



# BATAVIA (1629): giving voice to the voiceless Symposium

7 October 2017 | Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA



Institute of  
Advanced Studies



**CULTURAL PRECINCT**

# The Batavia Shipwreck – A Brief Background

In October 1628, a fleet of seven Dutch East India ships set out from Texel in the Netherlands for Batavia, known today as Jakarta. One of those ships, the Batavia, was on its maiden voyage. On board for the eight-month journey were 22 women (ladies and their maids) and a number of children in the complement of sailors, soldiers and passengers which different accounts place somewhere between 316 and 341. The ship was also carrying a valuable cargo of silver coins, two antiquities belonging to the artist Rubens, richly jewelled ornaments and supplies for the Dutch East Indies colony.

As was customary in the Dutch East India Company, the split command structure was such that the Batavia's skipper, Ariaen Jacobsz, was subordinate and answerable to Francisco Pelsaert. Commander Pelsaert was the company's representative on board, a senior merchant and veteran trader who lacked maritime skills. Jacobsz and Pelsaert had worked together on a previous voyage from India to Amsterdam and by the time the Batavia set sail, the two had developed an intense dislike of each other. Also on board was the recently bankrupted Haarlem apothecary Jeronimus Cornelisz, second-in-command for the company and Pelsaert's deputy. The voyage offered Cornelisz an escape from the Netherlands where his personal and professional reputation was in tatters following the recent death of his newborn son from syphilis, and from his association with the painter Johannes Torrentius, an alleged blasphemer, atheist, heretic and Satanist.

In April 1629, the Batavia reached the Cape of Good Hope with two other ships from the fleet. Shortly after departing the Cape, the Batavia became separated from the fleet during the Indian Ocean crossing and by early June the ship was 600 kilometres further east than either Jacobsz or the bed-ridden Pelsaert realized – many now believe that an inability to accurately calculate longitude played a crucial role in the Batavia being so far off course. At some point during this part of the voyage, in an atmosphere of rising hostility between Pelsaert and Jacobsz and with an alliance between Cornelisz and Jacobsz strengthening, 27 year old Lucretia van den Mylen was attacked. Following her rejection of Jacobsz's sexual advances, a group of masked men proceeded to “hang overboard by her feet the Lady van den Mylen and indecently maltreat her body”. Van den Mylen was also smeared with excrement and pitch although it is unclear if her “blackening”, as this indignity was termed, was a separate event to her being dangled overboard. It was later claimed that the horrors inflicted on van den Mylen were part of a broader plan hatched by Cornelisz and Jacobsz to instigate a mutiny.

About two hours before dawn on Monday 4 June 1629, as the Batavia was making its way through pounding surf, the ship ran aground on Morning Reef, a coral outcrop in the Houtman Abrolhos Islands that lie approximately 70 kilometres west of Geraldton. Over the next few days, as the Batavia swayed with the shifting tides on the sharp-toothed coral, most of the crew and passengers, among them 30 women, children and newborn babies, were ferried to Beacon Island and a smaller group of about 40 men made camp on Traitor's Island. About 70 seamen remained on the crumbling Batavia where they reportedly availed themselves of vast amounts of alcohol. One of those men was Jeronimus Cornelisz who was finally washed out of the Batavia on the 13th June when the ship's hull gave way, below deck was flooded and all but 20 of the inebriated men drowned. After two days of clinging to a section of the ship's bow drifting through reefs and shallows, Cornelisz was finally washed ashore. By the time Cornelisz made land on the 15<sup>th</sup> June, Pelsaert and Jacobsz had already left the islands and, as Pelsaert's deputy, Cornelisz was now the most highly ranked officer amongst the marooned survivors. His survival is remarkable given that he could not swim.

On either the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> June, a group of approximately 48 set off in a nine-metre open longboat in search of water. Amongst them were Pelsaert and Jacobsz, most of the Batavia's officers, several crew and passengers. Three women and a babe-in-arms were on board the longboat: one woman was van den Mylen's maid, Zwaantje Hendrix, the lover of Jacobsz. Unable to find adequate supplies of water on the Australian mainland and in the full knowledge that the few salvaged casks of bread and barrels of water would not sustain the 260 or so survivors, the group embarked on a 3,000-kilometre journey to Batavia from where a rescue operation could be launched. Pelsaert's determination to rescue the survivors was surely matched by his resolve to salvage the Batavia's valuable cargo. Incredibly, Pelsaert and his group arrived in Batavia a month later with no loss of life. Hendrix and Jacobsz were immediately incarcerated, with Jacobsz apparently never emerging from his dungeon, and one of van den Mylen's attackers, Jan Evertsz, was hanged.

