

**Remembering the Unknown:  
Intergenerational and Transgenerational Postmemory  
in the Works of Imants Tillers (1950)**

Diana Anna Kreichberga

Prof. dr. M. K. Valjakka

Leiden University

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## Introduction

The perception of an individual's identity is often formed by the events and experiences encountered in one's past that provide a foundation for the individual's sense of self. The experienced past of one's lived life creates personal memories that shape the present and inform the future actions of an individual. Moreover, as with any lived experience, memories can also be experienced and shared by multiple individuals, providing an important building block in the creation of a shared collective belonging and collective identity. According to archaeologist Jan Assmann, memories are not only important components in defining an individual's identity but can be seen as social obligations that are required as part of the social inclusion of an individual within a certain community.<sup>1</sup> In essence, without individual and collective memories, it is difficult to define one's identity and experience any form of collective bonding in society.

While the presence of experienced and shared memories has been extensively analyzed and discussed within the field of memory studies by Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, Astrid Erll, and Ann Rigney, scholars have encountered a phenomenon in which an individual internalizes memories that have not been physically experienced by the person at any point of his or her life.<sup>2</sup> In 1992, literary scholar Marianne Hirsch coined the term "postmemory" which aims to describe the acquisition of memories, often traumatic ones, that are passed from one generation to another through vivid recollections, emotionally charged narratives, and visual representations.<sup>3</sup> By focusing on the vernacular photography archives of the Holocaust survivors, Hirsch observed how the experienced trauma had the potential of becoming deeply ingrained in the minds of the generation after these experienced events.<sup>4</sup> The next generation appropriated or to a certain extent internalized the memories of their parents. As stories of loss and grief dominated the childhood of the next generation, the expressive retelling of these narratives became real and present in their imaginations, over time becoming part of their own stories of the past – their own memories.<sup>5</sup>

Hirsch has argued that the inheritance of postmemory can lead to the destabilization of one's identity, as the personal memories become overpowered by the retelling of the experienced trauma of a person's family. The individual becomes shaped by the past that he

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<sup>1</sup> Assmann J., "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 114.

<sup>2</sup> Assmann A., "Re-Framing Memory," 40-3; Assmann J., "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 109-14; Erll, "Cultural Memory," 4-6; Rigney, "Cultural Memory Studies," 67-70.

<sup>3</sup> Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 106-7.

<sup>4</sup> Hirsch, "Family Pictures," 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 107.

or she did not experience, resulting in an unclear and fragmented sense of self.<sup>6</sup> By addressing the concept of postmemory in her scholarly work, Hirsch pointed out the long-term effects that these appropriated memories had on individuals and their identities. A sense of displacement and pain continued to dominate the lives of the generation after the experienced historical event. To overcome this inherited sense of trauma, many children of the postmemory generation later in their adult lives turned to creative means, such as fiction, memoir, and visual story-telling, in order to make sense of their appropriated memories.<sup>7</sup>

Depiction of the past and the visualization of traumatic experiences have been present in the art-making process of many artists since World War I, becoming a particularly significant theme in visual arts after the atrocities experienced during World War II. By employing their creative faculties, artists have used visual arts as an outlet for discussing their inner dilemmas and recontextualizing their past experiences. In his artistic practice, Australian-Latvian artist Imants Tillers (1950) has focused on themes such as displacement, oppression, loss, diaspora, and identity that have been inspired by his own inheritance of traumatic memories from the previous generations.<sup>8</sup> Growing up in a household with Latvian immigrant parents, Tillers' sense of childhood was dominated by stories of pain and loss shared by his mother and father alike. Tillers' parents, Dzidra Lapiņš and Imants Tillers, met in a refugee camp in West Germany as both were forced to leave their native Latvia due to the gruesome reality experienced during World War II.<sup>9</sup> In order to escape the war and uncertainty dominating the European continent, his parents settled in Australia in 1949.<sup>10</sup> Tillers' formative years were influenced by his parents' trauma, and the inherited postmemory led to his acquisition of an identity of a displaced person that has played an important role in his creative output.<sup>11</sup>

While Tillers' identity was shaped by traumatic memories and the need to preserve his Latvian roots, this complex past hindered his sense of belonging to the collective identity of a second-generation immigrant in Australia. Tillers' assimilation into Australian culture meant the inheritance of its painful historical legacy of brutality and involuntary displacement. The policies of colonial settlers shaped the establishment of the Australian state and greatly effected the lives of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders who were eradicated,

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<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 107.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 112; Hirsch, "Connective Arts of Postmemory," 174.

<sup>8</sup> Hart, "Introduction," 9; Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 123.

<sup>9</sup> Ansone, "Finding Out About Latvia," 209-11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 213.

misplaced from their native lands, and diminished to non-citizen status.<sup>12</sup> The experienced trauma by indigenous populations and the guilt of atrocities committed as part of the colonial attitudes have permeated Australian society and continue to be an important discussion point in the debate regarding the nation's identity.<sup>13</sup> This past can be seen as a form of a shared traumatic collective memory, passed on from one generation to another. Tillers has often intentionally addressed and challenged Australia's problematic history and the myth that surrounds the formation of Australian identity, thus showcasing the influence of collective postmemory in his work.

During his long and extensive career as a conceptual artist, the work of Tillers has been recognized for its unique use of appropriation that acts as a method in establishing a complex visual narrative system in the conceptual project *The Book of Power* (1981-present). This long-term project intentionally encompasses all his works created within his elaborate canvasboard system in which every panel in the system is numbered in sequence, indicating the artist's continuous count toward infinity.<sup>14</sup> While appropriation in visual arts is normally associated with the intentional reuse of existing imagery, ideas, or objects with minimal transformation, Tillers' application of the method takes this aspect further by imperfectly copying and recontextualizing the appropriated sources in order to create new, complex narratives within his artworks.<sup>15</sup> Tillers' appropriation focuses on the usage of fine art imagery, poetry, place names, philosophical texts, and visual symbols found in books, art catalogs, and journals in his library.<sup>16</sup> The artist mostly employs sources that connect with his philosophical inquiries regarding identity, chance, faith, and history, forming an extremely extensive visual reference list. However, at the same time, over the years Tillers has noted the importance of recycling the used references in his works. He often refers back to artists such as Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1979), Colin McCahon (1919-1987), Shusaku Arakawa (1936-2010), Georg Baselitz (1938), Anselm Kiefer (1945), and Michael Nelson Jagamara (1946-2022), poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), and imagery found in Latvian children's books and folktales.<sup>17</sup>

Due to his successful development of a unique visual language system, Tillers' art has been closely studied by art historians Deborah Hart, Graham Coulter-Smith, Ian McLean, Elita Anson, and anthropologist Howard Morphy who have focused on his use of visual and

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<sup>12</sup> McLean, "The Metaphysics of Mimicry," 157-9; Stokes, "Citizenship and Aboriginality," 158.

<sup>13</sup> Kane, "Racialism and Democracy," 117-8; Stokes, "Introduction," 5-9.

<sup>14</sup> McLean, "The Metaphysics of Mimicry," 163.

<sup>15</sup> Chilvers and Glaves-Smith, "Appropriation," 27-8; McLean, "Post-Western Poetics," 640-2.

<sup>16</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 131.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-140.

conceptual appropriation, the philosophy behind the canvasboard system, and the analysis of visual elements conveying his dual identity. While scholars have recognized the role of Tillers' dual identity problem and the significance of his parents' memory narratives in his art, the presence of intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory has not yet been fully defined and explored in academic research. The presence of intergenerational postmemory, which encompasses the intimate communication of memories across three generations (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) and its impact on the individual's identity, has been discussed by scholars focusing on Tillers' appropriation of visual imagery from Latvian children's books and folktale stories; however, no connection has been made with this theoretical concept.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, transgenerational postmemory, which conveys the intentional mediation of public collective memories through symbols, historical narratives, and archives passed across distant generations, has not been addressed in the research of Tillers' art.<sup>19</sup> For these reasons, this research aims to address this gap in scholarly focus and provide a more nuanced reading of the depicted visual narratives in Tillers' works with the help of postmemory as a theoretical basis for this analysis.

The main research question of this thesis focuses on addressing the extent to which the use of postmemory provides new interpretative insights regarding the depiction of memories and trauma in Tillers' conceptual project *The Book of Power* (1981-present), particularly critically analyzing and categorizing intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory depicted in his artworks. By basing the theoretical framework in the fields of art history and memory studies, the coming chapters focus on revealing how postmemory can be recognized in Tillers' art and what are some of the interpretative possibilities this concept can offer in visual analysis. Due to the vast scope of *The Book of Power*, consisting of more than one hundred thousand canvasboards, the research centers on four of Tillers' large-scale artworks that have acquired scholarly attention in the past due to the complex visual and conceptual narrative systems presented within them.<sup>20</sup> The analyses concentrate on the paintings *Farewell to Reason* (1996), 292 canvasboards, *Monaro* (1998), 288 canvasboards, *Terra Negata* (2005), 288 canvasboards, and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011), 288 canvasboards, that provide fruitful grounds for recognizing manifestations of intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory in these artworks.

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<sup>18</sup> Hirsch, "Works in Progress," 143.

<sup>19</sup> Assmann A., "Re-Framing Memory," 42-4.

<sup>20</sup> Tillers, "Journey to Nowhere," 27-9.

In order to answer the set research question, a critical literature review, visual analyses, and past communication with the artist (email correspondence and studio visit) are employed to recontextualize the presence of intergenerational postmemory in Tillers' paintings *Monaro* (1998) and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011) and to provide new interpretative insights regarding the impact of transgenerational postmemory and the exploration of Australia's colonial history in paintings *Farewell to Reason* (1996) and *Terra Negata* (2005) (fig. 1-4). Due to the large-scale and distant location of the aforementioned artworks, it is important to recognize the limitations of working with printed reproductions and online materials. For this reason, this research analyzes the more visible elements in Tillers' artworks to make evident the presence of postmemory in his works on broader terms and further illustrate the artist's unique take on appropriation through the usage of visual imagery, ideas, place names, and texts. Thus, the field of memory studies and the application of postmemory within this analysis provides new insights into the research of Tillers' complex visual narrative system and aims to establish a new conceptual framework in the exploration of inherited traumatic memories in the works of visual artists.

This thesis, structured into three chapters, provides close readings of the presence of postmemory in Tillers' paintings. The first chapter sets the theoretical framework used within this research, examining the concept of postmemory as a tool in art historical analysis. An overview of the main developments within the field of memory studies showcases the significance of postmemory in visual arts and distinguishes the differences between intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory. Additionally, the chapter also characterizes Tillers' work by providing an insight into the artist's oeuvre, his early involvement in the conceptual art movement, and his interest in developing appropriation as an artistic method in the project *The Book of Power*. Then, the second chapter closely looks into the artist's Latvian roots, addressing the influence of his parents' memories in his artistic output. This is analyzed through the close readings of paintings *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* that distinctly showcase the presence of intergenerational postmemory appropriated by the artist. Finally, by emphasizing the influence of Tillers' dual identity, the third chapter explores the artist's critical take on the Australian collective identity and the country's colonial history. By engaging with different collective memories, the analyses of paintings *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata* showcase the ways how the artist uses transgenerational postmemory narratives in order to deconstruct and critique the origins of the nation's mystique.

## 1. Conveying Memories through Visual Narratives

Over the last few decades, the research on the importance of memories in the creation of personal and collective identities has expanded, reaching into the realms of visual arts and addressing the works of artists depicting narratives that showcase clear linkage to memory-inspired sources.<sup>21</sup> As memories play a significant role in the identity formation of any person, the focus on individual and collective identities and the factors that influence their creation and coexistence provides an interesting starting point for viewing memories as subjects affected by external influences, which mold and shape a person's understanding of oneself. This chapter aims to create a blueprint for the visual analysis in this research, focusing on the depiction of intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory in the works of Tillers by addressing the developments in the field of memory studies that have shaped the conceptualization and application of the concept of postmemory in visual arts. A critical analysis of the main aspects that effect one's understanding of personal and collective identities through the possession of individual and shared memories is followed by a discussion of the significance of postmemory and its role in destabilizing these memories.

### 1.1 Memory as a Source in Visual Story-Telling

By focusing on the significance of memory in the creation of individual and shared identities, the field of memory studies has grown and expanded in its focus, addressing the personal, social, cultural, and political factors that shape and alter the ways how memories are remembered and communicated.<sup>22</sup> Memory, according to archaeologist Jan Assmann, facilitates the creation and awareness of the self on a personal and a collective level.<sup>23</sup> This particular knowledge base, which in psychology is referred to as episodic memory, processes an individual's autobiographical experiences and is characterized by its embodied and fragmentary nature.<sup>24</sup> It forms the understanding of oneself and also fosters the possibility of establishing certain social group relationships (family, community, generation, etc.) that “are formed and cohere by the dynamics of association and dissociation which is always loaded (to varying degrees) with affection.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, eds., *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Cretien van Campen, ed., *The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories* (Oxford: Oxford Academic Press, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Assmann A., “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 214-221; Assmann J., “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 109-114.

