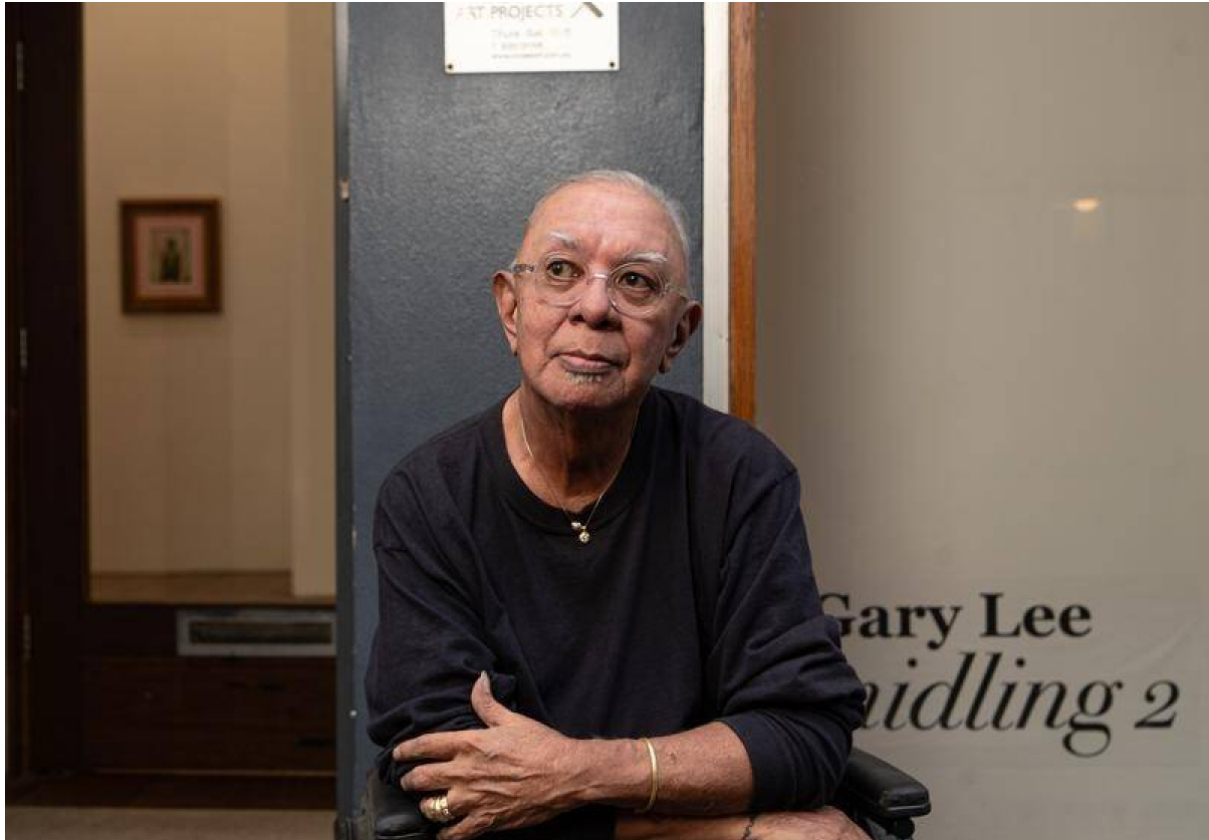


# Artist reimages colonial photos through a Larrakia lens

[Rudi Maxwell](#) - March 18, 2024



## CULTURE

Gary Lee has reconsidered photographs of traditional owners from Darwin for a new exhibition. (Image: Flavio Brancalone/AAP PHOTOS)

Larrakia artist Gary Lee has reconsidered a trove of photographs of traditional owners from his home town of Darwin in the late 19th century for a new exhibition.

"It's very important because I can reimage these people and give their portraits a different aesthetic through a contemporary Larrakia lens," he told AAP.

"By 'these people' I mean people who are important to me as descendants and/or Larrakia ancestors who are otherwise marginalised by mainstream histories."

Lee's exhibition *midling 2* (Larrakia: Together), curated by Maurice O'Riordan, is on show at the Cross Art Projects, Potts Point, Sydney, running in parallel to Mardi Gras Festival and Biennale of Sydney.

The exhibition contains a selection of Lee's new and remade works, including recent hand-coloured photo-based prints and a new presentation of photo-portraits.

The Cross Art Project also hosted a book launch of HEAT: Gary Lee — Selected texts art & anthropology and a conversation between Lee, O'Riordan and arts researchers Myles Russell-Cook, Tristen Harwood and Jane Clark about contested spaces in relation to Indigenous identity, queerness and the archive.

"That's kind of the role and the power of art, the way it can pose those questions in a way that can be both confronting but also aesthetically beautiful," O'Riordan said.

"So that people are given an entry into considering things in ways that they may not have, and it's not about directing people or instructing them but just creating spaces and concepts that open up conversations."

Based in Garramilla/Darwin, Gary Lee is a Larrakia artist, curator, writer, and anthropologist, who also has ties to the Wardaman (NT) and Karajarri peoples (WA).

O'Riordan, who edited the book, said the exhibition draws on Lee's personal archive of historic family photographs and artworks and brings together key strands of a practice which redefines notions of cultural identity, masculinity and beauty from a Larrakia perspective.

Some of the works in the exhibition reappropriate photographs taken by colonial police inspector Paul Foelsche.

"Foelsche left a large legacy of work, including portraits of many Larrakia people who he named, individually, so he is kind of a bit schizophrenic because he was quite the seasoned photographer ... but then there's controversy about his complicity in the colonial project," O'Riordan said.

"As Gary says, we can look beyond the measuring stick and we see beautiful people and he's very actively appropriating those images.

"It's not so much about valorising the photos but valorising the people he photographed ... one work includes an image of his great great grandmother ... the power of Gary's work has juxtaposed that against an image of his niece."

Lee has, since 1993, embarked on a photographic project focusing on male portraiture, which explores the connection between culture, ethnicity and masculinity, particularly among 'everyday' boys and men.

"Apart from work that deals with my own family history I also appreciate how the exhibition also integrates other aspects of my practice as with my various other portrait-based series," he said.

Midling 2 (Larrakia: Together) runs at the Cross Art Project until March 29.

Rudi Maxwell - AAP

National Indigenous Times: Gary Lee reimages colonial photos through a Larrakia lens by Rudi Maxwell, March 18, 2024 - <https://nit.com.au/18-03-2024/10313/artist-reimages-colonial-photos-through-a-larrakia-lens>