to American television magnate Herbert Mayer. He later gifted the collection to Colgate University in upstate New York where the art was to remain in obscurity for decades. Mrs Rutter passed away in 1958, her dreams shattered.

Noel and Lily White bought a house in a Perth suburb and both were teaching. In late 1961, Noel became the first teacher at Fremantle Prison Special

School. He received a letter from Revel Cooper, back in Western Australia and serving time at Pardelup Prison Farm, who offered to do some paintings for him.

You once said, that none of us boys would ever make a living out of our art, those words sir have helped me tremendously. I'm still out to prove you're wrong. Working as a commercial artist in Belgrave Victoria I made quite a good income ... in the future I shall endeavour to do my utmost to live up to the principles of life that you have taught me. I know I am a big disappointment to you sir, believing its not too late to make amends. I will say I am sorry and thoroughly ashamed of the kind of life I have led.¹⁹

The Whites' oldest daughter, Noelene White, remembers her father being very pleased, but also very sad, to see some of the Carrolup boys in his prison classroom. But there they taught younger inmates, which marked the beginning of the rise of Noongar prison art.

Noel White retired in 1965 and passed away in 1969. Revel Cooper said of Noel, 'This one man accomplished in a few short years what an whole Department could never do if they tried from now to eternity'.²⁰

Revel's life ended tragically when he was murdered in Victoria in 1983. He had been living in a car just before his death and his body was not found until 1985. He was eventually buried in 1987 in Victoria, in an unmarked grave thousands of miles away from his homeland and family.

Social anthropologist John Stanton first learned about the Carrolup children's art after seeing two Revel Cooper landscapes framing the study door of Ronald Berndt, the Foundation Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. In 1978, John became Curator (later Director) of the Anthropology Research Museum, as the Berndt Museum of Anthropology was then known.

In 1985, John started working with the Marribank Family Centre (Carrolup is now known as Marribank) and three years later they opened a Cultural Centre at Marribank which comprised an exhibition about the Carrolup child artists and a photographic archive.

In 1991, Gael Phillips and her father Stan donated to the Berndt Museum 150 artworks of the Carrolup children which Stan had collected, as a gift from them in memory of Gael's mother, Melvie. In 1992, the Berndt Museum launched the exhibition *Nyungar Landscapes. Aboriginal artists of the South-West: the heritage of Carrolup*, Western Australia, at the University's Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. Curated by John Stanton, the exhibition toured nationally for eight years, becoming at the time Australia's longest-travelling exhibition.

In 2004, Professor Howard Morphy from the Australian National University was invited to visit Colgate University in Upper New York State by the Director of Colgate's Picker Gallery. When Howard arrived, the Gallery

Curator, Diane Baker, mentioned that they had a box labelled Australian art, but she had never opened it.

The pair went to the storeroom and found the box. Howard was stunned to see a beautiful pastel drawing by Revel Cooper sitting on the very top. He recognised the style immediately, having read Stanton's monographs on the Carrolup artists. In fact, he was one of only a few people who would have recognised the Carrolup artworks. Howard and Diane found 65 drawings, just lying on top of each other. They had located the 'missing' Florence Rutter Collection. Another 48 drawings were later found.

Howard immediately called his close friend John Stanton, who had been looking for this collection for twenty years. John always had the feeling the drawings were somewhere in Upper New York State, but his efforts to find them had not come to fruition. John was elated. He had thought he would never see this collection.

In April 2005, John travelled to Colgate University with Noongar men Athol Farmer and Ezzard Flowers. When they arrived, they asked Picker Gallery staff if they could be alone with the drawings. The three men cried when they first saw them. It was extraordinarily emotional for the men to hold the drawings, thinking about *Boodja* (country) and the Carrolup children, and thinking of what these iconic objects represented to the Noongar community today.

They arranged for twenty pieces of the children's art to be temporarily returned to Western Australia in 2006 for the *Koorah Collingah (Children Long Ago)* exhibition in Katanning as part of the Perth International Arts Festival. The official opening of this Katanning exhibition on 24 February 2006 was the culmination of more than a year of careful planning, and much restoration work by staff in the Picker Gallery at Colgate University. Thousands of people visited Katanning.