<sup>23</sup> Assmann J., “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 109.

<sup>24</sup> Assmann A., “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 213.

<sup>25</sup> Assmann J., “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 114.



As sociologist Barry Schwartz asserts, memory and its embeddedness in the past (particular events and situations) means that an individual's biographical memory finds its grounds in experiences and feelings that refer to a particular time in one's life.<sup>26</sup> Due to the cognitive processes involved in the creation and storage of personal memories, the experienced past often becomes distorted and to some extent altered, as time shapes the individual's ability in recalling the events or experiences in their fullness.<sup>27</sup> Literary scholar Aleida Assmann further articulates that memory is defined through its particular relationship and interaction between acts of forgetting and remembering.<sup>28</sup> Remembering, however, is an important factor in one's dealing with the past that creates a sense of selfhood, and the act of keeping certain memories alive through recollection ensures that memories continue occupying space in an individual's psyche and informing one's present actions.<sup>29</sup> Literary scholar Ann Rigney emphasizes that memory in itself "is never pre-given but the always emerging outcome of acts of remembrance."<sup>30</sup> Thus, based on these insights, it can be summarized that individual memory involves active remembering which ensures a person's sense of self, informs future actions, and leads to collective inclusion.<sup>31</sup>

The creation of one's identity does not exist in a vacuum or outside social relations. Based on language, material images, and texts, memory, as Aleida Assmann has argued, is created through social encounters with others that enable individuals to share, exchange, confirm, and correct memories.<sup>32</sup> Because social participation leads to some form of engagement with a particular group identity, Assmann states: "To participate in the group's vision of its past, then, means that one has to learn about. One cannot remember it, one has to memorize it."<sup>33</sup> This means that collective belonging is created through shared and experienced memories that do not have to be experienced physically but have to be deeply ingrained in one's understanding and recollection of a particular group's identity. In Assmann's view, individual memory is a dynamic phenomenon that depends on the communication of intergenerational memory and plays an important role in defining a person's social identity. Moreover, interactions and situations in which shared memories are

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<sup>26</sup> Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Assmann A., "Memory, Individual, and Collective," 211.

<sup>29</sup> Rigney, "Cultural Memory Studies," 68.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," 10; Assmann J., "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 109; Rigney, "Cultural Memory Studies," 65.

<sup>32</sup> Assmann A., "Re-Framing Memory," 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

being exchanged are of great importance to any individuals who are part of certain communities.<sup>34</sup>

Scholars have argued that on a collective level, in certain situations, memories undergo transformations that remove the necessity for their embodied experience and instead enable individuals to acquire them through symbolic means.<sup>35</sup> The various channels through which the notion of collective memory can be communicated shape its nature, creating a mediated experience of the past.<sup>36</sup> In particular, political and cultural collective memory, existing at an idea-based level, depends on institutions such as governments, archives, and museums for creating a widespread sense of a collective identity through the employment of symbols, images, monuments, and ceremonies.<sup>37</sup> By selecting and excluding events that are used in constructing a collective identity, the mediation of collectively-based memories becomes a crucial aspect in forming the idea of, for example, a nation in the collective consciousness.<sup>38</sup> For an individual living in a particular country or region, it is therefore of great importance to learn and memorize these collective memories for the person to belong and become part of the “one of us” mentality. Thus, when certain collective memories are mediated to individuals on a transgenerational level, one does not necessarily have to have experienced them in real time in order to acquire these past stories and internalize the collective notions that govern the aspects of a shared identity.

The recognition of embodied and mediated memories and their impact on the individual's sense of self has enabled scholars to critically address the various forms of memories that can either positively or negatively impact the process of identity formation. By coining the term “postmemory” in the 1990s, literary scholar Marianne Hirsch established a framework that investigates the overwhelming presence of inherited memories in the lives of generations that come after a particular experienced historical trauma.<sup>39</sup> Through her focus on the vernacular photography archives of the Holocaust survivors, Hirsch, by reworking and expanding her concept, has addressed its usage in the realm of literary and visual arts scholarship.<sup>40</sup> Hirsch argues that postmemory, similarly to the memory itself, is constructed and mediated through the employment of narration and imagination.<sup>41</sup> As the generation after the witnessed trauma learns about the past of their families' experiences as young children,

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<sup>34</sup> Assmann A., “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 214.

<sup>35</sup> Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies,” 5; Assmann A., “Re-Framing Memory,” 42.

<sup>36</sup> Assmann A., “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 214.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-21.

<sup>38</sup> Stokes, “Introduction,” 9; Smith, “The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed?” 10.

<sup>39</sup> Hirsch, “Family Pictures,” 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Hirsch, “Connective Arts of Postmemory,” 174.

<sup>41</sup> Hirsch, “Family Pictures,” 8-9.

for example, their parents' survival through the complicated historical periods, the main mediums that enable the acquisition of these memories are images and stories. The strong feelings regarding the embodied past that their families experienced fuel emotionally-driven narratives which become ingrained in the minds of the next generation through their imaginative investment.<sup>42</sup> Growing up in an environment that is heavily influenced by such narratives, according to Hirsch, can lead to a situation in which “one's own stories and experiences [are] displaced, even evacuated by those of a previous generation.”<sup>43</sup> The individual and his or her memories become second-degree in the process of recollecting one's own personal history, affecting the formation and expression of personal identity. The memories of others become internalized and appropriated as part of one's own understanding of the self and the witnessed past, thus destabilizing a person's individual conception of his or her past through the inheritance of intergenerational postmemory.<sup>44</sup>

Hirsch's concept, reworked during the last two decades, has reframed the intergenerational and transgenerational mediation and transmission of traumatic memories. However, it is important to recognize Hirsch's situatedness in the Western trauma studies scholarship that has been criticized due to the lack of cultural sensitivity and exclusionary nature of universalizing Western conceptions of trauma.<sup>45</sup> During the 2010s, her research addressed its previous limitations, recognizing the impact that different collective experiences across the globe, such as extreme violence, political transformations, or revolutions in different world regions, can have both on an individual and collective level, as individual and collective memories continuously interconnect and shape the understanding of the past.<sup>46</sup> Transgenerational postmemory, similarly to intergenerational postmemory, can be mediated from one generation to another, impacting the collective perception of a group's identity through the transmission of historical collective experiences and knowledge about past injustices.<sup>47</sup> According to Hirsch, the communication of the shared past takes place through archives, collective imagination, public fantasies, and projections that shape the group's perception of their values and history and motivate a sense of responsibility towards the inherited collective past.<sup>48</sup> Based on Hirsch's research, it can be suggested then that the inheritance of traumatic memories can be shared on a transgenerational level as well due to

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<sup>42</sup> Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 106-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; Hirsch, “Works in Progress,” 143.

<sup>45</sup> Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 1-3.

<sup>46</sup> Hirsch, “Connective Arts of Postmemory,” 172.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

the usage of imagery and narratives that permeate the collective understanding of a group's identity.

By recognizing the power of remembering, an important aspect of ensuring the survival of individual and collective memories, the usage of visual arts has played a significant role in representing, commemorating, and communicating the difficult histories of individual and collective pasts. Ann Rigney has demonstrated in her research that the creation of visual artworks further ensures the longevity of memory that to some extent shapes the public's perception regarding the past.<sup>49</sup> Rigney argues that visual arts enable individual and collective memories to become shareable and appealing to the wider public, which in turn increases the possibility of these memories surviving in the public conscience long-term. The possibility of visual artworks in extending the “life-cycle” of memory through recollection has been previously represented in nineteenth-century artistic movements, such as history painting and romantic nationalism, which aimed at communicating to the audiences visual stories that were influenced by the retelling of past narratives.<sup>50</sup> However, these painting traditions often focused on the glorification of the past and legitimizing political order rather than addressing the experiences and emotional realities of involved individuals – an aspect that greatly contributed to the art-making process of artists in the twentieth century.<sup>51</sup> The aftermath of the historical atrocities and the sense of disillusionment experienced by many due to both World Wars demonstrated the possibilities of visual arts in providing a platform for emotional expression and remembrance, which meant that the recognition of trauma as a subject matter became more widely explored.<sup>52</sup>

After World War II, Hirsch sees the individual artist's practice as a platform that engages and brings together viewers with different experiences, for example, uniting the individuals who experienced and survived a particular historical trauma and those who learned and acquired the difficult memories via recollection.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Rigney argues that the potential of artworks in inspiring emotional reactions and nurturing aesthetic experiences transforms artworks into “catalysts [...] putting new stories into the public arena and in keeping them there as later points of reference.”<sup>54</sup> By bringing to life the complicated aftermath of individual and collective pasts, artists engaging with memory and postmemory-driven narratives provide new and distinct visual interpretative possibilities that

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<sup>49</sup> Rigney, “Cultural Memory Studies,” 72.

<sup>50</sup> Wintle, “Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands and the Historical Imagination,” 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Lamberti, “Introduction,” 9-10.

<sup>53</sup> Hirsch, “Connective Arts of Postmemory,” 174.

<sup>54</sup> Rigney, “Cultural Memory Studies,” 73.

create spaces for exploring traumatic memories through emotional and aesthetic means. Thus, this chapter turns to the works of Tillers who has actively engaged with individual and collective memories as part of his conceptual project *The Book of Power* (1981-present).

## 1.2 Contextualizing the Work of Imants Tillers

The artistic career of Imants Tillers (b. 1950) spans over fifty years during which the artist has contributed a multitude of artworks to the Australian contemporary art landscape. By using appropriation as his primary artistic method within his extensive canvasboard system, Tillers' works have repeatedly returned to themes such as displacement, loss, trauma, colonial history, and personal identity that have been explored in his conceptual project *The Book of Power*. The project showcases the artist's interest in building an elaborate system in which fine arts imagery, poetry, place names, and ethnographic symbols are used to create a visual language that aims to recontextualize these images and words in a new light.<sup>55</sup> This presence of conceptually driven narratives can be traced back to the beginnings of Tillers' career, illustrating the fact that similarly to *The Book of Power*, Tillers' creative developments are part of a continuous journey toward visual cohesiveness.<sup>56</sup>

In order to understand Tillers' dedication to the creation of complex visual narratives, it is important to briefly address the developments in the 1970s that inspired the artist to start his long-term project *The Book of Power*. While Tillers' interest in art was already present during his teenage years, many scholars point out his architectural studies at the University of Sydney as the starting point in his career as a professional artist.<sup>57</sup> During his studies, Tillers immersed himself in the current events and debates taking place in the changing art landscape of the late 1960s and the early 1970s that more and more embraced the notions of avant-garde and conceptualism, positioning art beyond the set boundaries of accepted visual conventionality. As part of his internship for his studies at the University of Sydney, the young Tillers participated in the creation of the large-scale conceptual sculpture *Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet* (1968-9) by Bulgarian-American artist Christo (1935-2020) and French artist Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009) in which the Little Bay coastline in Sydney was wrapped in erosion-control fabric.<sup>58</sup> The possibility to participate as one of the ten assistants in this three-week-long project and the exposure to working conceptual artists and their employment of philosophical concepts in their artistic practices inspired Tillers to pursue a

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<sup>55</sup> McLean, "The Metaphysics of Mimicry," 169-71.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> Hart, "Introduction: A Work in Progress," 5; Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 10-1.

<sup>58</sup> Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet."

career in art.<sup>59</sup> After graduating, Tillers actively experimented in the realm of visual arts that led to his successful solo debut in 1973 at Watters Gallery in Sydney for which the young artist embraced conceptualism and established himself as “a real artist.”<sup>60</sup>

Many scholars agree on categorizing Tillers' work in the 1970s as belonging to the conceptual art movement, as he experimented with appropriation and challenged the innate provincial nature present in Australia's art scene.<sup>61</sup> His most notable works during this period are arguably *Enclosure* (1972), *Conversations with the Bride* (1975), and *Untitled* (1978), as these artworks showcase the artist's early employment of Duchampian attitudes in his art-making process and the growing interest in using appropriation as an artistic tool.<sup>62</sup> According to art historian Graham Coulter-Smith, *Enclosure* (1972) is Tillers' most substantial performance piece in which the artist focused on the notion of systematic delivery of actions (fig 5).<sup>63</sup> The performance's main point of departure was two low-profile tents positioned along with a circle on a beach in Sydney. Tillers dug a hole in one tent and used the sand extracted from the first tent to fill the second one. The repetition of actions embraced the leading ideas presented within the post-object art movement in which traditional mediums and expressions were exchanged for radical avant-gardist ideas that employed the human body, systems, earth, processes, and language to illustrate the departure from the set artistic boundaries.<sup>64</sup>

By using systematic representations to convey his philosophical framework of chance and change, Tillers' further explored these ideas in his work *Conversations with the Bride* (1975) which was his contribution to São Paulo Art Bienal in Brazil the same year (fig. 6).<sup>65</sup> Inspired by the artwork *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23) by French conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Tillers' *Conversations with the Bride* used the copies of Duchamp's notes together with the images of landscape paintings by Australian artist Hans Heysen (1877-1968) with the aim of integrating these distinct artistic practices in a separate, stand-alone visual representation. The installation piece, acting similar to a sculptural entity, consisted of 112 miniature artworks positioned on aluminum stands arranged within the exhibition space.<sup>66</sup> While the appropriated images and notes were placed

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<sup>59</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 5-7; McLean, “The Metaphysics of Mimicry,” 157; Hart, “Introduction: A Work in Progress,” 1.

