



# DANIEL BOYD

## A DARKER SHADE OF DARK #1-4

# DANIEL BOYD'S A DARKER SHADE OF DARK

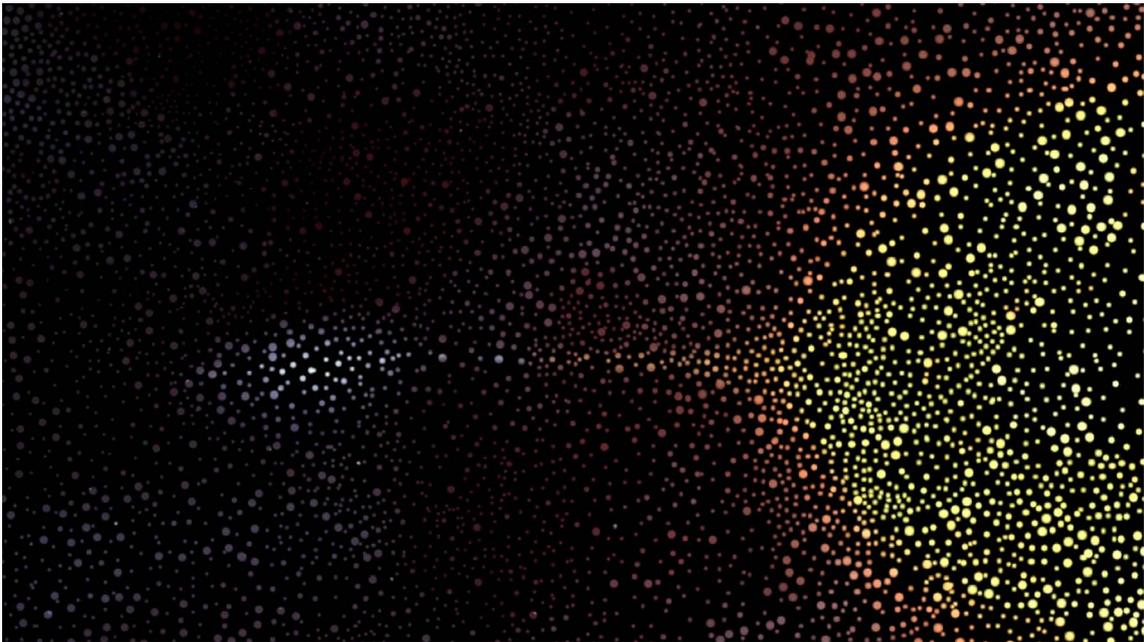
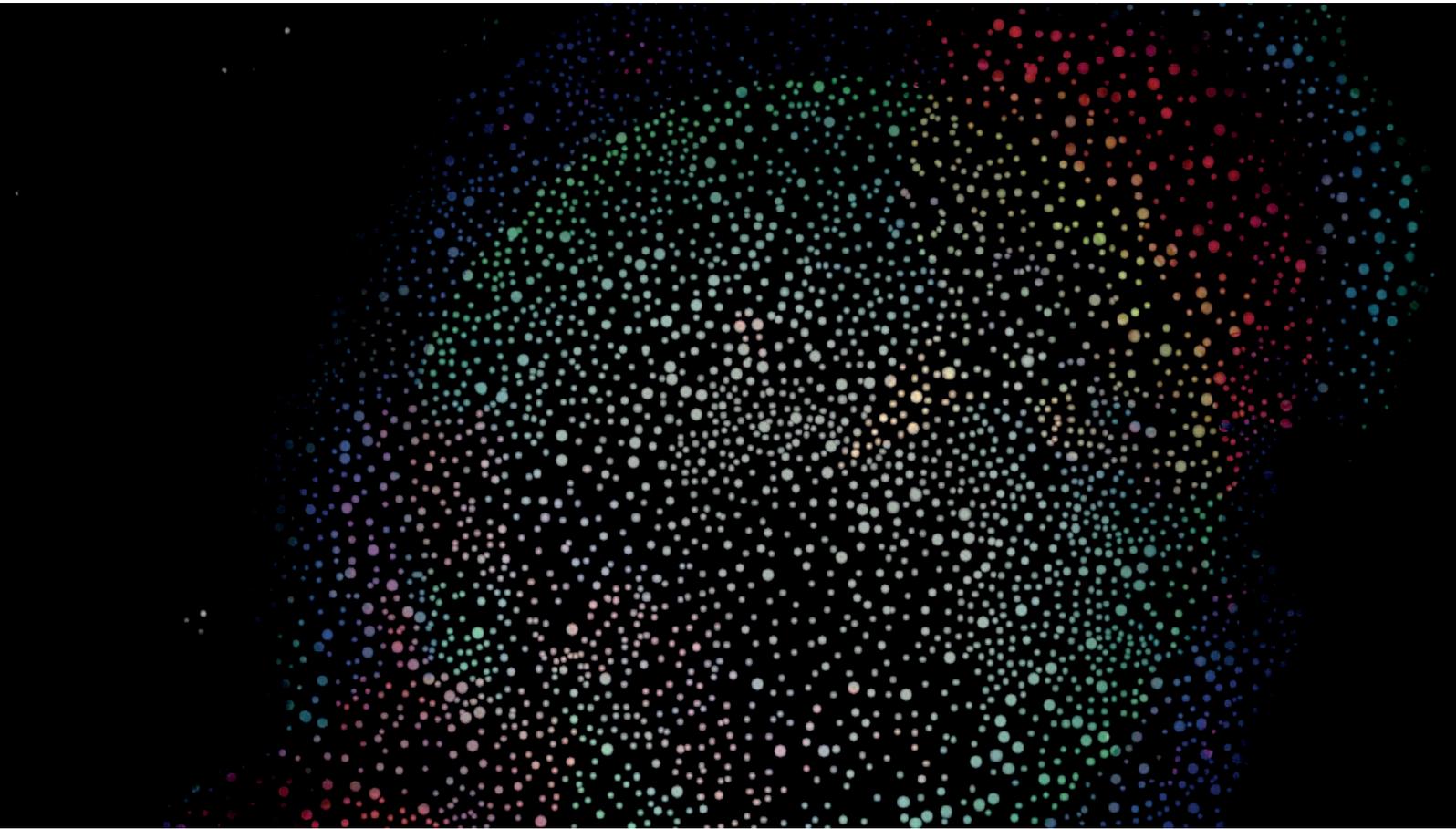
IAN MCLEAN

