

OC CURRENT AFFAIR

NOW // OCCURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW //

/ Vernon Ah Kee // Tony Albert // Richard Bell // Megan Cope // Je

ope// Jennifer Herd // Gordon Hookey // Laurie Nilsen // Vernon Ah





WARNING
SLIDING FIRE DOOR

EYE PROTECTION
MUST BE WORN
IN THIS AREA

“proppaNOW provides a constantly innovative approach to Aboriginal Art and urban expression in Australia and the position that is ascribed to Aboriginal people and culture within the national Australian context. proppaNOW’s central premise is to advocate and produce artists and exhibitions that question established notions of Aboriginal Art and Identity.” proppaNOW (2004)

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	8
<i>A Tribute to Loz</i>	10
<i>A Yarn Event</i>	14
<i>Vernon Ah-Kee</i>	48
<i>Tony Albert</i>	56
<i>Richard Bell</i>	66
<i>Megan Cope</i>	76
<i>Jennifer Herd</i>	88
<i>Gordon Hookey</i>	102
<i>Laurie Nilsen</i>	114
<i>Biographies</i>	130
<i>Afterword</i>	144



Foreword

Professor Bronwyn Fredericks
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement)
The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland is a site that has always been a place of deep listening, creating, and sharing for First Nations people. Our commitment to creating change through Indigenous knowledge preservation, creation, and application is integral to all learning and researching activities on campus and on Country. As such, our interest in our locale to represent the stories of our place at the University is vital to further our understanding of reconciliation, and to extend the conversation of Indigenous sovereignty.

It is befitting that UQ Art Museum in 2021 hosted the proppaNOW collective, with curation and collaboration from Blaklash Creative, in their exhibition *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*. The exhibition is a major survey of proppaNOW that highlights the contradictions and struggles of urban Indigenous artists creating in the contemporary era. Formed in Meanjin/Brisbane, proppaNOW and Blaklash situate the city as a place where Indigenous sovereignty is marked through artistic creation and collaboration. Each member of proppaNOW speak to their identity, and their shared experience of being an Aboriginal artist in the institution. The exhibition also brings proppaNOW together for the first time in five years. *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* is a provoking showcase of their stellar contribution to contemporary Indigenous art.

The exhibition salutes the continued activism of proppaNOW, and recognises art as a site of resilience and self-determination for First Nations people.

Activism has been at the heart of Indigenous sovereignty since the beginning of colonisation, not by preference but as a means for survival. Shared through the exhibition are the various ways of defiance that are common to every survival story of First Nations people. Activism through art makes the museum a site of resistance to the hurtful and false narrative of First Nations people perpetuated during the colonial project. During its time at UQ, the exhibition highlighted the difficult conversations of self-determination, and the unequal treatment of Indigenous people on their own land. *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* makes the case for looking head on into the challenges that continue to prevent First Nations people from being fully self-determining.

On the occasion of the national tour of *OCCURRENT AFFAIR*, it is vital to continue the conversation to challenge the institutions that have contributed to the highly politicized and derogatory narrative of Indigenous people. It is my hope that as this exhibition tours across Australia and across institutions, a dialogue is created to signal a change in the narrative.

A Tribute to Loz

Dr Richard Bell

Laurie Nilsen (1953–2020), the legendary artist, teacher, fencer, all round handyman and storyteller extraordinaire, was born and raised in and around a town called Roma.

Growing up in the 1960s in outback Queensland towns wasn't easy, especially for us blackfellas, or Murriss as we called ourselves. We were all living in tents or tin shacks on Aboriginal reserves on the outskirts of numerous country towns that we called Yumbas. It was truly a stretch to call them shanty towns; the only visible signs of economic activity in these communities were at the gambling 'schools'.

I became aware of Laurie's talent as an artist and wordsmith in about 1987, when he won the award for his poster highlighting famous Aboriginal people from that era.¹ In those days, most of us thought his name was Laurie Nelson. But he gently told us his surname was Nilsen, N-i-l-s-e-n, because his father was from Norway. He was held in awe and celebrated for his caption "Australia has a Black History". That image, shown below, is still my favourite Aboriginal Week poster.

By the time Laurie moved back to Brisbane, quite a few Murriss were hanging around a collective called Campfire Group. We all had a keen interest in contemporary art and so began a pretty interesting period of time. Laurie stayed with

¹ Laurie Nilsen designed the winning poster 'White Australia has a Black History' for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week poster competition in 1987.

Campfire Group until it folded in 2002. He was the first artist on the list of each of the founding members of proppaNOW—Jennifer Herd, Vernon Ah Kee and myself—in selecting artists to join our collective.

In closing, I gotta say Laurie Nilsen was the best art teacher I have ever known. He had all the skills in every aspect of art making as well as a remarkable, folksy ability to communicate difficult ideas and concepts. He loved life, he loved art and he loved to have fun making it.





NCW program NCW pro...

SOLIDARITY

ETHICS
...in There.

INV

occupy
work by
whitene

Establish
cultural
culture.
be a tot
activist
political
strength

Engage
the ses
program
language
remotely
affecting
Australia

proppa
Jennifer

Guest o

OC CURRENT AFFAIR

OC CURRENT AFFAIR is a major exhibition featuring new and recent works by the Brisbane-based Aboriginal artist collective proppanNOW. After a five-year hiatus to focus on their individual careers,

proppanNOW are one of Australia's leading contemporary Aboriginal artists, exploring the politics of Aboriginal art and provoking, subverting and re-thinking what it means to be a contemporary Aboriginal artist. Conceived as a collaborative exhibition, OC CURRENT AFFAIR will address current socio-economic and environmental issues, while celebrating the resilience and continuity of Aboriginal culture.

Working through its title, OC CURRENT AFFAIR references the sensationalist, tabloid style of some television current affairs programmes. OC CURRENT AFFAIR embraces the slippage between news and its associated readings to probe and present new perspectives. The exhibition reflects on the ongoing state of affairs in Aboriginal communities - issues that are relevant to all Australians.

proppanNOW: Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Richard Bell, Megan Cope, Gordon Hookey, Gordon Hooley, Gordon Hooley, Laurie Nilzen

curators: Amanda Heyman and Troy Casey (Blacklash Creative)

A Yarn Event

proppaNOW in Conversation

On 18 June 2021, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a day of conversations between proppaNOW members was held at The University of Queensland Art Museum (UQ Art Museum) in the context of the exhibition *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* (13 February - 19 June 2021). It was titled *A Yarn Event*.

These discussions exemplify the kinds of exchanges needed to break through the silence and challenges of having honest, authentic, and brave conversations in so-called Australia. The event acted as succession planning for the future, laying the groundwork for an unapologetic and productive space of dialogue across generations. The identity of proppaNOW has always been one of provocation, which is necessary to unsettle the collective amnesia enacted by White Australia. What is made obvious throughout the conversations is that while proppaNOW is many things, it has always aimed to upset the balance of power. For this reason, proppaNOW itself is a language, an ideology, and a platform, indicative of a group of artists whose practices have strong and unique perspectives that have grown alongside one another. proppaNOW's multidimensionality, and the way in which it holds space for difference and dialogue, both within and outside of itself, remains a singular model of practice across the Australian and international arts landscape.

The exhibition marked a reunion of the proppaNOW members following a five-year hiatus taken to focus on their individual careers. What follows is an edited transcript of the wide-ranging dialogue that took place. Among the topics discussed are the enduring legacy of the foundational Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art (CAIA) degree at Griffith University's Queensland College of Art (QCA); the ongoing reverberations of structural racism within major institutions; and the importance of collective over individual practices as a methodology through which to react against capitalism and the climate emergency.

Throughout *A Yarn Event* and the entire exhibition, the absence of proppaNOW member the late Laurie Nilsen (1953 -2020) is palpable, but he is ever present and his voice echoes throughout. We would like to thank Lily Eather for her permission to use his name throughout this text.

Artists in attendance included Richard Bell, Megan Cope, Gordon Hookey, Tony Albert, and Vernon Ah Kee. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, Jennifer Herd was unable to attend. This conversation was introduced by UQ Art Museum's Acting Director/Senior Curator Peta Rake and moderated by curators Troy Casey and Amanda Hayman from Blaklash.

Troy Casey

It's important to begin with acknowledging the contributions of the two artists who aren't here today: Jennifer Herd, the earliest member of the collective, and the late Laurie Nilsen, who contributed new works to this exhibition at a really challenging time. We would like to acknowledge Lily and Michael Eather for helping us amplify Laurie's presence. He was so excited about this proppaNOW exhibition [*OCCURRENT AFFAIR*], and we are really proud that his voice sings throughout.

Richard Bell

Laurie was a good friend. He was funny, generous, always ready for a yarn. He was just a really good person and I feel privileged to have known him and to have known him well.

Vernon Ah Kee

Hear, hear. We keenly feel his presence and his absence. We think about him all the time, but particularly in the context of what we're here for today.

Gordon Hookey

Our "Loz" [Laurie] is deeply missed by all of us.

He also resides in a lot of our work, because he was someone that knew the easy route to get something done. He was the most practical person. You could be struggling with something and Laurie would say "Just go do it this way", and it's done. I remember

when we first met in the studio in the early 2000s, at the Amersham building [where the Murri radio station is now].¹ I was painting this text, and Laurie was shaking his head, and he said, “No, not like that”. He got my visual diary and, as a former draughtsman and graphic designer, he quickly drew up a font from A to Z, including all the numbers. I still use that font constantly.

Megan Cope

Laurie was such an incredible mentor. From my first year at CAIA, he imparted so much skill and gave us so much confidence.

Tony Albert

And as this conversation progresses, understand that his voice is echoed through our answers.

¹ Triple A Murri Country Radio Station is located in West End, Brisbane.



Marxists
disagree
on whether
ethical
conditions





...not been told" (Jennifer Heald)

|| "Australia would rather live with a comfortable lie than the uncomfortable truth." (Gordon Hookey)

||

Megan

I felt really strongly about a proppaNOW show. I was very determined for us to have an exhibition in a major institution, because that hadn't happened for us. I felt that there was a sense of urgency.

As the youngest member of the collective, I've felt like it was critical that we have this exhibition, because when you look at contemporary Indigenous art today, it's going in a certain direction. I think about proppaNOW and what we've done and created, and especially what the senior members have established. It's too important for proppaNOW to just turn the page, like on internet speed, and be forgotten.

Troy

Richard, you are one of the founding members of proppaNOW.² You were pretty adamant that the exhibition included a particular email that was sent in 2005. Can you speak to this email and its context?

Richard

Well, we needed to make a statement to the art world because as soon as we told people that we were going to form a collective, that got tongues talking. When a group of people get together—especially blackfullas—in this country, everybody talks about it. So we wanted to put that statement out there, outlining where we were coming from at that moment.

² proppaNOW was established in 2003.

We decided to send out a press release. We sort of called out before [the emergence of] “call out” culture. We called out the Queensland Art Gallery then, stating that, at best, they had a third-rate collection of Aboriginal Art. Well, that was true, because if you think about it, the Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory had a better one, the National Gallery of Australia had a better one, and [so did the state galleries in] Victoria and New South Wales. The Gallery got very upset. They didn’t buy our work for almost 10 years after that, I think. We got to them. The message got out. And we made this emphatic statement. One of the things that is missing from the exhibition is our mission statement, which, holy shit, makes [the media release seem] tame.

Vernon

When we first started, people weren’t exactly friendly to us.

Richard

We were called “proppa nouns” and “proppa bullshit” and “proppa show offs”.

Vernon

This is one of the reasons we had to band together—to support each other. As individuals, we were all being aggressively ignored.