<sup>62</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 15; 58-59.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-2.

<sup>65</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 59; Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 12.

on one side of the postcard-size panels, the opposite side of these panels had mirrors that visually brought the viewer in within the installation with the goal of narrowing the distance between the viewer and the presented artworks.<sup>67</sup> Overall, the installation emphasized Tillers' investment in conceptual art and marked his early interest in the usage of appropriation of visual imagery, ideas, and concepts as his main artistic method of choice.

The use of appropriation in Tillers' artistic practice was defined in the painting *Untitled* (1978) which showcased the artist's growing awareness of the deconstructive possibilities that this creative method could possibly offer (fig. 7). In this artwork, by means of photomechanical reproduction, the artist appropriated the landscape painting *Summer* (1909) by Australian artist Hans Heysen, showcasing the technological developments that enabled the creation of a photographic painting on canvas.<sup>68</sup> By employing this artistic strategy, Tillers' work aimed to comment on the deconstructive possibilities that contemporary artistic and technological advancements meant in the current era.<sup>69</sup> While Tillers fully appropriated a well-known Australian landscape painting, his work also presented itself as a separate creation due to the photographic nature of the artwork. Moreover, at its core, the photographic origin of Tillers' appropriation showcased the current state of affairs in the art world, as his work was based on the already available photomechanical reproduction of Heysen's work rather than his original painting.<sup>70</sup> By showcasing that the presence of visual reproductions distances the artwork from its original creator, the artwork visualizes Tillers' interest in philosophy, particularly the work of German cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) whose essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) becomes manifested through the painting.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, from an early stage, Tillers' artistic work aimed at addressing these paradoxes and points of in-betweenness regarding established artistic practices and notions of chance that he set to explore through the means of appropriation and the recontextualization of the used sources.

In the early 1980s, working as an established contemporary artist, Tillers began a new conceptual project that embraced visual complexity and a new systematic approach that

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<sup>67</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 38-9; The observations regarding the nature of the artwork have been additionally derived from my experience seeing the artwork during Tillers solo exhibition *Journey to Nowhere* (July 6 - September 30, 2018) at the Latvian National Museum of Art (Riga, Latvia) in 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 113-9; Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 42-3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 42-3.

<sup>71</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 115-7.

founded the basis of *The Book of Power* and its impossible quest towards infinity.<sup>72</sup> Inspired by the work of French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), Tillers' new creative journey aimed at bringing to life Mallarmé's statement, emphasizing the idea that "everything, in the world, exists in order to end up in a book."<sup>73</sup> To embody this statement, Tillers, inspired by American artist Carl Andre's (1935) philosophy in using mass-produced democratic materials, started using *Frederix* canvasboards consisting of primed canvas mounted onto cardboard in his artistic practice and thus embarking on a journey where his work becomes "a huge all-encompassing book where each canvasboard panel is a page in the book."<sup>74</sup> As the canvasboards do not normally reach beyond the size of a traditional A3 canvas, this further allows the artist to make his point that the used canvasboards do indeed resemble a book that has an extensive page amount. The usage of canvasboards creates a grid-like structure in Tillers' paintings, establishing a common thread in all of the artworks in *The Book of Power*. Moreover, the sense of visual cohesiveness is further exhibited through his material use, as the artist most commonly employs acrylic and gouache paints, oil sticks, a scalpel, masking tape, brush, and rags during his work process.<sup>75</sup> Due to the large size that most of his paintings reach, often amounting to up to 300 canvasboards, the usage of canvasboards has enabled the artist to produce extensive artworks that can be easily stored and transported in small studio spaces.<sup>76</sup> As the paintings are usually assembled for exhibitions at particular venues, the artworks, on a regular basis, are stored in stacks that in turn can also be viewed as sculptural entities in their own right.<sup>77</sup>

While *The Book of Power* consists of thousands of canvasboards, it is the systematic approach to this medium and the underlying philosophy that sets it apart from Tillers' earlier work within the realm of conceptual art. According to art historian Ian McLean, the project brings together Tillers' acquired fluency in the usage of appropriation within the framework of his conceptual thinking, as *The Book of Power* "is nothing less than a vast allegorical and evolving scheme that ruminates on the nature of art and being."<sup>78</sup> Every canvasboard in Tillers' system is numbered in sequence, indicating that a singular piece holds a particular place in the canvasboard system.<sup>79</sup> Even though a sense of fragmentation is created due to the way how particular canvasboards belong to certain paintings and their established visual

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<sup>72</sup> Slatyer, "Diaspora: An Interview with Imants Tillers," 11.

<sup>73</sup> Ansone, "Finding Out About Latvia," 207.

<sup>74</sup> Tillers, "Journey to Nowhere," 27-9; Slatyer, "The Life-Motif," 65.

<sup>75</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 85.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; This was also observed during my visit at Tillers' home studio in Cooma, Australia in January 2020.

<sup>78</sup> McLean, "The Metaphysics of Mimicry," 163.

<sup>79</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 72.



landscapes, unity is nonetheless present in *The Book of Power*. Within the canvasboard system, Tillers visualizes complex narratives that are based on his style of appropriation and the usage of a grid-like system similar across all of his paintings in this project.<sup>80</sup> In his art-making practice, the artist employs appropriation as means to showcase the flow of images, ideas, and philosophies across borders that eventually find a home in his conceptual artworks through intentional miscopying.<sup>81</sup> Tillers' visual and ideological sources are derived from fine arts imagery, poetry, illustrations, place names, and philosophical texts found in books, catalogs, and art journals that the artist has collected as part of his extensive private library.<sup>82</sup> By using photomechanical reproductions and not the original artworks per se, the artist reproduces visual reproductions that allow him to experiment with the found images and create distance between himself and the created conceptual narratives.<sup>83</sup> During his image transfer process, Tillers embraces the notion of chance and error that over the years has enabled him to develop his signature style and methodology in the appropriation of images.<sup>84</sup>

Tillers' *The Book of Power* is an extensive and complex visual narrative system that has been primarily based on the use of appropriation. In the artist's case, appropriation is not only limited to the usage of visual imagery but it is also heavily dependent on the recontextualization of encountered ideological, philosophical, and ethical concepts that are illustrated through his use of poetry and textual references, historical narratives, and philosophical paradigms.<sup>85</sup> Developed throughout his artistic practice as a conceptual artist since the 1970s, Tillers' appropriation aims to bring together a vastness of sources that connect fine arts imagery, writings, and place names found in the centers of the art world together with that of its peripheries. Since the artist uses photomechanical reproductions as his primary sources for visual imagery, his artworks play with the notions of chance and error that occur in the process of transferring the given images to the canvasboard grid. Every canvasboard plays an important role in the structure of *The Book of Power*, and this emphasizes the goal of this project at large – to visualize a never-ending book that is manifested through the possibilities offered by working in the realm of conceptual art.

Throughout the years, scholars have indicated that Tillers tends to employ and appropriate certain artists and imagery that have become deeply enmeshed in his canvasboard system. Already in the late 1990s, art critic Wystan Curnow articulated that the artist

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<sup>80</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 125.

<sup>81</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 71.

<sup>82</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 163.

<sup>83</sup> In a private conversation with the artist in his studio in Cooma, Australia on January 16, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 73-5.

<sup>85</sup> McLean, "The Metaphysics of Mimicry," 157.

appropriates imagery and visual references that deeply interest him and further emphasize his philosophical focus within the project.<sup>86</sup> In his analysis, Curnow showcased that Tillers often refers in *The Book of Power* to the works of German painters Georg Baselitz (1938) and Sigmar Polke (1941-2010), New Zealand painter Colin McCahon (1919-1897), Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), and American-based Japanese conceptual artist Shusaku Arakawa (1936-2010).<sup>87</sup> However, his interest has not been limited to artists that have worked in the West only. Art historian Graham Coulter-Smith provided further analysis of Tillers' use of appropriation in the early 2000s, showcasing the importance that Papunya Tula painting, an art movement in the Northern Territory of Australia practiced by Aboriginal artists since the 1970s, plays in his visual vocabulary.<sup>88</sup> By using Papunya Tula Art and its underlying ideas in his work, Tillers further aims to emphasize the significance of Papunya painting as an important art movement in Australia that played a role in the history of Western art during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> The exploration of important art practices from the art world's "peripheries" have further motivated Tillers in exploring visual sources from the works of Latvian artists. Art historian Elita Ansone in the late 2010s examined the presence of Latvian imagery and narratives in Tillers' art. Specifically, Ansone identifies that in *The Book of Power* the artist has referred to the works of Latvian artists Vilhelms Purvītis (1872-1945), Gustavs Klucis (1895-1938), and Kārlis Zāle (1888-1942), writers Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877-1962) and Anšlavs Eglītis (1906-1993), characters from Latvian folktales, children's book illustrations, and words derived from Latvian poetry.<sup>90</sup> While Tillers' visual vocabulary has grown and increased over the years, the artist has acknowledged that the recycling of earlier works and references has been taking place since the mid-1990s that to an extent connects with his relocation from Sydney to Cooma, a rural town in New South Wales.<sup>91</sup>

Due to Tillers' situatedness between two cultures and his familiarity with the complicated histories that have shaped them, it is possible to argue that the inheritance of postmemory has played a role in his visual explorations regarding questions focusing on his personal and collective identities. By focusing on the interpretative possibilities that the analysis of postmemory-inspired narratives can provide in better understanding the artist's work, the next two chapters, engaging with the theoretical notions focusing on

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<sup>86</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 94.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-9.

<sup>88</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 162.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-8.

<sup>90</sup> Ansone, "Finding Out About Latvia," 207-9.

<sup>91</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 140; Hart, "Nature Speaks," 59.

intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory, elaborate on the previously set points regarding the presence of inherited and appropriated traumatic memories in Tillers' art and showcase the nuanced visual storytelling permeating his artistic output.

## 2. Stories of Loss

By growing up in an environment in which the presence of dual identities permeated his life, the work of Tillers has been greatly shaped by the questions and dilemmas that this particular situatedness between two cultures created in his mind. The recognition of his parents' experiences during World War II and their longing for Latvia enable to establish the presence of intergenerational postmemory in Tillers' life. A brief history of the artist's family can provide the necessary information to contextualize the significance of such memories in the artist's creative output and shed light on his artistic developments influenced by these narratives. Through critical visual analysis, this chapter examines the ways how Tillers' paintings *Monaro* (1998) and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011) address the questions connected to the artist's Latvian identity and further investigate the influence of intergenerational postmemory as a source in the artist's creative output that is manifested through his appropriation of imagery, cultural symbols, texts, and philosophical inquiries connected to his Latvian heritage.

### 2.1 Discovering Tillers' Latvian Identity

Raised in a Latvian immigrant family, Tillers' childhood was dominated by his parents' recollections of their lost homeland and their ongoing longing for a life they once knew. Both of Tillers' parents were born in Latvia, a country that established its independence in 1918 as the result of the aftermath of World War I. His parents grew up during a time when Latvia experienced economic stability and rapid growth in its industries. However, their youthful years took an unexpected turn when the country was once again swept over by the war, witnessing territorial conquests and atrocities committed by Soviet and Nazi German armies alike during World War II.<sup>92</sup>

Tillers' mother, Dzidra Lapiņš, was born in 1925 in the seaside town of Liepāja, located on the Eastern coastline of Latvia, while Tillers' father, also Imants Tillers, was born the same year in the centrally located town of Lielvārde.<sup>93</sup> Tillers' parents spent their childhoods and early youths in small towns that enabled them to value the country's

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<sup>92</sup> Neiburgs, "Latvia, Nazi German Occupation, and the Western Allies," 155-7; Prior to World War II, Latvia was an independent, democratic country that was founded in 1918 as a result of the aftermath of World War I. However, due to its strategic position in the Baltic region, its history has been greatly shaped by the military conflicts taking place within the country's borders. During World War II, the country was first occupied by the Soviet Union (1940-1), then invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany (1941-4), and reoccupied by the Soviet Union (1944-91). Latvia's development was greatly set back due to its full incorporation into the Soviet Union and extensive Russification policies that oppressed the Latvian population.

<sup>93</sup> Ansone, "Finding Out About Latvia," 209.

developments while at the same time enjoying the peaceful and tranquil life found in the Latvian countryside, however, their lives drastically changed due to World War II.<sup>94</sup> According to art historian Elita Ansonē, Tillers' father was mobilized in the Latvian Legion and fought on the frontline, “ending up in a military hospital, a British prisoner-of-war camp in Belgium, and finally a refugee camp in Germany.”<sup>95</sup> Due to the war, Tillers' mother left Latvia in 1943, leaving behind her parents and the rest of her family. In 1946, Dzidra and Imants met in a refugee camp in the town of Hamelin located in West Germany and soon married.<sup>96</sup> It took several years, however, of displacement and coping with the loss of their homes and the painful memories provoked by the trauma experienced during the war before the couple decided to move to a faraway place that bore no direct witness to the atrocities experienced in Europe.<sup>97</sup> Tillers' parents immigrated to Australia in 1949, and, similarly to other refugees, experienced difficulties during their settlement in a new and foreign land that did not resemble their homeland.

