

national indigenous art triennial '07 culture warriors

Education Resource

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Culture Warriors: National Indigenous Art Triennial presents the work of 30 Indigenous artists. The exhibition demonstrates the wide range of contemporary Indigenous art practice taking place today from painting on bark and canvas, sculpture, textiles, weaving, new media, photomedia, printmaking and installation.

Every state and territory of Australia is represented among the 30 Indigenous artists invited to exhibit by the inaugural Triennial curator, Brenda L Croft, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, National Gallery of Australia. The theme and title of the 2007 Triennial, *Culture Warriors*, carries a number of interpretations, from references to historical Indigenous warriors to investigations of current political and social issues. Although there are a number of artworks that have political messages in this exhibition, there are also examples of bark painting and weaving in which the spiritual significance of the works of art reminds us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is the oldest continuing art tradition in the world.

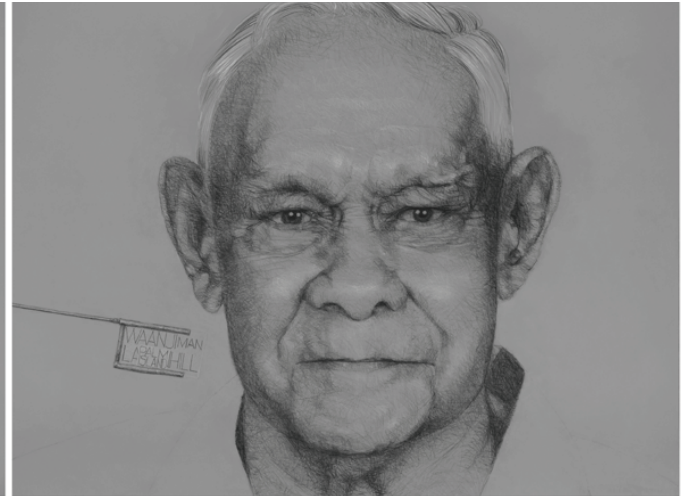
This kit contains a reproduction of an artwork from each of the exhibiting artists in the exhibition. These 30 full-colour reproductions have an explanatory text on the back as well as primary and secondary school activities.

A study of this material would be useful for a variety of curriculum areas such as Study of Society and Environment, Art, Drama, and Contemporary Politics. Themes that could be investigated with this kit could include: Aboriginal moiety and kinship systems, Indigenous spiritual beliefs, power and responsibility within Indigenous communities, the importance of ceremony, artistic traditions, the power of art to inform and change opinion, and political and social issues.

Primary and secondary students are encouraged to develop their knowledge, interpret symbols, analyse meanings, understand about other cultures and reflect on the relevance of this material to their daily lives. Each page has a discussion, a looking and a research activity or question tailored to either upper primary or secondary level.

Although these images and texts relate to this exhibition the information could also be used in any study of Aboriginal art and culture.

More information, including images of all the artworks in the exhibition, is available on the website nga.gov.au/NIAT07



Vernon Ah Kee

Kuku Yalanji/Waanyi/Yidinyji/Gugu Yimithirr/Kokoberrin peoples

mythread 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

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Vernon Ah Kee

Kuku Yalanji/Waanyi/Yidinyji/Gugu Yimithirr/Kokoberrin peoples
mythread 2007

synthetic polymer paint, charcoal and crayon on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
Courtesy of the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery

Vernon Ah Kee is from the Kuku Yalanji, Waanyi, Yidinyji, Gugu Yimithirr and Kokoberrin peoples of Far North Queensland. Of the three sections of this major work, two are self-portraits of the artist and the third portrait is a close-up of his grandfather's face. The three drawings were all made on three large rectangular canvases.

These two self-portraits and a close-up portrait of the artist's grandfather are presented in a triptych format that evokes the Christian tradition of altarpieces. However, another interpretation refers to the way anthropologists recorded Aboriginal images. The profile and front view suggest the 'mugshot' photographs of Aboriginal people – often only identified by number – which are lodged in museums like artefacts. After requesting photographs of his own family from the collection of the South Australian Museum, Vernon Ah Kee began to make sensitive drawings from these photographs, emphasising the eugenicist subtext of the original photographs.

In this work, Vernon Ah Kee has drawn from recent photographs of himself and his grandfather in similar poses to the old black-and-white museum photographs. In this way, he is making a direct connection between himself, his people's history and their lives today. His grandfather was also taken to Palm Island when he was a young man, where he met and married Vernon Ah Kee's grandmother.

Vernon Ah Kee was born in North Queensland in 1967 and his art is strongly related to his Aboriginal identity, the history of his people and the conditions they live in today. His work oscillates between beautifully rendered realist drawings and stark text pieces. Both mediums are handled with precision and both carry personal and political messages. The drawings are meticulous, cool and detached but, like the text works, carry beneath the surface a mixture of fury, poignancy and bleak black humour.

Primary

Discussion

Why has Vernon Ah Kee copied photographs of himself and his grandfather?

Looking

Look at the effect of drawing with charcoal on canvas. How does it differ from a black-and-white photograph?

Activity /Research

Find a photograph of yourself or a member of your family. Copy your photograph carefully using either soft pencil or charcoal.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss the way social history museums in the past recorded images of Aboriginal people.

Looking

Why do you think he has selected the triptych format?

Activity/Research

Find photographs of relatives from past generations. Copy the photographs carefully in black-and-white charcoal or pencil and accentuate certain features to convey differing emotions.



Jean Baptiste Aputimi

Tiwi people, Tapatapunga (March Fly) skin group, Jarrangini (Buffalo) dance

Yirrikapayi 2007

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Jean Baptiste Aputimi

Tiwi people, Tapatapunga (March Fly) skin group, Jarrangini (Buffalo) dance

Yirrikapayi 2007

natural earth pigments on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

© Jean Baptiste Aputimi

Jean Baptiste Aputimi has covered the surface of this large painting with outlines of shapes: triangles, rectangles and squares that draw on traditional Tiwi body designs. The shapes have been painted with hatched (not crosshatched) lines, which in turn create more shapes within a grid-like structure. Underneath the painted shapes there is a deep black background that makes the yellow, white and black lines stand out. These colours are natural earth pigments made from rocks from the artist's country and are called ochres.

This painting is called *Yirrikapayi*, which means male crocodile. The geometric pattern creates a visual texture that suggests crocodile skin. The painting relates the story of a man who lived around Fourcroy, who after he had been speared crawled into the water and turned into a crocodile. Patterns in the painting suggest the story about the crocodile without needing to reveal it figuratively. Tiwi people's ceremonies are usually open to all the community, quite different to Arnhem Land.

Jean Baptiste Aputimi was born at Pirlangimpi (Garden Point) on Bathurst Island, Northern Territory, around 1940 and she comes from a family of Tiwi painters, printmakers, ceremonial singers, dancers and sculptors. She was mentored by her late husband Declan Aputimi, who was a highly regarded artist, and she has been painting for 21 years and continues to paint every day. Traditionally Tiwi people painted *jilamara* or triangle and square designs on their bodies with sacred ochres for ceremonies. These designs disguised their bodies from the evil spirits of the dead. Similar designs were carved or painted onto *tutini*, or *pukumani* poles. Note that in this painting the shapes have an almost three-dimensional quality similar to traditional designs carved in wood.

Primary

Discussion

What is the story behind this painting?

Looking

Find all the diagonal lines and look at how they make the design lively and exciting.

Activity/Research

Design a pattern that reminds you of an animal skin.

Secondary

Discussion

Why did the Tiwi people paint designs on their bodies?

Looking

Select two different patterns, one vertical and one diagonal and find their repetitions. How does this affect the overall effect?

Activity/Research

Research the art and culture of the Tiwi people from Bathurst Island and Melville Island.

Design a dance costume for a dangerous animal.



Jimmy Baker
Pitjantjatjara people
Katatjita 2006

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Jimmy Baker
Pitjantjatjara people
Katatjita 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of Marshall Arts Aboriginal Fine Art Gallery
© Jimmy Baker

Brilliant reds, oranges, black, white and yellows enliven this landscape painting. It is titled *Katatjita*, which is a place of special significance for the artist. Jimmy Baker has the authority to paint this site because he is a senior custodian of the stories attached to it. The lines of coloured dots run in many directions and create shapes and patterns, swirls and circles. Coloured circles surround black circles, creating rich contrasts between light colours and dark colours. In the centre of the painting a flood of red dots is painted over black, like a galaxy of stars or red lava from a volcano.

Jimmy Baker was born around 1915 along the Emu Dreaming track in the Western Desert at a rock pool called Malumpa. He is one of the most senior and highly respected men in the Pitjantjatjara lands. He is a *ngangkari* (healer) and has travelled widely across South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Jimmy Baker began painting in 2004 because in his own words he wanted to 'put down stories for the younger generation and to teach you fellas'. He explains:

This place is called *Katatjita*. It's a rock hole underground. It's like a big underground cave inside. There is one woman sitting inside. She's from the *Tjukurpa* (creation time). Her name is Malilu. She's frightened and hiding in the cave. The man was trying to sleep with her, but she said 'wanti' (no). The man speared her many times and she fled to the safety of the cave.

Jimmy Baker paints landscapes that invoke Ancestral Beings and their stories; their presence is part of the physical, spiritual and ceremonial character of the land and his people.

Primary

Discussion

Discuss how the artist uses his painting to teach the young. What is he teaching them about?

Looking

Look closely at the painting while the story is being read to you.

Activity

Develop your own set of symbols or motifs to represent a journey or a place important to you.