Richard

They [the institutions] took it [the press release] completely out of context. We called for independent departments of Aboriginal Art in all the major museums in the country. And our validation for that was the fact that, at the time, Aboriginal Art—in terms of both sales value and sales numbers—outperformed the rest of Australian art. So, you know, we were 5 to 10 times bigger than non-Indigenous Australian art and yet there was a department of Australian art in every one of these institutions, but not a fully independently funded department of Aboriginal Art.

It's that typical thing of, you know, the tail wagging the dog, woof woof.

Tony

I think it's important to know and understand that among proppaNOW were the worlds that we straddled and understood. Knowing that whatever was to come out of that statement, either the positive or negative, was going to be good for us and for the art world in particular.

Richard

We had to do it for us, for the collective to get this voice. We wanted to be able to say things in the future and it was very important that we started out in this manner.



SOLIDARITY



You

HICS
in There

INVASION
AUS TRAIL YA

Tony

The most dangerous people have nothing to lose. And we were definitely in a position where it didn't matter what we said. Either way, it was going to be great for us.

Richard

We were prepared for it to go both ways. We survived not being collected by all these institutions that we'd been critical of. So we proved that we could actually make an art practice without kissing ass.

Amanda

Gordon, how do you feel about being a part of a collective voice?

Gordon

I was part of proppaNOW for two or three years without even knowing it. And, the same with Loz as well.

For me, it was about having good mates and friends. Not that I haven't got my own mates—*all these guys got no mates you know!*—but it's always good because they offer support.

When I first came here [to Brisbane from Sydney], proppaNOW were really good, because they were like a family away from my family. At that time, I was going through a lot, as I had lost my mum. In big Murri families, when a matriarch dies, there's all

this turmoil, infighting and carrying on, so I kind of had to get away from that. Richard, Vern, Loz, Tony, and Jen just took me in. We were in the warehouse space [Amersham] where the radio station was, and I lived there, along with a number of us, and we just made art and it was a great start to be in this collective like that.

proppaNOW allowed me to do what I do without censorship. The worst type of censorship doesn't come from the church, the government, or the public. I think the worst censorship is when you start censoring yourself. And proppaNOW allows me to do what I want to do.

Vern said that we give each other permission to do whatever. The best and worst part about it is that we're highly critical of each other's work. I mean, if we do shit work, one of us will tell you that it's shit. If we can run the gauntlet of proppaNOW, then out there in the so-called "art world" critique is child's play.

Megan

At the time of that statement, I was painting [tourist] boomerangs, because I thought that's what being an Aboriginal artist was. After a strange turn of events, I ended up applying to CAIA.³ A whole new world opened up and I felt like I could be myself and not have to perform anything. CAIA was really important. It still is.

³ Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art Bachelor of Visual Arts at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Meanjin/Brisbane.



Aboriginal Art is bought, sold and promoted from within the system, that is, Western Art consigns it to "Pigeon-holing" within that system. Why can't an Art movement arise and be separate from but equal to Western Art - within its own aesthetic, its own voices, its own infrastructure, etc?

Excerpt from 'Bell's Theorem'
(Richard Bell, 2002.)

Tony

CAIA is really important in understanding Jennifer [Herd]'s legacy. A foundation was set up within an art university [QCA] for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people, and it continues to be, fundamentally, one of the most important and exciting areas of institutional art and learning.

There is a connection between proppaNOW and a context like the Bachelor of Visual Arts (BoVA CAIA) in that they are continually chastised. And yet, every time that the course came under threat of being shut down or losing funding, you just had to list the artists who had graduated from that course—a list unmatched by mainstream art institutions, probably nationally, dare I say it, let alone within Queensland. The amount of artists who actually work as artists after doing that [degree], I mean, there's something quite inherently magical about that; I think [the degree] is looked at in a better light [now] than the days when we were involved. But I mean, that struggle still [remains]; the validity is still underpinned by a leadership that doesn't really understand the importance of why those kinds of things exist, or that something doesn't have to fit into a box or an institutionalised way of being to work.

Richard

CAIA is a testament to Jennifer's efforts.

Tony

And Laurie.

Richard

And Laurie, yes of course. What they did by helping those blackfullas from all around Queensland, and some from northern New South Wales, to find a voice in art was extraordinary. I remember talking with Jennifer often about how some memo would come down from the top that there was a change to the course, or a change to the funding. She'd go in and tell them this isn't going to work, you're going to have to change it back to how it was. That's what she did every time that they tried to change something. Jen didn't mess around. She didn't play politics. There are lots of graduates from CAIA who are currently showing internationally, more so than from any other program in this country.

Gordon

Jen and Loz are probably the most selfless people that I've known, where they just give everything to the students. What was interesting the other week at Loz's artist tribute and testimonial at the State Library of Queensland was that Michael Aird mentioned a little joke about Loz and the PhD—you know, owning a posthole digger = PhD—which was quite funny. But there's at least four blackfulla artists that had gone through and got their PhD through there, including D Harding, Robert Andrew, Ryan Presley, and Carol McGregor. So, that's four there, and that's under [the supervision of] Loz and Jen.

Richard

CAIA is one of the good stories for blackfullas. And it's not just the quality of students, the quality of people who have come along to CAIA, it's also that most of them are mature age, or have had time out in society. They come to us not fresh out of high school or anything like that. There should be something really special made about CAIA and its students.

Vernon

Richard and his brother Marshall [Bell] were involved initially scoping out the structure of the course. You have to remember that there was nothing like CAIA before it started, and it was so unbelievably different that people couldn't and still can't handle it.

Again, it's about the opposition to what is established, and what people feel comfortable with. The idea of CAIA is something people don't feel comfortable with. There were other people involved at the beginning as well, like Pat Hoffie, George Petelin and Michael Eather, who were instrumental in believing in the idea, because it was to talk about something and make something from nothing. It was not something that anybody was encouraging. For a time, it was going well and strong. And then external forces started chipping away at it. And that is still happening. But it's par for the course for blackfullas. But also sauce for the goose.



Gordon

Finally, you should mention CAIA, C-A-I-A:
Central Aboriginal Intelligence Agency.

Amanda

Do you think there's been progress? Do you think more people are comfortable viewing your artwork?

Vernon

Absolutely not. The fact that there's hardly any Aboriginal representation in APT⁴ or if you go to QAGOMA [Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art], you would think that blackfullas don't live here. Keep in mind that more than 25 percent of the Aboriginal population of this country is in Queensland. You could walk around here thinking where are all the blackfullas? They are everywhere, just not where we need to be. I think it's easy to demonstrate that things have gone backwards. And that is a whole other conversation.

Amanda

You mentioned that there's never been a proppaNOW exhibition in a major institution; why do you think that is?

⁴ The Asia Pacific Triennial is held every three years at QAGOMA.

Megan

Racism? I mean, we're not here to make people feel comfortable, not when our lives are so compromised in a settler colonial state. We're not there yet but we're here together and within this space we create something really powerful. That's always a threat.

Richard

The reason is racism. The settler colonial project strongly supports wilful forgetfulness and the stories that we tell don't allow that. I think that contributes to why we haven't had an institutional show.

Vernon

proppaNOW has always stuck by what we believe. We would like to move on but the issues that we raised 20 years ago are still occurring, and some of them are more relevant than they should be.

Gordon

I know there's many different genres of blackfulla art as well. Art is an expression of who we are, but also an expression of our humanity and how we see the world. And often, you know, we're dealing with metaphors and similes and onomatopoeias—somebody hit me with some more poetic terms!

Vernon

I feel like hitting you with those poetic terms, Gordy!

Gordon

Not too hard, though!

In many ways, proppaNOW holds a mirror up to society, to show them who they are and what they are. A lot of the time, they don't like what they see. So you're not going to have someone being called an asshole embracing you and taking you in, even though that's the honest truth about them. I feel that society is so confronted by how we present them back to themselves.

Vernon

What you are talking about Gordy is right across the arts. It's in music, it's in writing, poetry, dance and performance. And there are voices that don't correlate with the national narrative. And there are lots and lots of those voices there. And we need as a group, but also as individuals, to show support for those voices. [That's part of why] we started proppaNOW. People need to take on the responsibility of asking hard questions all the time. And people who are our targets, unintentionally or not, are just going to feel it. And we don't apologise for that.

Tony

I think racism is represented through the hierarchy within our institutions. And that is about having ownership and being experts. And what proppaNOW did was say that we are actually the experts of what we are doing and what we are making. And through that, ownership created a

divide within art institutions between Desert artists and urban-based artists. And where I see the proof within that, 20 years on, is that proppaNOW has also given a voice to traditionally based art to speak out against injustice, and that is what they are doing.

I think it is really interesting to reflect on why that is, because there's an element of power and control in understanding that disadvantaged people exist within regional and remote areas and not within city-based environments.

Gordon

When it comes to Australia, if it was just left to this country, I mean, we would not get a look in, but many of us here have high international profiles as well. So it's like, we've busted through this country and went into the world and presented how it is here to the world. And it's only [when we've had success overseas] that I feel Australia started to have a look at what we do. Because, you know, Australia still has this inferiority complex, and something has to be good outside of Australia before it is any good at all. And I think because of the [international] profile of my fellow artists, we are getting a little bit of recognition in Australia.

Tony

We all know what it's like to be an artist internationally and work with institutions internationally. And we know that experience is different to working within an Australian institution.



// GORDON: I would not be where I am now if it wasn't for being in prison. It was a hard time, but it was a time when I was able to learn a lot about myself and the world around me. It was a time when I was able to find my voice and my purpose. It was a time when I was able to become a man.



then automatically

and the... of the... and... of the... over the years affected us as Queenslanders. // TONY: The conce

Richard

Not this one [UQ Art Museum]!
Not since Peta's been here anyway.

Megan

Because she came from the international space back home.

Vernon

Yeah, the cultural cringe in this country is still quite crippling, I think.

Gordon

It's interesting that in the essay that George Petelin wrote⁵ he referred to proppaNOW as being a movement. Vern's partner Leesa [Watego] often refers to the work that we do as a genre; she will look at another person's work and refer to it as being proppaNOW influenced, probably because it encapsulates something that we're all about.

Vernon

You stick to your guns and make sure that you're being consistent and that everyone is, but we've also been consistent in pushing our ideas and each other, but also producing quality work.

⁵ George Petelin, "proppaNOW" in *proppaNOW 2004-2008: Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Bianca Beetson, Richard Bell, Andrea Fisher, Jennifer Herd, Gordon Hookey, Laurie Nilsen* (Brisbane: proppaNOW, 2009). 9-15

Gordon

Before these last five years, we were in regular contact, constantly talking and discussing. When events, issues or concerns arose, we'd just sit down and yarn and talk about it. But these guys are too busy travelling the world, and living elsewhere over the last five years, and we couldn't get together.

Richard

One of the key aims of proppaNOW was that we would use the collective to push our solo careers.

And we became so successful that we found it very hard to show together and to catch up with each other like we did.

Vernon

It caught us off guard.

Richard

God-damned success.

Megan

I think institutions or curators were interested in the ideas and the framework within proppaNOW's practice. They are happy to just select individuals from the collective in a group show. There's been a "watering down" of our collective practice in this way, in the major institutions, with these big kinds of shows that are about the grand narratives of Australia.

Tony

proppaNOW is about a movement, and no movement lasts forever. It's a finite amount of time, and then it's moved on, and then the repercussions of that continue. That's why I was very happy to see the dialogue attached to us without us having physical presence. We all went on and did our own thing. I think it's touched upon in Vernon's work,⁶ and I think there were some hard-hitting things that we had to reflect on. I think if I could do the past 10 years again, there would be some changes I would have made in making sure that the other members of the group were being equally supported. I could have probably pushed harder to make sure of that.