Tillers was born in 1950, the first child in a family of four, and from a young age became surrounded by stories, imagery, and memories that illustrated his parents' longing for their homeland and their desire to preserve the witnessed past and memories through their firstborn son. Before starting his school years, Tillers only spoke Latvian at home and read classical Latvian children's books and folktales that created a particular idea about the country that his parents were forced to leave.<sup>98</sup> In his early years, the artist read *A Selection of Latvian Folktales (Latviešu tautas pasakas)* and the graphic novel *The White Book (Baltā grāmata)* (1914) by Latvian writer and painter Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877-1962). These stories painted an image of the pastoral lifestyle practiced in Latvia and created vivid imagery regarding the beauty of the greenery and the vastness of the Latvian landscape that was dominated by forests, lakes, and fields. Throughout his school years, the young artist attended a community-run Latvian school on Saturdays where he learned more about the history of Latvia and its traditions.<sup>99</sup> It can be said that Tillers' early years were impacted by the proximity of his parents' yearning for their homeland and the sense of loss that was actively communicated to the artist through the presence of Latvian folklore, literature, and his parents' cultural practices embedded in the ideas acquired during their lives in pre-war Latvia.

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<sup>94</sup> Hearne, “Introduction. Latvia and Latvian Identity,” 26.

<sup>95</sup> Ansonē, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 211; Coulter-Smith, “The Evolution of Imants Tillers,” 137.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Coulter-Smith, “The Evolution of Imants Tillers,” 137; Ansonē, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 211; Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 190.

<sup>98</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 9; Ansonē, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 211.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 213.

Being surrounded by an environment that supported the active recollection of heritage and cultural identity, Tillers' early years were shaped by narratives that focused on the Latvian historical struggle of securing territorial and cultural independence as well as the idyllic way of life presented in the stories and novels of Latvian authors. The trauma experienced by the artist's parents during the war left emotional and psychological scars that were passed on to Tillers at a young age.<sup>100</sup> During a time when Tillers was establishing his own identity, his experiences and personal memories were preoccupied with the emotional recollections of his family's loss of their home country and their embodied traumatic experiences from the war.<sup>101</sup> These memory narratives clearly illustrate the notion of intergenerational postmemory as discussed by literary scholar Marianne Hirsch, in which the acquisition of memories depends on the generational and personal contact between the individuals who experienced a historical trauma and the generation living after these events.<sup>102</sup> In Tillers' case, his upbringing was influenced by the active use of imagination and the appropriation of his family's memories that aimed at securing the personal, but also cultural knowledge, of his parents' sense of Latvian identity.

The proximity of the memory sources in Tillers' daily life, i.e. the stories and recollections as told by Tillers' family, meant that the artist's understanding of being a Latvian was the result of the active appropriation of narratives and experiences that were based on their lived experiences in independent Latvia. As Tillers' perception of Latvia was heavily influenced by his parent's stories, he was surprised by the reality that he witnessed when finally visiting the country at the age of twenty-five.<sup>103</sup> He observed that "I was kind of *de facto* visitor, a surrogate for my parents, visiting their old haunts and their now aged relatives and friends."<sup>104</sup> The place that existed in Tillers' imagination through his appropriated memories was not the same one he encountered in 1975 under Soviet occupation. The artist expressed this clearly:

"The other side of this was a feeling of detachment and the sense that the 'memories' of which I had before I went of beautiful lakes and forests were but phantoms – not based on lived experience at all. Latvia of course was now a modern country, though impoverished by our standards and not the nineteenth-century rural paradise I had half

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<sup>100</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 184; Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 9-10.

<sup>101</sup> Coulter-Smith, "The Evolution of Imants Tillers," 137; Tillers, "Journey to Nowhere," 49.

<sup>102</sup> Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 107.

<sup>103</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 184.

<sup>104</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 15.

expected. Also, there was a pervasive underlying anxiety with all our hosts – the need to be careful about what was said and where one went. One felt under surveillance all the time and there were constant signs wherever one went that this was an occupied country.”<sup>105</sup>

Tillers' experience exemplifies the reality of foreign visitors who, under strict surveillance, were allowed to travel to Latvia, which at that point was known as the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. The visible uneasiness in his hosts due to the KGB's activities and the industrial and cultural impact of widespread Sovietization and Russification, which greatly altered the urban and rural landscapes of Latvia, created a completely different scenery when comparing that to what Tillers' was expecting as the result of his parents' communicated memories. This means that the memories Tillers inherited and appropriated as his own, which became the base for establishing his sense of Latvian identity, were only stories of the past – the experienced reality in Soviet Latvia differed greatly from his imagination.

These appropriated memories could not ensure stability or security in defining the artist's individual sense of identity. As illuminated by literary scholar Aleida Assmann, the formation of a person's identity heavily depends on the active recollection of embodied experiences that shape and inform one's understanding of the world. Additionally, the encounters with collective memories that inform a particular group's notion of themselves also play a part in molding an individual's inclusiveness and belonging to a community.<sup>106</sup> Tillers' experienced in-betweenness between his Latvian parents' memories, encapsulating intergenerational postmemory, and the transgenerational memories, acquired and learned throughout his life in Australia, further created this experience of displacement and emotional removal in both of these cultures.<sup>107</sup> According to Anson, the acquisition of his mother's and father's memories, heavily defined by their nostalgic nature, led the artist towards the internalization of “‘non-belonging,’ in which the inability to be part of Latvia is a hindrance to a sense of belonging to Australia.”<sup>108</sup> The constant act of navigating between two cultures and two identities, which formed the artist's understanding of his own self, established a distance and removal from these cultures in Tillers' life; the stories and memories that molded the artist were often learned and imagined rather than actively experienced and witnessed.

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<sup>105</sup> Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 15.

<sup>106</sup> Assmann A., “Re-Framing Memory,” 40.

<sup>107</sup> Epnors, *Es esmu latvietis*; Hart, “Introduction,” 2-3.

<sup>108</sup> Anson, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 213; Curnow, *Imants Tillers*, 42.

## 2.2. Analyses of *Monaro* (1998) and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011)

The dual identity dilemma has been a focal point in Tillers' oeuvre. By using his own sense of displacement and not belonging as a starting point in his philosophical explorations, the presence of intergenerational postmemory has played a role in his artistic career. Particularly, the large canvasboard paintings *Monaro* (1998) and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011) showcase the artist's investment in the understanding of his identity as a Latvian living in a foreign land that was chosen by his parents in the late 1940s. This decision to embrace the unknown and the notion of chance has been further illustrated in Tillers' quest of defining his place in two distant lands and two distant memory segments – the memories of his family and the artist's personal memories acquired during his life in Australia. In order to uncover the presence of intergenerational postmemory in the artworks *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)*, it is important to describe and define the various visual, textual, and symbolic elements that are present and characterize Tillers' visual language system, establishing narratives concerning loss, trauma, and displacement in these paintings.

The painting *Monaro*, consisting of 288 canvasboards and reaching 853 centimeters in length and 305 centimeters in height, depicts a juxtaposition of symbols, numbers, texts, and visual imagery that are spread across the beige-toned canvasboards (fig. 1). The central element in the artwork, the imagery of a window depicting a small mountain and stairs reaching into the sky, draws the viewer's attention to the artwork.<sup>109</sup> Surrounding this central window element, the attention is further caught by the presence of a stylized skeleton figure on the left side of the window element and a sketch of a church tower and two ornamental symbols on the right side due to the white borders enveloping these details. On the left side of the painting, numerical and textual elements, such as numbers from one to five, the word “us,” and the letter “T,” are present in the painting. Throughout the canvasboards, the uniting component in the artwork is the repetition of child-like faces that direct their gazes toward the centrally depicted window and its scenery. In par with Tillers' artistic practice, the artist stenciled a variety of textual references, for example, “We have decided not to die” and “Reversible destiny” that are repeated both on the left and the right sides of the artwork.

*Monaro*, named after a region located in the southern part of New South Wales, Australia, to which the artist moved in the 1990s, employs visual, textual, and philosophical references that aim to convey the significance of place in his life. Affected by his move to rural Australia and the increased connectivity to its nature and seasonal changes, the artwork

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<sup>109</sup> Hart, “Nature Speaks,” 64.



is a representation of the artist's experiences and provoked philosophical inquiries that are manifested through his complex visual narrative system.<sup>110</sup> At its core, the beige color scheme, enhanced with pink, bronze, and silver hues, together with the central imagery of a mountain, places the artwork in Australia's open plains that are surrounded by mountains. According to art historian Graham Coulter-Smith, Tillers' move to the Monaro region significantly increased his references to the Australian landscape, as the characteristics of the “treeless, sun-bronzed grass tableland with granite, ballast and volcanic geology” scenery can be found in the artist's work.<sup>111</sup> The wave-like presence of the faces in the painting's background refers to the drawing *The Cherubs Glory* (1809) by German artist Philipp Otto Runge (1777-1810) which depicts the multiplicity of angelic beings positioned in a semi-circle composition.<sup>112</sup> It can be argued that the inclusion of mystical beings linked to Christian ideals of angelic presence enables to focus on the artwork's philosophical connotations, as the appropriation of this drawing is one of the core parts of *Monaro*. Moreover, the textual references “We have decided not to die” and “Reversible destiny” as well as the skeleton figure (elements derived from the works of Shusaku Arakawa, Madeline Gins, and Chris Ofili) further support this interpretive trajectory.<sup>113</sup> Art historian Deborah Hart suggests that in the painting the artist “identifies our human mortality with cycles in nature” which is communicated through the subtle usage of these visual elements.<sup>114</sup> As the seasons change in the Monaro region and shift the physical and emotional state of the individual residing in this place, life and death appear as present companions during these transformations.

While the artwork, created in the 1990s, referred to the artist's more recent life event, situating its narrative within Australia, the usage of certain visual elements and referral to the cyclical aspects of human existence showcase narrative threads that have been influenced by the acquisition of intergenerational postmemory in connection to Tillers' Latvian identity throughout his life. Hart argues that Tillers' painting not only comments on the experience of the present situatedness but also “conveys [...] a sense that we carry our past with us from place to place.”<sup>115</sup> By seeing the artwork as a complex narrative system that brings together both the present and the past, the painting showcases the exploration of Tillers' identity as an Australian-Latvian. The undergoing changes in his Australian life are influenced by his

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<sup>110</sup> Coulter-Smith, “The Evolution of Imants Tillers,” 145.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>112</sup> Hart, “Nature Speaks,” 63.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Latvian upbringing, and this past and its memories continue reappearing even after a new relocation inside Australia. This aspect is present through the particular inclusion and appropriation of specific visual elements – on the right side of the window, the artist has incorporated a sketch of the Saint Peter's Church in Riga, Latvia, and two instances of a traditional Latvian ethnographic ornament symbolizing the stellar deity Auseklis (the morning star).<sup>116</sup> This subtle but visually striking inclusion of elements showcases the artist's familiarity with Latvian symbols and their meanings that he likely learned during his childhood as well as his adult life by following the political and cultural shifts taking place in his parents' homeland.<sup>117</sup>

The imagery of Saint Peter's Church, which has always been restored despite the wars taking place in the capital of Latvia, and the symbol of Auseklis, extensively used in the late 1980s during the Third Latvian National Awakening movement (1987-1991), connects the artwork with the attitudes of persistence present in the Latvian mentality.<sup>118</sup> As the early 1990s were shaped by the political and territorial changes in the crumbling Soviet Union, the inclusion of elements in relation to Latvia and its restoration of independence showcase Tillers' continued interest in understanding his Latvian heritage. Art historian Elita Ansone suggests that the presence of the Latvian symbols and the repetitive textual element “We have decided not to die” can be viewed as referring to the thousands of Latvians who had to go into exile due to the destruction and the establishment of a totalitarian regime resulting after World War II.<sup>119</sup> As his parents fled the country, their resilience and persistence enabled them to establish a life in Australia that was still heavily influenced and haunted by their memories of Latvia, its nature, culture, and traditions. By repeating the text “Reversible destiny,” Tillers' artwork aims to reflect on the idea of destiny and the possibility of multiple scenarios impacting one's existence.<sup>120</sup> While being situated in Monaro and its vast, sun-dried landscape, the artist addresses his inherited memories focusing on the involuntary removal of his family and the recollections of the Latvian way of life, characterized by the enormous willpower of surviving and maintaining one's integrity. While the destiny of his parent's move to Australia and his own relocation to regional Australia cannot be changed, Tillers aims to reflect on the past and his family's decisions, wondering if one's destiny has always been preset.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ansone, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 257.

<sup>117</sup> Epners, *Es esmu latvietis*; Tillers, “Imants Tillers as a Site of Conflict,” 422-3.

