CHRIS PEASE

Western Australian artist

Talk title: 'European Representation and First Nation Experience: Robert Dale's *Panoramic view of King George Sound* and Yagan's Head'

Abstract:

The interpretation of land for the people of the British Colony was very different to that of the Nyoongar people. A primary focus of the colony was to procure suitable fertile land for agriculture. The land was surveyed and interpreted via mathematics, Hydrology, Geology and was then divided up to individual families. Most of the land was then fenced and cleared. This was at complete odds with the cultural beliefs of Nyoongar people who used extensive trade routes through the South West of Western Australia and moved according to seasons. Private land ownership was a foreign concept to the Nyoongar people.

In 1829 HMS Sulphur arrived in the Swan River bringing with it a detachment of the 63rd Regiment, under the command of Captain Frederick Irwin, sent to provide protection for the colony. One of the regiment's soldiers, Lieutenant Robert Dale (1810-1856), explorer and draftsman, became acting assistant to Surveyor-General John Roe.

Dale made extensive and detailed expeditions throughout the Canning River, the York district and King George's Sound. At almost three metres in length, *Panoramic view of King George Sound* was the most ambitious attempt to depict the Australian landscape in print-making made during the first half of the nineteenth century. The 1834 etching and aquatint shows gently undulating countryside ripe for agricultural improvement and blessed with harmonious, peaceful relations between settlers and cheerfully compliant natives.

There is a sinister back story to Dale's Panorama. In 1833 Dale acquired the head of Yagan, a prominent Nyoongar leader who had been shot, skinned and beheaded that year. He took the head back to London where he met Thomas Pettigrew, a surgeon who had acquired a taste for antiquities and other scientific curiosities. Dale arranged for Thomas Pettigrew to have exclusive rights to exhibit the Yagan's head. Pettigrew held dinner parties and displayed Yagan's head in front of a copy of *Panoramic View of King George's Sound*, *Part of the Colony of Swan River* and encouraged his guests to buy the print as a souvenir. Several Black Cockatoo feathers were placed in Yagan's hair for aesthetic purposes.

Biographical Note:

Chris Pease has established himself as a prominent Western Australian visual artist since transitioning from a background in graphic design and art education over the last 17 years. Since winning the Painting Prize at the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards in 2002, Chris has continued to evolve and mature a highly individual style that draws significantly on his indigenous background and his interest in the complex intertwined history of Australia since the arrival of the Europeans. In particular his work focuses on the interpretation of land and systems of belief relating to land (scientific, spiritual and cultural). His work often reveals the propaganda, mythology and manipulation of the landscape through art by juxtaposing scientific, cultural or other symbolic elements against the work. Most recently his work has focused on the Minang area around Albany and Denmark and the dark history of drawings made by Robert Dale and subsequent prints by Robert Havell.

Painting for discussion**:** Charles Conder, *Balmoral Beach,* 1888