Having lived in other places, I haven't seen that sort of community generosity present, where you want to see other people being successful. I think that support is so important to our existence, and the fact that it isn't seen as an asset to broader society really does surprise me.

⁶ This refers to Vernon Ah Kee's video work *proppaNOW*, 2021, which was a documentary on proppaNOW artists that was first displayed in the exhibition *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* at UQ Art Museum (2021).

Megan

No one seems to want to make collectives, perhaps because it's an old kind of socialist idea, centring the collective self. Vernon has always said the membership of proppaNOW is by invite only, but we invite blackfullas around Australia to use this as a model, so that we can formulate a national network of strong Aboriginal people making work and having these conversations, so that we can break through those glass ceilings.

Richard

Younger artists should be setting up collectives to fight, to overcome the lone voice. I think that curators need to get together and get collectivised. I think there should be more collectives here in Brisbane; this is not just a one-collective town.

Vernon

We're also just one idea.

Megan

I don't know why truth-telling is anti-institutional.

Vernon

Whenever any of the institutions have any questions about Australian art or the relationship between Australian art and Aboriginal Art, or Australian art and Aboriginal people, we are not the first people they contact.

Gordon

One of the things that we've always had in our mission statement is that we are multigenerational, from us old fellas to Tony and Megan. Megan was the last member to join, but maybe she's not going to be the last member, because we're always on the lookout for young like-minded artists who could contribute or even help us in some kind of way to come in. And in this way, we just continue growing. This is sounding like a dynasty!

We're all not going to be around forever, of course, but it would be nice if proppaNOW remains in some form in the future. *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* has definitely thrown a few more logs on the fire for us.

Richard

Collectives are the best way to go about things. And collectivism lasted for tens of thousands of years on this planet. And it's only taken 250 years of capitalism and colonialism to bring the world to its knees.

When the colonisers came to this country, they found it in pristine condition. And our people got no thanks for how we cared for this country, the way it was, and how we've tried to protect it. And look at it now. It is time for the colonisers to stop behaving like spoiled children and to start having adult conversations with Indigenous peoples from around the world. Just stop this shit.

Tony

To add to that Richard, our climate crisis is the most important issue facing us. I feel really fortunate to be heavily involved within the movement and in climate camps to really understand the critical nature of where we're at. Indigenous people are now (and always have been) at the forefront of facing those issues, but we have a history and ignored history of understanding land management, ways of looking after, understanding and respecting the environment.

We are also at this critical point where we have everything we need at our disposal to make change.

Megan

Ten years ago, I started mapping sea level rise. I grew up in the bush so I've always been comfortable with living with the land and having a different kind of relationship with the land. We can break through the colonial project. We all have a responsibility to do our best for the environment and each other. Just because we as artists discuss humanity and ethics and we talk about things that are human, [it] doesn't mean that it is then our responsibility alone to offset everybody else's carbon.

Richard

We need a revolution. It's the only way to make change. Capitalism is not going to go away, we have to kill it. Right? It's on its knees at the moment; it's on life support, and that life support is drawn from

the blood of the poor. So if we're really serious about it, we have to make collectives, so that it makes it difficult for these people to stop what we're trying to do. Basically, what we're trying to do is to connect people and connect their ideas together, with the power of art.

Vernon

Keep in mind, the way we think about what we do is underpinned by how we think about each other, and the work proppaNOW makes is about people. It isn't about environmental issues, per se. It's about how we, as people, think about these things. You know, I've always said that land rights is an Aboriginal issue. That's because the land is an Aboriginal issue. It's an Aboriginal idea. Fracking is an Aboriginal issue. At the end of the day, it's about people and it's about how we engage with each other, and the spaces that we inhabit.

Everywhere, people are concerned about what's going to happen to the environment and the landscape. I just say "Well, you really messed it up by removing all the blackfullas from it". Because landscape is about people. Everything from the air that we are breathing, the quality of the air, to the fact that you can turn a tap on and drink the water that comes out of it, is an Aboriginal idea.

Send Attach Save Draft abc Spelling Cancel

To: **proppanow@yahoo.com.au** Show BCC

Cc:

Subject: **we have a dream** Plain Text

Arial 12 B I U T P E -

We have a dream...

Proppanow, the Brisbane based Aboriginal artists collective, has this message for all.

We have a dream that one day there will be an autonomous Aboriginal Art Department in every major art gallery and museum in this country. That the curators of Aboriginal Art there will share the same benefits and job security with their non-Aboriginal co-workers - instead of one year contracts. And that the said departments have their own purchasing budgets. We also hold that decisions to purchase works by the curatorial staff are made after consultation with a local consultative committee consisting of respected members of the Aboriginal community.

We have a dream that one day the Queensland Art Gallery will accept that it has a third rate (at best) collection of Aboriginal Art and must stop trying to play catch up. We believe it would be not only wise, but more prudent to purchase works by living artists from Queensland.

We have a dream that the National Gallery of Australia and the other major art institutions in this country acknowledge the outstanding contribution to the Australian community of the so-called Urban Aboriginal Artists. (Most of whom come from Qld e.g., Gordon Bennett, Fiona Foley, Gordon Hookey, Tracey Moffatt to name just a few).

We have a dream that the new Gallery of Modern Art will open with an exhibition of the works of Queensland's finest artists. Further, we would ask that this show include those from the Urban Aboriginal Art movement, established and emerging.

We have a dream that the staff at the Govt funded art institutions that, after a phasing in period, that no employee shall stay in any one job for more than five years.

proppaNOW



WHITE OUT
A BOBIGINAL
MOVEMENT
It's too strong for
you, Karen.
YOU ARE HERE
TIP: Ex



Vernon Ah Kee

“My work is Aboriginal art. It describes the life of Aboriginal people in contemporary and modern terms. We are not Stone Age people.”



proppa**NOW**



OC CURRENT
AFFAIR

**ifiamex
itisbec
mypeop
extrem
condi**

**Extremist
cause
to live in
very bad
conditions**

I'm not racist but... I don't know why Aboriginal people can't look after their houses properly
came and.... I'm not racist but... they never even wore any clothes before we came and.... I'm
racist but... my taxes are paying for their food and.... I'm not racist but... what about us White
I'm not racist but... my father worked hard to buy this land and.... I'm not racist but... my father
speak English and.... I'm not racist but... maybe they're poor because they just don't know how
and.... I'm not racist but... well, look at how they live and.... I'm not racist but... didn't we go
normally and.... I'm not racist but... they just sit on their Missions and Reserves and do nothing
racist but... if it wasn't for us White people, they would've died out a long time ago and.... I'm
when I just can't relate to them and.... I'm not racist but... they just don't understand how things
but... well, you just can't teach them anything and.... I'm not racist but... for 200 years we've
and.... I'm not racist but... a lot of them don't believe in God and.... I'm not racist but... they
it? and.... I'm not racist but... you can't expect too much of them really and.... I'm not racist but
to teach their kids is too hard sometimes and.... I'm not racist but... I think that just giving them
treated equal and.... I'm not racist but... haven't they got some rights that we do? and.... I'm
to either and.... I'm not racist but... my job is to guard against terrorism and.... I'm not racist but
people don't even speak English and.... I'm not racist but... someone's got to protect our way of
and.... I'm not racist but... Aboriginal communities is reaching distressing levels and.... I'm
lly... and.... I'm not racist but... other countries should look at their own human rights records
it... and.... I'm not racist but... I know... but he and.... I'm not racist but... Australia may have
... I'm not racist but... biscuits come from them and.... I'm not racist but... we should
... biscuits come from them and.... I'm not racist but... with deep and sincere regret.
... I'm not racist but... original people... something with the land before we
... you can't blame the government for not looking after them and.... I'm not
... I'm not racist but... White people have worked really hard too you know and.... I
... I'm not racist but... why we can't all just speak
... I'm not racist but... they're just because they want to be and....
the Vote? and.... I'm not racist but... if Aboriginal people could just learn to behave normally
I'm not racist but... if only Aboriginal people could just learn to live like us.... I'm not racist but
but... some people, you just can't talk to and.... I'm not racist but... there are times when I just
and.... I'm not racist but... a lot of them can't read and write and.... I'm not racist but... well, you
live with these people and.... I'm not racist but... they're not very religious and.... I'm not racist
people and.... I'm not racist but... well, it's not like they invented the wheel is it? and.... I'm
understand how frustrated some of my friends get and.... I'm not racist but... trying to teach
their land is asking too much and.... I'm not racist but... I just think everyone should be treated
racist but... if us White people can't hunt native animals then they shouldn't be allowed to enter
people can't just enter this country without a passport and.... I'm not racist but... those people
and.... I'm not racist but... some of those Native Title claims are just unreasonable and.... I'm
and.... I'm not racist but... levels of domestic violence on Aboriginal communities is really high
abuse and neglect and.... I'm not racist but... they don't know how to maintain a healthy diet and
they look at Australia's and.... I'm not racist but... I may have been and.... I'm not racist but...
and.... I'm not racist but... Australia has some current policies that may be and.... I'm not racist but
them and.... I'm not racist but... they're very ungrateful people and.... I'm not racist but

racist

y and.... I'm not racist but... Aboriginal people weren't doing anything with the land before we
m not racist but... you can't tell me that the government doesn't look after them and.... I'm not
e people? and.... I'm not racist but... us White people have it pretty hard too you know and....
mily have been here for 200 years and.... I'm not racist but... I don't see why we can't all just
ow to manage money and.... I'm not racist but... maybe they're poor because they want to be
ive them the Vote? and.... I'm not racist but... if Aboriginal people could just learn to behave
ing and.... I'm not racist but... if only Aboriginal people could just learn to live like us.... I'm not
n not racist but... some people, you just can't talk to and.... I'm not racist but... there are times
e law works and.... I'm not racist but... a lot of them can't read and write and.... I'm not racist
ve been trying to live with these people and.... I'm not racist but... they're not very religious
re very primitive people and.... I'm not racist but... well, it's not like they invented the wheel is
ut... I can understand how frustrated some of my friends get and.... I'm not racist but... trying
m back their land is asking too much and.... I'm not racist but... I just think everyone should be
I'm not racist but... if us White people can't hunt native animals then they shouldn't be allowed
but... people can't just enter this country without a passport and.... I'm not racist but... those
ay of life and.... I'm not racist but... some of those Native Title claims are just unreasonable
sing levels and.... I'm not racist but... levels of domestic violence on Aboriginal communities is
ry of child abuse and neglect and.... I'm not racist but... they don't know how to maintain a
records before they look at Australia's and.... I'm not racist but... I may have been and.... I'm
been in the past and.... I'm not racist but... Australia has some current policies that may be
were very kind to them and.... I'm not racist but... they're very ungrateful people and.... I'm not
... I'm not racist but... I don't know why Aboriginal people can't look after their houses properly
came and.... I'm not racist but... they never even wore any clothes before we came and.... I'm
racist but... my taxes are paying for their food and.... I'm not racist but... what about us White
I'm not racist but... my father worked hard to buy this land and.... I'm not racist but... my family
ak English and.... I'm not racist but... maybe they're poor because they just don't know how to
... I'm not racist but... well, look at how they live and.... I'm not racist but... didn't we give them
and.... I'm not racist but... they just sit on their Missions and Reserves and do nothing and....
t... if it wasn't for us White people, they would've died out a long time ago and.... I'm not racist
st can't relate to them and.... I'm not racist but... they just don't understand how the law works
ou just can't teach them anything and.... I'm not racist but... for 200 years we've been trying to
acist but... a lot of them don't believe in God and.... I'm not racist but... they're very primitive
n not racist but... you can't expect too much of them really and.... I'm not racist but... I can
their kids is too hard sometimes and.... I'm not racist but... I think that just giving them back
d equal and.... I'm not racist but... haven't they got the same rights that we do? and.... I'm not
ther and.... I'm not racist but... my job is to guard against terrorism and.... I'm not racist but...
e don't even speak English and.... I'm not racist but... someone's got to protect our way of life
not racist but... alcohol consumption on Aboriginal communities is reaching distressing levels
lding those people back and.... I'm not racist but... those communities have a history of child
and.... I'm not racist but... other countries should look at their own human rights records before
... I know people who may be and.... I'm not racist but... Australia may have been in the past
acist but... the past should just remain the past and.... I'm not racist but... we were very kind to
it... biscuits cost money and.... I'm not racist but... it is with deep and sincere regret....