<sup>118</sup> Ansone, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 257.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Hart, “Nature Speaks,” 64.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Tillers, “Journey to Nowhere,” 55.

The exploration of Tillers' inherited Latvian past and the questions of situatedness between two vastly different lands is further addressed in the work *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (fig. 2). Similarly to *Monaro*, *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* brings together visual imagery, texts, places names, and numbers across 288 canvasboards that reach 849,6 centimeters in length and 302,4 centimeters in height. With no distinct focal point, it can be suggested that the attention is first drawn to the number sequence on the left side of the painting. The dark rectangles and the white numbers contrast with the sand-colored color scheme present in the painting. In the upper left side of the painting, two line drawings of constructed objects are present with the words “*tabula rasa*” hanging above them. Moving on from the numbers, another dark visual element, a spiral in the right top corner of the artwork, moves the gaze across the centrally placed scene of mountain tops. The use of different orange, blue, and gray hues enables this visual element to blend in within the artwork. On the right side, next to the landscape scenery, three circles with handwritten text inside them, are present. Further on the right side, on the edge of the artwork, a rectangular shape containing an ornamental composition and the almost invisible text “We have decided not to die” underneath it are positioned, in some parts overlapping with one another.

The inclusion of the words “*tabula rasa*,” referring to the Latin phrase translatable as “clean slate,” directly brings the title of the artwork into the painting's narrative structure.<sup>122</sup> *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* can be seen as an attempt in interpreting the role of destiny in an individual's life where relocation to a new land correlates with a new beginning. By indicating in the title that the artwork is a dedication to Tiller's father, who arrived in Australia in the late 1940s, the painting visualizes his father's experience in starting a life in a new country from a “clean slate.” The presence of the mountainscape, desert-invoking hues, ornamental elements appropriated from Aboriginal Australian art, and the multiplicity of Aboriginal place names across the canvasboards position the artwork in the Australian landscape. By preoccupying the attention with visual elements that depict Australia's natural scenery, the artwork stems from the Latvian understanding that one's identity is closely connected with the land.<sup>123</sup> As Ansonne argues in her research, the physical and emotional connection with the land is part of the Latvian sense of identity where “losing one's land is tantamount to losing one's identity.”<sup>124</sup> Because Tillers' father was not able to return to Latvia, the painting aims to bring together the two distinct worlds in which his father lived.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>122</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, “*Tabula*, n.”

<sup>123</sup> Ansonne, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 211.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Hart, “Introduction,” 10.

loss of his homeland left his father emotionally scarred for life; in return, these memories in the form of intergenerational postmemory continued living on through his son in Australia, greatly affecting the life of Tillers and his creative output.<sup>126</sup>

While Tillers' father eventually became accustomed to Australia, the past memories continued lingering in his psyche.<sup>127</sup> This overarching presence of memories and their continual transformation and change due to time is visualized through the inclusion of three circles in the artwork. Within these circles, texts in Latvian, describing journeys made by foot between cities in Germany, are vaguely present, appearing almost invisible. The inclusion of elements connecting to the Latvian language in the midst of the visualized Australian landscape can be interpreted as drawing parallels to the reappearance of memories in an individual's mind. As Aleida Assmann argues, memories are volatile and changing, reappearing in an individual's life through acts of recollection.<sup>128</sup> They continuously fade out over time but, when recalled, memories remind a person of the experienced past, shaping one's attitudes and actions in the present moment. In this case, his father's memory of Latvia is somewhat present, however, due to time it has gradually faded due to the physical and emotional distance. The importance of recollection and memories is addressed through Tillers' usage of another vaguely present textual element, situated on the right side of the painting, containing the repetition of the words “remember” and “me.” Even though *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* focuses on the illustration of new beginnings in a foreign land, the resurgence of memories is often triggered through communication and retelling of one's past.<sup>129</sup> The painting, as a whole, presents Tillers' father's experience living in Australia and the overarching attitude of survival that characterizes the Latvian diaspora. Tillers' decision in depicting his father's past – his Latvian origins – ensures that his life and its multiple turns are encapsulated in an artwork with no clearly defined lifespan.

The two paintings in question, *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)*, visualize the artist's experience living in Australia as a second-generation immigrant and his active investment in understanding his Latvian identity through the inheritance of his parents' memories in the form of intergenerational postmemory. By appropriating texts, illustrations, and images that represent his upbringing in a Latvian household, Tillers' artworks appear as visual essays that aim to communicate not only his lived experiences but also those of his parents. Besides using visual sources that directly connect to his Latvian background,

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<sup>126</sup> Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, 194

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>128</sup> Assmann A., “Memory, Individual and Collective,” 213.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

*Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* also present Tillers' appropriation of ideas, geographical locations, historical narratives, and philosophical attitudes that are present through his use of textual references, such as place names of Aboriginal Australian populations and thought-provoking excerpts (“We have decided not to die,” “Reversible destiny,” “*tabula rasa*,” etc.). The artist brings together these sources in complex visual narrative systems that explore his Latvian heritage and also shed light on the oppression experienced by Latvian people due to Soviet imperialism that aimed at eliminating any forms of cultural expression.<sup>130</sup> In Australia, starting from a clean slate, Tillers' family was not able to let go of the loss and trauma due to their involuntary relocation, and for these reasons, their investment in sharing their experiences and Latvian cultural identity with Tillers was of great importance in ensuring that their personal connection to Latvia was maintained through the means of memory recollection. It can be argued that the presence of the inherited intergenerational postmemory is an important source material that inspires Tillers' narrative structures, focusing on the ever-present sense of duality permeating his life as an Australian-Latvian. While the artist uses his paintings as open spaces for self-reflective inquiries regarding his identity, *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* also provide places for communicating and recognizing his family's struggles and his parents' strong sense of willpower, thus ensuring that their cultural heritage, legacy, and memories are kept alive.

Tillers' situatedness in Australia, established through a matter of chance due to his family's move to the distant land, enables the artist to draw parallels between different forms of oppression existing in these countries. By recognizing and sharing the trauma experienced by his Latvian parents and realizing the impact of Soviet imperialism in the lives of the Latvian population, the artist uses his art to visualize and shed light on the experiences of the oppressed. This, in turn, is further addressed in his works *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata*, analyzed in the next chapter, which particularly focus on the historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders due to British colonial policies.

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<sup>130</sup> Solska, “Citizenship, Collective Identity and the International Impact,” 1089-90.

### 3. Stories of Injustice

As it has become present in this research, the questions relating to the situatedness between two distinct cultures and collective identities have greatly influenced the artistic output of Tillers. While his individual understanding of his identity has been influenced by the inherited memories from his Latvian immigrant parents, the necessity to assimilate and position himself in Australian society has also shaped in what ways and through what means the artist has dealt with displacement and trauma in his art. By continuously questioning the myth of Australia and its implications within Australian society, Tillers' works *Farewell to Reason* (1996) and *Terra Negata* (2005) aim to address the past injustices toward indigenous people and the inherited collective colonial guilt that he depicts by appropriating Aboriginal Australian art and creating visual narratives in relation to Australia's gruesome colonial history. The use of appropriation plays an important role in the artist's depiction of these memories, as Tillers moves beyond simple visual appropriation of images and fine arts imagery and further employs his interest in the appropriation and representation of philosophical ideas, geographical locations, and discussions relating to ethical issues.

#### 3.1 The Myth of Australia

Due to its remote location, Australia has built itself as a prosperous and democratic country that has benefitted from its mythical and distant position in Oceania. As its developments and urbanization have been shaped by waves of immigration, the country, recognizing the diversity of its population, aims to embrace policies that support multiculturalism in the present day.<sup>131</sup> However, Australia's origins lie in the widespread settlement and expansion of British penal and free settler colonies throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries during which the settlers positioned themselves as rulers and governors of the acquired territories.<sup>132</sup> Believing that their settlement enabled the discovery of new and foreign land, the settlers deliberately ignored the extensive presence and history of indigenous populations who suffered extensive devastation by diseases and conflicts brought to the continent by British colonizers.<sup>133</sup>

Over the last few decades, the public collective consciousness of Australian society has tried to address and come to terms with the country's complex colonial past.<sup>134</sup> The recognition of the long-lasting effects of the pioneer myth, the idea of the “Australian

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<sup>131</sup> Jupp, “Immigration and National Identity: Multiculturalism,” 135-6.

<sup>132</sup> Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 119-23.

<sup>133</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 117-8.

Legend,” and the historical injustices inflicted on Aboriginal Australians due to the arrival of British settlers have showcased the necessity for addressing the dominant historical narrative that has widely excluded minority experiences. According to political scientist Geoffrey Stokes, the understanding of the country's collective identity became actively reevaluated only in the 1970s when academic scholars began connecting certain historical narratives and their impacts in creating the Australian national identity.<sup>135</sup> Dominant up until the late 1970s, the idea of pioneer settlers constructed the collective understanding of Australia's history.<sup>136</sup> According to historian John Hirst, by emphasizing the firstcomer experiences in the foreign land, the pioneer myth provided “a nationalist legend which [dealt] in a heroic way with the central experience of European settlement in Australia: the taming of the new environment to man's use.”<sup>137</sup> The recounters of these past experiences were often used to emphasize the individualistic and conservative attitudes present in society at large that connected with the state's nationalistic policies of self-determination and sovereignty.<sup>138</sup> These ideas became further embedded in the collective mind through the commonly accepted idea of the “Australian Legend” established in the 1950s. Introduced by historian Russel Ward, the tracing of the origins and the creation of the national mystique enabled to define the essence of a “typical Australian” that in Ward's words was “a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others...”<sup>139</sup> By primarily focusing on the experiences of white male Europeans, his research dominated the teaching of Australian history, emphasizing the aspects addressed in the pioneer myth and further asserting the importance of egalitarianism in nation-building which was reserved for particular groups in society.

The creation of a historical narrative that based itself on the colonizer's experiences deliberately overlooked the problematic aspects regarding its long-term legacy. Throughout the centuries, the state policies were fueled by colonial and racist attitudes which continuously aimed at eradicating Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, their cultures, physical existences, and land ownership rights.<sup>140</sup> According to historian Peter Read, the incoming British settlers defined the continent as *terra nullius*, viewing indigenous populations and their claims to the land as irrelevant and not legally defined.<sup>141</sup> By seeing the

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<sup>135</sup> Stokes, “Introduction,” 1-2.

<sup>136</sup> Archer, “Situating Australian National Identity,” 30.

<sup>137</sup> Hirst, “The Pioneer Legend,” 316.

<sup>138</sup> Archer, “Situating Australian National Identity,” 30.

<sup>139</sup> Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 1-2.

<sup>140</sup> Stokes, “Citizenship and Aboriginality,” 158.

<sup>141</sup> Read, “Aborigines.”

new continent as a territory with no recognized owners, the colonial presence created the idea that Aboriginal people did not exist before their arrival in 1788.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the exposure to diseases, armed conflicts, and removal from fertile lands led to a massive decrease in indigenous populations that further promoted the absence and displacement of these groups in the collective understanding.<sup>143</sup> The establishment of the nation-state was set on a trajectory that based itself on the ideals found in Anglo-Celtic thinking, thus promoting assimilation policies implemented to control and remodel the indigenous populations.<sup>144</sup> The forced removal of children from their families, known as Stolen Generations, established their position in Australian society as further hidden and removed.<sup>145</sup> Heavily guided by colonial attitudes, it is not surprising that the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1, 1901, ignored the presence of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, constructing them as “absent” within the state's Constitution.<sup>146</sup>

By emphasizing the non-existence of indigenous groups as a result of the policies that aimed at diminishing their status, historical and cultural studies scholar Chris Healy observes the paradox that permeated Australian collective understanding. Healy argues that up until the mid-twentieth century, by ignoring the continuous historical presence of indigenous people, the state dealings “varied considerably, from ruthless cruelty to humanitarian and religiously inflected racism, and these [attitudes] were adapted and elaborated again and again through colonial encounters.”<sup>147</sup> After the constitutional referendum in 1967 that recognized the presence and land ownership rights of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders and established their full citizen status, the country witnessed a “resurgence” of indigenous cultures and art that suddenly became a part of the country's public culture.<sup>148</sup> Aboriginal art became the central focus of exhibitions *Dreamings* (1988) and *Aratjara* (1994) and acquired broad interest during its representations at the Venice Biennale in 1990 and 1997.<sup>149</sup>

The development and artistic significance of Western Desert Painting of Papunya Tula Art positioned Australia in the Western art historical narrative, eventually becoming the main artistic movement that continues defining and constituting the idea of Australian art to the

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<sup>142</sup> Rowse, “Terra Nullius.”

<sup>143</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 11-5.

<sup>144</sup> Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 128.

<sup>145</sup> Rowse, “Stolen Generations;” Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 123.

<sup>146</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 11.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; Stokes, “Citizenship and Aboriginality,” 164.