Secondary

Discussion

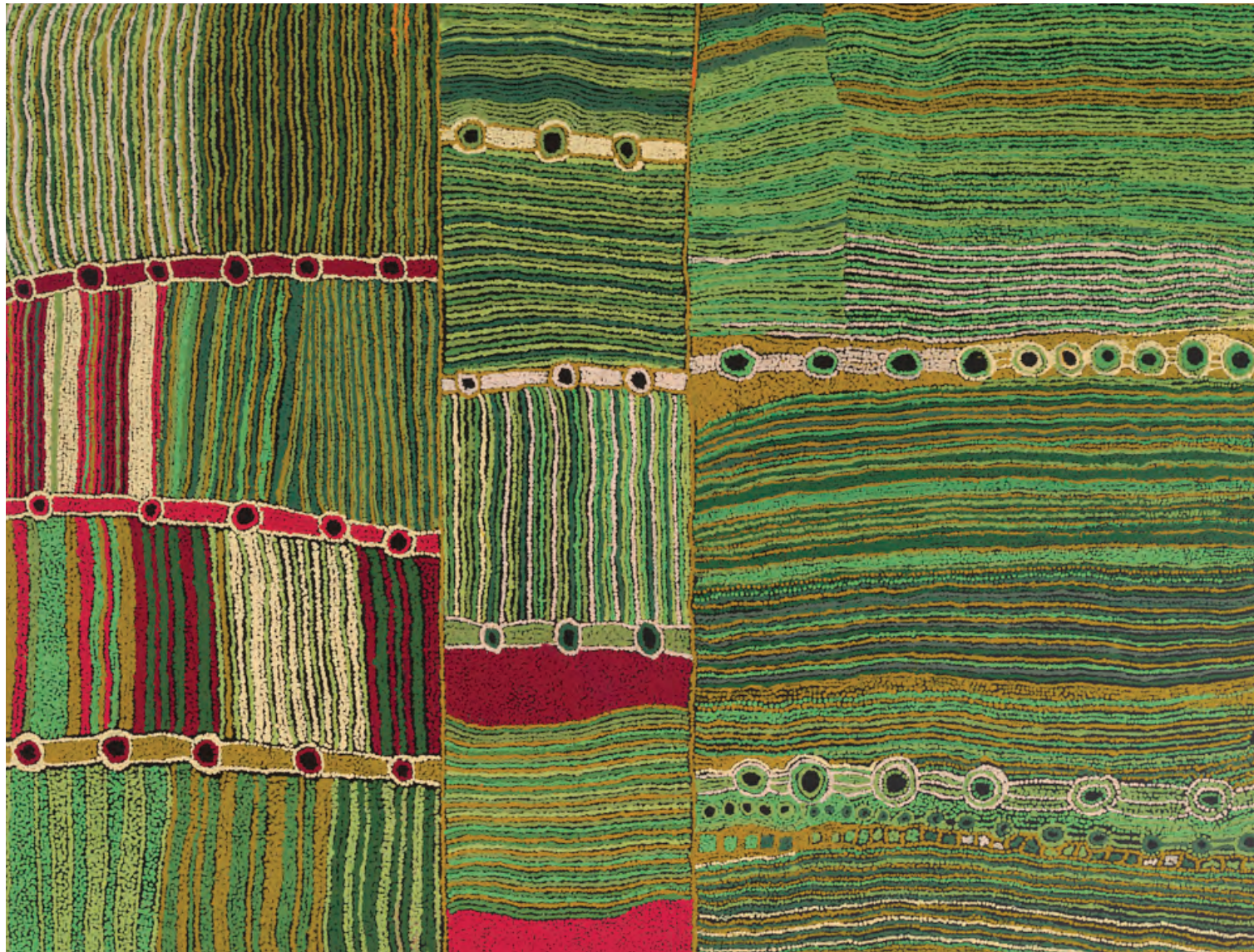
Discuss the important connection between Aboriginal painting and the continuation of culture.

Looking

Carefully analyse the painting and look at all the different ways this artist uses dots to indicate different parts of the landscape.

Research/Activity

Research the history of the Pitjantjatjara people.



Maringka Baker
Pitjantjatjara people
Kuru Ala 2007

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Maringka Baker
Pitjantjatjara people
Kuru Ala 2007
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Maringka Baker

This large painting is created with bold and brilliant colours. Ribbons of yellow, green, orange, red and white dots connect black circles across the canvas. The dark circles are each surrounded by circles of coloured dots, making them stand out against the patterns of lines. Like compressed strata in ancient rock formations the composition leads our eyes down, across and up again.

Kuru Ala is a place in the desert region of central Australia. After seasonal rain the rock pools fill and the desert comes into bloom with plants and grasses bursting with colour and life. In the dry season, knowledge of waterholes is essential for survival. The black circles in this landscape painting are the waterholes, but they have a deeper significance for the artist. They are the sites where Ancestral Beings were born, rested, fought or played. Knowledge of these sacred sites and the authority to relate these stories, rests with the Indigenous custodians of the land.

In this vibrant landscape painting, Maringka Baker has recorded the Seven Sisters Creation Story:

There was a cheeky man called Aman Nyiru, he wanted to get the eldest sister of the seven to become his wife. He was a magician and turned into animals to trick the sisters.

Maringka Baker is a senior Pitjantjatjara artist, she lives in Kanpi in the north-west corner of South Australia. She was born at an important ceremonial rock hole site at Kaliumpil around 1952. Baker explains:

My mother would walk around this country, travel half way to another rock hole, sleep for a while and travel on. She came to this place and I was born. There are lots of rock holes around there.

In her paintings Maringka Baker communicates her heritage, culture and identity with the land in a way that is personal to her as a woman and an artist.

Primary

Discussion

Why are waterholes so important in the desert?

Looking

What season of the year do you think the artist is depicting?

Activity/Research

Illustrate the story of the Seven Sisters.

Secondary

Discussion

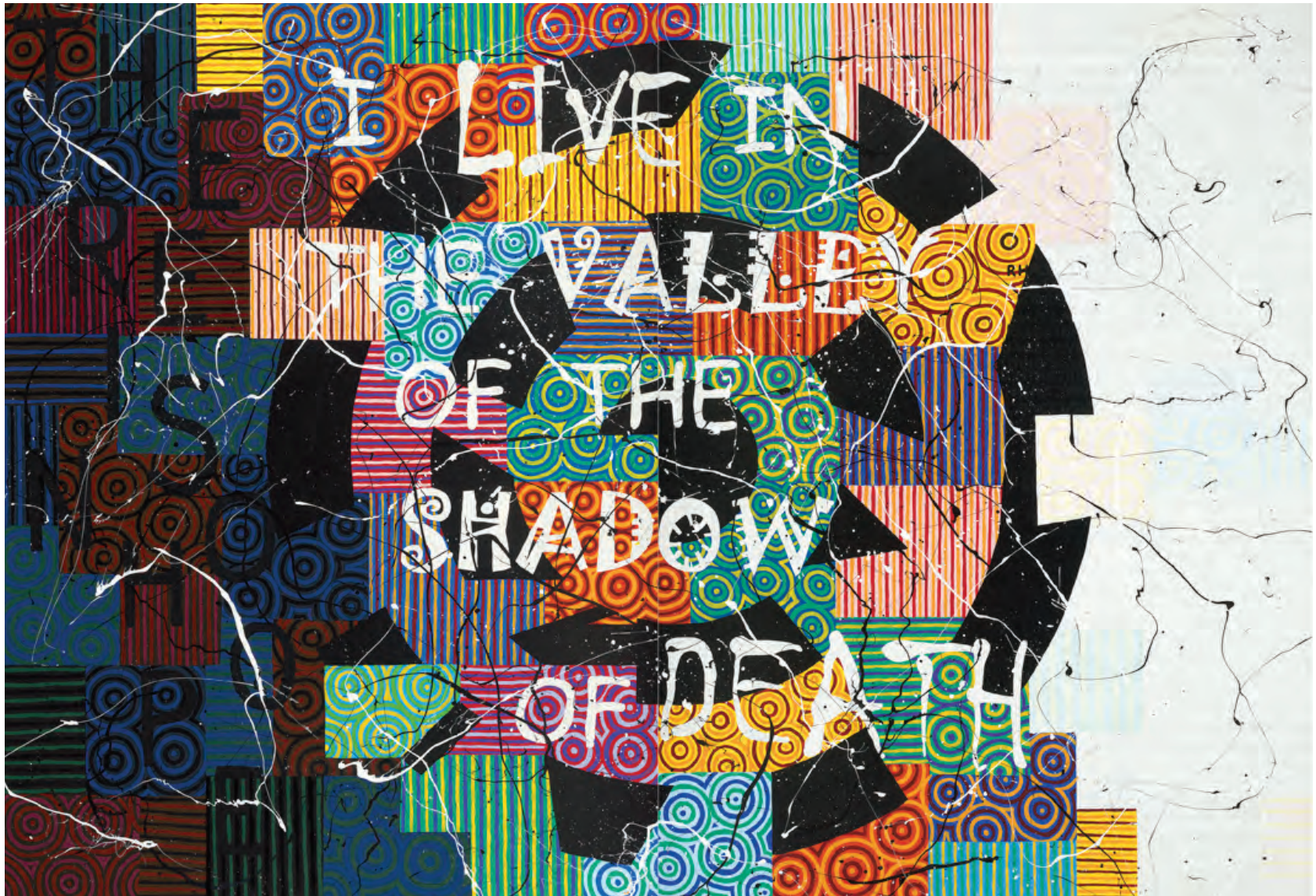
Discuss the different perceptions of the desert as seen by European settlers and the Aboriginal custodians of the land.

Looking

Look at the lines in the painting. How are they formed?
What colour did the artist paint first?

Research/Activity

Research water in the central desert region, both above ground and below.



Richard Bell
Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang peoples
Psalm singing 2007

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Richard Bell

Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang peoples

Psalm singing 2007

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

Courtesy of the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery

In this painting, Richard Bell created a complicated composition with many sections and layers of meaning. The small colourful and decorative squares and rectangles are superimposed and arranged with black shapes to create a circle. The letters that make up the message 'I live in the valley of the shadow of death' are painted in various styles, some decorative, some in printed style and some more spontaneously. Richard Bell is referring to the 25th Psalm but, taken out of context, there is no sense of safety or protection. Instead, he is using this phrase to refer to a recent Aboriginal death in police custody on Palm Island, which resulted in major protests and despair for Indigenous people, not only on the island but also throughout Australia. Although this colourful arrangement is similar to a collage, mosaic or patchwork quilt, the message printed in the centre has a powerful and unsettling effect.

Richard Bell was born in Charleville, Queensland, in 1953 and belongs to the Kamilaroi/Kooma/Jiman/Gurang Gurang peoples from New South Wales and Queensland. He lives and works in Brisbane and in his art he makes reference to both Aboriginal Western Desert designs and European art styles. The central black circle in this painting is reminiscent of the Western Desert waterholes, as are the coloured designs.

The concentric black circles are like a target and the black and white sides of the composition highlight a racial difference. The quotation from the Bible refers to the way religion was forced upon Aboriginal people, and the dripped white paint reminds us that this is an impassioned painting and summons up the work of the American Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock (who, in turn, was interested in the customary sand art of Native Americans).

In the same way that there are many layers of paint in Richard Bell's composition, there are also many layers of meaning. He makes powerful statements about the troubled intersections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories and the present.