Tony Albert

*“My work looks at
optimism in the
face of adversity”*



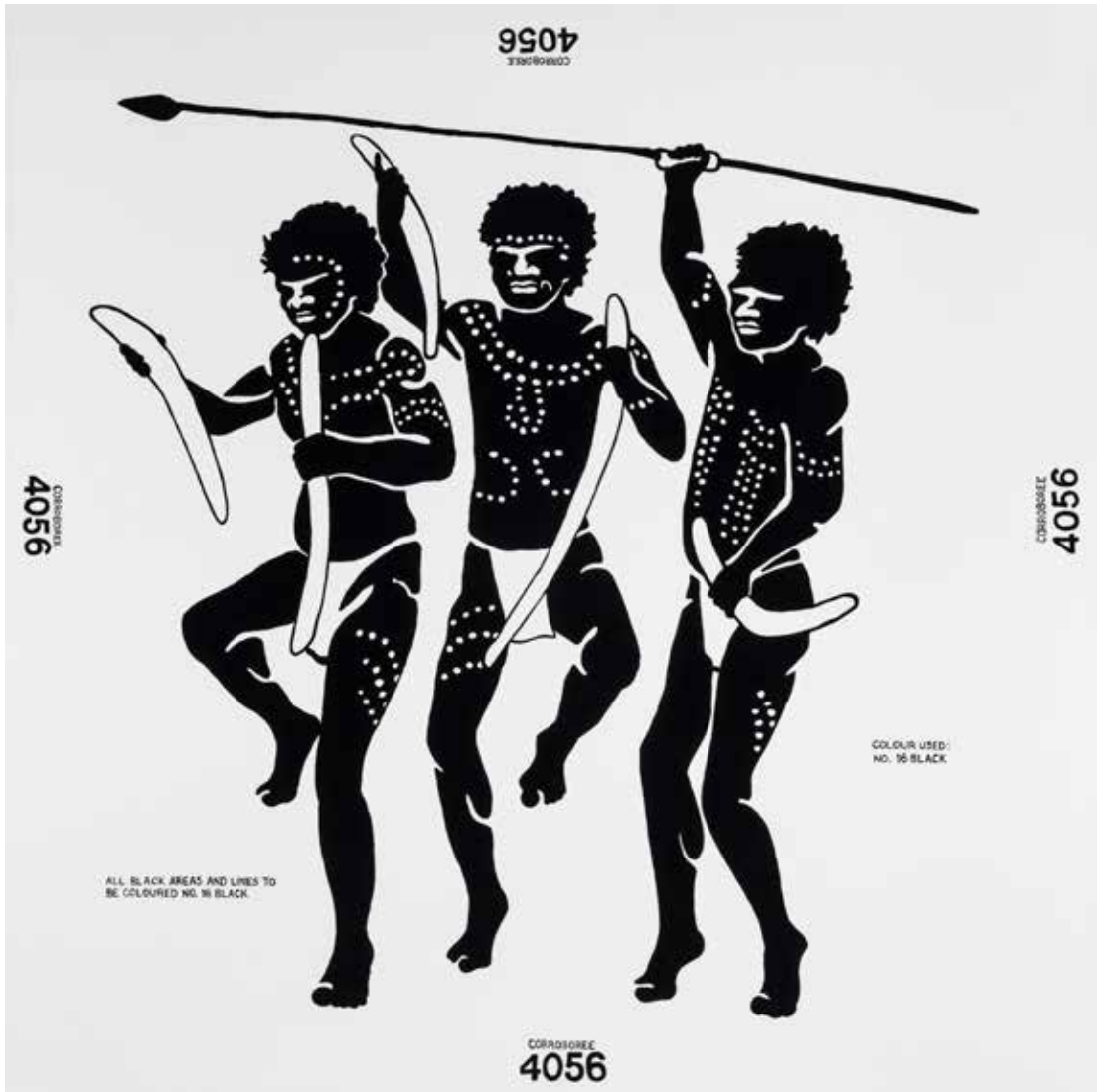
Brother (Our Past), 2013



Brother (Our Present), 2013



Brother (Our Future), 2013



COLOURS USED;

- 1 WHITE
- 6 CORAL
- 10 RED
- 68 COCOA
- 77 EARTH BROWN
- 85 BUTTERSCTCH

TRIBESMAN 5654

LEAVE THESE AREAS OF BLACK VELVET UNPAINTED

5654 TRIBESMAN

5654 TRIBESMAN



IMPORTANT:

EACH COAT OF PAINT MUST BE 'ABSOLUTLEY DRY'
BEFORE APPLYING THE NEXT COAT.