After the opening, members of the community, and the wider public, were invited into the Katanning Art Gallery for the first time.²¹ It was a very emotional moment. The sense of awe and reflection was almost palpable. There was a mixture of pride and sadness – sadness that all but one of the child artists, Milton Jackson, had passed on. The loan of these twenty works from the Picker Gallery at Colgate University for the Perth International Arts Festival, and their return to country, to Noongar Boodja, had an extraordinary impact on the Katanning community – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people – and beyond.

Colgate University eventually made the decision to permanently return the artworks to Noongar country. In May 2013, they were moved to Curtin University in Perth, where they are housed in the John Curtin Gallery as 'The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artwork'. The *Koolark Koort Koorliny*

(*Heart coming home*) exhibition in 2013 had an enormous impact in the community.

The Legacy

On the 2 February 1950, Mrs Rutter told the boys of Carrolup that she would do all in her power to make their work known throughout the world. Seventy years later, John Stanton and I are trying to help the children of Carrolup reach out again, through our online resource *The Carrolup Story*²², our YouTube channel of the same name²³ and our eBook, published in June 2020, *Connection: Aboriginal Child Artists Captivate Europe*.

Noongar Elders have emphasised to us how important the Carrolup story is to their people and to their culture. They, and other Noongar people, know that the story can facilitate healing in Aboriginal communities. Connecting Aboriginal people to their culture, land, spirituality, family, community, and history is key to healing. John and I believe strongly that the story of Carrolup, which has never previously been told in detail, will help create cultural pride amongst Aboriginal people, which in turn will facilitate cultural connectedness. The story shows how Aboriginal children overcame considerable adversity, revealed their considerable talents, and captivated the public in various countries around the world.

In the *Elders Report Into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm and Youth Suicide*, published in 2014, Aboriginal Elders from around Australia stressed that the government's top-down approach in 'helping' Aboriginal people was not working.²⁴ They argued for: 1) Indigenous people to be connected to their culture, and 2) a community-led approach to healing. They said that access to traditional knowledge and culture strengthens a positive sense of identity, and provides young people with a cultural foundation that 'helps protect them from feelings of hopelessness, isolation and being lost between two worlds.'

These arguments are strongly supported by seminal research by Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde with over 200 Indigenous communities in British Columbia, Canada.²⁵ They observed that whilst some Indigenous communities had suicide rates nearly 800 times the national average, others had no suicides at all. They also found a strong correlation between 'cultural continuity' factors and the incidence of suicide. Indigenous communities that have control over local institutions and are grounded in a collective sense of history and culture, have the low rates of suicide or none at all.

By telling the Carrolup story, John Stanton and I aim to help people understand the impact of colonisation in the past and the legacy it has left for Aboriginal people today. We provide insights into what can help Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) people overcome trauma and its consequences.

Whilst healing comes from the individual, the process of healing is influenced by a person's environment, their family, community, and government policies. John and I aim to educate and inform non-Aboriginal people, to help wider society create safe and empathic environments in which healing can take place. Prejudice and racism act as major barriers to healing. By enhancing public awareness of the issues that have been faced by Aboriginal people, and celebrating their resilience and successes, we hope to reduce prejudice and racism in today's world.

The story of Carrolup speaks to today, not just in relation to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but also to the oppressed and their oppressors in various parts of the world. At its heart, our story is about the innate emotional needs of human beings. What happens if these innate needs are not satisfied? And what can happen if satisfaction of these needs is restored?

On the page opposite, I provide a list of basic needs that we as humans need satisfying in order to function normally. These needs were not satisfied for the children of Carrolup in the environment created by the Department of Native Affairs prior to the arrival of Noel and Lily White. In the Carrolup school environment, these needs started to be satisfied thanks to Noel White. He was a man ahead of his time in helping children heal from trauma. The Aboriginal children of Carrolup showed what could be achieved in the transformative healing environment created by this remarkable teacher.



Some of the Carrolup young artists. Front row: Reynold Hart (Far Left), Parnell Dempster (Middle), Ross Jones (2nd Right) and Revel Cooper (Far Right). Back row: Claude Kelly (Far Left) and Barry Loo (2nd Left). (Mary Durack Miller Collection, Battye Library, SLWA.)

- Feeling safe and secure.
 - Feeling a sense of belonging.
 - Being connected to others, to culture and country.
 - Having hope.
 - Feeling empowered, a sense of autonomy and control.
 - Having a sense of competence and achievement. Feeling pride.
 - Having trust and being trusted.
 - Having meaning and purpose.
 - Possessing a strong identity.
 - Feeling loved.
- Reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else's mind and heart.

