

When Saddam Hussein invaded his oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait, in 1990, the US led a multi-national military coalition against Saddam, which included Australia. The country from down under joined the US again in 2003 to aid in the removal of Weapons of Mass Destruction that were suspected to be in Iraq. This “Australian occupation” stretched from 1990-2014. One symptom of this occupation was the creation of a special US work visa, which benefits Australians exclusively, and now represents 15% of the combined total of annual visas awarded for entry into the United States. As borders became harder, border mobility became a reward of war.

Now, a flow of Australians consistently arrive to the US every year with this new work visa, which is renewable, indefinitely. This wave of border crossers has brought with it one particularly interesting niche: Australian café culture. For *Penal Café*, George Egerton-Warburton has created a *mise en scène* café. The installation consists of colonies of chairs and tables; spaces of retrenchment and self-surveillance, where precarious laborers pay to work for themselves.

Part of the set includes two paintings that are inspired by scenes in history: the Lindt Café siege, and Degas’ *Scene of war in the Middle Ages* (1865). The café “tables” are like penal machines; sort of self-censoring weapons of war, replacements for men, or sex machines, that move kinetically and constantly. As if manifesting from the complicated cocktail of shame, pathos, and pride that makes up Australia’s convict-settler history, the artist has wrangled chairs, stools, benches, and some sheep, appropriated from Australian cafés in New York.

This is George Egerton-Warburton’s first New York solo exhibition.

*Penal Café* is on view through May 12, 2019.

George Egerton-Warburton (b. 1988 Kojonup, Australia) Selected exhibitions include: Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne (forthcoming, 2019); Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, (2018); Chateau Shatto, Los Angeles (2017); Artist Curated Projects, Los Angeles (2017); *Pillow Torque* (with Lauren Burrow), The Physics Room, Christchurch (2016); *Big Trouble*, Human Resources, Los Angeles, curated by Megan Plunkett, (2015); Shanaynay, Paris (2015); Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth (2014); *Melbourne Now*, National Gallery of Victoria, curated by Max Delany, Melbourne (2013).

—Ebony L. Haynes

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