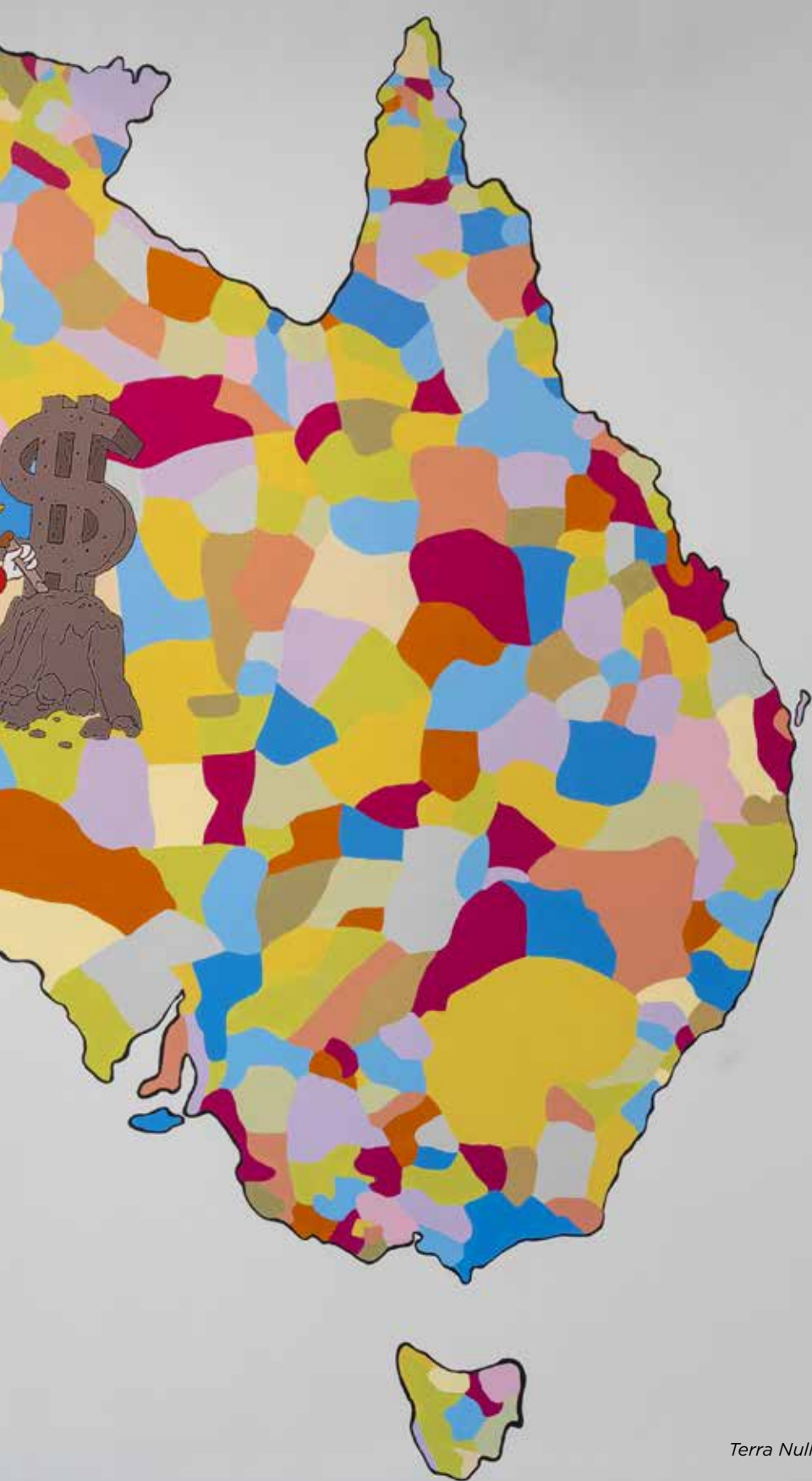
BLEND COLOURS



FOR NOS 1, 6, 10, 77, 85 APPLY 4 COATS.
FOR NO. 68 APPLY 3 COATS

TRIBESMAN 5654









Richard Bell

*“I describe myself as an
activist masquerading
as an artist.”*



Little fish are sweet, 2021



ABOR
E ME

WHITE INVADERS
YOU ARE LIVING ON
STOLEN
LAND



ORIGINAL
EMBASSY

IF YOU CANT
LET ME LIVE
ABORIGINAL
WHY! PREACH
DEMOCRACY

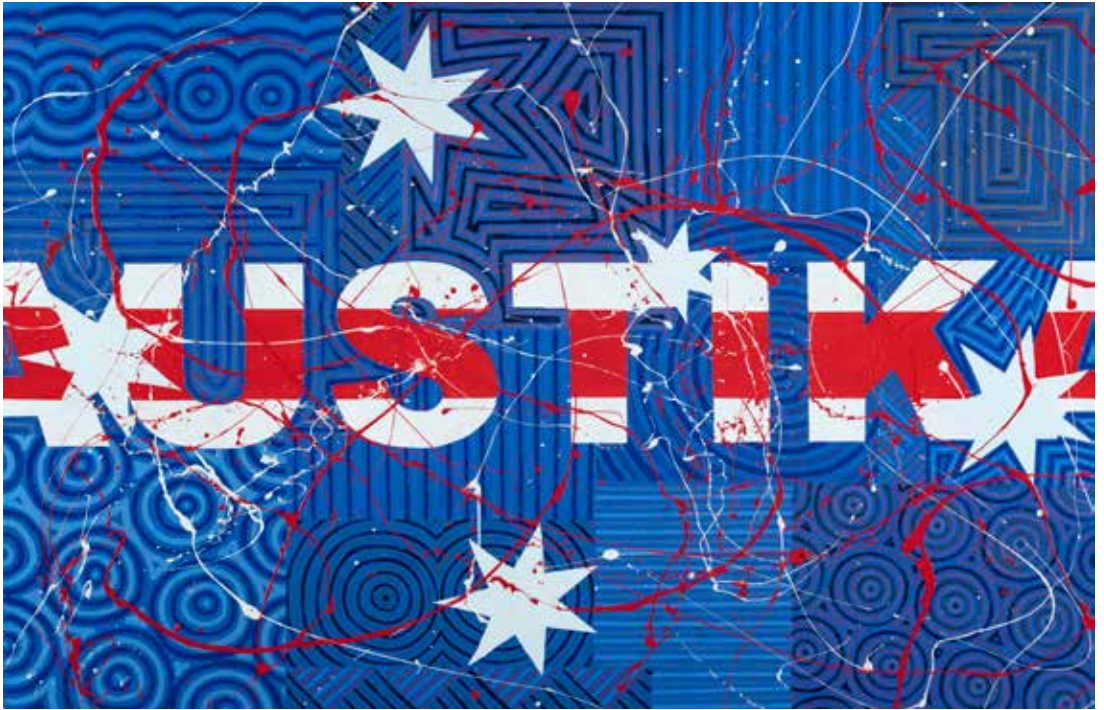








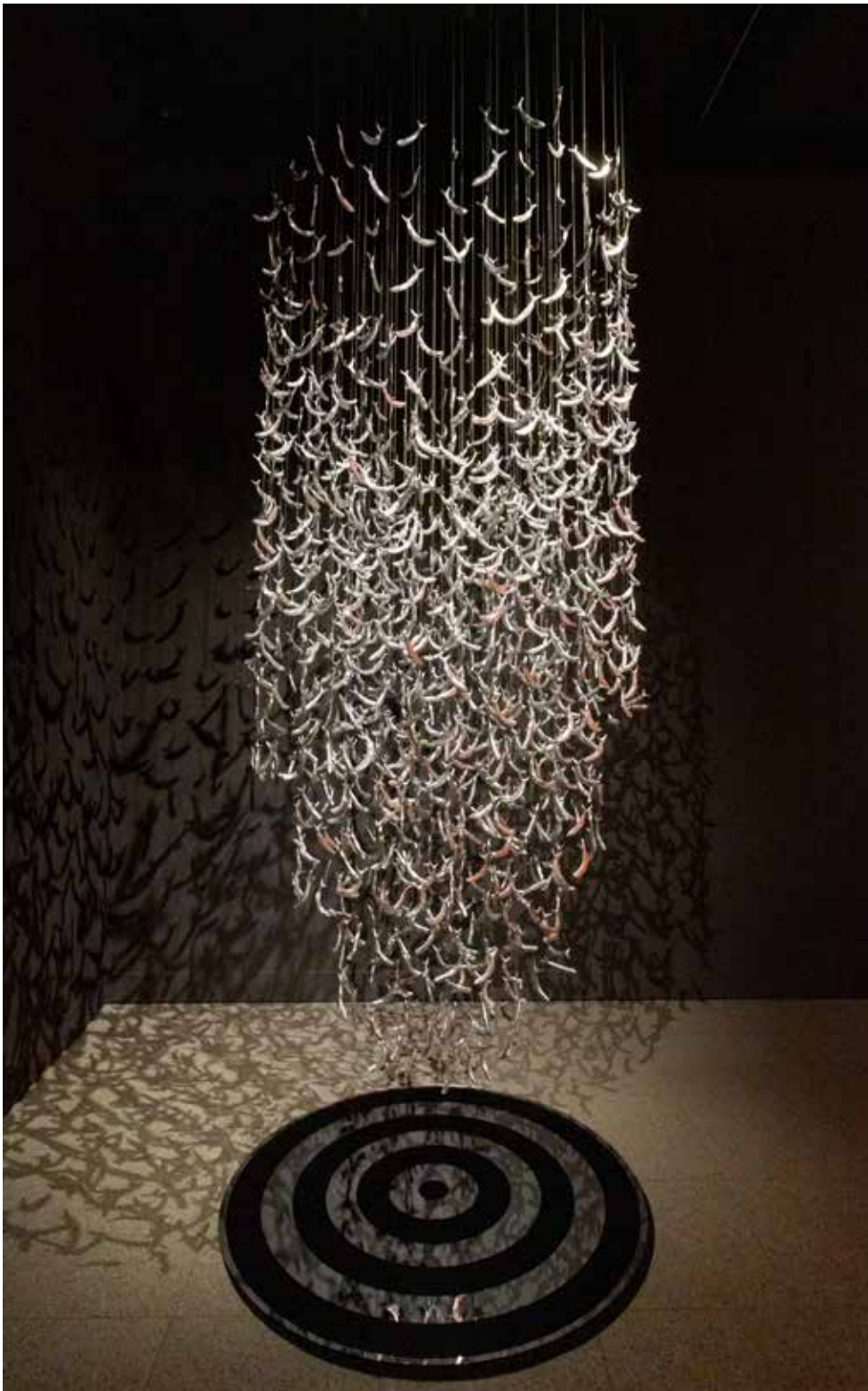




Megan Cope

“In many ways, proppaNOW has functioned as a barometer of truth telling and critique in Australian art and culture, and often an unwelcome one.”







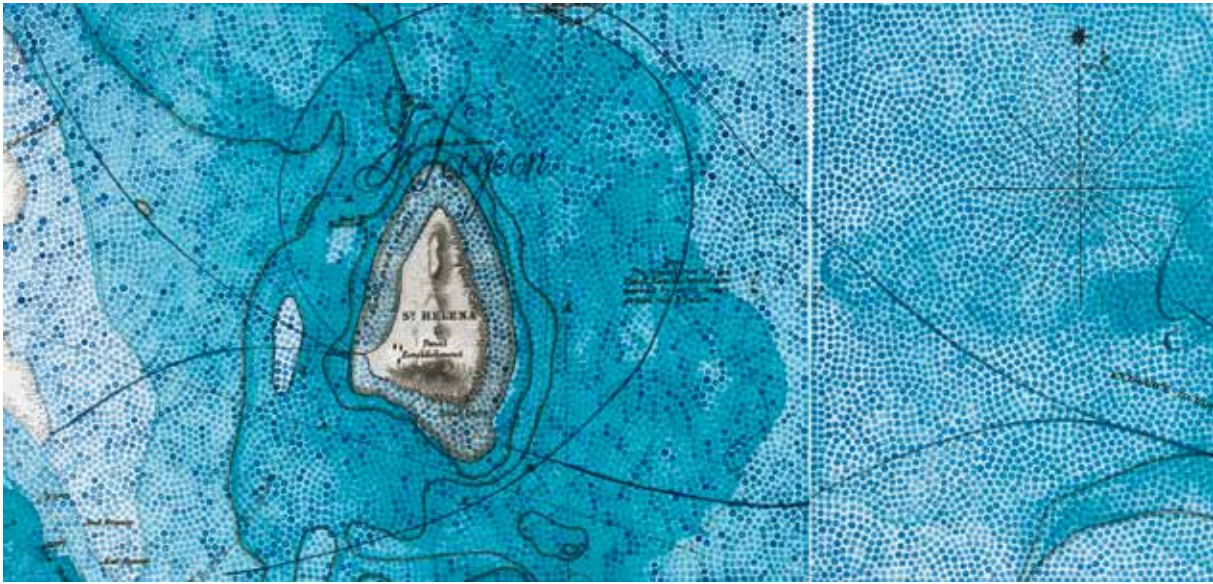
A GENERAL
Exhibiting the DISCOVERIES made by Captⁿ JAMES COOK in this and his two
By Lewis Roberts of the

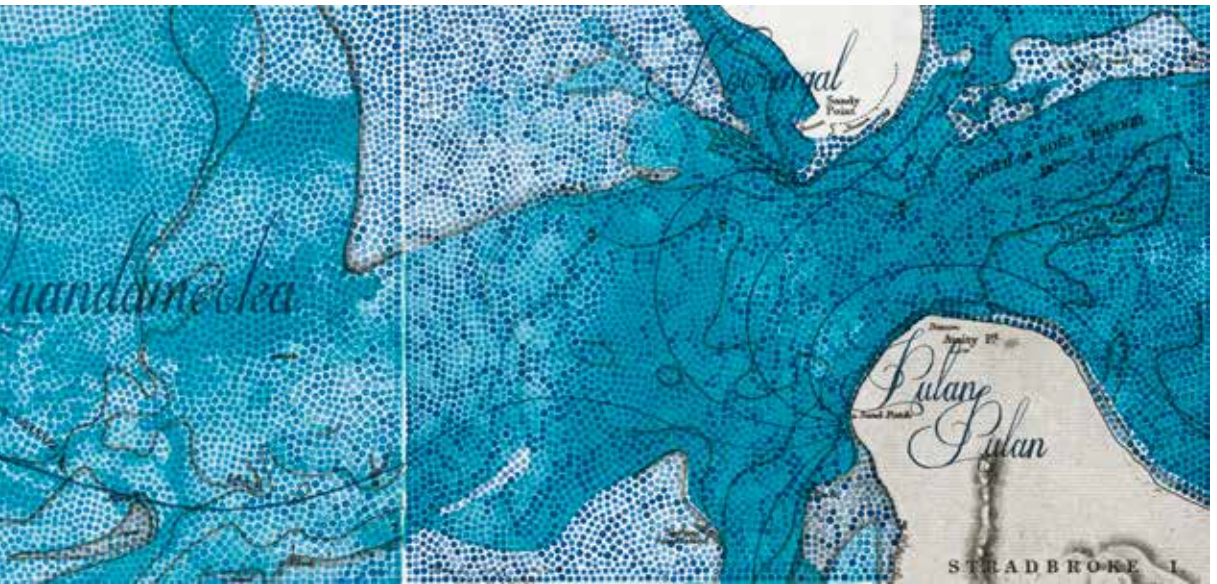


CHART
of the two preceding VOYAGES: with the TRACKS of the SHIPS under his Command.
His Majesty's Royal Navy



The Age of Entitlement





Quandamooka Sovereign Owners
Country Condition Report

The Country Condition Report (CCR) is a document that provides a detailed overview of the current state of the Country. It is a key tool for the Sovereign Owners to monitor and manage the Country's health and well-being. The CCR is prepared by the Country Condition Report Committee (CCRC) and is presented to the Sovereign Owners for their approval. The CCR is a living document that is updated regularly to reflect changes in the Country's condition. The CCR is a key tool for the Sovereign Owners to monitor and manage the Country's health and well-being. The CCR is prepared by the Country Condition Report Committee (CCRC) and is presented to the Sovereign Owners for their approval. The CCR is a living document that is updated regularly to reflect changes in the Country's condition.

The Country Condition Report (CCR) is a document that provides a detailed overview of the current state of the Country. It is a key tool for the Sovereign Owners to monitor and manage the Country's health and well-being. The CCR is prepared by the Country Condition Report Committee (CCRC) and is presented to the Sovereign Owners for their approval. The CCR is a living document that is updated regularly to reflect changes in the Country's condition. The CCR is a key tool for the Sovereign Owners to monitor and manage the Country's health and well-being. The CCR is prepared by the Country Condition Report Committee (CCRC) and is presented to the Sovereign Owners for their approval. The CCR is a living document that is updated regularly to reflect changes in the Country's condition.



Eviction Notice Form

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
I, _____, the _____ of _____, do hereby give notice to you that you are to vacate the premises at _____ on or before _____.
If you do not vacate the premises by the date specified above, you will be liable for the cost of removal of your personal property and the cost of any damage to the premises.
This notice is given to you in accordance with the provisions of _____, Chapter _____, Section _____.

TRAVEL
&
TRACY

INFLUENCES

TR
ENDING

DIME A
DOLEZAL

A glowing green lightbulb is centered on a dark background. The words "NET ZERO" are written in a bold, glowing green, sans-serif font across the middle of the bulb. The bulb's outline is faintly visible, and there are a few small dark spots on its surface.