Primary

Discussion

Where does the quote 'I live in the valley of the shadow of death' come from?

Looking

Find the target and other circular forms in the painting.

Activity/Research

Make a collaged target using patterns cut from magazines.

Secondary

Discussion

Why did Richard Bell superimpose the words on the painting?

Looking

Analyse the layers of this painting from first to last.

Activity/Research

Research the art of Jasper Johns and Jackson Pollock in relation to this painting.



Jan Billycan (Djan Nanundie)
Yulparija people
All the Jila 2006

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Jan Billycan (Djan Nanundie)

Yulparija people

All the Jila 2006

acrylic binder with langridge dry pigment and marble dust on plyboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

© Jan Billycan (Djan Nanundie)

Each of the eight panels of this painting features a number of oval and rounded geometric forms filled with large striped brushstrokes going in different directions. A brilliant, vibrating effect is created by the stripes of contrasting colours against a black background.

The subject of the painting is the living water that makes surviving in the Great Sandy Desert of northern Western Australia possible. Water appears as springs and also in wells and each striped shape may relate to a particular water source. The artist states:

When I was young I walked all around these places with my mummy and daddy. In living water there is a quiet snake. Sometimes he rises up, but we sing him down, sometimes he can travel and bring rain ... Ilyarra is my country where I grew up. Lots of *tali* (sand dunes) and *jila* in this country. This is big dog country.

Jan Billycan is a medicine/healing woman with the ability to 'see' inside the human body. Her landscape paintings may refer to human organs as well as water and sand dunes. A living waterhole can also be interpreted as a liver or kidney as without these organs people would not survive. It is as if she is painting the landscape as a living, breathing being.

Artists from the desert regions of Australia traditionally painted on their bodies during ceremonies and on ceremonially sacred objects. They also created large sand paintings with shapes drawn into the sand with sticks. Jan Billycan, who was born around 1930, is from the Yulparija people of the north-west coastal region of Western Australia. She interprets these patterns in her paintings using dry pigments and marble dust mixed with an acrylic binder.

Primary

Discussion

What sorts of surfaces did Aboriginal artists traditionally paint on during ceremonies?

Looking

Look at all the different ways Jan Billycan makes marks on the canvas, from little dots to broad lines.

Activity/Research

Make your own picture of a billabong or waterhole.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss how Jan Billycan references the human body in this painting of a desert landscape.

Looking

How does the artist interpret her landscape as a vibrant, living, fertile place?

Activity/Research

Research the ecology of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia.



King No Beard

Daniel Boyd
Kudjla/Gangalu peoples
King No Beard 2007

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Daniel Boyd
Kudjla/Gangalu peoples
King No Beard 2007
oil on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2007

King George III of England is the subject of this larger-than-life-size oil painting. It is based on a portrait painted by Nathaniel Dance in London in 1773, which is now in the collection of the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia.

Daniel Boyd has copied the original painting precisely, but inserted his own subtle changes. The King stands with hand on hip dressed in ermine and brocade. He holds a golden staff and wears a sword on his side. However, the artist has added important details such as the eye patch, the parrot on the shoulder and the head within a jar on the left. This jar replaces the King's crown in the original painting.

The decapitated head in the jar is a self-portrait of the artist gazing mournfully heavenward – both a specimen and a martyr. A macabre touch is added with the chain of small human skulls hanging around the King's neck.

The title, *King No Beard*, is written below in a mock depiction of postcards of Indigenous people, making the painting appear to be a commercial product. The title also refers to the fact that Aboriginal people thought Cook and his men were women due to their lack of facial hair.

The artist challenges the European view of history by adding references to piracy, where the stealing of land and other cultures' treasures to enlarge European empires was commonplace. King George III was the King of Great Britain during the time of the three voyages of Captain Cook from 1768 to 1779.

Documents given to Cook by the King stated that Cook was, 'with the consent of the Natives, to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the name of the King of Great Britain'.

Daniel Boyd was born in Cairns in 1982 and after moving to Canberra in the early 2000s graduated with honours from the Australian National University School of Art with a Bachelor of Visual Arts.

Primary

Discussion

Who is the subject of this painting?

Looking

What has the artist added to make King George III look like a pirate?

Activity/Research

Find out about the relationship between Captain Cook and King George III.

Secondary

Discussion

Why has Daniel Boyd chosen King George III to be the subject of his painting?

Looking

How has the artist revealed the regal status of the figure? What additions has he made to undermine the status of the original portrait?

Activity/Research

Find a reproduction of an eighteenth-century portrait and make your own adjustments to it in order to convey a political message.



Trevor 'Turbo' Brown
Latje Latje people
Koala and babies 2005

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Trevor 'Turbo' Brown
Latje Latje people
Koala and babies 2005
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Trevor 'Turbo' Brown

The images of a mother koala and two babies dominate this painting. The two babies, cut off by the green border below, can be seen nuzzling their mother. The mother has a broad white front and is also outlined by a white line, which makes the figure stand out from the yellow and green background. Her red eyes and mouth add a comical and lively quality to the painting. The brushstrokes are energetic and spontaneous, creating illusions of fur, grass, and foliage.

When I paint I feel like I'm in the Dreamtime and can see all the animals and birds that live there.

This statement by the artist makes us realise that his images of animals are more than illustrations. They refer to another time before European invasion. Since then, over-grazing, erosion and environmental changes have endangered the habitat for these animals.

Trevor 'Turbo' Brown, born in 1967, is a Latje Latje man from Mildura, Victoria. His nickname is derived from his break dancing ability and the speed with which he makes his paintings.

Primary

Discussion

Why is the artist called 'Turbo' Brown?

Looking

Find pairs of objects in the painting.

Activity/Research

Find out about koalas. Do they often have twins?

Secondary

Discussion

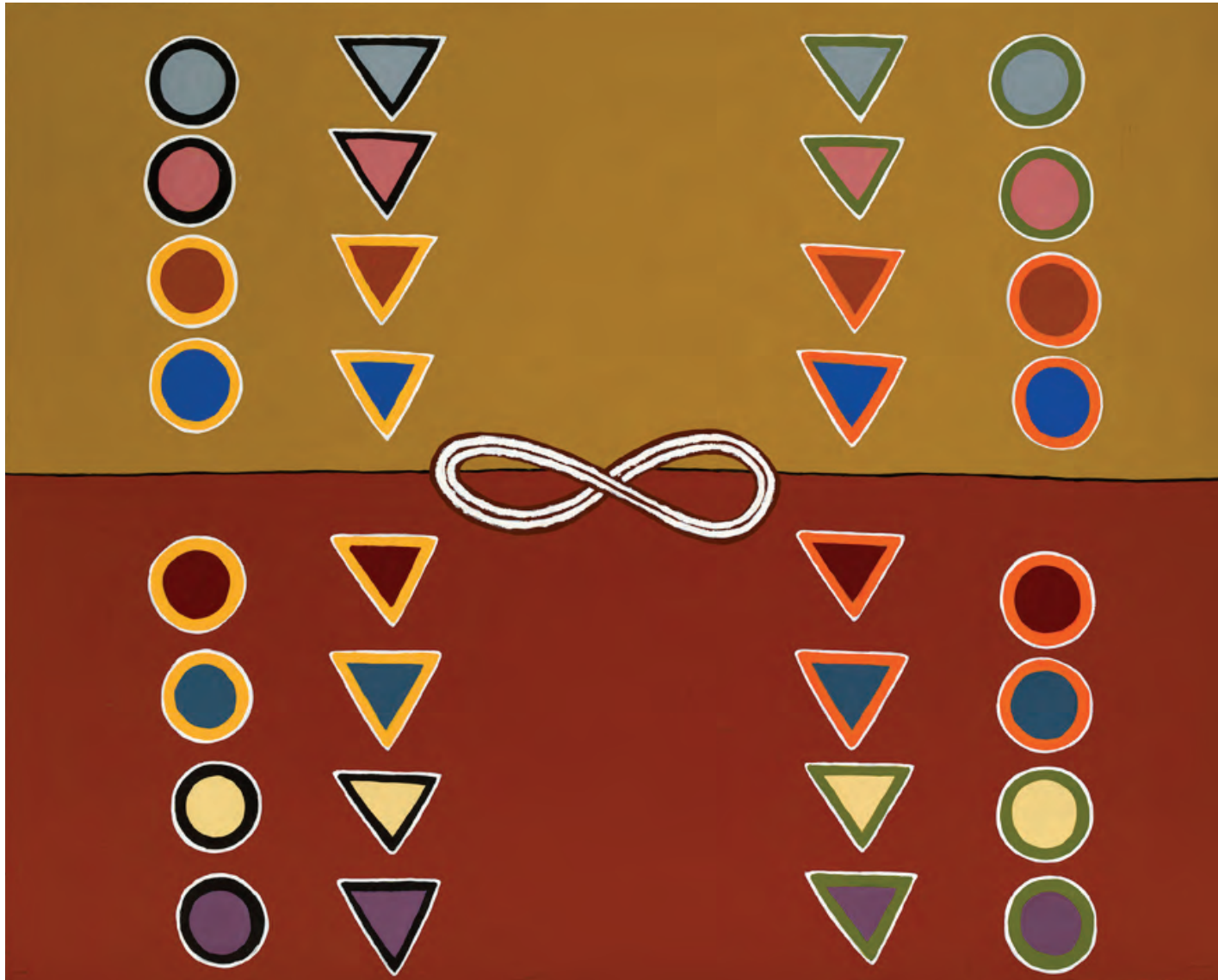
Discuss the rarity of images of the koala in Aboriginal art.

Looking

How has the artist made this image seem powerful and possibly related to the Dreaming?

Activity/Research

Research the habitat of koalas and how they have been affected by European settlement.



Christine Christophersen
Iwatja/Iwaidja people
The past, the present, the future 2006

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Christine Christophersen
Iwatja/Iwaidja people
The past, the present, the future 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

The horizon line divides the painting into two rectangles, the lower one a darker brown than the top. Right in the middle, straddling the dividing line, you can see a shape like a link in a chain, connecting all the other shapes in this composition. This never-ending elliptical shape is also connected to the title, *The past, the present, the future*. On either side of this white symbol there are two columns of geometric shapes. The column closest to the centre consists of eight triangles paired with a circle painted in similar colours. Although the colours in the centre of each pair are the same the artist uses black in the outer band in some of the symbols. The shapes appear to hang in front of the divided background, their symmetrical pairing giving us a clue to their meaning.