The Aboriginal children of Carrolup have left a healing legacy with their art and their story, a legacy that will not just impact today, but also on future generations. Trauma has rippled across generations – healing can do the same.

Note:

This article is condensed from my book *Connection: Aboriginal Child Artists Captivate Europe*, written in association with John Stanton. Information about *Connection* is in the 'Book' section of *The Carrolup Story* website (<https://www.carrolup.info>).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who have contributed to our overall Carrolup project. You can see who they are and their contribution in the acknowledgements section of the book. Here, I would like to give a huge thanks to the following:

John Stanton, for our wonderful collaboration and close friendship. John has been on a Carrolup journey for over 40 years, and it's clear to me that the story of the Aboriginal child artists of Carrolup would probably have withered away if it wasn't for him.

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Dedication

This article is dedicated to the children of Carrolup Native Settlement and their families. It is also dedicated to my four children, Natasha, Sam, Ben and

Annalie, and grandchildren Evie and Ally. We may be far apart in distance, but you are always close to my hearts.

Endnotes:

1. Revel Cooper reflections on Carrolup, 1960, Doreen Trainor Collection, Batty Library, SLWA A342A.
2. Carrolup School Journal. Noel & Lily White Collection.
3. The children commonly called Noel and Lily White, 'Mr and Mrs Whites'.
4. Letter from Barry Loo to Florence Rutter, 20 September 1950. In: Florence Rutter, *Little Black Fingers*, 1950, p.9.
5. *Lord Forrest Centenary Booklet*, Trove, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-363984514/view?partId=nla.obj-363984848#page/n0/mode/1up>. Accessed 16 February 2021.
6. Aboriginal Children Show Amazing Skill in Art', *Sunday Times*, 13 July 1947, p.6.
7. Revel Cooper reflections on Carrolup. op.cit.
8. Florence Rutter, *Little Black Fingers*, 1950, p.5.
9. Letter from Parnell Dempster to Florence Rutter, 6 July 1950. Mary Durack Miller Collection (ACC 3302A), Batty Library, SLWA.
10. Typed extracts of Mr Sully's Diary (February - June 1950), originally held by Department of Native Affairs. State Records Office of Western Australia.
11. 'Can Your Children Draw Like This?' *Daily Graphic*, UK, 29 July 1950. Noel & Lily White Collection.
12. Letter from Florence Rutter to SG Middleton, 30 July 1950. Mary Durack Miller Collection (ACC 3302A), Batty Library, SLWA.
13. Artworks from Carrolup in the *Illustrated London News*, 12th August 1950. This page, along with the front page of the issue, can be found in the Mary Durack Miller Collection (ACC 3302A), Batty Library, SLWA.
14. *Daily Graphic*, UK, 29 July 1950. op.cit.
15. Mr Sully's report about Noel White, 7 June 1950, sent to SG Middleton, Commissioner of the Department of Native Affairs. State Records Office of Western Australia.
16. Letter from SG Middleton to Florence Rutter, 12 September 1950. Mary Durack Miller Collection (ACC 3302A), Batty Library, SLWA.
17. Revel Cooper reflections on Carrolup. op.cit.
18. MD Miller and F Rutter, *Child Artists of the Australian Bush*, Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., 1952.
19. Letter from Revel Cooper to Noel White, 4th December 1961. Noel & Lily White Collection.
20. Revel Cooper reflections on Carrolup. op.cit.
21. 'Into the Katanning Art Gallery for the Koorah Coolingah Exhibition', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc_9tW7wnIg. Accessed 16 February 2021.
22. Our website *The Carrolup Story*, <https://www.carrolup.info>, contains a wealth of content focused on the story of the Carrolup child artists and a variety of issues and related matters. You can access more than 200 articles on our *Story* and *Healing* blogs,

a gallery of Carrolup art, collections of photographs and memorabilia, videos focused on the story and on trauma and healing, and more.

23. *The Carrolup Story* YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpCtcTVICG446OURXP2gUQA/videos>. Accessed 16 February 2021.
24. *Elders Report Into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm and Youth Suicide*, <https://www.cultureislife.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Elders-Report-CultureIsLife.pdf>. Accessed 16 February 2021.
25. Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde, *Cultural Continuity as a Hedge Against Suicide in Canada's First Nations*, https://reviewboard.ca/upload/project_document/Chandler_and_Lalonde_1998_Paper_1265041839.PDF