NET ZERO

Jennifer Herd

*“I like truth in history.
But real history hasn’t
been told.”*



Still War! Mother's Country, 2021 (detail)











UQ ART MUSEUM

In defence, 2021





In defence I, II, III, 2017







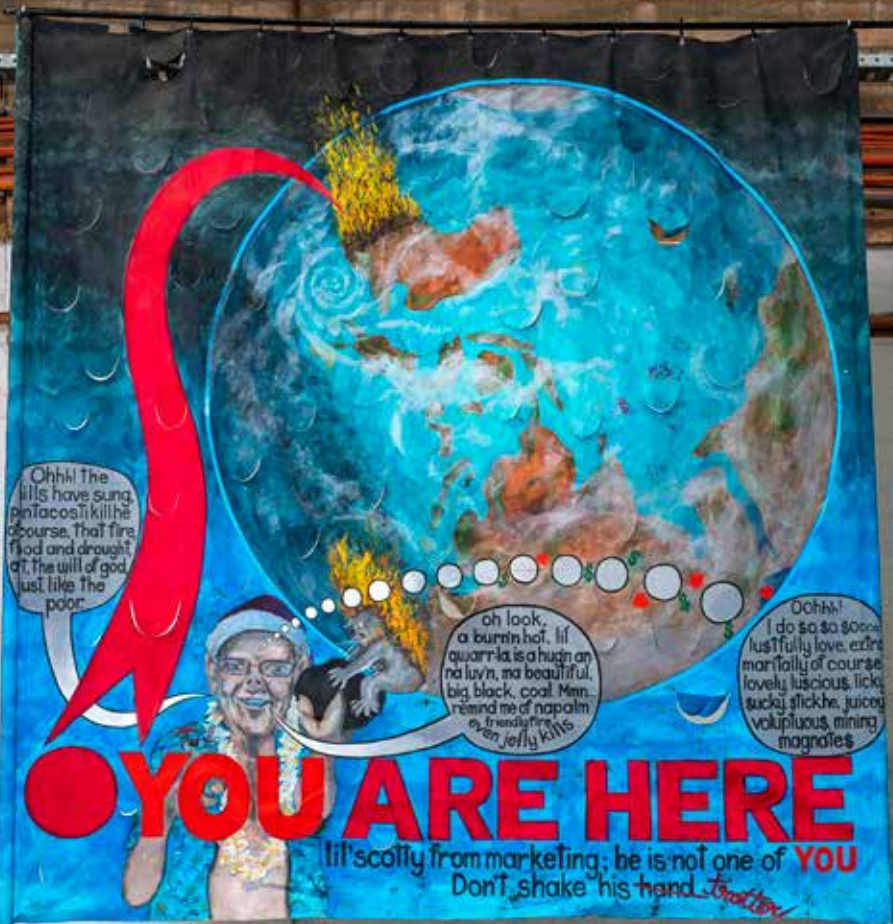


Gordon Hookey

*“Australia would rather live
with a comfortable lie than
the uncomfortable truth”*







Ohhh! The
kills have sung
on tacos. Kill the
course. That fine
flood and drought
of. The will of god
just like the poor

oh look,
a burnin' hot, lil'
quarr-la is a hugh an
na luv'n, ma beautiful,
big black, coal. Mmm...
remind me of napalm
ex. It really fire
even jelly kills

Oohhh!
I do so so sooooo
lustfully love, extra
maritally of course,
lovely, luscious, lick,
sucky, stickhe, juicy,
voluptuous, mining
magnates

● YOU ARE HERE

lil' scotty from marketing; he is not one of YOU
Don't shake his hand.





**THEE THEFT AND
UGLIFUCKATION
OF OUR CONSTELLATION**

* created by Richard Bell, with the support of the Australian Council on the Arts, December 2006, at Cronulla, Sydney.



**WE CAN'T SETTLE FOR
ANYTHING LESS THAN
WHAT WE HAD BEFORE
INVASION....**

So.... mmh.... Ok! Realistically, the migrant, he not gonna pack up his bitumen, concrete, glass, introduced species, and shit, and FFUCKOFF! back to england...
(where he belong)

**SO.... WE CAN'T SETTLE
FOR ANYTHING LESS THAN
THE TOTAL AND ABSOLUTE
ABORIGINAL EYESATION OF
SO CALLED AUSTRALYA!**



Whitefella

ABOMINABLE

White hand/ice

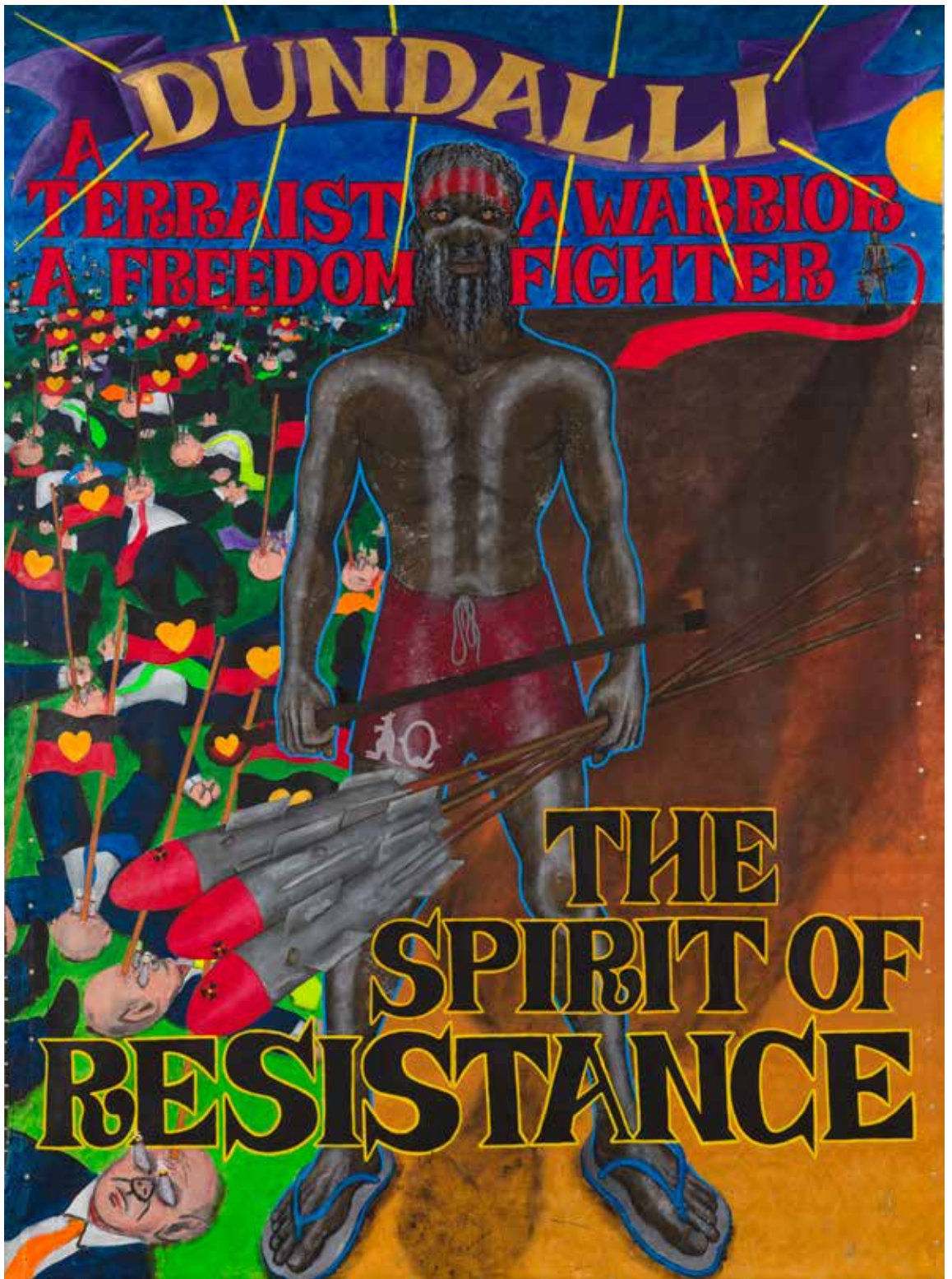
*

of Beauty out
with water
now. 100% M.





no!No!NO!... It's ethics: E-T-H-I-C-S,
ETHICS. There's no fuck'n N in there.



DUNDALLI

**A TERRAIST A WARRIOR
A FREEDOM FIGHTER**

**THE
SPIRIT OF
RESISTANCE**



Most anglo-australians occupying Aborigine lands are direct beneficiaries from its horrific, heinous, barbaric brutal atrocities and attempted genocide committed by their forebears on my ancestors. They inherited our lands, great wealth, power, privilege and control. We have some physical, mental and spiritual trauma, anguish dis...

Blakfella don't bidde **YOU GENICS!** on white fellow brain



DIAGNOSIS

The anglo-australian, affluent, white privileged, white fellow; (although, fragile, at times, can be brittle,) is a Human Been.

Most anglo-australians sleep on the pillars of their prisoner, distinct, criminal ancestry. It is who they are, P.O.W. Prisoner Of Her Majesty



Laurie Nilsen

“We’re all blackfellas and we’re all from Queensland and some of those political things that happened over the years affected us as Queenslanders”

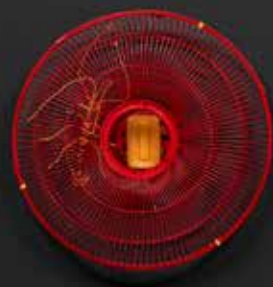


Goolburris on the Bungil Creek, 2017 (detail)