Each shape has three colours, a white border and two other colours, denoting the various moieties (skin groups) in the artist's clan. Moieties are part of an important and complex system of family and group relationships in Aboriginal communities. The central chain link shape also points to these strong bonds between the moieties.

This painting is part of Christine Christophersen's *Kinship series* in which she investigates identity, belonging and relationship to country and to each other in Aboriginal society. The complicated rules that determine who can marry and relate to whom may be suggested by the symbols and their relationship to each other. Christophersen, through her art, is passing on important principles about respect, obligation and responsibility to future generations.

Christine Christophersen comes from north-west Arnhem Land. She was born in 1959 and since the 1980s has been involved in journalism, art, politics, anti-uranium mining, campaigning and has served on many advisory and cultural boards.

Primary

Discussion

How does the artist make this painting look like a landscape?

Looking

Look at how the central colours in the circles and triangles are changed by the surrounding colour?

Activity/Research

Draw your own family tree.

Secondary

Discussion

How does the white central symbol relate to the title of the painting?

Looking

What sort of spatial ambiguity is created by the suggestion of a horizon line?

Activity/Research

Research kinship in Aboriginal societies in the Northern Territory.



Destiny Deacon
Kugu/Kuku/Erub/Mer peoples
Virginia Fraser
Colour blinded series 2005

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Destiny Deacon
Kugu/Kuku/Erub/Mer peoples
Virginia Fraser
Colour blinded series 2005 installation
Courtesy of the artists and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

There are a number of works of art in this space. They are all part of the installation *Colour blinded*, by Destiny Deacon (Kugu/Kuku/Erub/Mer peoples) in collaboration with non-Indigenous artist Virginia Fraser.

The installation comprises two video projections, photographs and two objects on plinths all flooded with yellow sodium lighting.

The acidic light has an immediate impact on the way everything looks in the space. It also affects the way the viewers appear to each other and how they see colours. In effect, the yellow light makes the viewer 'colour blind'. The split-screen video *Good golly miss dolly* shows John Harding, Destiny Deacon's brother, writing on a whiteboard, and his daughter Sofii throwing open a parcel of golliwog dolls and asking, 'What are you doing here?'

There are six large rich black-and-white photographs of dolls on the walls. Shot on orthochromatic film, the photographs make everything appear overly graphic with little tonal qualities. Sitting on plinths, the *Snow Storms* consists of perspex cubes filled with golliwogs and white beanbag balls. The golliwogs are wide-eyed and look as though they are suffocating. There is something playful, yet also threatening about the artists' use of dolls and hand-knitted golliwogs; they use them in a purposefully unsettling way. The space, the light, the questions posed to us by the video and the golliwogs squashed in their perspex cubes all challenge our expectations.

Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser invite us to think about our role as the viewer in the installation space. They challenge the idea that Indigenous artists have all the answers to issues relating to their national identity and Indigenous struggles, past and present. Instead, they question us and ask us to think and respond to these issues.

Destiny Deacon was born in 1957 in Maryborough, Queensland. She was raised in Melbourne and still lives and works there. In the early 1980s, after completing a Bachelor of Arts and a Diploma of Education, she worked as a history teacher. She began taking photographs in 1990 and first exhibited her work that same year. Virginia Fraser was born in Melbourne and lives and works in the city of her birth.

Primary

Discussion

Why have the artists used coloured light?

Looking

How does the cube of golliwogs make you feel and why?

Activity/Research

Working in pairs, bring toys from home and make your own installation.

Secondary

Discussion

Why do you think the artists use golliwogs and dolls in this work?

Looking

How does being part of an installation change your relationship with it?

Activity/Research

Research the life and work of Destiny Deacon and her collaboration with Virginia Fraser.



Philip Gudthaykudthay
Liyagalawumirr people
Wagilag Sisters, with child 2007

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Philip Gudthaykudthay
Liyagalawumirr people
Wagilag Sisters, with child 2007
natural earth pigments on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Philip Gudthaykudthay. Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia, 2007

The three figures in this painting, the Wagilag Sisters and a child, are key figures in a major ancestral creation story. They are surrounded and framed by the shapes of a python – across the top of the canvas and down the bottom right – and five goannas. There are also many sharp triangular and egg shapes. The painting is made with ochre paint made from rock pigments; this gives the surface of the canvas a dry, dusty appearance.

The background of the painting is left bare, whereas other parts of the figures and animals are decorated with finely painted lines that cross in a coloured grid pattern called *rarrk*. This technique is very characteristic of Philip Gudthaykudthay's work. His fine line *rarrk* painting with silvery white, brown and brilliant yellow creates an energy that makes the surface of the painting vibrate or 'sing'. For the artist and his people this invokes a connection to an ancestral presence.

Philip Gudthaykudthay was born around 1925 and is the last conversant speaker from the Liyagalawumirr people in Central Arnhem Land. He is the most senior artist from Ramingining and the last active artist from the Milingimbi school of painters. Many years ago he was taught to paint on bark and hollow logs by his father Dawidi and his customary uncle Djawa. Today Gudthaykudthay is the senior ceremonial leader for two *Dhuwa* moiety groups. He is a custodian of the stories of his ancestral lands. One of these stories is the Wagilag Sisters and this painting is all about that story.

In the distant past two Wagilag Sisters were travelling with their children across the countryside to a waterhole at Mirarrmina. The younger sister accidentally let blood fall into the waterhole, the python that lived there was furious and swallowed the sisters and the children. Storms raged and the first wet season took place. Disturbed by the flood all the other sacred pythons stood up, and spoke with voices like thunder. The Mirarrmina python confessed to swallowing the sisters and fell to earth making a huge depression in the ground. The first dry season then occurred as a strong wind blew across the land.

Primary

Discussion

Who are the two main female figures in this bark painting?

Looking

What can you see surrounding the sisters and their child?

Activity/Research

Find out about creation stories in other cultures.

Secondary

Discussion

Why is the Wagilag Sisters story significant for this artist?

Looking

How can you tell the artist painted this bark from a number of directions?

Activity/Research

Research the importance of the Wagilag Sisters story to Aboriginal culture in Arnhem Land.



Treahna Hamm
Yorta Yorta people
Yabby 2005

national indigenous art triennial '07

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Treahna Hamm
Yorta Yorta people
Yabby 2005

sedge grass (*Cyperus involucratus*), gumnuts and wire
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2007 © Treahna Hamm

This broad clawed yabby is woven in a coiled bundle technique that has been used to make fibre objects for thousands of generations in the south-east and southern regions of Australia, particularly along the rivers. The bundles of fibres run around and around the yabby and give it shape, they become thinner coils towards his head. The claws are raised expressively and the bulging eyes are made out of gumnuts. The antennae are very long and his eight thin woven bundle legs project out from his body.

A Yorta Yorta artist, Treahna Hamm grew up by the Murray River in Yarrawonga, Victoria. From an early age she was fascinated by the Murray River and by the Ancestral Beings and animals that reside there. Along the meandering river by the Barmah Forest there are still yabbies, long necked turtles and other animals. Ancient middens, canoe trees and burial sites from earlier times can also be found. These are sites of enormous cultural significance for Yorta Yorta people.

Treahna Hamm's art is inspired by her connection to land, the river and culture. She has helped revive the traditional practice of making possum skin cloaks. Through research into the traditional incised designs on the possum skin cloaks she discovered stories about the animals of the Murray River plain, and the Ancestral Beings that emerge from the river. The artist's inspiration also comes from listening to Yorta Yorta elders relating stories from the past. In this way, Treahna Hamm's art defies the claim that the 'tide of history has washed away' (as stated by a High Court judge in 1998) a connection between the Yorta Yorta people and their land and that it was a connection 'not capable of revival'.

Primary

Discussion

What animals live in the Barmah Forest area?

Looking

Look closely to find out how the coiled bundle technique is used.

Activity/Research

Make some imaginary aquatic animals using string and wire.

Find out about yabbies. What is missing from this one?

Secondary

Discussion

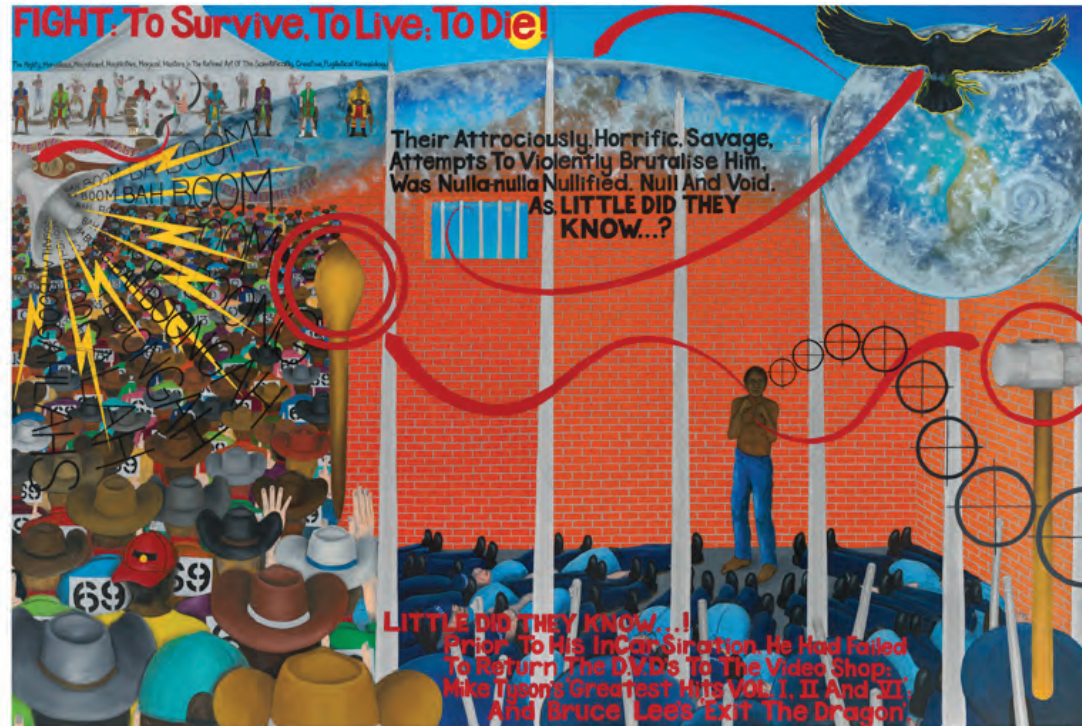
Why does Treahna Hamm make animal sculptures that relate to her land?