<sup>149</sup> Muecke, “Aboriginal Art.”



wider world.<sup>150</sup> The art movement, which found its origins in the Papunya community in the Northern Territory of Australia, began as an artistic response to the creative prompts and materials suggested by art teacher Geoffrey Bardon in the 1970s.<sup>151</sup> Based on the ephemeral ground paintings that hold a significant part in ritual performances, Papunya painting has been characterized through its employment of symbolic language, regular dot patterns, U shapes, and lines aimed at telling stories linked to Dreaming – Aboriginal philosophy expressing the time and experiences of the Ancestral Spirits that shape the lives of its people in the present.<sup>152</sup> Through the use of various visual means, such as printing, carving, pottery, and textiles, the artworks of Aboriginal artists demonstrate their interpretations of their community styles while also showcasing personal artistic innovations.<sup>153</sup> By the late 1980s, the Papunya art movement received widespread global recognition, which, according to Healy, “set a new mode through which indigenous people were recognized by White Australia.”<sup>154</sup> Due to its increased popularity and commerciality, Papunya Art brought to the fore the historical presence and the complexity of Aboriginal art and culture to the wider Australian society, inspiring broader studies of indigenous people and the awareness of the historical displacement, trauma, and oppression endured by these groups.<sup>155</sup>

Due to its position as a mythic and faraway land, Australia has acquired widespread interest from the international public that has often overlooked the complex colonial history which shaped its creation. By critically reassessing the legacy of the country's origins and recognizing the systematic issues that continue affecting the lives of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, it is important to examine the ways how these questions are being addressed and challenged within Australian society and visual arts.<sup>156</sup> For the last few decades, indigenous artists have used visual arts as means to communicate and showcase the oppression experienced by Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders and to define political anti-colonial stances within the public discourse. Artists such as Gordon Bennet (1955-2014), Tracey Moffat (1960), and Daniel Boyd (1982) have used their work to reexamine Australia's racist attitudes and its historical narratives regarding the mythical beginnings of the country in order to showcase the influence of the country's colonial origins

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<sup>150</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 67.

<sup>151</sup> Coulter-Smith, “The Evolution of Imants Tillers,” 137.

<sup>152</sup> National Museum of Australia, “Papunya Collection.”; Aboriginal Art Gallery, “Understanding Aboriginal Dreamings.”

<sup>153</sup> Muecke, “Aboriginal Art.”

<sup>154</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 71.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>156</sup> Jupp, “Immigration and National Identity,” 133-4; Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 117-8.

on the policies that continue perpetuating social and systematic problems in relation to indigenous populations.<sup>157</sup>

As the public has become more aware of the atrocities and injustices experienced by indigenous populations through state inquiries, changes in school curriculums, and the work of indigenous activists, it seems appropriate to suggest that collective transgenerational postmemory holds a certain place in the lives of generations that came after these horrific events. The presence of pain and loss, but also injustice and guilt, occupy the space in the collective memory of a nation that seeks to come to terms with its colonial legacy.<sup>158</sup> As literary scholar Marianne Hirsch has pointed out, art enables the communication of difficult, traumatic memories that in regards to collective memory “function as the connective tissue between divergent but related histories of violence and their transmission across generations.”<sup>159</sup> Due to art's potential in providing a critical outlet in the questioning and visualization of past narratives, this chapter turns to the works of Tillers in order to explore his take on Australia's collective transgenerational postmemory.

### **3.2 Analyses of *Farewell to Reason* (1996) and *Terra Negata* (2005)**

Australia's complex colonial past and the impact of colonial attitudes and policies have been of great importance in Tillers' large-scale artworks in which the artist has appropriated works of Papunya artists as well as visual imagery and textual references showcasing the presence of death, devastation, displacement, and loss experienced on the Australian continent. Particularly, his paintings *Farewell to Reason* (1996) and *Terra Negata* (2005) depict these narratives through visually and conceptually layered structures that stem from his desire to question and deconstruct Australian collective identity.

Tillers' painting *Farewell to Reason*, the fourth and final installment in his *Diaspora* series (1992-1996) focusing on the experiences of dislocation from an individual's homeland, particularly addresses the historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal Australians (fig. 3). The artwork, consisting of 292 canvasboards and reaching 914,4 centimeters in length and 304,8 centimeters in height, appears as a collage of separate paintings, photographs, and illustrations that together create one, unified painting. At the center of the composition, an image of an Aboriginal man is situated – his facial expression and presence encompass pain and sorrow that are further enhanced through the image's appearance in black and white. On

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<sup>157</sup> Fischer, *Aboriginal Art and Australian Society*, 31, 95.

<sup>158</sup> Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 118.

<sup>159</sup> Hirsch, “Connective Arts of Postmemory,” 174.

the man's chest, a spiral-like pattern is placed, further drawing attention to this figure. On the left side of the painting, fine arts imagery and text, for example, a large white cross, a black-and-white image of an indigenous figure, numbers one to seven, textual references “There Is Only One” and “destiny,” despite their visual differences, create a balanced composition through the usage of black, brown, orange, and yellow undertones. The right side of the painting similarly follows this color scheme via the presence of illustrations, images, and texts depicting a mountainscape, a white cross, another drawing of a black-and-white indigenous figure, an illustration of a cup, and poems. On this side of the artwork, the artist uses textual references, such as the repetition of the word “surf” and the phrase “You are forgiven” that contrast with the background colors on which these texts are positioned.

By deliberately placing the Aboriginal man as the central figure in the artwork, *Farewell to Reason* aims to address the unequal power dynamics that have existed between indigenous populations and colonial invaders, shaping the country's history and the collective understanding of the nation.<sup>160</sup> At its core, the artwork looks at the forced relocation and displacement of indigenous people as a result of the influx of British settlers and the practiced state policies aimed at subjugating and controlling their physical and cultural existences. The image of the Aboriginal man derives its origin from a book cover published in the newspaper *Sydney Morning Herald*, addressing the tragedy of nuclear testing witnessed by the Maralinga Tjarutja people in the 1950s.<sup>161</sup> This way the artist situates the artwork in Australia and re-emphasizes the state's acceptance in allowing acts that displaced and harmed Aboriginal Australians.<sup>162</sup> The presence of death and suffering in the artwork is further stressed by art historian Deborah Hart who argues that the visual images and texts surrounding the central figure have been found in different sources from around the world relating to ideas regarding mortality and rituals.<sup>163</sup> The multiplicity of voices, for example, the cross imagery originating from the works of New Zealand painter Colin McCahon (1919-1987), funerary image from the work of Chilean painter Eugenio Dittborn (1943), and the Latvian word “*nezināms*” (“unknown”), referring to a tombstone of an unknown soldier, create a layered juxtaposition of images that aim to showcase that certain human experiences, such as death and loss, transcend national boundaries. While death is inevitable, its untimely

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<sup>160</sup> Ansone, “Finding Out About Latvia,” 251; Hart, “The *Diaspora* Series,” 55.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Stokes, “Citizenship and Aboriginality,” 165; Hart, “The *Diaspora* Series,” 55.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

arrival can be driven by human ignorance and cruelty that the artist tries to showcase by focusing on Australia's colonial history and its treatment of Aboriginal Australians.<sup>164</sup>

Tillers' painting and its main focus, the recognition of Aboriginal trauma and its public commemoration, becomes visible and present through the layering of visual imagery, historical narratives, and memories. By addressing the colonial legacy of the Australian state, it is possible to argue that the starting point of the artist's critical inquiry can be found in his familiarity with Australia's history and the inherited transgenerational memories shared and exchanged on a collective level. In *Farewell to Reason*, Tillers uses visual and textual sources that are used to question the legacy of the "Australian Legend" and its mystique.<sup>165</sup> Instead of celebrating the pioneer struggles in the "new land" and showcasing their perseverance, Tillers investigates the consequences of their presence on the continent and the harm that it caused to the rightful owners of the land – Aboriginal Australians. His visual inquiry corresponds with the time when the general public was following along the state's investigations on Stolen Generations and finally started recognizing the historical trauma inflicted on indigenous groups through the state's discriminatory practices, greatly influenced by its colonial origins.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, the artwork can be seen as a response to the developments taking place in Australian society as it aims to deconstruct the nation's acquired sense of mystique regarding its history by displaying and further exposing the one-sided nature of the historical narrative that was written by the colonial oppressors.

The recognition of these injustices and the awareness of the dominant historical narrative, based on the experiences of white Australians, motivated the artist to inspect the inherited public memories that were passed on from one generation to the next.<sup>167</sup> As articulated by political scientist Jeff Archer, the Australian public discourse in the 1990s was dominated by narratives focusing on trauma and displacement as well as historical legacy and guilt regarding the country's colonial policies.<sup>168</sup> Tillers' artwork illustrates this perspective, as the painting visualizes the transgenerational postmemory of indigenous populations and their experienced oppression throughout the centuries while also showcasing the state's involvement in causing this emotional and physical pain. The inclusion of these experiences enables the artwork to bring forth the ethical question regarding the inheritance of guilt – another form of ideological appropriation that manifests the presence of transgenerational

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<sup>164</sup> Hart, "The *Diaspora Series*," 55; Stokes, "Citizenship and Aboriginality," 165.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Rowse, "Stolen Generations."

<sup>167</sup> Ansone, "Finding Out About Latvia," 251.

<sup>168</sup> Archer, "Situating Australian National Identity," 29-33.

postmemory. The guilt of white Australia, articulated in the 1990s due to the realization of their ancestor support of the status quo that discriminated against Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, is as present in the painting as the emotional distress visible in the centrally positioned photograph of the Aboriginal man. By exposing the root cause that contributed to the pain, loss, and death experienced by indigenous populations – an aspect that was hidden for centuries from Australia's public history – *Farewell to Reason* acts as a visual inquiry into the understanding of the nation's collective consciousness. This is achieved in the artwork through the appropriation of visual, ideological, and conceptual sources that depict the collective inheritance of trauma and guilt on a transgenerational level.

The belief in Aboriginal absence that dominated public discourse regarding Australia's history through the majority of the twentieth century has been further challenged and addressed in the painting *Terra Negata*. By using 288 canvasboards and reaching 853 centimeters in length and 305 centimeters in height, the artwork is another example of Tillers' elaborate use of multiple visual, textual, and historical sources that aim in creating a complex visual narrative with an underlying message. The main color scheme dominating the artwork consists of orange and brown hues that become more apparent in the central part of the painting. Here, the presence of intertwined white lines is restricted within a square format. On the right side of this shape, a view of a mountain, encircled by a white line, is situated in the upper part of the painting. Continuing further on this side, stylized black-and-white imagery of waves sits on the borders of the artwork. On the opposite side, a checkered black-and-white skull is placed next to the rundown of the letters found in the English alphabet. The dominating theme in the artwork, however, is the inclusion of curved white lines that fade in and out throughout the painting while situated in the background. Additionally, various Aboriginal place names are positioned across the entire canvasboard system while short text excerpts appear in different places in the artwork. For example, near the central square, the texts “Tragedy of lost tribe” and “Like a dream, like a vision, like a bubble, like a shadow, like lightning” are placed. On the right side of the canvas, the word “null” and the texts “Nothing / will have taken place / but the place” and “That this land did not exist” are visible due to the usage of white color; similarly, on the left side, textual references such as “The unpromised land / without place / without time / without body” and “The land did not exist” are included.

The artwork, using references that situate its scope within the Australian borders, provides another example of a complex and interconnected visual narrative. At its core, the meaning of the title *Terra Negata* connects the artwork to the history of the Australian

continent and the idea of *terra nullius* – free, ungoverned land.<sup>169</sup> The origins of the words *terra* and *negata* can be found in Latin, with *terra* meaning land and *negata* stemming from the verb *negō* – to deny.<sup>170</sup> In Tillers' case, *The Denied Land* signposts to the viewer that the artwork at hand is geographically situated, thus addressing particular issues that are relevant to this context. The painting prominently features the artwork *Big Yam Dreaming* (1995) by Aboriginal artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1910-1996) whose interconnected white lines fill the entire background of *Terra Negata*. By acting as the building block of the artwork, this inclusion further aims to add to the situatedness of the painting while also commenting on an important aspect addressed in Tillers' other works – the perseverance of indigenous populations throughout the country's history.<sup>171</sup> The painting, intended as a map of the continent, showcases the historical presence of various Aboriginal populations in different regions. The artist inscribed 460 indigenous tribal and language groups across the canvasboards, originally defined in the research conducted by Australian archaeologist David Horton.<sup>172</sup> The place names are positioned in a manner that approximately corresponds to the geographical location of these groups (e.g. North and South, East and West).<sup>173</sup> Moreover, the inclusion of the mountain imagery, depicting the sacred Uluru or Ayers Rock that symbolizes the ancestral origins of Aboriginal Australians, further connects the artwork with ideas related to longevity and placeness that stretch beyond the Western understanding of time and space.<sup>174</sup>

It can be argued that *Terra Negata* depicts the collective transgenerational postmemory by visualizing the historical presence of indigenous populations and the injustices these groups experienced due to the arrival of the British colonizers in 1788. Even though Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders had inhabited the continent for more than 60 000 years and structured their lives according to particular land ownership systems, the European colonial attitudes, which centered on “discovering” new lands and exploiting these territories for their economic benefits, deliberately ignored the historical presence of indigenous groups.<sup>175</sup> According to trauma studies scholar Ann E. Kaplan, the concept of *terra nullius*, or the emptiness of the land prior to the arrival of the British colonizers, has heavily dominated Australian society's understanding of its origins and

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<sup>169</sup> Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 115.