Following a short respite in Batavia, Pelsaert again set sail, this time with a crew of 40 on board the Sardam. While the longboat voyage to Batavia had taken roughly a month, the return journey took 63 days. Thus, by the time Pelsaert again stepped foot on the Abrolhos Islands on the 17<sup>th</sup> September, he had been absent for three months. In those intervening months Cornelisz and his band of supporters had unleashed a reign of the most violent and ferocious terror.

In all, some 120 people had been killed. Men, women, children and babies had been arbitrarily slaughtered, a number of men were cast out to sea on makeshift rafts and subsequently drowned, others had been forcibly dispatched to nearby islands in the mistaken belief that they would perish, and, at least seven young women had been “distributed among the men” as sexual slaves. The long-suffering van den Mylen was ‘allocated’ to Cornelisz, 21 year old Judith Gijsberts was ‘assigned’ to Cornelisz’s co-conspirator, Conrad van Huysen, and the remaining five women were deemed “for common service” of the entire group of Cornelisz’s supporters.

About two weeks prior to Pelsaert’s return, Cornelisz had been seized and taken captive on West Wallabi Island by a group of soldiers led by Wiebbe Hayes. From their outpost on West Wallabi Island, Hayes and his men had been able to repel several attacks from Corenlisz’s forces and on the final assault they captured Cornelisz and executed his party of five. With the arrival of Pelsaert further outbreaks of violence were suppressed and the interrogation and torture of Cornelisz and the other murderous villains commenced on the very day of Pelsaert’s return on the 17<sup>th</sup> September. Under Dutch law of the day, confession could be lawfully extracted by torture, but was only considered legally valid if the confession was confirmed by free will within 24 hours of the conclusion of the torture. By the end of September those legal proceedings had concluded and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, Cornelisz and six of his closest associates were hanged on Seal Island.

In November 1629, during the return journey on the *Sardam* to Batavia, at least seven of the lesser offenders were interrogated, tried and punished by keel hauling, flogging and by dropping from the yard-arm. Upon arrival in Batavia on the 5<sup>th</sup> December, some of those prisoners were re-sentenced and five men were sent to the gallows on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1630. On that day too, Jacop Pietersz was broken on the wheel but he most likely did not die until the following day. On the return journey Pelsaert had marooned two young men on the mainland, possibly near the mouth of the Murchison River. Neither the 24 year old Wouter Loos nor 18 year old Jan Pelgrom de Bye was heard of again.

Although Pelsaert had salvaged most of the Batavia’s cargo, his personal circumstances and reputation were ruined by the events of 1629. The Dutch East India Company held him responsible for the disaster, stripped him of his commission and seized his personal fortune. He was summarily dispatched to Sumatra where he died some time between June and September 1630, apparently a broken man.

Of Lucretia van den Mylen little is known. She had been travelling to Batavia to be re-united with her husband but upon her arrival she discovered that he had died whilst she was en route. The Council of Justice of Batavia determined that van den Mylen’s beguiling charm and feminine wiles had played a role in the catastrophic events of 1629 and she was accused of “provocation, encouraging evil acts and murdering the survivors...some of whom lost their lives owing to her backhandedness”. She denied the charges of being an accessory to the crimes and refused to confess. The public prosecutor sought authorization to torture van den Mylen but it is not known if that permission was granted or if the torture actually occurred. Van den Mylen re-married in October 1630 and in 1635 the married couple returned to the Netherlands and from that time forward there is little to no trace of her.

Although nothing has yet been uncovered about Lucretia van den Mylen following her return to the Netherlands, she did not quite disappear from the historical record. Around 1647, following the publication of the hugely popular *Unfortunate voyage of the ship Batavia*, the directors of the Dutch East India Company legislated that henceforth the number of female passengers on company ships would be limited. That decree was underpinned by the belief that the very presence of women on trading ships was dangerous for the directors justified their decision by pointing to the existence of women on the Batavia as proof of the disasters that were caused by their presence. While there is no evidence to suggest that van den Mylen played a role in the events of 1629, given the accusations that were directed towards her, it is most likely she who was foremost in the minds of the Dutch East India Company directors when they made that decision. Eighteen years after the Batavia was wrecked, it would seem that at least one group of powerful men believed that Lucretia van den Mylen and her bewitching charm was partly responsible for the violent catastrophe.