Looking

Where did she start this sculpture and what materials did she use and why?

Activity/Research

Research the ecological significance of the Barmah Forest.



Gordon Hookey
Waanyi/Waanjiminjin peoples
FIGHT: To Survive; To Live; To Die! 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Gordon Hookey

Waanyi/Waanjiminjin peoples

FIGHT: To Survive; To Live; To Die! 2007

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007 © Gordon Hookey

This large multiple panel painting confronts the viewer with a complicated assemblage of images that carry a message of conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous society. On the left panel Hookey paints a crowd of 'rednecks' in suits and ties, their faces obscured by stockings, like criminals. The artist is suggesting that the crowd mentality of the dominant culture masks racism. The lone kangaroo in sunglasses satirically emphasises the seriousness of Hookey's attack against social norms.

In the central panel a boxing tent dominates the left-hand side and refers to a history of Aboriginal men travelling with the boxing troupes to earn a living in Australia throughout much of the twentieth century until the 1970s. It is a sign of empowerment with the Indigenous men as heroes and the redneck crowd as villains.

Isolated against the red background is the lone figure of the Aboriginal resistance fighter – or Culture Warrior – who is linked to the left to a traditional Aboriginal weapon and on the right to a European hammer. The vertical spikes are repeated in the bars of the cell window in the upper left. Hookey states that the crow on the right of the central panel refers to the totemic spirit of blackfellas who have died in custody, ascending from the jail cell, in a direct reference to a recent Aboriginal death in custody in Queensland. On the right, the dove symbolises the resting place of these spirits – to a place of freedom and peace – while the globe refers to globalisation and the effect of multinationals, such as mining companies, on many Indigenous communities.

Much of Gordon Hookey's art is urgent, satirical and confrontational. He uses imagery and text that challenge accepted ideas about racial harmony. Conflict and satire are central to the meaning of his art. Through his paintings, he conveys an underlying message that he hopes will change the values and attitudes of the dominant culture. He also conveys a sense of humour and the absurd through his use of word play and having animals as metaphors for human beings.

Gordon Hookey was born in 1961 in Cloncurry, Queensland, and is from the Waanyi/Waanjiminjin people. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1992, and has had a number of exhibitions in Australia and overseas since the early 1990s.

Primary

Discussion

What do the kangaroo and the black crow stand for?

Looking

In the central panel, who is the most important figure and why?

Activity/Research

Create a painting or drawing using symbols that convey conflict and peace.

Secondary

Discussion

Why is the Aboriginal boxer an important figure for the artist?

Looking

Look at the different ways Gordon Hookey paints crowds.

Activity/Research

Research Indigenous athletes in sideshow boxing in Australia.

Research Aboriginal deaths in custody.



Anniebell Marrngamarrnga
Kuninjku people
Yawkyawk mother and babies 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga
Kuninjku people
Yawkyawk mother and babies 2006
natural earth pigments dyed on woven pandanus (*Pandanus spiralis*)
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Anniebell Marrngamarrnga, courtesy Maningrida Arts & Culture

This fibre work, *Yawkyawk*, was made in Western Arnhem Land by Anniebell Marrngamarrnga. It is made from fibre from pandanus leaves, which is collected by women, usually after the monsoon season, from the new growth at the top of the trees. The leaf fibres are dyed with natural dyes made from certain roots, berries and bark. The frame, which gives the work its shape, is made from bamboo and the coloured fibres of pandanus are woven from the outside in to create the sections of contrasting patterns. This is the same weaving technique used to make twined bags. Techniques in weaving coiled baskets, dilly and string bags, fish traps and mats have been passed down for thousands of years in Arnhem Land.

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga learnt how to weave from her mother and paint from her father. She says:

My favourite subject is to represent the *yawkyawk* spirit who lives in the water at Kubumi. It is my husband's Dreaming. I represent her in bark paintings, in my timber carvings and also in my weaving ... I came with the idea to make flat *yawkyawks* from pandanus ... I use lots of different colours and I like it. Colours are important in my work.

Oral ancestral stories tell how during the time of creation these spirit beings, through a series of events and travels, turned into animal forms. The name *yawkaw* is a word in the Kuninjku/Kunwok language of Western Arnhem Land meaning 'young woman' and 'young woman spirit being'. These spirits are sometimes compared with the European idea of a mermaid. They exist as spiritual beings living in freshwater streams and rock pools, particularly in stony country. They have a tail like a fish and long hair, which is associated with blooms of green algae. Sometimes they leave the water and walk about the dry land at night. Today, the Kuninjku believe that *yawkyawks* are alive and well and living in freshwater sites in sacred locations.

Anniebell Marrngamarrnga was born in Maningrida, Western Arnhem Land, in 1968. Her language group is Kuninjku and her moiety is *Yirritja*.

Primary

Discussion

What is this sculpture made from?

Looking

Look carefully at the patterns. How have they been made?

Activity

Find out about the *yawkyawk*.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss the role of the *yawkyawk* in the belief system of Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land

Looking

Examine the form carefully and work out how it was made.

Activity/Research

Research the use of natural dyes and create your own colours.



John Mawurndjul
Kuninjku (eastern Kunwinjku) people
Mardayin design at Dilebang 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

John Mawurndjul

Kuninjku (eastern Kunwinjku) people

Mardayin design at Dilebang 2006

natural earth pigments on stringybark

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

© John Mawurndjul, courtesy Maningrida Arts & Culture

This majestic bark painting by John Mawurndjul, a renowned Kuninjku artist from Western Arnhem Land, vibrates with light and movement. He uses a fine *rarrk* (crosshatching) to create a zig zag pattern of light and dark wedges across the length of the bark. The rippling effect of the horizontal shapes suggests the movement of water in the Billabong at Milmilngkan, and the power of the Ancestral Beings that live in the water.

The rhythms and pattern of colour and line may also have deeper meanings associated with the energy of the ancestors that the artist is revealing in his depictions of his clan's land and waterholes. In this bark painting, John Mawurndjul is creating a completely abstract composition that hums with the ancestral light and energy that he is tapping into through his intricate and complex *rarrk*.

Mawurndjul is a member of the Kurulk clan of the Kuninjku people of Western Arnhem Land, a community highly respected for their artistic and cultural practices. Born in the bush in Western Arnhem Land in 1952, he moved to Maningrida – on the mouth of the Liverpool River – as a young man in 1963. In 1973 Mawurndjul and his family returned to their homelands on the Mann River and it was there that he began to paint Ancestral Beings. Other, earlier paintings by him represent *Ngalyod* the Rainbow Serpent but lately he has been focussing on increasingly refined and abstract patterns such as in this painting.

John Mawurndjul has participated in many group and individual exhibitions and was one of eight Aboriginal artists in the Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the new Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France, which opened in 2006. Although his status as an international artist requires him to travel widely, he is also involved in teaching and mentoring a younger generation of Kuninjku artists who seek his permission to paint particular subjects or to develop their own style.

Primary

Discussion

Name the place that is the subject of this painting.

Looking

How does the artist create an effect of light on moving water?

Activity/Research

Make an abstract pattern that suggests rippling water.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss how the rhythm of this work may relate to Aboriginal life in more general terms.

Looking

What devices has the artist used to create the optical effect of light on water?

Activity/Research

Research the life and art of John Mawurndjul.



Ricky Maynard
Ben Lomond/Big River peoples
Coming home 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Ricky Maynard
Ben Lomond/Big River peoples
Coming home 2007
silver gelatin photograph
Courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery

Ricky Maynard's photographs of contemporary Indigenous Tasmanians make us think about what has happened during European occupation of Australia. Most of the history we read has been written by Europeans and this artist is interested in challenging this point of view.

Many history books relate the story of the alleged 'extermination' of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people by the European settlers, through disease, massacre and transportation to other islands. The artist's photographs address this one-sided view of history by presenting images of community members who have maintained and upheld their local cultural heritage. In this photograph, *Coming home*, an Aboriginal man is standing in a field of native grass, carrying over his shoulder a stick of dead mutton-birds. Mutton-birds were hunted for their oil by Europeans but were always a rich source of nutrition for local Indigenous custodians.

These photographs trace an ancient surviving culture that has adapted and evolved alongside the recent and at times violent interaction between Aboriginal and European cultures. They capture important aspects of cultural practice, both from the past – the images of massacre sites, middens and sacred cultural sites – and from the present-day – the images of Aboriginal people living and working in Tasmania today.

Ricky Maynard was born in 1953 in Launceston, Tasmania. He is a member of the Big River/Ben Lomond people of Tasmania and in these photographs, his personal viewpoint as a local Indigenous artist adds strength to the idea that there is another history of survival to counteract the Euro-centric idea of eradication.

Primary

Discussion

What is this man doing?

Looking

Describe the relationship between the man and the landscape.

Activity/Research

Write a short story about this man.

Secondary

Discussion

Why has Ricky Maynard taken this photograph?

Looking

What sort of mood is the artist capturing in this photograph?

Activity/Research

Research the mutton-birders of Tasmania.



Danie Mellor

Mamu/Ngagen/Ngajan peoples

The contrivance of a vintage wonderland (A magnificent flight of curious fancy for science buffs ... a china ark of seductive whimsy ... a divinely ordered special attraction ... upheld in multifariousness) 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Danie Mellor

Mamu/Ngagen/Ngajan peoples

The contrivance of a vintage wonderland (A magnificent flight of curious fancy for science buffs ... a china ark of seductive whimsy ... a divinely ordered special attraction ... upheld in multifariousness) 2007 (detail)

installation mixed media, kangaroo skin, ceramic, synthetic eyeballs, wood and birds

Courtesy of the artist

Danie Mellor's fibreglass kangaroos have real ears, and paws, but instead of fur they are covered in a mosaic of broken blue and white china. They stand within an installation of china-clad trees and stuffed birds. They are both startlingly lifelike and surreal, their soft grey fur replaced by shards of broken china.

Danie Mellor is deliberately creating an installation that reminds us of old fashioned dioramas in socio-historical or ethnographic museums, where stuffed native animals were often presented in a fake, artificial and didactic environment. For Danie Mellor, the Kangaroo is a symbol of all the native animals and Indigenous people who lived in this land before European settlement. It is also seen as a symbol of Australiana, used by white Australians on badges, by national icons such as QANTAS and even on the Australian coat of arms.