<sup>170</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, “Terra, n.”; Lewis and Short, “Nego.”

<sup>171</sup> National Gallery of Australia, “Imants Tillers.”

<sup>172</sup> Morphy, “Impossible to Ignore,” 90.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 90-1; National Gallery of Australia, “Imants Tillers.”

<sup>174</sup> Layton, *Uluru: An Aboriginal History*, 5; Morphy, “Impossible to Ignore,” 90.

<sup>175</sup> Read, “Aborigines.”

history for a long time.<sup>176</sup> By seeing the arrival of British colonizers as the “starting point” of the Australian nation, *terra nullius* justified the erasure and gruesome colonial tactics that controlled and displaced the Aboriginal populations from their ancestral lands.<sup>177</sup> Tillers comments on the country’s dark history by using visual imagery and texts that showcase these events – the checkered black-and-white skull, symbolizing the arrival of the colonizers from the West and the devastation they brought with them, the textual references describing the colonial point of view when claiming an “empty land” and disregarding the presence of indigenous populations (e.g. “That this land did not exist,” “null,” “The unpromised land / without place / without time / without body,” etc.).<sup>178</sup> However, despite the devastation and pain brought to indigenous populations, the artwork celebrates and commemorates the perseverance of the different groups and cultures through the inclusion of place names.<sup>179</sup> By including names of hundreds of tribal and language groups that have existed on the Australian continent, the painting elucidates the cultural diversity of the indigenous populations. Moreover, this aspect is further emphasized through the distinct presence of Kngwarreye's painting that in Tillers' words showcases “the spectacular resurgence of [Aboriginal] culture [...] revealed to the wider world through art and especially through the medium of painting.”<sup>180</sup>

Tillers' *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata*, through the employment of a systematic appropriation of imagery, symbols, texts, historical narratives, and questions relating to ethical discussions aim to visualize the consequences of colonial settlers in the lives of indigenous populations. By critically examining the country's history and challenging the idea of homogenous Australian identity that dominated its understanding throughout the twentieth century, the artist draws his inspiration from collective memories that were passed from generation to generation in different communities. Particularly, due to the social and political changes that gradually recognized the importance of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders as part of the country's multicultural nation, the often overlooked postmemory of indigenous populations was able to resurface and claim its place in the Australian collective consciousness. Tillers interacts with these collective memories, appropriating this form of transgenerational postmemory, in order to shed light on the country's colonial past and further comment on its dark history. However, at the same time,

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<sup>176</sup> Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 115.

<sup>177</sup> Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines*, 11.

<sup>178</sup> Morphy, “Impossible to Ignore,” 90; Kane, “Racialism and Democracy,” 119-23; National Gallery of Australia, “Imants Tillers.”

<sup>179</sup> National Gallery of Australia, “Imants Tillers.”

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

by using art historical and geographical references that showcase the diversity of indigenous groups, the artist also commemorates and celebrates the cultural diversity and perseverance of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders that have continued to exist despite the experienced oppression.

By showcasing the multiculturalism that has always existed on the Australian continent, the artist critiques the idea of Australianness based on European ideas and the dominant historical narratives that overlooked settler involvement in the eradication of indigenous populations. The uneasiness with Australia's past and the resurgence of transgenerational postmemory in the collective understanding are depicted within Tillers' complex visual language system that transforms the inherited collective memories into complex, layered works of art. As a non-indigenous artist, Tillers' work appropriates memories, ideas, and philosophy of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders with the aim of bringing to the fore their collective experiences and trauma while at the same honoring the memory and achievements. The artist positions their experiences at the center in order to ask the Australian public to examine their ancestor complicity in supporting colonial attitudes and policies that greatly affected the lives of many indigenous people. This way Tillers communicates the presence of an inherited sense of guilt, existing among white Australians, and the need to address the country's historical injustices inflicted upon its minority groups that stemmed from the false beliefs regarding racial superiority and societal homogeneity. Both *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata* visualize these complex issues and narratives by appropriating collective transgenerational postmemory that continues lingering in Australia's public consciousness and shaping its understanding of the nation in the present day.



## Conclusion

As past events inform and shape an individual's sense of identity, the experienced memories play a role in establishing social relationships and creating a possibility for inclusion within particular communities. Since memories require acts of recollection and communication that influence their remembrance and longevity, both positive and negative memories depend on these social actions.<sup>181</sup> The inheritance of traumatic memories, defined as postmemory in the field of memory studies, can take place across different generations, including both intergenerational and transgenerational levels that extend the often short life-span of memories that at their core are limited to the personal memory of the individual who experienced particular events. While being dependent on the group relationships that shape the communication of postmemory, the impact of postmemory and the ways how it is shared across different generations play a role in the creation of an individual's identity, defining and informing one's understanding of oneself and one's position within a particular collective identity.<sup>182</sup>

Due to Tillers' dual identity as an Australian-Latvian, his oeuvre has heavily focused on the understanding of his own sense of self through the usage of visual narratives that explore the painful memories regarding the loss of his parent's home country and Australia's complicated colonial past. By appropriating visual elements, symbols, poetry, and text derived from the works of artists and writers both found within the Western art historical canon and outside its borders, Tillers' work aims to showcase the transcendence of human experiences while at the same time creating particular visual and philosophical narrative structures that act as part of a unified whole within his long-term project *The Book of Power* (1981-present). By exploring the potential of conceptual art in the 1970s, Tillers' work embraced the notion of chance and error that became more evident through his development of a particular style of appropriation. In *The Book of Power*, the artist intentionally miscopies visual imagery to recontextualize these elements and adjust them to the narrative structures created within his large-scale paintings. Moreover, Tillers' method of work is not only limited to the use of visual sources but also employs the active appropriation of memories, philosophical concepts, ethical questions, histories, and ideologies that are often derived from his extensive private library which plays a significant role in his artistic output. The recontextualization of ideas and concepts and the creation of elaborate juxtapositions that employ texts, underlying narrative threads, and symbolism are present in the artist's work.

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<sup>181</sup> Assmann J., "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 114; Assmann A., "Re-Framing Memory," 42-4.

<sup>182</sup> Hirsch, "Connective Arts of Postmemory," 172.

While the question of identity occupies a significant part in the works of Tillers, the artist also addresses experiences of loss, trauma, oppression, displacement, and diaspora, showcasing the different ways in which these experiences bear similarities and have differences across cultures.

By focusing on the impact that postmemory can play in the artistic output of an artist working within the realm of visual arts, this research specifically addressed the role of intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory as a source in visual story-telling. The significance and scope of these memories differ due to their embeddedness in particular social relationships. On an intergenerational level, the communication of postmemory occurs within a family setting where the interaction between different generations and their close relations can have a severe impact on the formation of a person's identity. On a transgenerational level, however, traumatic memories are communicated across distant generations through the usage of symbols, archives, and historical narratives that play an important role in the creation of a public collective identity. The difference in the proximity of the experienced memories and their sources alters the long-term effect on the individual's understanding of oneself. In Tillers' case, his exposure to his parents' traumatic memories had a significant role in his understanding of his own personal identity as a Latvian and a second-generation immigrant, while his acquisition of Australia's collective memory narratives inspired and informed his critical visual inquiries during his professional career.

While other scholars focusing on Tillers' work have addressed the presence of different memories in his works, often focusing on the artist's memories that originated from his Latvian background, none of the researchers have done it to the extent articulated in this thesis. This research aimed to showcase that the artist's main sources of inspiration for the narratives illustrating the questions of individual and collective identities have been shaped by the acquisition of postmemory throughout his life. According to literary scholar Marianne Hirsch, postmemory is characterized by the presence of traumatic memories communicated across several generations, and the power of art enables these memories to be articulated and visualized in order to withstand time.<sup>183</sup> While Hirsch recognizes the impact of familial relationships and collective belonging in shaping one's acquisition of traumatic memories, this research specifically addressed the different outputs that intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory can provoke in the works of a visual artist. On an intergenerational level, Tillers' inheritance of his parents' trauma through emotionally-driven

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<sup>183</sup> Hirsch, "Connective Arts of Postmemory," 173-4.

recollections, which dominated his upbringing and the overall understanding of his Latvian identity, has deeply affected his artistic output. His visual artworks, such as *Monaro* (1998) and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* (2011), focus on questions relating to his own understanding of Latvian identity, the country's tumultuous history, and his physical and emotional distance from Latvia. On a transgenerational level, Tillers' embeddedness in Australia and his encounters with the country's difficult colonial legacy, the witnessing of trauma experienced by Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, and the sense of guilt inherited through collective remembrance, have guided his work and its exploration of questions that have been inspired through the reassessment of Australia's collective history. His works *Farewell to Reason* (1996) and *Terra Negata* (2005) particularly focus on Australia's colonial politics and the survival and perseverance of indigenous populations throughout the time.

While the presence of intergenerational postmemory concerning Tillers' work has been addressed by scholars Graham Coulter-Smith, Elita Ansone, Deborah Hart, and Wytan Curnow, a clear connection to this concept had not been made before. Therefore, within this research, the analyses of *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)* defined the influence of intergenerational postmemory through the close reading of the artworks in connection to scholarly literature addressing the background and meaning of the appropriated elements derived from Latvian sources, textual references, and Western fine arts imagery. Tillers' experience growing up in a family of Latvian refugees in Sydney had a significant role in shaping his identity at a young age. His parents' experienced loss of their homeland and acquired trauma due to World War II meant that the emotional and psychological scars witnessed by his mother and father were passed on to the young Tillers. The inheritance of memories within a close family setting defines the nature of intergenerationality – Tillers' intimate connection to his parents' memories and their dominance within his life contributed to the destabilization and to some extent the evacuation of his own memories in his early years. The artist visualizes his Latvian upbringing and connection to his parents' home country by appropriating Latvian ethnographic ornaments and symbols. These elements are then combined with fine arts imagery and illustrations from artists working in the West, creating layered narrative systems that focus on questions regarding reversible destiny, the significance of the location, perseverance, and new beginnings, further emphasizing the role of these artworks in conveying his parents' lived experiences and memories through visual means.

Regarding transgenerational postmemory that entails the inheritance of traumatic memories across distant generations, the visual analyses of *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata* illustrated this phenomenon by discussing the employment of collective memories and narratives in Tillers' paintings. By explicitly situating the narratives of the artworks within Australian borders, the paintings look at the country's colonial history and the devastation caused to the indigenous populations through the state's policies that promoted the superiority of white Australians. The inclusion of elements such as the place names of 460 indigenous language groups, the fine arts imagery from the Papunya Tula Art movement, illustrations and a photograph depicting Aboriginal people are used to showcase the historical presence of indigenous populations throughout the country's history – a fact that in the past was often overlooked and deliberately ignored since the arrival of British settlers. Tillers combines these sources with textual elements that are used to showcase the colonial attitudes that shaped the idea of Australia as an uninhabited land – *terra nullius*, thus questioning and deconstructing the dominant historical narrative that was based on the pioneer myth and the “Australian Legend.” The artist uses his paintings to bring forth these aspects in order to address the presence of guilt occupying the minds of white Australia that stem from their ancestor involvement in policies that oppressed the indigenous populations. The visualization of the different collective pasts that have been present within Australia enables to observe how the memories of distant groups can be communicated across multiple generations and how these experiences can be visualized through the means of appropriation and layering of sources.

The aforementioned paintings bear particular narrative similarities that enable these artworks to play a role in the grand narrative structure of *The Book of Power* despite the vastly distinct historical and cultural backgrounds represented (Latvia and Australia) and their focus on different memory sources (family-based/private and collective/public). In *Monaro* and *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)*, the artist depicts the influence of displacement and relocation that greatly affected his family's life. The experienced war in Latvia and the deliberate oppression of the Latvian population due to Soviet imperialism are at the core of the artist's parents' decision in starting a new life from a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) in a distant, foreign land. At the same time, their new start in Australia, a place formerly perceived as a nobody's land due to British colonial policies (*terra nullius*), also witnessed the widespread oppression of the country's indigenous populations. In *Farewell to Reason* and *Terra Negata*, Tillers recognizes and commemorates the pain, loss, and injustice experienced by Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders and further questions the nation's collective

understanding of itself and its ancestors. While the experiences of Latvian and indigenous populations cannot in any way be compared due to the causes propelling their oppression and the power structures defining discriminatory policies, Tillers' art showcases the ways how the presence of traumatic memories can travel across borders and resonate in different paintings through the employment of intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory. The artist uses his art as a place to explore these complex memories and question the public's awareness of its own history and the histories of the oppressed. Thus, Tillers' work does not simply appropriate visual imagery that conveys postmemory-inspired narratives but also showcases and appropriates ideas, experiences, histories, and concepts that are forming these memories.