This free public symposium is being held in conjunction with the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery exhibition *BATAVIA (1629): giving voice to the voiceless* and is co-hosted by the UWA Cultural Precinct and the Institute of Advanced Studies.

## Programme

10am-10.10am	Welcome and Introduction MC: Professor Ted Snell
10.10am- 12.10pm	<b>Session One. The Wreck: from the first to the future</b>
10.10am-10.40am	Corioli Souter <b>The History of the Batavia Wreck and Early Discoveries</b>
10.40am-11.10am	Professor Alistair Paterson <b>Archaeological Work on Beacon Island in Recent Years</b>
11.10am-11.40am	Associate Professor Daniel Franklin <b>What Can the Bones Tell Us?</b>
11.40am-12.10pm	Alec Coles <b>Batavia: its significance, legacy and future</b>
12.10pm-1.10pm	Lunch (University Club)
1.10pm-2.10pm	<b>Session Two. The Unlucky Voyage</b>
1.10pm-1.40pm	Professor Jane Lydon <b>Dreams, Adventures, Pirates: the unlucky voyage of the ship Batavia</b>
1.40pm-2.10pm	Arvi Wattel <b>The Treasured Cargo of the Batavia: “rubbish” worth millions</b>
2.10pm-2.30pm	Coffee break
2.30pm-4.00pm	<b>Session Three. Torrentius: the link of art and science to Batavia</b>
2.30pm-3.15pm	Dr Paul Uhlmann <b>Torrentius, Darkness made Visible: the odd link of science and art to the tale of the Batavia</b>
3.15pm-4pm	Robert Cleworth <b>Scenes from a Movie: searching for truth in painting and history</b>
4pm	Close

## Exhibition – *BATAVIA (1629): giving voice to the voiceless*

7 October - 16 December 2017

This exhibition re-examines the horrendous story of the murder of 125 men women and children, following the wreck of the Dutch VOC ship the Batavia In 1629, as reinterpreted through the work of archaeologists, scientists and artists, who share the collective aim of deepening perceptual understandings of the Batavia Wreck.

# About the Speakers

## Alec Coles

Since 2010, Alec Coles has been CEO of the Western Australian Museum, the State's museum with branches in Perth, Fremantle, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Albany. In this role, he is the Australian Government's delegate under the 1976 Historic Shipwrecks Act. He was previously Director of Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums in North East England for eight years and, prior to that, CEO of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust, a wildlife conservation charity.

Alec is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at The University of Western Australia, an Executive Member of the Council for Australasian Museum Directors and Chair of International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia. He is committed to developing and demonstrating the public value of museums and he is currently driving the creation of Western Australia's new State Museum, aspiring to create a museum that is owned and valued by all West Australians and admired by the world.

In 2010, Alec was awarded an OBE in the Queen's birthday honours list for Services to Museums. In March 2017, he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Letters from The University of Western Australia in recognition of his contribution to the Arts and was a 2017 finalist in the Culture and Arts category of Western Australian of the Year.

## Robert Cleworth

Robert Cleworth is a practicing artist with over 30 years experience working across different mediums including, painting, drawing, collage and printmaking. Currently residing in Newcastle NSW, Robert has worked and exhibited nationally and overseas. In the early 1990s he undertook an intensive period of study at the Glasgow School of Art as an International Samstag Scholar. During this period he developed highly realistic images that traversed a dynamic intersection between abstraction, photography and painting. These painterly fragments took their inspiration from images from popular culture converging with his long exploration of the rhetorical power of Baroque painting inspired by Caravaggio and Jusepe Ribera.

Robert lived and worked as an artist for ten years in Western Australia. In 2009 he was commissioned by the Geraldton Regional Art Gallery to make a series of paintings about the Batavia. His work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, City of Greater Geraldton Art Collection, City of Bunbury, City of Prospect, Adelaide, and private collections.