The English firm Spode manufactured blue-and-white china in the late eighteenth century, around the time of European settlement of Australia. The famous willow pattern, adapted from Chinese ceramics, became popular at this time and demonstrates another way in which English culture absorbed another, creating a fabricated history. The covering of the kangaroo with broken English/Chinese pottery refers obliquely to the domination of Indigenous society by outsiders, but there is also a great sense of fun and fantasy in the artist's intent.

Danie Mellor was born in Mackay in 1971. He is from the Mamu/Ngagen/Ngajan peoples and lives and works in Canberra.

Primary

Discussion

What has Danie Mellor covered the kangaroos with?

Looking

Find some natural materials and some manmade materials.

Activity/Research

Find images of kangaroos used to symbolise Australia.

Secondary

Discussion

Why has Danie Mellor covered kangaroos with broken china?

Looking

Describe your response to this installation. How is he commenting on dioramas in museums?

Activity/Research

Research the relationship between British and Chinese ceramics.



Wamud Namok AO
Kundedjnenghmi people
Dulklorrelorrkeng and Wakkewakken 2005

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Wamud Namok AO
Kundedjnjenghmi people
Dulkorrelorkeng and Wakkewakken 2005
natural earth pigments on stringybark
Collection of Michael and Eleonora Triguboff
© Wamud Namok, Injalak Arts

Wamud Namok is rightly acknowledged as one of the most learned elders of the Arnhem Land escarpment known as 'Stone Country', and is the last of the painters of the magnificent rock art galleries of the region. His paintings, with their stark figures outlined against plain backgrounds, remind us of his rock painting tradition.

The two figures in this painting convey a strong emotional energy. *Dulkorrelorkeng*, the male figure, is an evil spirit while *Wakkewakken*, the other figure, is the honey spirit. *Dulkorrelorkeng* has a black snake attached to his thumb and this may refer to the fact that these evil spirits eat poisonous snakes – they also have pets as big as wolfhounds. These malevolent spirits can only be seen by 'clever men' like Wamud Namok who learnt to paint them. *Dulkorrelorkeng* live in hollow trees and drink the water that collects there.

On the right is *Wakkewakken*, the female honey spirit associated with Honey Dreaming and Mok country on the upper Liverpool River in Western Arnhem Land. These spirits can be identified by their lack of legs. The artist says:

This is the same again [female *Wakkewakken* spirit] with a dillybag full of *Leea rubra* fruit. That *Leea rubra* is her food and she has filled up the dillybag to the brim and is taking it to her camp. Those long knotted dillybags, she makes them. The plant she gets her food from flowers and then the fruit appears for *Wakkewakken* spirits. She goes and collects it.

Wamud Namok was born around 1926 near the upper Mann and Liverpool Rivers in Western Arnhem Land. He is a senior elder of the Mok clan. He has participated in nearly 30 group exhibitions since 1975 and was awarded the prize for the best work on paper at the *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award* in 1998. He was also commissioned to do a painting which appeared on the Australian 40-cent stamp in 1982. In 2006 he received an Order of Australia.

Primary

Discussion

This is a bark painting. What other surfaces do Arnhem Land artists paint on?

Looking

How has the artist made the male figure look evil?

Activity/Research

Find out about native bees and collecting honey in the bush.

Secondary

Discussion

What is the story relating to *Dulkorrelorkeng*?

Looking

How does the artist convey the spiritual power of these figures?

Activity/Research

Research rock painting in Arnhem Land.



Doreen Reid Nakamarra
Pintupi/Ngaatjatgarra peoples
Untitled 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07 culture warriors

Doreen Reid Nakamarra
Pintupi/Ngaatjatgarra peoples
Untitled 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of a private collection, Melbourne
© Doreen Reid Nakamarra, courtesy of Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd

The intricate and dazzling optical effect of this painting is created from thousands of finely painted zigzag lines. The canvas seems to rise and fall like a series of meandering ridges and valleys. The landscape can appear far away, as if viewed from an aeroplane, or very close, as if hovering just above sand blown into complex patterns. The use of a variety of closely related tones creates waves of subtle variation across the canvas.

There is a mesmerising quality to this painting. There is no focal point, no image against a background, the whole surface undulates with obsessively repetitive lines which, by their diagonal nature, create an illusion of peaks and troughs.

This painting depicts designs associated with the rock hole site of Wirrunga just to the east of the Kiwirrkura community in Western Australia. The lines in the painting represent the surrounding *tali* or sandhills in the area around Wirrunga, which is known as a traditional birthing site for the women of the area. It is also a place where the women gathered the edible berries known as desert raisins from small shrubs.

Doreen Reid Nakamarra was born near the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia in the mid 1950s. As a young girl she walked with her family to the Lutheran Mission Station at Haasts Bluff. After attending school at Papunya, the artist travelled to Kintore where she met her husband George 'Tjampu' Tjapaltjarri, who was an established artist with the Papunya Tula Artists. Doreen now lives further west in the small isolated community of Kiwirrkura and paints for Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd.

Primary

Discussion

What is this painting about?

Looking

How does the artist create a three-dimensional effect?

Activity/Research

Use repeated diagonal lines to make a drawing that looks three-dimensional.

Find some pictures of sandhills.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss whether this painting is abstract or representational.

Looking

How does the artist create a dazzling moving optical effect?

Activity/Research

Research the Papunya Tula art movement.



Dennis Nona
Kala Lagaw Ya (Western Torres Strait) people
Ubirikubiri 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Dennis Nona
Kala Lagaw Ya (Western Torres Strait) people
Ubirikubiri 2007
bronze and pearlshell
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
Courtesy of the artist and the Australian Art Print Network

This larger-than-life-size bronze sculpture of a crocodile carrying a man on its back is called *Ubirikubiri*. The man is clutching a spear and he has fish tails on his head and in place of his feet. The man appears to be merging with the crocodile and the river it lives in.

The sculpture is covered in very delicate and complex patterns. The black patterns are indented and look as if they are carved into the surface; surrounding these patterns are areas of smooth shining bronze. The shapes of other animals, including a shovelhead shark, and a human are visible along the crocodile's sides.

The designs interlock and weave themselves across the surface of the sculptures, almost as if they are moving, linking the crocodile and the man together. These incredibly intricate and beautiful patterns refer to traditional stories and carving designs of the Torres Strait Islanders.

The legend of *Ubirikubiri* is from Papua New Guinea, the near neighbour of the Torres Strait Islands, and is the story of a father who offers his daughter a series of pets that she doesn't like until one day he brings home a baby crocodile. She names it *Ubirikubiri*. The crocodile grows up in captivity and is later neglected when the father travels away. When he returns, *Ubirikubiri*, hungry and neglected, kills him and carries him away to the river, and despite the daughter's pleas, *Ubirikubiri* refuses to return the man's body to her.

Dennis Nona was born in 1973 on Badu Island and is one of the most innovative Torres Strait Islander artists working today. As a boy, Dennis Nona was taught the traditional craft of woodcarving and his lino prints and sculptures reflect this skill and the intricate clan patterns he has learnt.

Primary

Discussion

Discuss the problems of having a crocodile as a pet.

Looking

What animals can you see in the patterns on the crocodile?

Activity/Research

Write a short story about a crocodile.

Secondary

Discussion

What is the moral associated with the story of *Ubirikubiri*?

Looking

How has the artist integrated the figure of the man with the body of the crocodile?

Activity/Research

Research the life and work of Denis Nona.



Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr
Wik-Mungkan
Face painting 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr

Wik-Mungkan

Face painting 2006

natural earth pigments and hibiscus charcoal with synthetic
polymer binder on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007

© Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr, courtesy of Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane

This long horizontal painting is on two canvases that are hung together. The painting is dominated by strong horizontal stripes of red-brown, black and white. These stripes are broken up with vertical lines on either side of a black field patterned with downward curving white lines. The strong colours of black, white and red-brown come from natural earth pigments and hibiscus charcoal collected by the artist from his traditional country and bonded to the surface of the canvas.

These patterns and colours refer to designs painted on the bodies of the performers of the *Kalben* (Flying Fox Story Place) and *Walkaln-aw* (Bonefish Story Place) ceremonies. Performed by the Wik people, these ceremonies are associated with places near the Small Archer River area on the western side of Cape York in Queensland. *Kalben* is associated with the first stage of an initiation ceremony and is the story of a group of young initiates who disobeyed the elders by hunting and killing more flying foxes than they needed. Later, flying foxes came and took the boys up into the sky, where they turned into flying foxes and never returned.

Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr was born in 1936 in Aurukun, Cape York, in Far North Queensland. His involvement with ceremonies began when he was a child; he learnt how to carve and how to perform traditional ceremonies from his father, who was also an important artist and ceremonial leader. The designs and colours of Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr's art come from the traditions of his ceremonial group, Winchanam. After his father's death the artist became the senior songman for the Winchanam people. He performs the lead ceremonial dance roles and is a pre-eminent carver of his ancestral stories.

Primary

Discussion

Where do these designs come from?

Looking

Imagine the dazzling effect of these patterns if painted on an object that moves.

Activity/Research

Find some information about flying foxes.

Secondary

Discussion

Describe the ceremonial background to these designs.

Looking

Look at the colours of the natural earth pigments. How do they differ from commercial paints?

Activity/Research

Find out about the Wik people and their political significance.



Christopher Pease
Minang/Wardandi/Balardong/Nyoongar peoples
New Water Dreaming 2005

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Christopher Pease
Minang/Wardandi/Balardong/Nyoongar peoples
New Water Dreaming 2005
oil on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2005

New Water Dreaming is a painting by Christopher Pease that is based on a print by another earlier artist, Louis Auguste de Sainson, called *Taking on water – the Astrolabe – St George's Sound* 1826. Sainson was the appointed draughtsman for the ship *Astrolabe*, captained by Dumont d'Urville.

Both the print and the painting show the early interaction between Indigenous Australians and European explorers in the early 1800s in the beautiful landscape of King George Sound in the south-west of Western Australia – the artist's traditional country. The scene is friendly and positive, and suggests co-operation between the ship's crew and the Minang people of Western Australia. The crew are collecting water in buckets, which is then poured into a funnel. A flexible hose leads from the funnel to the barrels on the longboat.

The painting, unlike the black-and-white print, is richly coloured. The artist has used oil paint to enhance the impression of history. He has added a diagram to the sky above the figures, which is a symbol of the scientific thinking and technological attitude of the Europeans. This new way of thinking, which is so different from the Minang peoples, hovers over the scene. It suggests the way European settlers imposed their own ideas of order and structure onto an unspoiled ancient land. The painting evokes the tensions that came to exist between the new settlers and the Indigenous people.