In this thesis, by recognizing the influence of individual and collective memories in Tillers' oeuvre, I illustrated the possibilities of interdisciplinary art historical research in creating a better understanding of the complex visual language employed by the artist. Tillers' use of a particular style of appropriation that miscopies visual imagery, employs philosophical texts, poetry, and ideas, and presents and engages with complex ethical issues shows that postmemory and its influence can be manifested in various forms that go beyond the simple usage of past narratives and memories. Additionally, the visual analyses also defined the possibilities of how intergenerational and transgenerational postmemory can be recognized and interpreted, thus paving an entry point in the exploration of postmemory at large in Tillers' conceptual project *The Book of Power*.

By analyzing visual artworks through the lens of postmemory, this research provided insight into the application of this concept that can inform other art historical explorations of artists and their works that have been directly or indirectly affected by the inheritance of traumatic memories. In regards to Tillers' work, additional readings of other large-scale paintings can be further suggested in order to gain more insights regarding the artist's use of postmemory and explore the ethical issues that arise due to Tillers' appropriation of indigenous and non-indigenous memories and visual practices as part of his art-making practice.

## Images

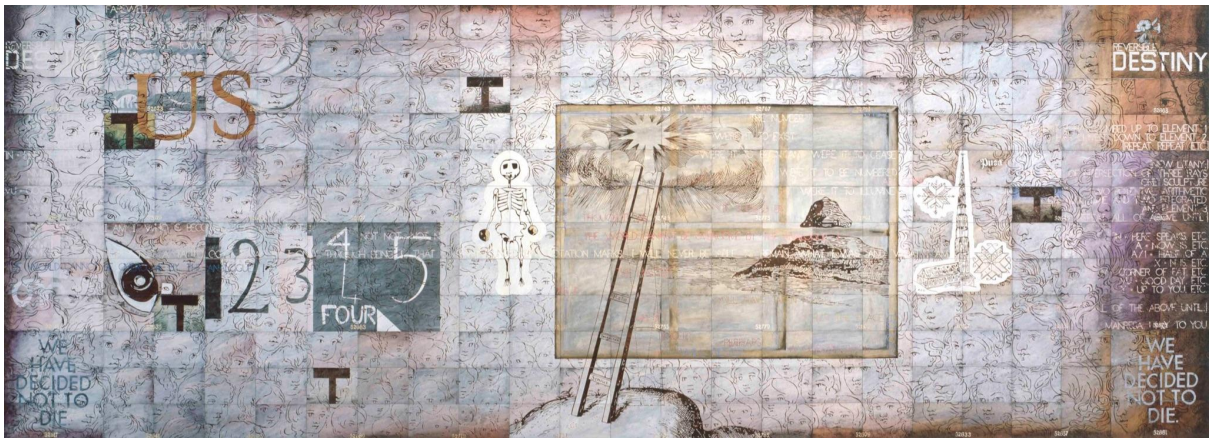


Figure 1. Imants Tillers, *Monaro*, 1998, synthetic polymer paint and gouache on 288 canvasboards, 305 x 853 cm. (Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia).

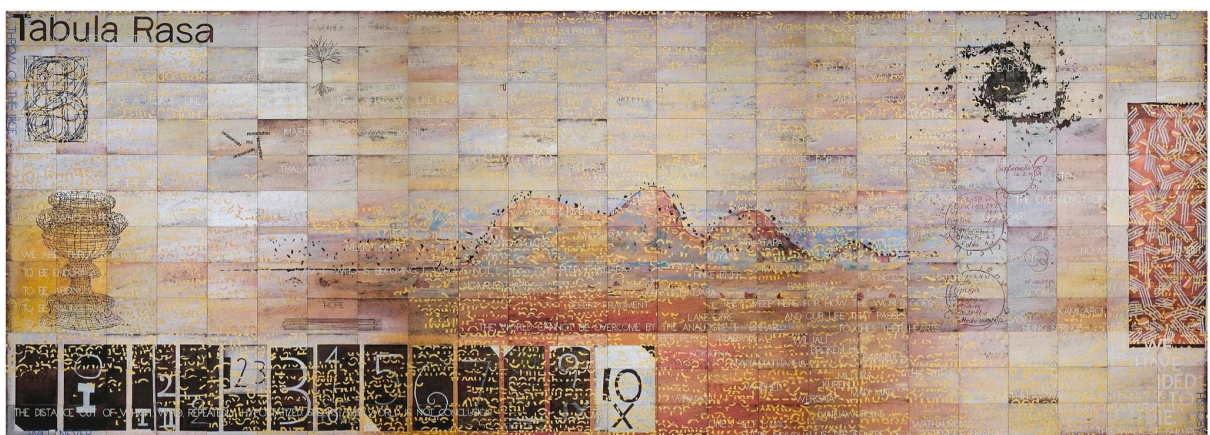


Figure 2. Imants Tillers, *Tabula Rasa (For My Father)*, 2011, synthetic polymer paint, gouache on 288 canvasboards, 304,8 × 853,4 cm. (Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia).



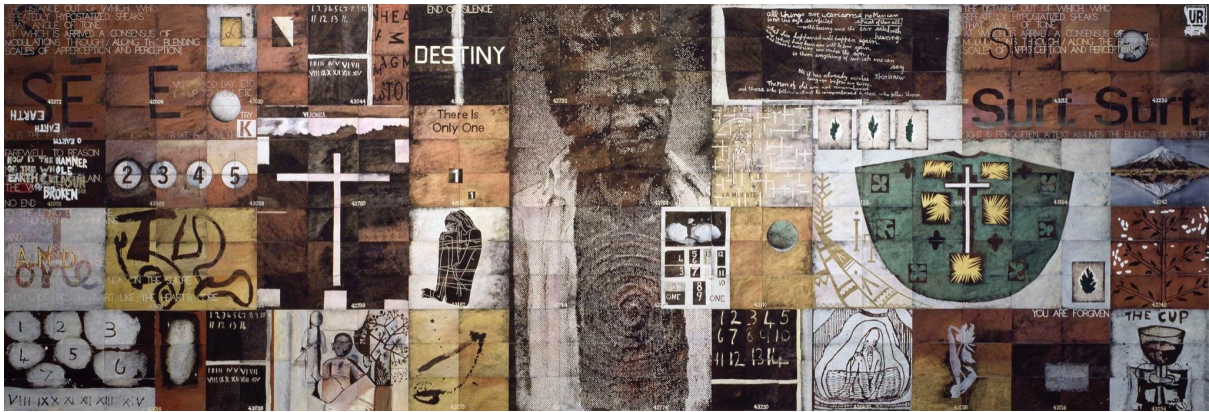


Figure 3. Imants Tillers, *Farewell to Reason*, 1996, oil, oil stick, and synthetic polymer paint on 292 canvasboards, 305 x 915 cm. (Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia).

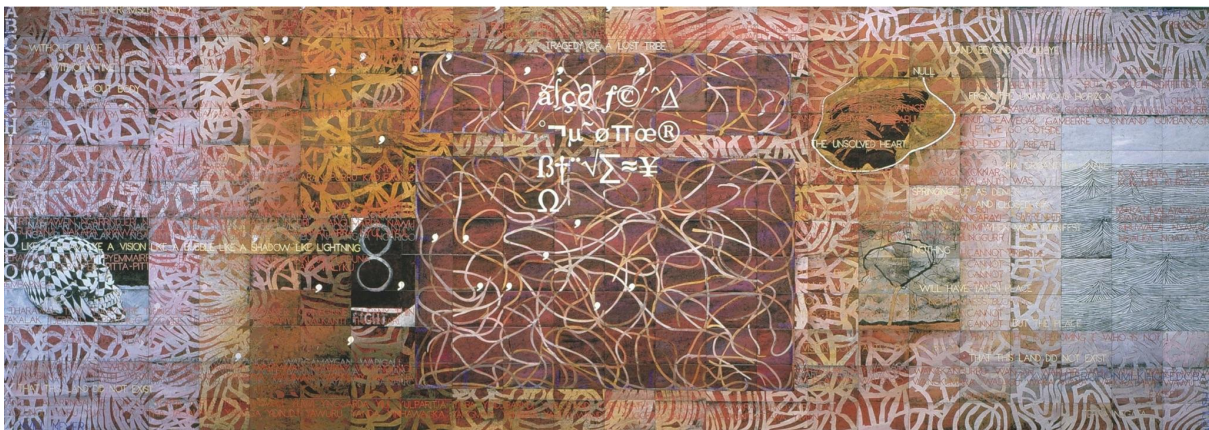


Figure 4. Imants Tillers, *Terra Negata*, 2005, synthetic polymer paint, gouache on 288 canvasboards, 304,8 x 853,4 cm. (Collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga, Latvia).



Figure 5. Imants Tillers, *Enclosure*, 1972, performance carried out at a beach in Sydney, tents, photographs, dimensions variable.



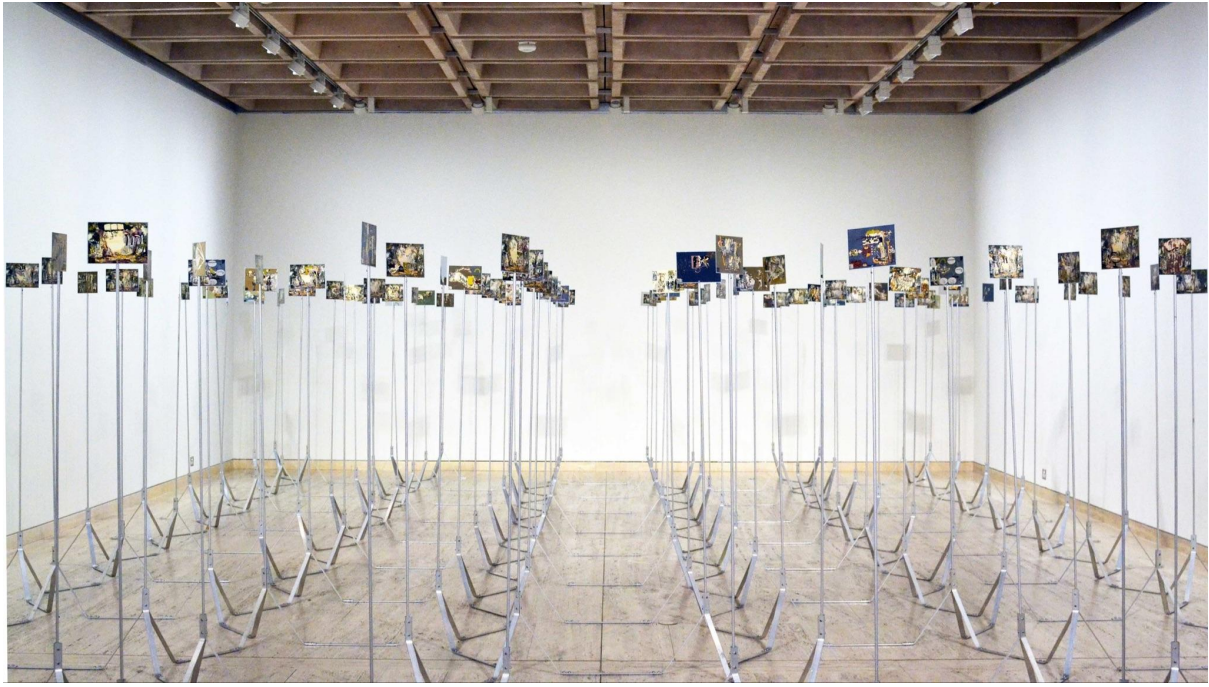


Figure 6. Imants Tillers, *Conversations with the Bride*, 1975, 112 gouache and acrylic-epoxy paintings on aluminum panels with chrome-plated mirrored backs, mounted on aluminum stands, overall dimensions variable, each painting 8,5 x 11,8 cm, stand height 163 cm, space between stands 75 cm. (Collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia).



Figure 7. Imants Tillers, *Untitled*, 1978, Neco digital paint-jet print on canvas, two parts, each 163,9 x 185,5 cm. (Collection of National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia).

## Image Source List

Fig. 1. Downloaded August 19, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-1990s>.

Fig. 2. Downloaded August 19, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/2018-from-the-studio-2>.

Fig. 3. Downloaded August 20, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-1990s>.

Fig. 4. Downloaded August 21, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-2010s>.

Fig. 5. Downloaded August 28, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-1970s>.

Fig. 6. Downloaded September 7, 2022. <https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-1970s>.

Fig. 7. Downloaded September 22, 2022.

<https://www.imantstillers.com/selected-works-1970s>.

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By submitting this examination, I certify that:

- ✓ this work has been drafted by me without any assistance from others (not applicable to group work);
- ✓ I have not discussed, shared, or copied assessment work from/with other students;
- ✓ I have not used sources that are not explicitly allowed by the course instructors and I have clearly referenced all sources (either from a printed source, internet or any other source) used in the work in accordance with the course requirements and the indications of the course instructors;
- ✓ this work has not been previously used for other courses in the programme or for course of another program or university, unless explicitly allowed by the instructors.

I understand that any false claim in respect of this work will result in disciplinary action in accordance with university regulations and the programme regulations, and that any false claim will be reported to the Board of Examiners. Disciplinary measures can result in exclusion from the course and/or the programme.

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