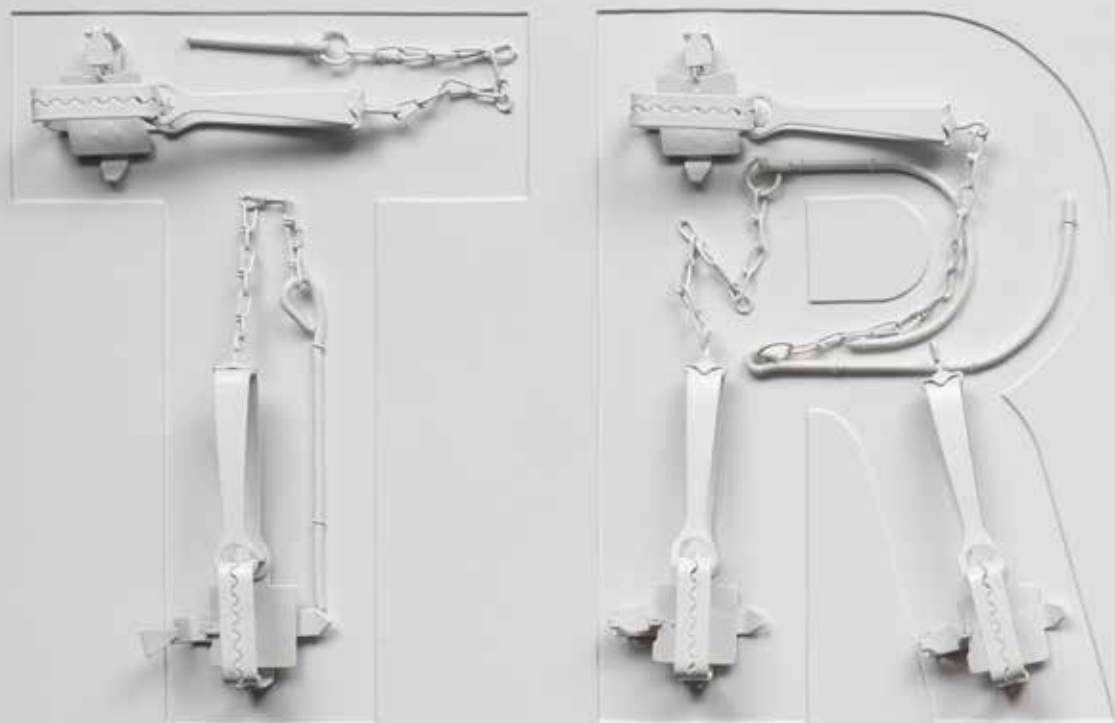
Dollar Dilemma Flag, 2020

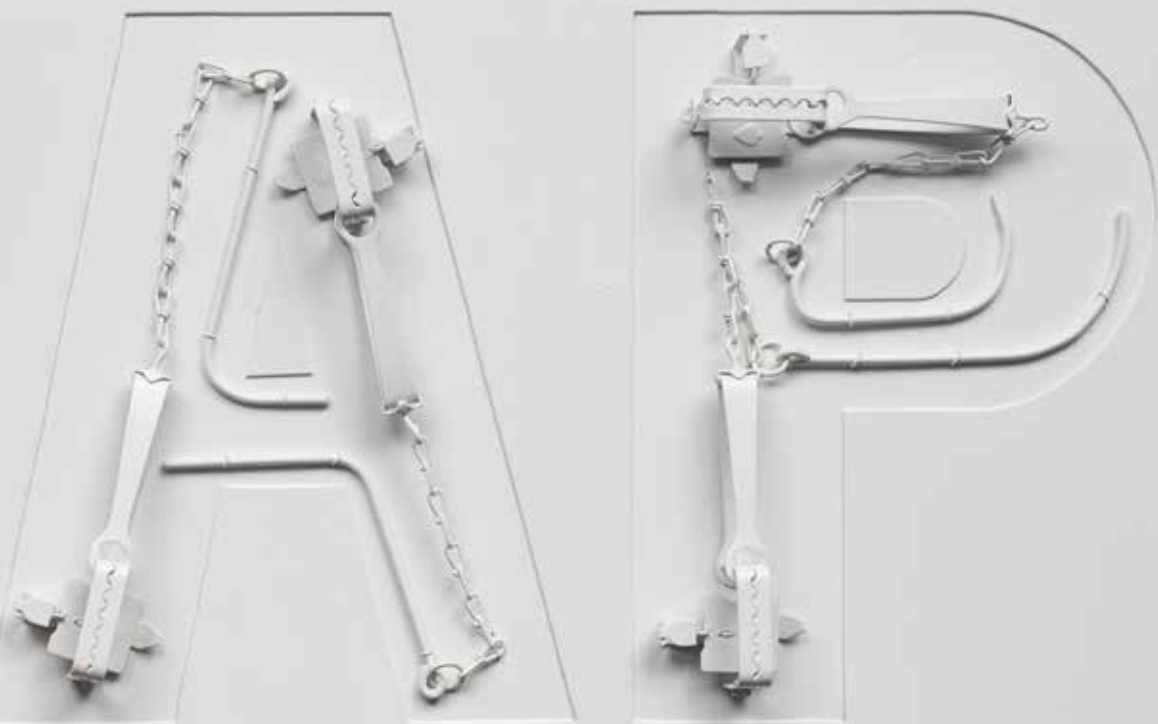














Goolburris on the Bungil Creek, 2017









Vernon Ah Kee



austracism, 2003

ink on polypropylene board, satin laminated, edition 1/3
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2010.

proppaNOW, 2021

video documentary on proppaNOW artists
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Scratch the surface, 2019/2021

twelve acrylic riot shields, charcoal
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

ifiamextremeist, 2002

acrylic on board
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee

Conversations I, II, III, 2022

barbed wire, aluminium and patina
Courtesy of the artists, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen,
FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Vernon Ah Kee was born in 1967 in Innisfail, North Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. He belongs to the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji, Koko Berrin and Gugu Yimithirr people. Ah Kee's conceptual text pieces, videos, photographs and drawings form a critique of Australian popular culture from the perspective of the Aboriginal experience of contemporary life. He particularly explores the dichotomy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies and cultures.

Ah Kee's work has been exhibited in a number of significant international and national exhibitions including *ESPRESSIONI CON FRAZIONE*, Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2022); *A Year in Art: Australia 1992*, Tate Modern, London (2021); *The National: New Australian Art*, Carriageworks, Sydney (2020); *Body Language*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2019); *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*, Harvard Art Museums, USA (2016); *When Silence Falls*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2015–2016); *Encounters*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra (2015–2016); *Brutal Truths*, Griffith University Museum, Brisbane (2015–2016); *The 14th Istanbul Biennial: SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms* (2015); *Once Removed*, Australian Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2009); *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art*, National Gallery of Canada (2013); *unDisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2012); *Ideas of Barack*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2011); and *16th Biennale of Sydney: Revolutions – Forms that turn*, Sydney (2008). In 2020, Ah Kee presented a major new work as part of his solo exhibition *The Island* at Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney.

Ah Kee's works are held in a number of major collections within Australia and overseas including the Tate Modern, London; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane, The University of Technology, Sydney; and QUT Art Museum, Brisbane. Awards include the Australia Council for the Arts Fellowship (Visual Arts) (2018); and Sidney Myer Creative Fellow, Sidney Myer Fund and The Myer Foundation (2014). In 2006, Ah Kee completed a Doctorate of Visual Arts from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane.

Tony Albert



Butterscotch tribesman, 2009
synthetic polymer paint on Belgian linen
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2009.

Corroboree, 2009
oil on canvas
Collection of The University of Queensland. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Danielle Milani in memory of Mona Dubois, 2018.

Brother (Our Past), 2013
from the series 'Brothers'
pigment print on paper, edition AP 1
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2014.

Brother (Our Present), 2013
from the series 'Brothers'
pigment print on paper, edition AP 1
Collection of The University of Queensland. Gift of Tony Albert through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift program, 2014.

Brother (Our Future), 2013
from the series 'Brothers'
pigment print on paper, edition AP 1
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2013.

Terra Nullius (with Scrooge) 2021
acrylic paint onto the wall; ephemeral installation
Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney.

Tony Albert was born in 1981 in Townsville, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Albert is a descendant of the Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku-Yalanji peoples. Albert is one of Australia's foremost contemporary artists with a longstanding interest in the cultural misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. Drawing on both personal and collective histories, his multidisciplinary practice considers the ways in which optimism might be utilised to overcome adversity. His work poses crucial questions such as how do we remember, give justice to, and rewrite complex and traumatic histories?

Tony Albert is the first Indigenous Trustee for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. His commitment to connecting and collaborating with other artists has made him an integral part of Australia's contemporary arts community. Albert's important work has been acknowledged industry-wide with multiple prestigious awards and commissions. Major public art commissions include Albert's monumental 15-metre-long floating botanical sculpture, *Inhabitant*, which will welcome visitors at the entrance of the transformational Queen's Wharf, Brisbane (2023); and *The Big Hose*, an iconic outdoor play sculpture made in collaboration with artist Nell for Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2022). In 2022, Albert was commissioned to design an artwork for the new Sydney Football Stadium seats. Other significant commissions by Albert include *Healing Land, Remembering Country*, 2020 Biennale of Sydney; *House of Discards*, The National 2019: New Australian Art, Carriageworks, Sydney (2019); and *I am Visible*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2019). In 2013, Albert was commissioned by the City of Sydney to create an artwork for the Sydney Hyde Park War Memorial, installed in Hyde Park South on Anzac Day 2015 to commemorate Indigenous soldiers.

Albert is strongly represented in major national collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; the Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. Awards and residencies include Residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York (2019); Fleurieu Art Prize (2016); the Basil Sellers Art Prize (2014); and the 31st Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory (2014). In 2022, Albert was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Griffith University, Brisbane.

Richard Bell



Austika, 2018
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Little fish are sweet, 2021
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, and paper-bag
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Me, 2015
synthetic polymer paint on linen
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2016.

Me, me, dreaming, 2013
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Tent Embassy, 2013–ongoing
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

U can't touch this, 2021
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Richard Bell was born in 1953, Charleville, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Bell is a member of the Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman and Gurang Gurang communities. He works across a variety of media including painting, installation, performance and video. He grew out of a generation of Aboriginal activists and has remained committed to the politics of Aboriginal emancipation and self-determination. One of Australia's most significant artists, Bell's work explores the complex artistic and political problems of Western, colonial and Indigenous art production.

In 2023, Bell presented his major work *Embassy* (2013–ongoing) at Tate Modern, London. Other recent international and national exhibitions include *ESPRESSIONI CON FRAZIONI*, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Torino, Italy (2022–2023); *Relinking*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (2022); *documenta fifteen*, The Fridericianum and Friedrichsplatz, Kassel, Germany (2022); *Hawai'i Triennale 2022: Pacific Century - E Ho'omau no Moananuiākea'*, Honolulu, Hawaii (2022); and *Richard Bell: You can go now* (survey), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2021). Significant exhibitions also include *BELL invites...*, Stedelijk Museum SMBA, Amsterdam (2016); 20th Biennale of Sydney (2016); *SONSBEEK '16: transaction*, Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem, Netherlands (2016); *16th Jakarta Biennale*, Indonesia (2015); 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2015); *Performa 15*, New York City (2015); *Embassy*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth (2014); *5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Russia (2013); and *Sakàhan*, National Gallery of Canada's largest show of International Indigenous art, Ottawa, Canada (2013).

Bell's works are held by all National and State Collections in Australia, as well as Tate Modern, London. Awards include The Gold Award, Rockhampton Art Gallery, Queensland (2018); and Creative Australia Fellowship, Australian Council for the Arts (2013). In 2015, Bell was a finalist in the Archibald Prize, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. In 2003, he was the recipient of the 20th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, establishing him as an important Australian artistic figure.

In 2022, Bell was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Megan Cope



The Age of Entitlement, 2016
acrylic on giclee map of Cook's Map of Discoveries
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Arsenal, 2021
glow mineral and acrylic on black slate
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Bated Breath, 2021
chrome-plated ceramic fish on steel frame with fishing line and mirror
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Nyanba tahbiyilbanjara gnanany (He knew his saltwater country), 2019
lithograph on paper
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Dead Wood, 2021
paperbark, tissue paper, beeswax, ink
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

The artist would like to acknowledge Elisabeth Gondwe as primary researcher and collaborator for the historical accounts on this work.

Megan Cope was born in 1982 in Brisbane, Australia. She lives and works in Brisbane. Cope is a Quandamooka artist (North Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland). Her site-specific sculptural installations, public art and paintings investigate issues relating to colonial histories, culture, the environment and mapping practices. Cope's work often resists prescribed notions of Aboriginality, and examines the psychogeographies that challenge the grand narrative of 'Australia' along with our sense of time and ownership in a settler colonial state. These explorations result in various material outcomes.

Cope's work has been featured in several notable exhibitions, including *We, On The Rising Wave, Busan Biennale* (2022), South Korea; *Reclaim the Earth*, Palais de Tokyo (2022), Paris, France; *Embodied Knowledge: Queensland Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery | Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (2023), Brisbane; *NGV Triennial 2020*, National Gallery of Victoria (2020), Melbourne; *2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Monster Theatres*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2020); *TarraWarra Biennial: Slow Moving Waters*, Tarra Warra Museum of Art (2021), Victoria; *The National 2017: New Australian Art*, Art Gallery of New South Wales (2017); and *Defying Empire: 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2017). She has held solo exhibitions at UNSW Galleries, School of Design and Art, Sydney; The Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne; The Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

Cope's works are held in both national and international collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Musées de la Civilisation, Québec, Canada, and more. Public art commissions include *What Becomes of the Clouds* (2022), 80 Anne Street, Brisbane; *After the Flood* (2020), James Cook University, Townsville; *Weelam Ngalut (Our Place)* (2018), Monash University, Clayfield; *Transcendence* (2015) Museum of Victoria, Melbourne; and *You Are, Here Now* (2015), Australian Catholic University, Victoria.