Christopher Pease was born in 1969 and is descended from the Minang people, who are part of the Nyoongar nation. Pease's art focuses on specific Indigenous heritage and identity and he is particularly interested in the impact of non-Indigenous culture on Nyoongar culture from the early 1800s to the present day.

Primary

Discussion

What part of Australia is shown in this painting?

Looking

What are the figures in the painting doing?

Activity/Research

Find some information about the ship called *Astrolabe* captained by Dumont d'Urville.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss how the artist is depicting the interaction between early European explorers and Aboriginal people.

Looking

What might the artist be indicating by placing the geometric form in the sky?

Activity/Research

Research early contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people in south-west Western Australia.



Shane Pickett
Balardong/Nyoongar peoples
On the Horizon of the Dreaming Boodja 2005

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Shane Pickett

Balardong/Nyoongar peoples

On the Horizon of the Dreaming Boodja 2005

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of Roslynne Bracher 2006

© Shane Pickett

This stark, mainly black-and-white painting is a physical and a metaphorical landscape. The three strong horizontal black stripes suggest distant horizons and landforms, while the vertical division in the foreground flattens the composition. Energetic brushstrokes of thick white paint are dragged and scumbled across a black canvas. The strong black elements, therefore, appear from behind the white brushstrokes. Subtle greys and glimpses of orange are revealed through the paint and, in some areas, nearly obliterate delicate skeins of white dots. More careful and delicate strands of dots stand out against the black background of the horizontal elements.

Shane Pickett stated that *On the Horizon of the Dreaming Boodja* depicts the birth of life breaking through the warmth of eternity and bringing the beginning of the Dreaming Boodja, a place mankind calls earth. The Dreaming is not just an ancient myth, but true, real and still experienced. Shane Pickett's paintings are proof of the continuing everyday power of the Dreaming. His paintings act like maps; not like static European maps, more like weather maps, which capture the ebb and flow of pressure systems. Shane Pickett says:

I have learnt to read the songlines that journey through all living things across the entire landscape. Every river, every tree, every rock is important as the Dreaming runs through them connecting all things, including mankind. These are the energy paths of the Dreaming and they are never meant to be broken.

Shane Pickett was born in 1957 in the south-west of Western Australia but has lived in Perth since the mid 1970s. He is one of the foremost Nyoongar artists working in Australia today, combining his deep knowledge of Nyoongar culture and belief with an individual, original style of gestural abstraction. He has exhibited in every state of Australia and his works are held in major private and public collections.

Primary

Discussion

What is this painting about?

Looking

What do the horizontal black lines look like?

Activity/Research

Using just horizontal and vertical lines make a painting of a familiar landscape.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss how Shane Pickett's paintings relate to the Dreaming.

Looking

How does the limited palette affect your response to this landscape?

Activity/Research

Research the life and work of Shane Pickett.



Elaine Russell
Kamilaroi people
Inspecting our houses 2004

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Elaine Russell
Kamilaroi people
Inspecting our houses 2004
synthetic polymer paint on paper
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2004
© Elaine Russell

In this painting, Elaine Russell remembers the regimental life on a mission, or Aboriginal reserve. The dirt road boundaries define the six plots of land, each dominated by a brightly coloured house, a tree and an outhouse. Other curved roads lead to the cemetery, the oval, the schoolhouse and the mission manager's house. Bright flat colours are used to suggest the red sand, the blue water of the Lachlan River, the line of green trees in the distance and the white fluffy clouds in the bright blue sky. The different colours of the houses suggest an expression of individuality within a system seeking uniformity.

This painting recalls Elaine Russell's childhood memories during the 1940s and 1950s on the Murrin Bridge Mission on the Lachlan River in central New South Wales. Residents of the mission were overseen by the mission manager, who had absolute control and authority over the Aboriginal residents' lives, a control that is emphasised by the static geometry of this painting. The tight composition and highly defined parameters within the work reflect the regulated nature of mission life.

In this painting Russell recalls her spotless family home being inspected on a weekly basis by the mission manager's wife, who was greatly disliked as she decided what was an acceptable standard of cleanliness. This unnecessary intrusion into family life is a bitter memory for Elaine Russell – the insistence that such visits would even be necessary cut at the heart of a family's respectability.

Elaine Russell, from the Kamilaroi language group, was born in Tingha, northern New South Wales, in 1941. She also spent part of her childhood at La Perouse, an Aboriginal community on the shores of Botany Bay in Sydney, where her father moved the family seeking work.

Primary

Discussion

Are all the houses the same? If not, how do they differ?

Looking

Are we looking down on this picture or across it or both?

Activity/Research

Draw your own house and backyard from above.

Secondary

Discussion

How does the artist convey her feelings about mission life in this painting?

Looking

Look at the use of repetition in this painting.

How does this enhance the meaning of the work?

Activity/Research

Research Aboriginal reserves of the early to mid twentieth century.



Christian Bumbarra Thompson
Bidjara people
The Sixth Mile 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Christian Bumbarra Thompson
Bidjara people
The Sixth Mile 2006
digital media on DVD 6.10 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi

This DVD presents a very intimate, family ritual. Christian Bumbarra Thompson and his father are involved in a customary greeting ceremony. Speaking their own language, Bidjara, with their bodies turned towards each other, they are making the same gestures repetitively. The artist is aware that in the past, Indigenous people were forced to disclose aspects of their culture for the purpose of study and, in this work, he consciously refrains from revealing the meanings of words exchanged between himself and his father; this is a private ceremony made public.

Even though there is a verbal barrier the viewer is still invited into a private space, which reveals both the contemporary nature of Indigenous ceremony and culture and the commonality of family rituals in all cultures.

Christian Bumbarra Thompson's work is highly political and is also informed by international conceptual art practices. It forms a response to the increasingly conservative government policies that emphasise the dysfunctional nature of Indigenous communities. Choosing video because of its potential for direct and intense audience engagement, the artist offers insight into Indigenous rituals and into notions of masculinity and father-child relationships in personal and challenging ways.

Christian Bumbarra Thompson was born in 1978 in Gawler, South Australia. However, he is a Bidjara man of the Kunja Nation from south-west Queensland and is also from German and Jewish heritage on his mother's side. He refuses historical 'classification', stating 'my work, like myself, is in a constant state of flux'. He is one of Australia's most innovative conceptual installation artists and his work relies heavily on the relationship between objects, space and history.

Primary

Discussion

Who are the people in this DVD?

Looking

How do you think these people feel about each other?

Activity/Research

In pairs, mime a short sequence of gestures that shows a sense of trust and care between two people.

Secondary

Discussion

What is Christian Bumbarra Thompson saying about the relationship between family members?

Looking

How does the use of an Aboriginal language affect your response to this DVD?

Activity/Research

Make your own short video focussing on a repeated activity between members of your family.



Judy Watson
Waanyi people
palm cluster 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Judy Watson
Waanyi people
palm cluster 2007
pigment, pastel, synthetic polymer paint and carbon ink
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Judy Watson

Two large map-like shapes dominate this vertical canvas. The stingray shape at the top is outlined in a thin white line. The groups of horizontal lines inside this shape create a strong horizontal effect, and also suggest the gills of a stingray. Judy Watson, on a visit to Palm Island in the mid 1980s, remembers wading through shallow water with stingrays swimming around her feet.

The shape at the bottom is a map of the main island of the Palm group or cluster of islands. It has the major roads marked on it, and the white dotted shapes along the edge suggest the sparkling of light on the water and beaches fringing its coastline. Although the shape of the island looks like a view from an aeroplane, the dark brown colour suggest a place with an unhappy history.

The white circular forms are like constellations of stars or pinpoints of light in a dark blue sky/sea. Judy Watson deliberately plays with spatial illusion in this work. Are we looking down at the sea, up at the sky or at reflections of the sky in water? For the artist, blue is the colour of memory and is associated with water. The deep blues of the background of the canvas are made by scrubbing the intense Prussian and ultramarine blue pigments into the material using a stiff brush.

Two events made Palm Island a place of traumatic significance for Judy Watson. First, in 2004 Mulrundji Doomadgee, an Aboriginal man from Palm Island, died in police custody. He was from the same language group, Waanyi (from north-west Queensland), as the artist. Second, while researching her grandmother's files, Judy Watson found that some of her relatives had been sent to Palm Island in the early twentieth century. This island, which was established as an Aboriginal settlement for 'troublemakers' in the early twentieth century, therefore becomes associated with death and incarceration in the artist's mind.

Judy Watson was born in Mundubbera, Queensland, in 1959. Her work is held in many public and private collections within Australia and overseas.

Primary

Discussion

How does Judy Watson paint the background colour?

Looking

Are we looking down at the water or up at the stars?

Activity/Research

Find Palm Island on a map of Australia.

Research stingrays.

Secondary

Discussion

What events on Palm Island underlie this work?

Looking

Why do you think the artist uses the dark Prussian blue?

What mood does this colour create?

Activity/Research

Find out more about the death of Mulrundji Doomadgee while in police custody on Palm Island.



H.J. Wedge
Wiradjuri people
No more drinking 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

H.J. Wedge
Wiradjuri people
No more drinking 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Courtesy of Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Co-operative Ltd
© H.J. Wedge

These three wild figures with their staring eyes and wriggling hair communicate clearly what happens when alcohol takes over. The figure on the right is vomiting and the central one, red-faced and glaring, has his hand on a cask of wine. The group appears to be sitting on or near cut down stumps of trees against a green background. The sky is a startling pink and together with the bright colours of blue, orange and brown the artist creates an effect that is crazed and disturbing, almost hallucinatory.

There is an unbridled energy about this painting. It is raw, intuitive, original and distinct from other Indigenous art being created today. H.J. Wedge often paints confronting images dealing with the social and political issues relevant to Aboriginal people living in an urban or rural context, communities which have felt the longest effects of displacement and colonisation. Although he lacks a formal education and is limited in his ability to read or write, H.J. Wedge creates highly emotive art to communicate his own perceptions of Aboriginal life in a modern world; his Indigenous heritage underpins all his work.

H.J. Wedge is a Wiradjuri artist who was born in Cowra, New South Wales, in 1958. He grew up on the Erambie Aboriginal Reserve (Cowra) where the government and the managers of the mission controlled his life. While working as a drover and an itinerant fruit picker, he gained only a rudimentary education and it was not until he started a course at the Eora Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Redfern, Sydney, in the late 1980s that an untapped artistic talent surfaced.

Primary

Discussion

What have these people been doing?