## Daniel Franklin

Daniel Franklin is an Associate Professor in the School of Human Sciences, and Director of the Centre for Forensic Anthropology, at The University of Western Australia. His current research largely involves the development of alternative techniques to facilitate the rapid and accurate identification of unknown skeletal remains, most recently focussing on addressing the validation, accuracy and improvement of forensic anthropological methods, with a specific emphasis on the development of Australian identification standards. Daniel's work to-date has resulted in over 40 peer-reviewed publications in international and national journals, which continues through competitive funding obtained from various sources. He is Associate Editor of the *Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences* and a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Legal Medicine*. Daniel has been involved in the excavation and analysis of human skeletal remains associated with the Batavia mutiny since 1999, most recently as a co-investigator on an ongoing Australian Research Council project: Shipwrecks of the Roaring Forties: A Maritime Archaeological Reassessment of some of Australia's Earliest Shipwrecks.

## Jane Lydon

Professor Jane Lydon is the Wesfarmers Chair of Australian History at The University of Western Australia. Her research centres upon Australia's colonial past and its legacies in the present. Her books include *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Duke, 2005) and *The Flash of Recognition: Photography and the emergence of Indigenous rights* (NewSouth, 2012) which won the 2013 Queensland Literary Awards' History Book Award. She edited *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014) which brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars to explore the Indigenous meanings of the photographic archive. Other major current research interests include anti-slavery in Australia, the role of magic lantern slides in shaping early visual culture, and the emotional narratives that created relationships across the British Empire. *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire* was published by Bloomsbury in paperback in March 2017.

## Alistair Paterson

Professor Alistair Paterson is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow in archaeology at The University of Western Australia. His research examines the historical archaeology of colonial coastal contact and settlement in Australia's Northwest and the Indian Ocean. His key interests are Western Australia and Indian Ocean history, Aboriginal Australia, the Dutch East India Company, colonialism and exploration, rock art, and the history of collecting in Western Australia in collaboration with the Western Australian Museum, the State Library of Western Australia, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the British Museum.

Alistair is lead Chief Investigator on several ongoing Australian Research Council projects: (1) *Collecting the West: Reimagining Western Australia from its collections*, (2) *Coastal Connections: dynamic societies of Australia's Northwest frontier*, and (3) *Shipwrecks of the Roaring Forties: A Maritime Archaeological Reassessment of some of Australia's Earliest Shipwrecks*, and he is a Chief Investigator on (4) *Murujuga: Dynamics of the Dreaming*.

Alistair is the author of *A Millennium of Cultural Contact* (Left Coast, 2011), *The Lost Legions: Culture Contact in Colonial Australia* (Alta Mira, 2008) and editor with Jane Balme of *Archaeology in Practice: A Student Guide to Archaeological Analyses* (2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2013). He has been involved with editing for, and publishing in, key archaeology journals including *Antiquity*, *World Archaeology*, *Historical Archaeology*, *Archaeology in Oceania*, *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, *Internet Archaeology*, and *Australian Archaeology*.

## Corioli Souter

Corioli Souter is Curator at the Department of Maritime Archaeology at the Western Australian Museum and adjunct lecturer at The University of Western Australia. During her employment, she has taken part in over 40 archaeological research projects. She has been invited to assist with a number of overseas archaeological surveys including the survey of a Roman Bridge in the Netherlands, the excavation and survey of a 6th century BC wreck site in Turkey, the survey of the British sloop HMS Swift in Argentina, and, remote sensing searches for Dutch East Indiamen and World War II vessels in Sri Lanka.

Corioli's current research interests are archaeology of the Indian Ocean and the history of collecting in Western Australia. She has collaborated with University of Western Australia archaeologists on the investigation of shipwreck survivor camps and other maritime terrestrial sites such as those found in the Wallabi Group in the Abrolhos, the Dampier Archipelago, as well as the Southwest and Kimberley coasts. Over the last few years, Corioli has developed exhibition projects for the Western Australian Museum including *Immerse: Exploring the Deep* (2011), *Lustre: Pearling and Australia* (2015) and *Travellers and Traders in the Indian Ocean World* (2016), a collaboration with the British Museum.

Corioli is currently a PhD candidate at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University and is a Partner Investigator on an Australian Research Council project, *Collecting the West: How collections create Western Australia*. Her project is titled, *Collecting the Sea: Making and exhibiting maritime collections from the Indian Ocean in Western Australia*.