Jennifer Herd



Target, 2008
acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of the artist and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

In defence
Part of *OCCURRENT AFFAIR: proppaNOW*
Guest curated by Blaklash Projects, Amanda Hayman and Troy Casey
Front window commission: 21 January - 19 June 2021

In defence I, II & III, 2017
pinholes in Arches paper
Courtesy of the artist and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

Resist, Rebel, Reclaim, 2021
screenprint on paper
Courtesy of the artist and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

Still War! Mother's Country, 2021
digital print, bullet casings
Courtesy of the artist and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

Jennifer Herd is from Eumundi, Queensland. She lives and works in Brisbane. Herd is a Mbarbarrum woman whose family roots lie in far North Queensland. Herd draws on her past experiences and knowledge in costume design, often incorporating stitching and pin holes in her installations, painting, drawing and sculptural works. She creates shield designs as a way of connecting to her heritage and culture. Herd's shield designs are presented as a reminder of speaking truth to power, frontier resistance and the aftermath of cultural identity stripped bare.

Significant group exhibitions include *The Local*, Museum of Brisbane (2023); *Veiled Histories: Joanne Currie Nalingu & Jennifer Herd*, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Queensland (2022); *2021 Sunshine Coast Art Prize*, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Queensland (2021); *I, Object*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2020–2021); *15 Artists*, Redcliffe Regional Art Gallery, Queensland (2020); *Spoken*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane (2020); *GOMA Q: Contemporary Queensland Art*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2015); *proppaNOW*, kuril dhagun Indigenous Knowledge Centre, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane (2012); *Black See*, Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, KickArts Cairns, Queensland (2011); *Flash Women*, kuril dhagun Indigenous Knowledge Centre State Library of Queensland, Brisbane (2011).

Herd's works are held in major national and private collections including Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Caloundra Regional Gallery, Queensland; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane; Griffith University, Brisbane; Home of the Arts (HOTA), Gold Coast; UQ Art Museum, Brisbane. Awards and residencies include the Artist Residency, Kluge Ruhe Centre, University of Virginia, USA (2004); Highly Commended Award, Sunshine Coast Art Prize, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Sunshine Coast (2017); and finalist for the 33rd National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards, Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory (2016). Herd is a founding member of the proppaNOW Aboriginal artist collective and the Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art (CAIA) undergraduate program at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane. Herd is Adjunct Professor at Griffith University.


Gordon Hookey



Dundalli Banner, 2021
fabric, paint, wood dowels 
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Kangaroo Point, 2011–2012
oil on canvas
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2012.

Terraist Gloves, 2008
mixed media
Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2008.

WAM / Ethics, 2021
fabric, paint, wood dowels, witches hats, castors 
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Austika / Australiya, 2021
fabric, paint, wood dowels, witches hats, castors
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Solidarity / You Are Here, 2021
fabric, paint, wood dowels, witches hats, castors
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Gordon Hookey was born in 1961, Cloncurry, Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane. Hookey belongs to the Waanyi people. Hookey locates his art at the interface where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures converge. He explicitly attacks the establishment and implicates our current political representatives. His style and approach is distinctive in its vibrancy and best known for its biting satire of Australia's political landscape, its leaders and representatives.

Significant solo exhibitions include *MURRIALITY*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and touring in partnership with UNSW, Sydney (2022); *Sacred Nation, Scared Nation*, in collaboration with Gary Simmons, Fort Gansevoort, New York (online) (2021); *Wellaroo*, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Sydney (2017); *Gordon Hookey: Kangaroo Crew*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2013–2014); *Ruddocks Wheel*, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney (2000); and *Interface Inya Face*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra (1995). Recent group exhibitions include *The Local*, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane (2023); *Zombie Eaters*, Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA), New South Wales (2022); *The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT10)*, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2021); *Just Not Australian*, Artspace, Sydney (2019); *Frontier Imaginaries ed. 5: Trade Markings*, Vanabbe Museum, Eindhoven (2018); *The National - New Australian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2017); *Continental Drift: From Blak to Black*, CIAF, Cairns Art Gallery, Cairns (2017); and *documenta 14*, Athens and Kassel (2017).

Gordon Hookey's work is held in major collections within Australia including the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; National Gallery of Australia and Australian National University, Canberra; and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Home of the Arts (HOTA), Gold Coast. Awards and grants include Albers Foundation Studio Residency, Connecticut, USA (Australia Council for the Arts) (2009); Casula Powerhouse Residency, Sydney (2008); Gertrude Street Contemporary Art Space and Studios Residency, Melbourne (2007); Otago University Residency, Dunedin, New Zealand (2006); and Banff Centre Residency, Banff, Canada (2006).

Laurie Nilsen



Dollar Dilemma (Flagless), 2020

Dollar Dilemma (Sold), 2020

Dollar Dilemma (Flag), 2020

Dollar Dilemma (\$1), 2020

Dollar Dilemma (\$2), 2020

mixed media on archival paper

Collection of The University of Queensland, purchased 2020.



Baited, 2010

six fan covers, electrical wire and light soap

Courtesy the artist, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen, and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.



Gooburriss on the Bungil Creek, 2017

barbed wire, steel and cast aluminium

Courtesy from Joanna Baillieu and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

Spreading the word, 2013

metal dingo traps, paint, MDF

Courtesy from Joanna Baillieu and FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane.

Dollar Dilemma Flag 2020

digital print on textile

Courtesy the artist, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen, and Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane.

Laurie Nilsen and Vernon Ah Kee

Conversations I, II, III, 2022

barbed wire, aluminium and patina

Courtesy of the artists, The Estate of Laurie Nilsen,
FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Born 1954, Roma, Queensland. Laurie Nilsen lived and worked in Brisbane until his passing in 2020. Nilsen was a Manadandanji artist. His practice was charged with ideas surrounding Indigenous and gender issues, emus (the artist's totem) and introduced species, religious doctrines, and the presentation of language. His work spans sculpture, drawing, painting, and printmaking, and often incorporates barbed wires that have been used in rural Queensland to threaten native species like emus. In 1988, Laurie was one of the first 'urban' Aboriginal artists to have work acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. In the early 1990s, Nilsen was a founding member of the Campfire Group that preceded proppaNOW, which he became a founding member of in 2004.

Significant group exhibitions include *Sculptors Exposed*, Pine Rivers Art Gallery, Strathpine, QLD (2019); *Saltwater Country*, a travelling exhibition developed in partnership between Museums & Galleries Queensland and Gold Coast City Gallery (2014–2017); *15 Artists* Redcliffe City Art Gallery QLD (2015); *String Theory: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2013); *Insurgence* (with proppaNOW Artists Collective), Museum of Australian Democracy, Canberra (2013); *28th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award*, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin (2013); *proppaNOW: A Social History of Queensland's Leading Aboriginal Art Collective*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane (2011); *existence resistance*, The Bega Valley Regional Gallery, Bega, NSW (2011); *70% Urban*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra (2007); *Thick and Fast* (with proppaNOW Artists Collective), Powerhouse Museum, Brisbane (2006); and *SHOOSH! A History of the Campfire Group*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2005).

Nilsen's works are held in major collections within Australia including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Museum of Australia, Canberra; Museum of Victoria, Melbourne; Australian Museum, Sydney; Queensland Museum, Brisbane; and State Library of Queensland, Brisbane. Significant awards include the Telstra Wandjuk Marika 3D Memorial Award (2007); Wandjuk Marika Three-Dimensional Memorial Award, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin (2007). From 1995–2019, Nilsen was Lecturer of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art at Griffith University, Brisbane.

Afterword

proppaNOW

In the lead up to proppaNOW's 20th Anniversary the collective decision to renew the membership of the group is ensuring continuity for not just the collective itself but the movement of ideas, Indigenous solidarity and social and political contemporary art practice.

The renewal of proppaNOW arose from the recognition of the Jane Lombard Art Prize for Social Justice, a prestigious achievement awarded through the Vera List Center for Art and Politics in New York (2022-2024). The award acknowledges proppaNOW's vision in risk taking to advance Aboriginal Art discourse and dialogues and highlighted the need to maintain critical thinking and expansion of Indigenous knowledges globally.

The passing of founding member Laurie Nilsen in 2020 also brought legacy making to the forefront of the collective's future thinking, prompting the invitation to Lily Eather as an emerging Art Historian carrying the bequest of her father Laurie. A new generation came with Lily's membership and the topics of expansion and dynamic diversity followed.

In the spirit of Uncle Laurie who's life and work was based on generosity, community leadership to which the highly successful Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Indigenous Arts is still running at Queensland College of Art is a testimony, along with Jennifer Herd whose selflessness also pervades the collective, it was time to open up and extend the proppaNOW family.

We welcome Wakka Wakka/Butchulla/Goreng Goreng Artist and Reseacher Shannon Brett and Kamilaroi Artist and Educator Warraba Weatherall with Mandandanji woman Lily Eather into proppaNOW in 2023.



OCCURRENT AFFAIR by proppaNOW

Published in 2023 by The University of Queensland (UQ) Art Museum, on the occasion of the national tour of the exhibition *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* by proppaNOW. The original exhibition which was hosted at UQ Art Museum from 13 February 2021 to 19 June 2021 and organised by proppaNOW, and curators Amanda Hayman and Troy Casey from Blaklash.

art-museum.uq.edu.au

Editors: Peta Rake, Isabella Baker

Design: Brent Wilson

Copyright Permissions: Effie Skoufa-Klesnik, Sean Rafferty

Copy editing: Evie Franzidis, Warraba Weatherall, Shannon Brett

© 2023 UQ Art Museum the artists and authors. The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors. No material, whether written or photographic, may be reproduced without the permission of the artists, authors, or UQ Art Museum.

UQ Art Museum acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which this exhibition and publication were curated, conceived, and authored. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

Thank you to our lenders and supporters: Josh Milani, Danielle Milani, Georgia Boe, Graeme Auchterlonie and Torin Frances at Milani Gallery, Brisbane; Joanna Ballieau; Michael Eather and Morgan Bundy-Wright at FireWorks Gallery, Brisbane; and Lily Eather and The Estate of Laurie Nilsen; Professor Bronwyn Fredericks, Professor Tracey Bunda and Professor Sandra Phillips.

Thank you to everyone in the UQ Art Museum team, particularly Acting Director/Senior Curator Peta Rake, Production Manager Brent Wilson, Assistant Curator Isabella Baker, Assistant Registrar Sean Rafferty, Registrar Loans and Acquisitions Effie Skoufa-Klesnik, Production Assistant Emma Gardner; Exhibitions Manager Olivia Welch, Funding and Programs Manager Susan Wachter, Exhibitions Coordinator Ashleigh Reardon and the team at Museums and Galleries New South Wales (MGNSW); and Amanda Hayman, Troy Casey, and Christopher Bassi at Blaklash.

Thank you to everyone that has contributed to this publication, and to the artists for their generosity, openness, and flexibility across the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unless otherwise stated all photos are exhibition documentation from the *OCCURRENT AFFAIR* exhibition, UQ Art Museum, 2021.

Photography: Carl Warner except;
Simon Woods, pages 24, 34, 49, 64, 65, 79, 86, 94, 96, 98, 125
Rhett Hammerton, pages 2, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 128, 130, 132, 134, 136, 138, 140, 142
Joe Ruckli, pages 110, 111
Brad Coleman, pages 78, 126

ISBN: 978-1-74272-403-4



An exhibition from The University of Queensland Art Museum touring with Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. This project is assisted by the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program.



NOW // OCCURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // OCCURRENT AFFAIR // proppaNOW // C

Vernon Ah Kee // Tony Albert // Richard Bell // Megan Cope //

pe// Jennifer Herd // Gordon Hookey // Laurie Nilsen // Vernon Ah