Looking

How has the artist used line and colour to create a disturbing effect?

Activity

Make a poster about the dangers of alcohol.

Secondary

Discussion

Why does H.J. Wedge make paintings like these?

Looking

How do the lurid colours contribute to the meaning of this painting?

Activity/Research

Research the effect of alcohol on Aboriginal and Australian culture in Australia.



Owen Yalandja
Kuninjku (eastern Kunwinjku) people
Yawkyawk 2007

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Owen Yalandja
Kuninjku (eastern Kunwinjku) people
Yawkyawk 2007
natural earth pigment and PVA fixative on kurrajong wood
(*Brachychiton diversifolius*)
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 2007
© Owen Yalandja, courtesy of Maningrida Arts & Culture

Carved from the wood of the kurrajong tree this sculpture represents the spirit form of a *yawkyawk*. The tapered body and fish-like tail has a sinuous curve which follows the line of the original branch. He chooses wood pieces that best portray the movements of the fish-like forms, sometimes making use of natural forks in the wood to create the tail. The delicate pattern, carved and painted, creates the illusion of scales. The artist stated:

I decided to start representing *yawkyawk* spirit figures. *Yawkyawk* is a bit the equivalent of a mermaid in *Balanda* (whitefella) culture. *Yawkyawk* is my Dreaming and she lives in the water at Barrihdjowkkeng near where I have set up my outstation. She has always been there. I often visit this place. I love making these sculptures and I have invented a way to represent the fish scales on her body. The colours I use have particular meanings which are not public...

Owen Yalandja was born in 1962. He is a Kuninjku artist from the Maningrida region of Central Arnhem Land and is a senior member of the Dangkorlo clan. His father the late Crusoe Kunigbal was a famed Kuninjku singer, dancer and ceremonial leader and carver of *mimih* spirits. The Kuninjku believe that *yawkyawk* are young girl spirits or ancestors who live in the water and whose shadows can sometimes be seen as they run away from any humans who may come near.

Primary

Discussion

Where do *yawkyawks* live?

Looking

How does the artist make the sculpture seem alive?

Activity/Research

Research the effects of the wet season on the ecology of Arnhem Land.

Secondary

Discussion

Compare and contrast two different sculptures of *yawkyawk*.

Looking

How does the artist use surface decoration to convey a sense of life and movement?

Activity/Research

Research the link between Ancestral Beings and the environment in which they live.



Gulumbu Yunupingu
Gumatj/Rrakpala peoples
Garak (the Universe) 2005

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Gulumbu Yunupingu
Gumatj/Rrakpala peoples
Garak (the Universe) 2007
earth pigments on bark
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Gulumbu Yunupingu

The entire surface of this large piece of stringy bark is covered in multitudes of stars. They touch points to create distinct patterned areas against a subtly shaded background. There is a sense of perpetuity and repetition, but also a reference to the infinite number of stars in a world beyond our comprehension.

In conversation, Gulumbu Yunupingu stated that this image is more than a representation of the Milky Way. Her art is about the entire universe, all the stars that can be seen by the naked eye and also everything that exists far beyond any scientific expedition or understanding. When Gulumbu looks at the stars she thinks about the universe, about every clan and all the people of all colours from around the world. Everyone sees the same stars, but she is aware that there are multitudes of stars invisible to normal eyes. Ancestral Beings, however, with infinite vision would see nothing but stars covering the entire night sky. The stars are also spirits of Yolngu Ancestors, who exist within specific bodies of water in North-East Arnhem Land as well as in an astral dimension.

Gulumbu Yunupingu was born in 1945 in North-East Arnhem Land. She is a respected elder of the renowned Yunupingu family from Yirrkala. She belongs to the Gumatj/Rrakpala peoples, many members of which have become famous artists and activists. She has also studied as a health worker and has extensive knowledge of bush medicine, having recently established a traditional healing centre in her community.

Primary

Discussion

What is this artist's art all about?

Looking

Are we looking up at the sky or from above the stars looking down on the earth?

Activity/Research

Make a drawing using one geometric design that interconnects across the surface of the painting.

Secondary

Discussion

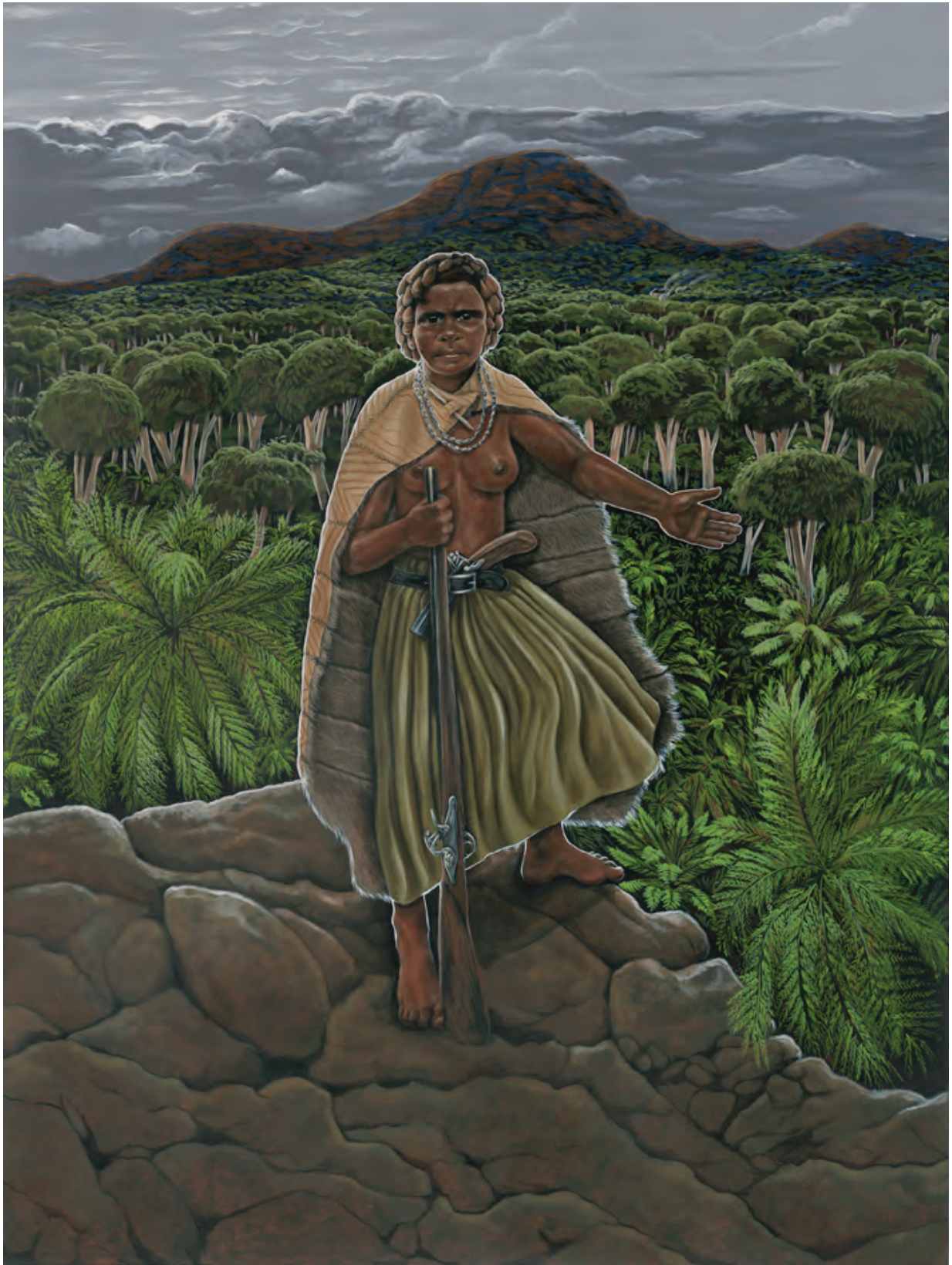
What is Gulumbu Yunupingu investigating in this painting?

Looking

Look at the subtly changing background beneath the repetitive pattern of stars. What might these areas suggest?

Activity/Research

Research the Yunupingu family.



Julie Dowling
Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi peoples
Walyer 2006

national indigenous art triennial '07

culture warriors

Julie Dowling
Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi peoples
Walyer 2006
synthetic polymer paint and red ochre on canvas
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2007
© Ms Julie Dowling

This painting is a portrait of a famous Aboriginal resistance fighter known as Walyer, who lived in Tasmania c.1800–31. In her teens Walyer was abducted by men from another clan and traded to sealers for flour and dogs. During her time with the sealers she learnt English and how to use firearms. After she escaped she joined the Lairmairrener group of Emu Bay and began to lead attacks against settlers and other Aboriginal groups. She was the first Aboriginal warrior to use firearms against the colonists.

There is an intense atmosphere in the painting. The moon shining through the stormy clouds creates an eerie light around the rock where Walyer stands and on her skin, hair and kangaroo cloak. Walyer seems to glow. She is separate from the landscape behind her and yet, at the same time, everything about her is strongly related to it. The line of her outstretched arm is reinforced by the line of white eucalyptus trees across the canvas. The flowing lines in her green skirt blend with curves of the tree ferns and gum trees that stretch into the distance behind her. The deeply shadowed brown of the mountains complements the lighter brown of the rock where she stands and the warmth of her skin, while the silver and white of the clouds are picked up by the smoke from the tiny houses on the right as well as Walyer's shell necklace, buckle and guns in the foreground. This is a portrait painting where every detail relates to the story and personality of the subject.

The artist Julie Dowling says of her work:

Walyer represents to me the hundreds of women who fought for their land against the invading colonial forces ... I painted Walyer gesturing toward a group of colonial houses in the distant right ... she is gesturing to the viewer as if they are a member of the fighters she has assembled to fight the colonial encroachments upon their land and hers.

Julie Dowling was born in Subiaco in Perth, Western Australia in 1969. She is from the Badimaya/Yamatji/Widi peoples. She graduated from Perth Metropolitan TAFE with an Associate Diploma in Visual Arts Management in 1995 and received a Bachelor of Fine Art from Curtin University in 1992.

Primary

Discussion

Who was Walyer?

Looking

Describe what Walyer is wearing and holding.

Activity/Research

Find out about other Indigenous warriors who fought for their land.

Secondary

Discussion

Discuss the historical and political implications of this painting.

Looking

What devices has the artist used to demonstrate the heroism of her subject?

Activity/Research

Find out more about the heroic activities of Walyer.