## Arvi Wattel

Arvi Wattel is a lecturer in the History of Art at the School of Design, The University of Western Australia. Before moving to Perth in 2012, he held fellowships at the Fondazione Ermitage in Ferrara, the Kunsthistorisches Institut (Max Planck Gesellschaft) in Florence, the Dutch Institute for Art History in Florence and the Royal Netherlandish Institute in Rome, and lectured at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the University of Maastricht and for Oberlin College in Arezzo.

Arvi has published on love and sympathy in Renaissance Ferrara, and on gendered space in the Renaissance convent. Besides his research into the relationship between courtly and civic-religious space in early sixteenth-century Ferrara, his research interests include the Dutch cultural exchange with Asia in the seventeenth century and the depiction of ritual performance and identity in the Dutch colonial city of Batavia (today's Jakarta).

## Paul Uhlmann

Paul Uhlmann is coordinator of Visual Arts, and coordinator of Printmaking Studio in the School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Perth. He is a practicing artist who works in painting, printmaking and artists books. He is interested in the philosophy of Spinoza, which articulates the unifying interconnectedness of all living beings. He questions and translates these concerns through painting, drawing, printmaking and artists' books as well as through experimental approaches to the camera obscura.

Paul studied art in Australia, and was the recipient of a DAAD scholarship to study in Germany (1986-87) and an International Samstag Scholarship to study in the Netherlands (1994-95). He was awarded an Australia Council studio residency grant to study frescos in Italy (1994). He has recently engaged in research on embodiment in Shanghai, China (2013 and 2015) and in Berlin, Germany (2013).

He has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1983 and his work is held in many collections including; National Gallery of Australia; Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Victoria.

He has been an artist and an educator for over 30 years and has taught at the Australian National University, Monash University and Edith Cowan University.

### Ted Snell (MC)

Professor Ted Snell, AM CitWA, is Chief Cultural Officer at The University of Western Australia. Over the past two decades he has contributed to the national arts agenda through his role as Chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Chair of Artbank, Chair of the Asialink Visual Arts Advisory Committee, Board member of the National Association for the Visual Arts, Chair of the Australian Experimental Art Foundation and Chair of University Art Museums Australia. He is currently on the board of the University of Queensland's Art Museum and the Australian Research Council Advisory Council. He has published several books and has curated numerous exhibitions, many of which document the visual culture of Western Australia. Ted Snell is a regular commentator on the Arts for ABC radio and television and is currently Perth art reviewer for *The Australian* and writes regularly for *The Conversation*.

### Suggested Reading

- Dash, M. *Batavia's Graveyard: The True Story of the Mad Heretic Who Led History's Bloodiest Mutiny*, London: Phoenix, 2003. AVAILABLE AT LWAG
- Drake-Brockman, H. *Voyage to Disaster: The Life of Francisco Pelsaert*, (trans. E. D. Drok,) Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1995. AVAILABLE AT LWAG
- van Duivenvoorde, W. *Dutch East India Company Shipbuilding: The Archaeological Study of Batavia and other Seventeenth Century VOC Ships*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015. AVAILABLE AT LWAG
- Edwards, H. *Islands of Angry Ghosts*, North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1989.
- Fitzsimmons, P. *Batavia*, Random House Australia, 2011.
- Leys, S. *The Wreck of the Batavia: A True Story*, Basic Books, 2005.

### Film Night: Maarten de Kroon, *Mysterious Masterpiece*

Join us for a special one-night-only screening of *MYSTERIOUS MASTERPIECE: Cold Case Torrentius*, a documentary film by Maarten de Kroon in cooperation with Jeanne van der Horst. The film investigates the incredible case of the 17th century Dutch painter Johannes Torrentius and presents the hallucinatory story of a libertine and painter of genius whose one remaining painting is now part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum. The painting, a wooden circular panel, was used for a long time as the lid on a raisin barrel in a grocery shop in Enschede, a town in Holland. Even after extensive research his *Emblematic still life with flagon, glass, jug and bridle* (1614) remains a mystery. *Mysterious Masterpiece* re-opens the case to examine what is known of the painting and what extensive research done by the Rijksmuseum shows. What medium did Torrentius use? Did he use a camera obscura, and if so: how did he work with it? What about his ties with the Rosicrucians? An international team of witness specialists are consulted to get closer to Torrentius' mysteries.

Join us for a drink after the film.

Running time: 67 minutes | Campus Partner: Discipline of Archaeology

**When:** 19 October 2017, 6-7:30pm | Venue: Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

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