Daniel Boyd's Melanesian heritage is an obvious spur to his interest in Europe's Pacific explorations during the Age of Enlightenment. It provides a locus for his investigations, which increasingly question the philosophical assumptions behind the scientific quest of these explorations.

These days the darkest regions are no longer Europe's antipodes but outer space and the quantum world. Both figure in Boyd's large video installations *A Darker Shade of Dark* (2012). Ryan Grieve of the Canyons provided the soundtrack, while Boyd contributed the visual elements, which are animated versions of his paintings. Like a hypnotic star-saturated night sky by which the Pacific explorers (European and Indigenous) navigated, or at the opposite scale, an array of sub-atomic particles in the quantum world, each is at the ends of today's known world where today's Captain Cooks venture.

Boyd's subject is what lies beyond the reach of empirical investigation, what can't be seen or detected except theoretically: so-called dark matter, which with dark energy accounts for 95 per cent of the universe. *A Darker Shade of Dark*, Boyd said, was made 'just before the discovery of the 'God particle' [Higgs Boson particle] by the Hadron Collider. And not being able to see that, but knowing that it is there, intrigued me. I saw Dark Matter as a metaphor for comprehension',<sup>1</sup> or the limits of knowledge. The empirical ideals of Enlightenment – its ethnographic, geological, geographic, meteorological and botanic quantifications – were predicated on avoiding metaphysical questions. In Boyd's art metaphysics returns like the repressed to trouble its certainties and desires.

Venturing into these philosophical regions is the reason Boyd's style changed dramatically in 2011 from a naturalistic realism typical of exploration art to a much more abstract dotting, as if shifting from empiricism's concern with the verity of what we see to the science of how we see. The dots of light allude to the transparent three-dimensional beads that cover the appropriated images in his paintings. Each bead is, like the eye, a concave lens through which all information must pass before being processed. However, Boyd's point is as much cognitive as optical. In concealing rather than revealing, the dots shatter the Enlightenment dream of transparent, unmediated and absolute knowledge. They blind and mesmerise rather than illuminate. Paradoxically, given the usual metaphors of Western thought, Boyd makes light a metonym of dark matter.



Daniel BOYD, *A Darker Shade of Dark #1-4* (details), 2012, HD video, 16:9 with sound, 4 channel video installation, duration 20 minutes, sound: Ryan Grieve. Image courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Boyd's dotting is closer to late nineteenth-century French pointillism than Western Desert painting. However, the latter reference is difficult to avoid whatever the artist's intentions, especially since Boyd's art recalls the shimmering effect of Western Desert painting. It gives dark matter an unknown and inexplicable ancestry.

Metaphors of colonialism run through Boyd's philosophical critique of Enlightenment's empirical science. After all, its desire to know everything, to illuminate the dark regions of the world and map the whole universe, was the opening gambit of colonialism. Boyd's metaphysical turn has not abandoned the impetus for his earlier witty postcolonial appropriations but more emphatically alerts us to what wasn't, isn't and will not, be seen.

Ian McLean is Senior Research Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Wollongong and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Western Australia. He has published extensively on Australian art and particularly Aboriginal art within a contemporary context. His books include *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous art*, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, *White Aborigines Identity Politics in Australian Art*, and *The Art of Gordon Bennett* (with a chapter by Gordon Bennett). He is a former advisory board member of Third Text, and is currently on the advisory boards of World Art and National Identities.

#### Note

- 1 Daniel Boyd quoted in Kerri Davies, 'Sydney Festival: 100 million nights', *Megaphone Oz*, 7 January 2014, <http://megaphoneoz.com/sydney-festival-100-million-nights/>.

## Daniel Boyd: A Darker Shade of Dark #1-4

9 October – 4 December 2015

### LIST OF WORKS

#### Daniel BOYD

Kudjla/Gangalu people, Queensland

*Daniel Boyd: A Darker Shade of Dark #1-4*, 2012

HD video, 16:9 with sound

4 channel video installation

duration 20 minutes

Sound: Ryan Grieve

#### Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art

University of South Australia

55 North Terrace, Adelaide, SA 5000

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Cover image: Daniel BOYD: *A Darker Shade of Dark #1-4*, (detail), 2012, HD video, 16:9 with sound, 4 channel video installation, duration 20 minutes. Sound: Ryan Grieve. Image courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

